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**GROWTH STRATEGIES AND SMALL BUSINESS
OWNERS:
a Structurationist investigation of
Strategy-as-Practice in Small Enterprises**

Nigel Petts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of Northumbria at Newcastle
for the degree of
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Research undertaken in the
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July 2013



ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to investigate how the strategising of growth-oriented Small Business Owners (SBOs) influences the strategy in their businesses.

This thesis describes a 'Strategy-as-Practice' (S-as-P) investigation of ten Small Business Owners (SBOs) in Northeast England. Each SBO participated in a confidential 'one-to-one' strategy workshop with the author. The workshop format required each SBO to create a strategy map during the videoed session. The research design was intended to be minimally intrusive for members of the small businesses community.

The theoretical underpinning in this interpretive study was informed by Structuration Theory (ST). The video data were analysed with CAQDAS software. A template analysis approach was used based upon the symbiotic relationship of agency and structure proposed by ST. Cross-cutting themes were sought across the case companies.

The author found that the methodology attracted participation by growth-oriented SBOs. At the *meso-level* growth-oriented SBOs can be characterised as "strategically aware", even if their strategy has remained unchanged for a considerable time. This strategic awareness is a manifestation of strategising praxes within the business. SBOs that are not actively changing strategy tend to articulate aspects of their business model which are visible in the firm, the others find difficulty in expressing their strategy in words. The "one-to-one" strategy workshop format used in this study facilitates the articulation of tacit knowledge and hence aids such discussion.

This research was focused upon SBOs that had a history of organic-growth, and had been relatively unscathed by the 2008 Banking Crisis aftermath. The participation group were all based in the North East of England.

This study contributes to existing S-as-P knowledge by extending the contextual boundary beyond large organisations into the small business domain. The author contrasts, and compares, the S-as-P findings in this study with the extant field that has almost exclusively been devoted to larger scale enterprise. The videoed "one-to-one" strategy workshop design is a methodological contribution that has proven efficacious in both recruiting and studying SBOs with the minimum of intervention disruption for these busy people. The author creates a synthesised model of small business strategising based on findings from this study that may assist future researchers to better engage and understand the strategising of SBOs.

Keywords

Strategising;
Small Business Owners;
Strategy-as-Practice;
Structuration;
Methodology

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Glossary

<i>a priori</i>	<i>“from the earlier”, pre-defined, not requiring experience;</i>
ABTA	<i>Association of British Travel Agents;</i>
BMI	<i>Business Model Innovation;</i>
CAQDAS	<i>Computer-aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (see NVivo);</i>
CP	<i>Chargepacks (case company);</i>
DCV	<i>Dynamic Capabilities View (of strategy);</i>
<i>di minimis</i>	<i>An EU State Aid Rule whereby SMEs cannot received more than €200k financial aid per three fiscal years (on a rolling three year basis);</i>
<i>et al.</i>	<i>and others [Latin];</i>
IATA	<i>International Airline Travel Association;</i>
<i>ibid.</i>	<i>The same as the preceding reference [Latin];</i>
IoD	<i>Institute of Directors (UK);</i>
IPO	<i>Initial Public Offering;</i>
ISO	<i>International Standards Organisation;</i>
KPI	<i>Key Performance Indicator;</i>
MBA	<i>Masters’ in Business Administration;</i>
M-E	<i>Montague-Endeavour (case company);</i>
MSE	<i>Micro and Small sized Enterprise;</i>
NBS	<i>Newcastle Business School;</i>
NVivo [™]	<i>Bibliographic software package published by QSR International, Australia;</i>
OBW	<i>Only Branding Works (case company);</i>
<i>p.</i>	<i>Page;</i>
<i>pp.</i>	<i>Page Range;</i>
RBV	<i>Resource-Based View (of strategy);</i>
S-as-P	<i>Strategy-as-Practice;</i>
SCA	<i>Sustained Competitive Advantage;</i>
SBO	<i>Small Business Owner;</i>
SEO	<i>Search Engine Optimisation (web design / maintenance technique);</i>
SHC	<i>Sandra Hill Consulting (case company);</i>
SME	<i>Small and Medium sized Enterprise;</i>
ST	<i>Structuration Theory;</i>
TB	<i>Travel Bravura (case company);</i>
TCC	<i>Town and Country Cleaning (case company);</i>
VRIN	<i>Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-Substitutable resources and capabilities;</i>
VRIO	<i>Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Organizational resources and capabilities.</i>

Acknowledgements

Will appear here

Preface

This study is informed by the theory of Anthony Giddens (Structuration Theory). The author has indicated this influence by using italics for the following significant words and phrases defined under that theory (with the exception of headings). The reader can therefore assume the Giddensian connotation where these italicised words occur in the text. The author will render a full explanation at the first occurrence.

- *Agency*
- *Allocative resource*
- *Authoritative resource*
- *Communication*
- *Discursive consciousness*
- *Domination*
- *Double hermeneutic*
- *Duality of structure*
- *Interpretive scheme*
- *Knowledgeable agent*
- *Legitimation*
- *Norm*
- *Power*
- *Practical consciousness*
- *Praxis (Praxes pl.)*
- *Reflexive monitoring*
- *Resources*
- *Rules*
- *Sanction*
- *Signification*
- *Structuration*
- *Structure*

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought, and granted, by the Newcastle Business School Ethics Committee on 16 June 2010.

Name: **Nigel Petts**

Signature: _____

Date: 26 July 2013

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The academic rationale for this study

New concepts in strategic management tend to be discovered and developed in large organisations; rarely do they originate from small business (Johnson, 1993). Theories from large firm contexts are adapted for the small enterprise (with varying degrees of success). A common characteristic of these research endeavours is the lag between large firm theory production and the attempted application to a small business.

This research study has been conducted exclusively in small business using a recent development in strategic management theory that has only been applied in the larger firm context. The author embarked upon a literature search to find out whether Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P) research investigations had reached the small business environment. If there were no such academic publications, this gap in the knowledge base could provide a worthwhile subject for investigation.

S-as-P research is considered, by some academics, to be the natural consequence of the limitations inherent in the strategic perspective that emerged in the 1990's known as the Resource-based View (RBV) (Johnson *et al.*, 2003). Although the RBV looked at the inner workings of a company (rather than the external environment), to explain sustained competitive advantage; it was by definition, concentrating upon with the strategic actions of teams and their deployment of rare resources (Barney, 1996; Kay, 1993; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Although the RBV added another perspective on the possible reasons for sustained competitive advantage (SCA); it was inherently self-defeating in explanation of the phenomenon, because one of the suspected reasons for success was 'inimitability'. Where this inability to replicate was due to tacit knowledge or hidden agency, scrutiny of company resources was naturally problematic for researchers. Therefore RBV authors, among other interested parties, urged deeper investigation into the behaviour of individual strategists in the businesses being studied (Whittington, 1996). This prompted a 'practice turn' for some strategy researchers that resembled the antecedent movement in the general social science field (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001). Responding to such academic calls for deeper research at the level of the individual strategist, S-as-P researchers began to open up a new field using methods and techniques from the realm of the social sciences (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006).

The Literature Review confirms that S-as-P in 2013 remains a research domain devoted to large organisations. Some limited S-as-P attention was being directed towards family-owned businesses (Nordqvist & Melin, 2010), but this still neglected the smaller and micro-sized businesses. This lacuna provides an opportunity for this thesis to make an early contribution to a new sub-field. Not only is there an absence of S-as-P academic papers on the subject of small business, but there is also an apparent lack of S-as-P specific methodological experience available to would-be researchers. The opportunity to make a methodological contribution also arises.

1.2. Methodological requirement

Small Business Owners (SBOs) are notoriously difficult to recruit into research programmes (Curran & Blackburn, 2001). Anticipating this difficulty will be an integral part of a suitable research design for S-as-P inquiry. A determination to maximise data capture while minimising the actual intervention duration has been central to this cross-sectional design. A committed ethnographer would probably be appalled at this self-imposed limitation, but the reality of initial SBO resistance leaves very little in the way of options for continuous longitudinal research. The paucity of such research in the academic literature may be explained by research imperatives that ignore the lack of SBO patience for interminable engagement.

The adopted methodology uses video to record SBOs engaged in a 'one-to-one' discussion with the author while they construct a strategy diagram with *Post-it*™ notes. These individual sessions were offered to the local SBO community as "free strategy workshops" that took about 90 minutes.

The author found that the offer of a free strategy workshop was particularly attractive to SBOs who were committed to growing their businesses organically and had been in business for at least five years.

1.3. The prevailing economic environment

The far environment that surrounds this study is one of unprecedented global economic recession. The precursor experience of the Japanese Economy (the "Lost Decade"), and recent statements by the UK Coalition Government suggest (as of mid-2013), that sustained recovery may not be realised in the UK until after 2017. In essence, the UK and Europe could have a very similar 'flat-line' growth experience to that of the Japanese in the previous decade.

With such economic gloom, it might be considered surprising that a study like this can assemble ten cases that represent small businesses with a persistent and robust growth agenda. None of these participants were vexed by a lack of available (and affordable) bank lending for their business. Even more remarkable was that these small firms were situated in one of the most economically depressed regions of the United Kingdom.

There are approximately 2.5 million people in the North East of England (which represents 4% of the UK population). The regional GDP was calculated at £40 billion in 2010 which was 3.5% of UK GDP. Although the figures seem roughly proportionate, it is the unemployment rate for the North East that shows an underlying weakness (11.5% at mid-2012). The region is the most affected by Government cut backs in the public sector that are a key part of its austerity programme.

1.4. The research question and objectives

In view of the aforementioned, the following research question arises:

‘How are firm-level strategies created by the micro-strategising activities of owner-managers working in the North East of England’s small businesses?’

This study will concern a qualitative analysis of discussions about strategising with owners of small businesses (SBOs). The literature review (see pages 16-72) will help to identify how much is already known about this subject, and the methodology chapter will contain the rationale for using qualitative methods (see page 74). Considering the aforementioned, achieving an answer to the research question is predicated by several research objectives, which are outlined below:

- To collect primary research data from selected research participants in various small businesses. They will be, characteristically, both owner-managers and likely to be practising strategy formulation in their business. The research data will be primarily interview recordings relating to a particular ‘strategic issue’ that the SBO would like to discuss in private.
- To use a visual elicitation technique of strategy mapping¹ to facilitate and encourage the type of responses from participants who can attempt to reveal how they perform strategy work in practice.
- To analyse and interpret the cognitive aspects of each participant’s strategy work and to adopt a theoretical perspective conducive to the study of strategy practice.
- To synthesise this analysis with the extant literature (from small business strategy research, entrepreneurial studies, and S-as-P in larger organisations) to establish the efficacy of S-as-P in the small business context.
- To synthesise strategising at the *micro-level*² with strategy at the *meso-level*³ into a coherent model of SBO strategising and strategy formulation and implementation in small businesses.

1.5. Potential impact

The study of resilient small business in the most economically depressed region of the UK can provide valuable lessons for the future. Governments want to stimulate small business growth to provide reliable private sector employment throughout periods of austerity. Universities can play

¹ A montage of *Post-It*™ notes on an A1 sheet created by each participant to help them to describe how they strategise

² See page 17 for explanation of this term.

³ Ditto

their part by providing practical guidance to entrepreneurs and SBOs, who can be informed by such research. Most HE institutions are already committed to bringing contemporary research into the lecture room for their cohorts of business students.

1.6. Summary of Introduction

The prevailing business environment in the north-east of England at the time of commencing this thesis has been explained. The author has also expressed and explained his motivations towards conducting this study. He will now undertake a literature review of the subject area to demonstrate that a particular knowledge gap exists. This thesis contains the following chapters.

#	Chapter	Synopsis	Page
1	Introduction	<i>Introduction to thesis (this chapter). The reasons for the author's interest in this topic. The research question and objectives. The economic environment.</i>	11
2	Literature Review I	<i>Review of strategy literature that has implications for small business. Identification of a gap in knowledge pertaining to SBO strategising.</i>	16
3	Literature Review II	<i>Review of underpinning sociological theories used in Strategy-as-Practice. Explanation of chosen theory including its benefits, limitations and major criticisms by other authors.</i>	53
4	Methodology	<i>Detailed explanation of a research methodology designed to attract SBO participants to the study while maintaining academic rigor. Demographic, methodological and interpretative limitations to the study.</i>	74
5	Cases & Findings	<i>Description and analysis of the ten interviews across seven small businesses. Discussion of the structuration exhibited in each case and consideration of delegation in one case. Conceptual model of SBO strategising applied to each case in this study.</i>	114
6	Contributions	<i>Theoretical and methodological contributions offered by this research.</i>	247
7	Recommendations	<i>The author's recommendations for further research and methodological development.</i>	249
8	Summary	<i>Concluding statement of thesis.</i>	251
9	Appendices	<i>Strategy definitions</i>	252
10	References	<i>APA 6th References cited in this study.</i>	254

Figure 1.1 Synopsis of chapters in this study

2. ENDOGENOUS STRATEGY IN SMALL BUSINESS

2.1. Introduction

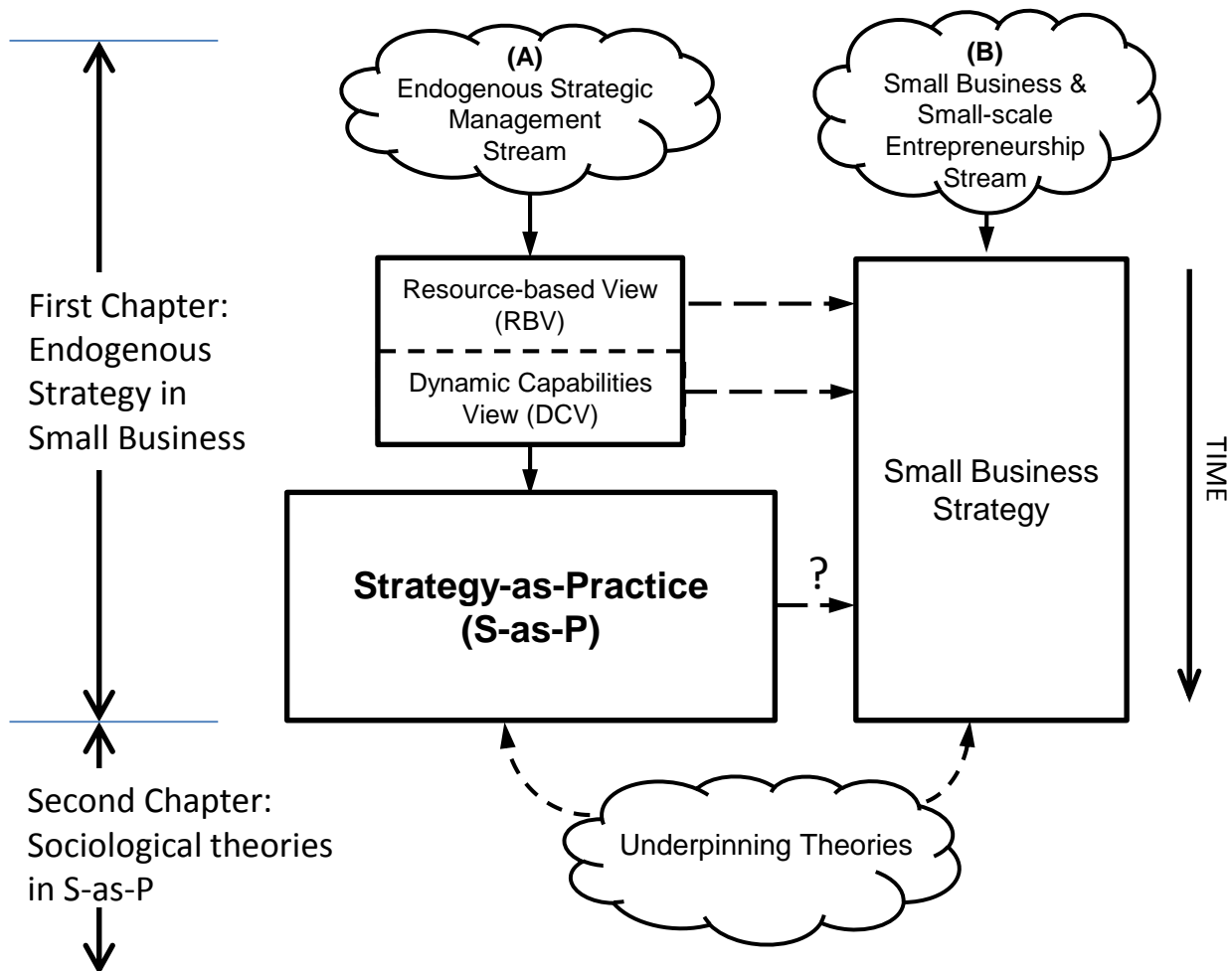


Figure 2.1 Plan of dual chapter Literature Review

This Literature Review is divided into two succeeding chapters “Endogenous Strategy in Small Business” and “Sociological Theories underpinning S-as-P” (see Figure 2.1). The first chapter concerns the existing literature that pertains to specific business strategic thinking and implementation by individuals in small businesses. The second chapter concerns the available theoretical approaches that can underpin a contribution to the field of knowledge identified in the first chapter.

In Chapter Two two streams of academic knowledge are reviewed ‘*Endogenous Strategic Management*’ and ‘*Small Business & Small-scale Entrepreneurship*’ (shown as streams A and B in Figure 2.1). Particular focus is placed upon research that has emerged from stream A but are contextually linked to stream B (a trajectory shown as horizontal arrows in Figure 2.1).

Strategic Management, as an academic subject, is replete with overlapping and sometimes contradictory definitions. To enable the reader to navigate through this plethora of explanations, the chapter first builds the taxonomy necessary to describe the endogenous strategy stream within the subject area. Starting with the multifarious definitions of '*Strategy*', the chapter then focuses upon '*Practice*' and '*Strategising*' as precursors to discussing the generally accepted current definitions associated with '*Strategy-as-Practice*' (S-as-P). A table of primary, interconnected or hierarchically dependent definitions is presented at the end of each of the two literature review chapters (see pages 52 and 72).

This particular arrangement of the chapter highlights two findings that support the *raison d'être* for this thesis. There are occasional academic papers that bridge the two streams in question (i.e. endogenous strategy applied to small business). A publication that spans contemporary thinking in both streams will probably emerge in the near future, and a current gap therefore exists in the knowledge base (i.e. an S-as-P publication in the context of Small Business).

The second chapter, of the literature review, is devoted to some of the theoretical underpinning choices available to authors in the S-as-P field. As S-as-P looks at the strategising of individuals, most researchers in this field are informed by elements of existing sociological theory. The S-as-P researcher therefore requires an underpinning sociological theory (unlike the researchers of previous endogenous strategy perspectives). The common theories that have already been used in the field of S-as-P are reviewed in this thesis. The choice of underpinning theory is justified according to the needs of this research study into small business strategy. The benefits and limitations of this decision are discussed in the light of published works critiquing the theory.

To aid clarity, this thesis standardises the terms used by various authors to contextualise strategic scope in terms of a hierarchy of complexity level. Henceforth (in this thesis) the institutional level will be referred to as the '*macro-level*', the firm or organisational level will be the '*meso-level*', and the individual level of strategising will be the '*micro-level*'. These levels will be indicated in various figures and tables by means of the following visual artefacts. Confusion can arise as some authors refer to '*micro-strategising*'. The thesis will use the *micro*, *meso* and *macro* prefixes to indicate the contextual levels indicated in Figure 2.2.

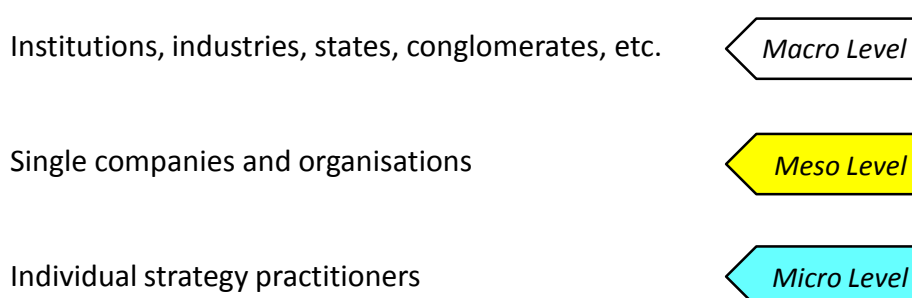


Figure 2.2 Designation of hierarchical levels in this thesis

2.1. The Endogenous Strategic Management Stream (A)

In this section, the development of endogenous strategic management thinking⁴ since the 1970s is described. This is represented in Figure 2.1 by the left hand column. This portrayal excludes the exogenous theories⁵ that have occurred over the same timeframe. There is an implied chronological development as each stream moves downwards in the diagram. However, assumptions should not be made concerning concurrency between streams (or the relative size of boxes).

The Resource-based View can be traced back to the work of Schumpeter in the 1930s. It was given a wider appreciation by Penrose in the 1950's and reached a zenith of popularity in the 1990's with authors such as Hamel & Prahalad and Barney.

The term "*Resource-based View*" (RBV) was first used by Birger Wernerfelt (1984) to describe a hitherto rather obscure side of organisational research that had origins in the earlier work of Penrose (1959), Chandler (1977) and Nelson & Winter (1982). Other authors expanded the concept by the addition of unique intangible resources that are accordingly difficult for competitors to emulate (Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Rumelt, 1984). The rising interest among academics was opened up to a much wider audience by work of Prahalad & Hamel (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994a, 1993; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Other academics such as Barney (1991) and Teece (1997; 1994) added their support to a movement that opposed the orthodoxy laid down by exogenous strategy authors such as Michael Porter (1985, 1979).

The endogenous strategic management stream (as shown in Figure 2.1) ends in the current manifestation of S-as-P (in mid 2014). This presumption of lineage is not universally agreed within the field. Some authors argue that S-as-P does not originate from the Resource-based View tradition at all (Carter *et al.*, 2009). However, this heritage is identified by some of the lead authors in the field (Regnér, 2008; Johnson *et al.*, 2003; Whittington, 1996).

The Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV) emerged after the Resource-based View (RBV) and some (but not all) researchers active in these areas have since moved on to S-as-P. The Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV) has effectively added a temporal dimension to the RBV. This added dimension is particularly useful in the analysis of dynamic situations, and enables examination of how strategy needs to evolve over time as competitive circumstances change. The DCV is cited as a precursor to S-as-P by some authors (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009; Regnér, 2008).

S-as-P has gradually emerged from a growing research movement towards the 'individual

⁴ Endogenous Strategic Management: the probable causes of sustained competitive advantage are found to reside inside the company or organisation.

⁵ Exogenous Strategic Management: future success is predicated upon a company or organisation's ability to position itself to best advantage in an external competitive environment.

strategiser' rather than the 'organisation' as the unit of analysis. It is the intent of this thesis to investigate whether this trend presents a fresh opportunity to take some of the latest thinking from the endogenous strategic management stream into the small business environment.

The history of transferring strategic management knowledge that is derived from large-scale enterprise to small business has been sporadic. Some authors are of the opinion that strategy in small business has to be treated differently from the corporate context (Sandberg *et al.*, 2001; Welsh & White, 1981). However, this opinion has not prevented endogenous strategy papers from occasionally being devoted to small business. These contributions to strategic management within the small-firm context are highlighted in this literature review (see pages 46 and 47).

The review of the literature attempts to set the theoretical foundations through close examination of S-as-P, its evolution over the last two decades, and its wider context and general position within the discipline of strategic management. However, before this can be accomplished; it is necessary to discuss some key definitions, as the terminology can be very specific and liable to misinterpretation when viewed from other research fields. The essential definitions that are necessary to discuss the endogenous strategy field will now be examined in turn. The basic definitions are inherent in subsequent definitions, so a "definitions in use" table for the continuing thesis will be presented at the end of the chapter.

2.1.1. Strategy

The wide variety and inconsistency of strategy perspectives make the formation of one universal definition of strategy a virtual impossibility. There has never been a consensus view in research concerning the definition of 'strategy' (O'Regan & Ghobadian, 2002; Quinn, 1980). Instead, there has been a steady stream of somewhat conflicting definitions, ranging from seeing strategy as an intended plan of action (Porter, 1991; Ansoff & McDonnell, 1990) to unpredictable emergent patterns (Mintzberg & Ghoshal, 2003; Stacey, 1993; Cyert & March, 1963) to a perspective that exists only in the actors' minds (Mintzberg & Ghoshal, 2003; Chaffee, 1985), highlighting its complexity and ambiguity (Munro, 1995; Knights & Morgan, 1991), and contributing to the confusion surrounding what strategy is, and consequently, how it is formed.

"One needs only to consider a text like Strategy Safari (Mintzberg et al., 1998) to recognize that the strategy field is incredibly fragmented." (Thomas, 2006, p.3)

A much more succinct definition of strategy is possible from a particular perspective (albeit differing from one from an alternative perspective). As Leitch, Hill and Neergaard observe, the problem of comparison between perspectives is the price being paid for ostensible clarity of definition.

"Perspectival positions cannot avoid the problem of relativism, where it is impossible to judge one against the other except in terms of presuppositions and prejudices" (Leitch et al., 2010, p.576) .

The emerging typologies also tend to reflect their academic origins, e.g. Economics, Sociology or Psychology. The most recent work to produce a typology of strategies has been published by Jacobs (2010) and is shown in Figure 2.3.

Strategy School	Strategy Process	Process Type
Design	Conception	Rational decision-making followed by implementation.
Planning	Internal Formal	
Positioning	Analytical	
Entrepreneurial	Visionary Determination	
Configuration	External Formal	
Portfolio Planning	Financial Investment	
Resource and Competence-based	Internal Analysis	
Stakeholder and Resource dependent	External Analysis	
Transaction-Cost Approach	Economic Reasoning	Rational economic analysis followed by possible implementation.
Game Theory	Logic	
Evolutionary	Market Determination	
Guerrilla Approach	Visionary Market Determination	
Critical	Emancipatory Focus	Framed rationality.
Post-modernism	Deconstruction	
Cognitive	Sense-making	
Cultural	Organisational	
Political	Sociological	Interaction.
Identity Approach	Organisational	
System Dynamics	Organisational Modelling	
Social Constructivism	Sense-making and Networking	
Complexity and Co-evolution	Complex interactive processes	

Figure 2.3 Various Strategy Perspectives, adapted from Jacobs (2010).

The research tendency over the decades, since the 1960s, has been to create strategic perspectives that loosely represent different strategic management “schools of thought”. Various authors, from time to time, have assembled a taxonomy of the various perspectives (Mintzberg *et al.*, 1998). Strategy is a very wide field of study, which permeates many others, and this can be exemplified by the difficulty experienced by authors in formulating a practical and accepted general definition of the topic. Strategy as a subject has evolved since the 1950s as a series of ‘perspectives’ or ‘schools of thought’, each focusing on distinct aspects of strategy (whilst ignoring or de-emphasising others). To further demonstrate the diversity, 21 different definitions of ‘strategy’ found in the Strategic Management literature are presented in the Appendices (see Table 9.1 on page 253). The definitions are mainly context sensitive and / or path dependent, and this realisation provides an explanation of the plethora of definitions. One definition that has become

widely accepted (particularly in business schools) is that of Johnson, Scholes & Whittington (Johnson *et al.*, 2008a):

"Strategy is the direction and scope of an organisation over the long-term: which achieves advantage for the organisation through its configuration of resources within a challenging environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfil stakeholder expectations." (Johnson et al., 2008, p.3).

This definition which is sufficiently broad (yet remaining reasonably concise) will be used hereafter in this thesis (see summary of definitions for this chapter on page 52).

2.1.2. Practice

As we move forward to a definition of Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P), it becomes necessary to explain what is meant by the word 'practice' in the context of this thesis. Those writers that have considered S-as-P often make a distinction between process research and practice research. This is the definition that is cited in most S-as-P publications:

"Thus the practice perspective is concerned with managerial activity, how managers 'do strategy'" (Whittington, 1996, p.732; emphasis added by author)

Although this is a relatively simple statement, it carries deeper implications; for instance, the emphasis upon "do" is indicative of researcher suspicions that there is a difference between the espoused strategy of an organisation and the actual strategising of individuals. This aspect of practice is made clearer in other definitions, such as:

"The coordinated activities of individuals and groups in doing their "real work" as it is informed by a particular organizational or group context." (Cook & Brown, 1999, p.390; emphasis added by author)

It is almost inevitable that as a new research field expands that there will be further elaborations on the definition of terms; such was the evolution of Strategic Management research in general. The search for greater explicitness is usually accompanied by an increase in complexity lest vital factors are excluded.

"Practice connotes doing and involves awareness and application of both explicit (language, tools, concepts, roles, procedures) and tacit (rules of thumb, embodied capabilities, shared worldviews) elements." (Sole & Edmondson, 2002, p.S18)

Some critics of S-as-P point towards a lack of definition in the meaning of "practice". However, it could be argued that this lack of clarity is common to the entire field of sociological investigation of organisations.

"Practice can mean a myriad of things including events, routines, rules, or simply 'being closer to reality' and 'being more practical'." (Carter et al., 2008)

As strategic practice occurs within other forms of business and social practice; the implication from such criticisms is that the researcher will be unable to discriminate '*strategic practice*' from the background clutter of the long-run organisational milieu. Identifying instances of strategic practice can be a difficult task for researchers, but some have reported useful cues. For instance, that strategy practice tends to be episodic in nature:

"It is through episodes that organizations are able to routinely suspend their normal routine structures of discourse, communication and hierarchy, and so create the opportunity for reflexive strategic practice." (Hendry & Seidl, 2003, p.176)

Others have focused upon episodic events that ostensibly will contain some observable strategising practice on the part of the observed. Hence the number of published articles and reports that focus upon '*strategy workshops*', '*clinics*' and '*away-days*' (Johnson *et al.*, 2010a; Bourque & Johnson, 2008; Hodgkinson *et al.*, 2006; Johnson *et al.*, 2006; Bowman, 1995).

There is no discussion in the literature concerning strategy practice in very small organisations, but the author notes that the problems associated with the observation of a large number of people potentially exhibiting their strategic practices are avoided in such a context. This is not to say that strategic practice is confined to organisational boundaries; as many S-as-P researchers observe that strategisers can be inside, or outside, of an organisation.

"A practitioner could be external, meaning categories of actor that might influence the strategy of a focal organization but did not have an allocated hierarchy, line or staff role within that organization's structural and governance arrangements." (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p. 72)

'Practice' in S-as-P can mean '*habitual or customary actions*', '*behaviour patterns*', a '*manner*' or even a '*routine*'. The essence of meaning is the performance of strategic thought and action. Some have pointed out that practice has a temporal dimension, and this could be added to the list of complications cited by the critics of S-as-P. However, the author does not want to preclude this dimension at this stage. The following definition captures the main elements, and will be taken forward in this thesis:

"Practice, then, is the conduct of transactional life, which involves the temporally-unfolding, symbolically-mediated interweaving of experience and action." (Simpson, 2009, p.1338)

The author has shown how Strategy practices are the social constructs, symbolic metaphors, and strategic tools that are present when strategy is being created and implemented in the workplace. Having discussed the terms '*strategy*' and '*practice*' it is still not possible to define '*Strategy-as-Practice*' without understanding that the perspective is focused on the underlying '*strategising*' activities of individuals (rather than any resulting strategy). It is necessary to define what it is '*to strategise*' in the business sense (and particularly in the context of small business), because the adopted (here) definition of strategy makes no mention of the activities of individuals.

2.1.3. Strategising

The most common definition of strategising that has appeared in S-as-P articles since Whittington's eponymous publication (Whittington, 1996) has been the following one from Johnson, Melin and Whittington:

"The detailed processes and practices which constitute the day-to-day activities of organization life and which relate to strategic outcomes"
(Johnson *et al.*, 2003, p.14).

This definition will be used in this thesis, but it should be noted that this definition does not necessarily focus upon the individual, it can equally apply to interactions between individual strategisers. As with definitions of strategy, there are alternatives, which carry a higher degree of specificity; but thereby place tighter bounds upon the type of strategising that might be recognised as such. The following is typical of those authors that have wished to be more precise in their definition of strategising:

"Mobilizing explicit tools and tacit knowledge in interactions to produce strategies",
(Denis *et al.*, 2007, p.204).

The problem with doing this is one of exclusion. In this definition the strategist is excluding explicit knowledge. Such omission is probably unintentional and completely incidental to the main thrust of the paper (the comparison of three different theories). However, transferring this definition to another context could be problematic.

The concern of those defining '*strategising*' for S-as-P purposes is to make sure that strategising is viewed at the level of daily mundane activity. Some authors invoke a definition of '*micro-strategizing*' to emphasise that the strategy actions of an individual can be very small-scale and sporadic.

"The myriad micro-actions through which human actors shape activity in ways that are consequential for strategic outcomes" (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2007, p.6).

For the purposes of this thesis, the term '*strategising*' will be used to refer to all strategic activity by individuals in a small business. In this regard, the Johnson, *et al.* (2003) definition with its "detailed processes" can be considered to be covering the slightest of strategising activities thereby rendering the '*micro*' epithet unnecessary.

Some definitions of strategising are more focused upon research methodological issues. In particular, that Strategising Research requires different techniques compared to the traditional methods used to study Business Strategy.

"Strategizing is about studying practitioners and their practices within the context of their work", (Balogun *et al.*, 2003, p.200).

Such definitions tend to imply the need to get close to the ‘*strategiser*’ (or ‘*strategisers*’), ideally within the strategising environment. In this study, the environments are the ‘*day-to-day*’ situations present in the participating small businesses.

Although the field under consideration in this thesis has been dubbed by others as ‘Strategy-as-Practice’, a more accurate name might have been ‘Strategising-as-Practice’. This change in the term would have emphasised the activity over the outcome. However, the generally accepted term of Strategy-as-Practice will be used hereafter in this thesis.

2.1.4. Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P)

S-as-P is a fast growing field of study in large organisations, and continues a thread of research interest in the internal analysis of strategy that was sustained competitive advantage. This renewed emphasis upon the actions and knowledge of the individual strategist(s) was a response to calls for a ‘practice turn’ in strategy research. Whittington’s (1996) eponymous article voiced dissatisfaction with contemporary strategy research that had failed to answer some fundamental questions regarding the gap between theory and actual practice. A growing body of academic opinion is now positing that existing conceptualisations of strategic planning activity cannot provide a complete understanding of such discourse (Hendry, 2000).

This initiative was partly invoked because of the suspicion that the ‘*Resource-based View*’ (RVB) and ‘*Dynamic Capabilities View*’ (DCV) had failed to fully explain the reasons for sustained competitive advantage. Going to the deeper ‘*micro-level*’ of the practice of individual strategisers was thought to be one way forward in this endeavour of explain sustained competitive advantage.

S-as-P is now being hailed as a new business strategy perspective, yet it owes much to the work of the earlier ‘*Processual School of Strategy*’ with such authors as Henry Mintzberg and Andrew Pettigrew. S-as-P is partly a reaction to the prior research preoccupation with organisational level analysis that did little to explain the peculiarities and effects of individual actors within the firm.

“The focus of this approach is on strategy as a social ‘practice’, on how the practitioners of strategy really act and interact.” (Whittington, 1996, p.731)

A consequence of this practice turn has been that many S-as-P researchers have needed to draw upon existing Anthropological, Sociological and Psychological traditions. In this way they have been able to examine more closely the actual strategy practice of managers (rather than trying to draw inferences from espoused strategies). In this way, they have the theoretical background necessary to understand the realities of the activities, and also have been able to embrace established research techniques and methods. The research tend to be very context specific and concerns the actions of people who contribute to ‘*meso-level*’ strategy, the routines they employ, and most importantly their practices. S-as-P is a concerted effort to bring strategy research into the complex and unpredictable realm of day-to-day business situations that might affect strategic

outcomes. It is possible to map S-as-P into the wider context of Strategic Management using Hart's (1992) integrative framework for strategy making processes (see Figure 2.4).

The right-most column (Generative Processes) was originally intended to categorise the so called 'Processual School of Thought' (as mentioned above), but it can be seen that the style of 'strategy driven by organisational actors' initiative' and the member role of 'entrepreneur' has a close affinity to the strategising activities scrutinised under a S-as-P perspective. This connection is even more pertinent in the context of small business.

S-as-P investigates both innovative (or novel) activity and routine practice by individual strategisers. There has been research into the embedded nature of routinised methods and practices in firms (Pentland & Feldman, 2008, 2007, 2005). However, these authors urge caution when using '*routines*' as units of analysis; because they have found inconsistencies in subjective impressions of routines carried out by people (Pentland & Feldman, 2005). The authors identify two distinct components of routines which they designate as '*ostensive*' (the routine's essential idea) and '*performative*' (its actual outcome in practice). These researchers have been interested in whether such phenomena can be an intangible asset that leads to sustained competitive advantage. This echoes the work of two other RBV theorists (Barney & Hesterley, 2009; Barney, 2007; Barney & Hesterley, 2005; Barney, 2001, 1995, 1991, 1986).

RBV theorists argue that the '*resources*', '*capabilities*' or '*competences*' that lead to competitive advantage are those that are '*valuable*', '*rare*', '*non-substitutable*', and '*inimitable*'. For instance,

An Integrative Framework for Strategy-Making Processes					
Descriptors	Command	Symbolic	Rational	Transactive	Generative
Style	(Imperial)	(Cultural)	(Analytical)	(Procedure)	(Organic)
	Strategy driven by leader or small top-team	Strategy driven by mission and a vision of the future	Strategy driven by formal structure and planning systems	Strategy driven by internal process and mutual adjustment	Strategy driven by organizational actors' initiative
Role of top management	(Commander)	(Coach)	(Boss)	(Facilitator)	(Sponsor)
	Provide direction	Motivate and inspire	Evaluate and control	Empower and enable	Endorse and support
Role of organizational members	(Soldier)	(Player)	(Subordinate)	(Participant)	(Entrepreneur)
	Obey orders	Respond to challenge	Follow the system	Learn and improve	Experiment and take risks

Figure 2.4 Integrative Strategy Framework (Hart, 1992, p.344)

'core competence' can be regarded as a '*black box*' that has the external attributes of '*invisibility*', '*complexity*', '*durability*', '*superiority*', '*appropriability*', '*non-substitutability*', and '*inimitability*' (Petts, 1997; Collis & Montgomery, 1995). Whilst this serves to explain apparent sustained competitive

advantage (SCA), the S-as-P researcher wants to understand the inner workings of this elusive concept (Johnson *et al.*, 2003). The '*meso-level*' ability of creating and recreating periods of sustained competitive advantage is also the research focus of the Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV). Some DCV strategy authors find a strong affinity with the S-as-P perspective. In writing about the DCV, Regnér (2008) states:

"we are essentially taking a micro perspective of organizations; we acknowledge that it is individuals and what they do that matters (Felin & Foss, 2005; Orlikowski, 2002)." (cited in Ambrosini et al., 2009, p.S10).

The question vexing S-as-P researchers is which praxis constituents are being mixed or combined to provide successful strategising? Some authors believe that the answer lies in routines that have been adopted by the company over time that can marshal both tangible and intangible resources (Pentland & Feldman, 2008, 2007, 2005). Others feel that the competitive advantage is even deeper embedded in the firm's culture (Barney, 1986). This echoes previous work in the 1980's on the effects of organisational culture (Schein, 1990, 1985, 1983).

The study of individual strategising cannot be accomplished without due regard to the effect of the prevalent routines within the firm. The routines will probably contain elements of previous valued strategic thinking that have become embedded and routinised in the context of the firm. The '*meso-level*' RBV concept of '*core competence*' embodies the notion of underlying '*routinised problem solving*' that combines '*discrete technologies*' and '*know-how*' in innovative ways (Collis & Montgomery, 1995; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Therefore the performance of routines ought to provide one of the connections between '*micro*' and '*meso*' level that are sought by S-as-P researchers.

Whereas the exogenous strategy theorists tend to be uninterested in small business strategy (and rarely devote their research to that context); endogenous '*Processual School*' authors consider the planning, actions and reactions of the entrepreneurially-minded small business owner to be just another form of strategy (Mintzberg, 1994, 1990a, 1990b; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Mintzberg's main argument was that strategy could be emergent, as well as planned. Mintzberg was one of the earliest researchers to study the effect of '*routines*' in strategic behaviour.

"I wish to propose an additional view of the strategist - as a pattern recognizer, a learner if you will - who manages a process in which strategies (and visions) can emerge as well as be deliberately conceived." (Mintzberg, 1987, p.73)

This observation finds redolence with the later S-as-P movement and the research publications concerning '*organisational routines*' by Martha Feldman and Brian Pentland (Pentland & Feldman, 2008, 2007, 2005; Feldman, 2003; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002; Feldman, 2000).

Some authors approach strategising at the '*micro-level*' from a different direction to that of organisational '*routines*', rather seeing the activity of '*organising*' as being implicitly strategic

(Smith & Graetz, 2006). So rather than just routines, they see the more formal structures of organisation as '*artefacts and edifices of strategy*'. In a similar vein, the strategy adopted by an organisation that can be articulated at the '*meso-level*' can also be considered an '*artefact of strategising*' that was previously created by strategising at the '*micro-level*'. The starting point for the vast majority of '*micro-level*' investigations into strategising has been the large or medium sized organisation. For instance, the research conducted at Cranfield University into of the '*strategising*' conducted at the '*micro-level*' that might be underpinning competitive advantage (Ambrosini *et al.*, 2009; Ambrosini, 2003; Ambrosini & Bowman, 2001).

Another possible linkage between '*meso*' and '*micro*' levels that is being investigated from the S-as-P perspective is the use of '*strategy tools*'. This renewed academic interest has built upon previous investigations into the degree to which strategy tools and strategic frameworks are used in business. Quantitative studies were conducted at the '*macro*' and '*meso*' levels in the 1990's, and into the early years of this century; but these have only reported on the amount of usage by firms in a sector rather than any particular efficacy attributable to usage by strategisers (Kaplan & Norton, 2004; Frost, 2003; Savioz & Blum, 2002; Stonehouse & Pemberton, 2002). In contrast, S-as-P has shifted the focus to the practicalities of using such devices to assist strategising (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2009). Just as the DCV extended the RBV debate (particularly in the question of how distinctive capabilities or core competences are created over time); the S-as-P protagonists are similarly looking at the creation and renewal of competitive advantage (Regnér, 2008). Large organisations that have been studied under the S-as-P lens have been found to have differences in the '*micro-level*' strategic behaviour depending whether the activity is happening at the centre or the periphery of the organisation (Regnér, 2003). Unfortunately this can say little about the small business context (until comparative studies from small business emerge).

The S-as-P research methodologies all face problems, particularly when trying to ascribe performance improvements to strategising activities at the '*micro-level*'. Authors warn of the causal complexity and ambiguities surrounding performance, and the limitations of using data based on retrospective partial recall of participant subjects (March & Sutton, 1997). Such obstacles prompted Jarzabkowski & Spee to review the extent of S-as-P literature in 2009, and critically evaluate the growing body of academic knowledge and research agendas in this area. Jarzabkowski & Spee, like others in the field, make use of the term '*praxis*', which they define in the manner that will be adopted in this thesis:

"the stream of activity in which strategy is accomplished over time." (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p. 73).

'Praxis' (or the plural 'praxes') can be considered as theories or concepts put into practice, and refer(s) to the essential work that underpins strategy such as 'meeting', 'talking', 'arguing', 'persuading', 'reporting' and 'presenting'. In their analysis of the S-as-P research domain in 2009, the authors produced a 3 x 3 matrix (shown in adapted format in Figure 2.5). The vertical dimension is delineated by "level of praxis", that is the level at which the praxis occurs – 'micro', 'meso' and 'macro' (as similarly defined in this thesis).

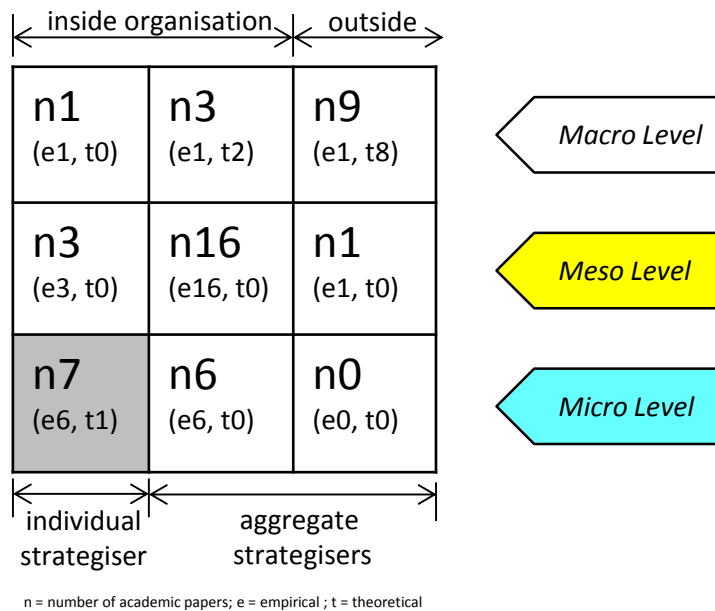


Figure 2.5. Adapted from Jarzabkowski & Spee (2009, p.74)

The horizontal dimension takes regard of types of "strategy practitioners". These are those people who strategise and can include 'individual internal actors', 'internal aggregate actors' and 'external aggregate actors'. S-as-P theorists consider anyone within the focal organisation that performs strategy to be a 'practitioner'. The diagram also distinguishes between 'internal' or 'external' primary locations for the practitioner relative to the firm. 'Aggregate Actors' can be considered as 'individuals' strategising as a group, just so long as they are engaged in the strategy process at an individual locus of action (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008).

The modified diagram (in Figure 2.6) serves to portray the interest in this thesis located on a broader canvas (i.e. individuals strategising at the 'micro-level' of praxis, shown shaded). It was evident in 2009 that the majority of journal articles had been concerned with aggregate actors operating at the 'meso-level' of praxis.

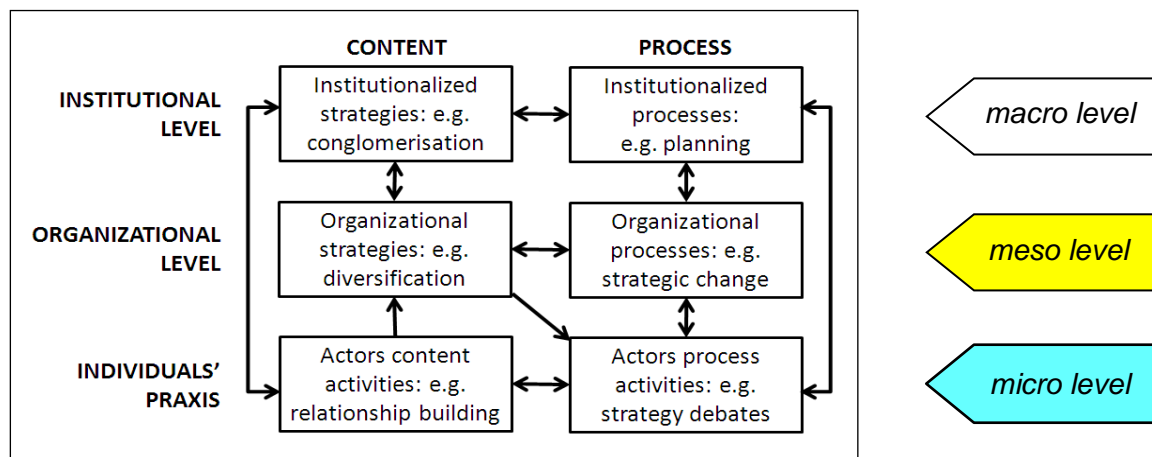


Figure 2.6 Adapted from “Levels of strategy” (Johnson *et al.*, 2007, p.18)

Just as S-as-P theorists urge investigation at the micro-level of praxis, they are also concerned that the new deeper level of investigation should not be disconnected from the ‘meso’ or ‘macro’ levels of strategic analysis. Any such findings should have relevance and connection to the firm, its wider business environment and institutional forces. Seidl (2007) notes that some S-as-P authors are now investigating the ‘macro-social’ influences on strategisers at the ‘micro-level’. There appears to be general agreement in the community of S-as-P theorists that there is a necessity to adopt a multi-level approach to the analysis of empirical research at both the level of social construction and the politics of intentional communication (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). This concern is raised elsewhere; for instance, De la Ville & Mounoud, using a narrative approach to S-as-P, see the problem this way:

“Focusing on micro-activities leaves the macro-micro distinction intact, but raises the problem of linking individual actions to macro outcomes.” (de La Ville & Mounoud, 2010, p.183)

Strategising does not happen in isolation at the ‘micro-level’, and the interrelationship of higher levels has to be recognised. It will also be through this linkage that the S-as-P disciplines are expected to provide sensemaking to strategic issues that appear to defy analysis at the ‘meso-level’ of investigation. This has been the hope of S-as-P theorists who have previously been writing about the RBV, and is one of the main reasons for this burgeoning field of strategic inquiry. The S-as-P perspective is far from maturity as a field of research. It has only been seen as a movement since 1996; however, some work that was contributed prior to that is now seen as located within the ethos of this ‘practice turn’.

“S-as-P provides insights beyond studying organizational processes and embeds strategizing activities in the wider practices of societies” (Whittington, 2006b, 2007 cited in Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p.70).

Since the S-as-P movement began in 1996 it has increasingly been portrayed as a distinct strategy perspective (Chia, 2004). It is concerned with how individuals perform ‘strategising’, or the “myriad micro activities that make up strategy and strategising in practice” (Balogun *et al.*, 2003, p.199).

It has been observed that the S-as-P perspective's attention to '*tacit knowledge*' (Polanyi, 1966, 1962) held by those involved in day-to-day strategy formulation has shared origins with another perspective - the Resource-based View (Johnson *et al.*, 2007).

The next section will discuss Small Business Strategy and its place in the literature stream of Small Business and Small-scale Entrepreneurship.

2.2. The Small-scale Entrepreneurship & Small Business Stream (B)

The second stream in this literature review is devoted to research that investigates strategy in the context of small business; but rather than call it such, the author acknowledges the close affinity with an aspect of entrepreneurship. The association between small business ownership and entrepreneurship has been a topic of academic debate for decades (Beaver, 2003; Beaver, 2002a). For the purposes of this thesis, it is only necessary to include small-scale entrepreneurship within the scope of a small business strategy review (given that much of the entrepreneurship literature relates equally to large organisations). A specific term of '*intrapreneur*' has even been coined to indicate entrepreneurial activity that is usually found in larger organisations (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003).

The key part of this stream is literature devoted to small business strategy (and that found under the banner of entrepreneurship that relates to small business strategy). Prior to discussing this it is necessary to consider the definitions of small business. In the early days of small business research, the definitions were very varied and the upper threshold on employee numbers could be as high as 2000. A \$10m annual turnover (in the early 80's) was seen as the maximum revenue for a small business (see Robinson Jr. & Pearce II, 1984, pp.131-2, Table 2). Schwenk & Shrader (1993) reviewed articles from the USA and UK that were published between 1982 and 1990 and found the small business definitions had, over time, become more precise by limiting employee headcounts to fewer than 100.

"The differences in the administrative structure of the very small and the very large firms are so great that in many ways it is hard to see that the two species are of the same genus . . . we cannot define a caterpillar and then use the same definition for a butterfly."
Penrose (1959, p. 19).

In the UK the Bolton Report (1971) had a similarly sector-centric view of what constituted a small business (see Figure 2.7)

For instance, a manufacturing firm was deemed small with 200 employees whilst the equivalent small firm in construction could only have 25. The small wholesale business could turnover £200,000 p.a. whereas the small retailer could only declare £50,000 p.a. in 1971.

Before proceeding with an explanation of strategy research in smaller businesses it is necessary to discuss what is meant by the term SME and how its sub-categories will be used in this thesis. In the UK, the term 'SME' is generally understood to stand for 'Small and Medium Sized Enterprise'. The acronym is now found in common parlance, particularly by local and national politicians, companies, public sector organisations and the Press.

The Bolton Report definitions of the small firm	
Sector	Definition
Manufacturing	200 employees or less
Retailing	Turnover of £50,000 p.a. or less
Wholesale trades	Turnover of £200,000 p.a. or less
Construction	25 employees or less
Mining/quarrying	25 employees or less
Motor trades	Turnover of £100,000 p.a. or less
Miscellaneous services	Turnover of £50,000 p.a. or less
Road transport	5 vehicles or less
Catering	All excluding multiples and brewery managed pubs

Figure 2.7 Extract from the Bolton Report (1971) in Curran & Blackburn (2001)

The preponderance of the term has been exacerbated by the UK's membership of the European Union (EU) which uses the definition to permit limited financial assistance to SMEs (assistance that would normally be banned under the State Aid Rules of the European Treaty). This is accordance with the EU Charter rules that are aimed at establishing a "level playing field" for business across the EU membership states whilst attempting to stimulate enterprise.

UK Accountancy Definition of Small and Medium Enterprise			
	Employees	Turnover	Balance Sheet
Small	1 - 49	< £6.5m	< £3.26m
Medium	50 - 249	< £25.9m	< £12.9m

Figure 2.8 The UK Accountancy Definition of Enterprise Size

In the United Kingdom, the Companies Act (2006) sets the size boundaries of companies in terms of financial and employment metrics (sections 382 and 465) Figure 2.8 shows the categories. However, it is worth noting that this domestic definition is not universally adopted in the UK. The profound effect of EU funding to state members, has meant that firms falling within the EU definition of SME have a strong financial incentive to be so regarded, and therefore opt for that classification system.

EU definition of SME (1963 – 2006)			
	Employees	Turnover	Balance Sheet
Small	10 - 49	€2m - €10m*	€2m - €10m*
Medium	50 - 249	€10m - €50m*	€10m - €43m*
* Less than			

Figure 2.9 Original EU definition of SME

In the period 1963 – 2006, the European Economic Community (EEC) and latterly the European Union (EU) had a very similar definition to that employed by the UK Accountancy profession (see Figure 2.9). It was also based upon the metrics of employees, turnover and balance sheet value.

The current EU definition (see Figure 2.10) retains a similar structure, but the European Commission wants to focus particular assistance on very small firms. They have included an additional category of 'Micro Business'. Firms falling within the categories of Medium, Small and Micro enterprises can be legitimately eligible for certain limited EU funding assistance that does not infringe the precepts of the Treaty of Rome with regard to the abolition of State Aid. Such assistance is subject to '*di minimis*' regulations that limit such funding according to a three year rolling account.

It is worth noting that the SME definition has been broadened to include individuals (as opposed to

EU definition of SME (since 2006)				
	Employees	Turnover	or	Balance Sheet
Micro	1 - 9	< €2m		< €2m
Small	10 - 49	€2m - €10m*		€2m - €10m*
Medium	50 - 249	€10m - €50m*		€10m - €43m*
* Less than				

Figure 2.10 EU definition of SME since 2006

companies) that are engaged in economic activity. One of the major problems with the EU's revised definition of SME is that the acronym has not been altered to match the change, i.e. confusingly 'SME' has not become 'MSME'.

Although the term SME is widely used in the extant literature, the assumption that it always applies to the three EU categorisations shown above is erroneous. There are other definitions in use in countries outside of the EU. For, instance the USA uses the same term but with very different categories across various business sectors. It can be seen that some care is required when comparing literature concerning SMEs as to which criteria was applicable at the time of writing. Obviously, the main concern is with comparisons at the boundary edge for each category. The acronym MSE is now being used by notable authors (such as Gibb, 2009) to denote Micro and Small Enterprises.

The study of small businesses has reached a consensus view over many decades that small businesses are not miniature versions of large companies (Redmond *et al.*, 2008; Marsden & Forbes, 2003; Man *et al.*, 2002; Burns & Dewhurst, 1996; Keats & Bracker, 1988; Welsh & White, 1981; Dandridge, 1979). Obviously most large firms have an ultimate origin in a small business (although the lineage can be somewhat tenuous and distant when subjected to acquisitions and mergers). However, the researcher cannot assume that methodologies that are applied to the study of large institutions can just simply be scaled down for the small business (Blackburn &

Kovalainen, 2009; Motwani *et al.*, 2006; Beaver & Prince, 2004; Smallbone & Wyer, 2000).

Beaver defines the small business owner-manager in the following way:

“A small business owner is an individual who establishes and manages a business for the principal purpose of furthering personal goals. The business must be the primary source of income and will consume the majority of one's time and resources. The owner perceives the business as an extension of his or her personality, intricately bound with family needs and desires.” (Beaver, 2002c, p.42).

This can be contrasted Carland's definition of an entrepreneur:

“An entrepreneur is an individual who establishes and manages a business for the principal purposes of profit and growth. The entrepreneur is characterized principally by innovative behaviour and will employ strategic management practices in the business.” (Carland et al., 1984, p.358)

Furthermore, the firms that these people create and manage can also be categorised.

*“The **small firm** is independently owned and operated, not dominant in its field, and does not engage in innovative strategic practices. The **entrepreneurial venture**, by contrast, is any business whose primary goals are profitability and growth and that can be characterised by innovative strategic management practices.” (Beaver, 2007, p.11)*

The essential difference is one of motivation, in that the entrepreneur tends to be motivated more by profit than ownership of any particular business. This can be seen in the tendency of some entrepreneurs to serially create and liquidate a series of businesses in an intended progression of wealth accumulation. As far as the Government is concerned, such activity represents a lamentable series of business failures; because the statistical evidence is based upon business mortality rather than the aggregation of entrepreneurial wealth (Gibb, 2000).

The problem with the definitions above is that the researcher can find exceptions to the rules in the field. For instance, a small firm that is dominant in its field. The definition of 'field' is crucial here. A small firm possessing a governing patent in that field could be judged to be dominant. Such entities are often the target of an acquisition attempt by a larger player. Beaver's contention that an SBO does not engage in innovative strategic practices is also problematic, particularly if the investigation is informed by S-as-P research. Writers that publish in the small management field are also being urged towards some of the tenets of S-as-P:

“... the [small business] domain is pre-paradigmatic and needs to build upon the foundations of the social sciences before it develops and, indeed, if it is ever to develop, its own distinctive theoretical basis.” (Blackburn & Kovalainen, 2009, p.128)

Paradoxically, even though the majority of small businesses do not grow, the majority of SME research has been focused on growth strategies (Marsden & Forbes, 2003: p.39). There have been numerous frameworks postulated concerning the theoretical stages of growth and the lifecycle concept as applied to a small business (Greiner, 1998; Gibb & Davies, 1990; Scott & Bruce, 1987; Churchill & Lewis, 1983).

Recent work by Achtenhagen, Naldi & Melin (2010) has revealed an added problem. The authors

have found that the term 'growth' is perceived somewhat differently by business owners and academics. The SBO does not necessarily equate growth with quantitative financial or employment measures, but rather opts to express business growth in more qualitative terms which includes such things as '*maturation of capabilities*' or '*improvement in service delivery*'.

This section has reviewed the interpretation and definitions of small business. Although this provides a subjective scale for the research described in this thesis, it does not consider the behaviour of small business owners. There is a considerable body of knowledge appertaining to entrepreneurship. The author cannot preclude this from the research of Small Business Owners (SBOs), as some may well be entrepreneurial. The next section describes entrepreneurship as it might be exhibited by a strategising SBO; that is, '*small-scale entrepreneurial strategy*'.

2.2.1. Small-scale Entrepreneurship

The interrelated fields of Small-scale Entrepreneurial Strategy and Small Business Strategy research are considered a single stream of knowledge (for the purposes of this thesis) from which emanates a specific area of research devoted to strategy in small business.

Despite many attempts, offering a precise and unequivocal definition of the '*entrepreneur*' has proven impossible for writers interested in the subject. There are a plethora of definitions for the term '*entrepreneur*' within the literature (Wickham, 2006). The debate concerning what exactly constitutes the entrepreneurship field of study has also lasted for decades (Bruyat & Julien, 2000; Bygrave & Hofer, 1991; Carland *et al.*, 1989; Carsrud & Johnson, 1989; Brockhaus, 1987; Ronstadt, 1986; Sexton & Van Auken, 1985).

The definition of the entrepreneur has expanded in recent years to accommodate behaviour that reflects the complexities of the contemporary business environment. The follow definition is typical, and will be used henceforth in this thesis.

"Entrepreneurs are those persons who seek to generate economic and social value through the creation or expansion of economic activity, by identifying and exploiting opportunities for new products, processes, markets, and for meeting outstanding social and environmental needs." (Blundel & Lockett, 2011, p.6).

The wider research arena of Entrepreneurship has embraced the strategic thinking of entrepreneurs. However, Entrepreneurial strategy is not necessarily confined to small business (Kuratko & Audretsch, 2009; Barton-Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991; Pinchot, 1985). Various authors have offered differing typologies of entrepreneurs (Westhead *et al.*, 2005, 2003; McCarthy & Leavy, 1998; Bracker *et al.*, 1988) as a '*contextual landscape*' for their writings on business strategy. None of these offerings are particular to a size of business. In terms of personality and behaviour, the strategising entrepreneur can be seen both as '*heroic*' (Perren & Ram, 2004) and '*sinister*' (Kets de Vries, 1985).

Some owners of small businesses prefer to be cast as '*entrepreneurs*'; whereas many others do

not particularly identify with the title. Entrepreneurs that specialise in business start-ups, tend to own a portfolio of businesses that remain in the SME classification. They often have a preference to sell any firm that has grown beyond the entrepreneur's preferred limits as a "going concern". Some entrepreneurs want to always maintain direct control on their portfolio businesses. This becomes impractical when one of the businesses grows too large (usually requiring the recruitment of professional managers). McGowan *et al.* (2001) see the entrepreneurial character of the ownership manifest itself in the ethos and character of the small firm, and thereby something that could be difficult to maintain in a larger organisation. Beaver (2003) makes the further assertion that the '*entrepreneurial small firm*' is distinguished from the average small business by the level of innovation that is adopted by the ownership. This theoretical linkage between entrepreneurship and innovation can be traced back to Schumpeter (1934).

The author has used a designation of '*small-scale entrepreneurship*' for this literature review so that it falls within the bounds of investigation of strategising in small businesses. It is now necessary to review small business strategy, a field that the author considers promising as an opportunity to contribute knowledge by means of S-as-P research.

2.2.2. Small business strategy

To a large extent, it has been found that the chosen strategy in a small business closely reflects the personal goals of owner (Kisfalvi, 2002). The owner-manager may only be qualified in one aspect of the business. This is often seen where the owner is a founding expert in the technology being used within the firm.

The most common strategic complaint among SMEs (particularly in the high-technology and manufacturing sectors) is the difficulty in recruiting skilled staff. This is often seen as a limiting factor to growth. Another factor is the '*resource poverty*' that a small operation usually faces (Welsh & White, 1981, p.18). From a financial point of view, this situation has become even more acute in the wake of the 2008 Banking Crisis. In the UK, there has been considerable complaint from the SME sector concerning banks' lack of willingness to lend at realistic rates.

Some small business can be characterised as being '*supply-chain*' companies. In a recession, they can be particularly vulnerable if the ultimate '*customer*' company goes into liquidation or moves abroad. At the time of writing this thesis the UK economy is yet to fully emerge from the worst recession since the 1930s. Politicians can be heard almost every day extolling the job creating virtue of small business activity. Numerous studies have shown that small enterprise is a significant job creator.

"... the most cited public benefit of small business growth however is the contribution made by these firms to employment." (Smallbone & Wyer, 2000) cited in (Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007, p.297).

It is argued by authors, that the small business context is different to large-scale enterprise in the

practice of strategy. The emphasis is on adaptation to immediate circumstances without much in the way of long-range prediction or strategic manoeuvre (Marsden & Forbes, 2003, p.36; Jennings & Beaver, 1997, p.64).

There are plenty of anecdotal references in the literature to some small businesses that are able to compete with larger organisations by being more agile, 'closer' to their customers and more responsive to changing market conditions (Jones *et al.*, 2010; Singh *et al.*, 2008; Covin *et al.*, 1990; Forbes, 1974). Yet many small businesses have proven to be vulnerable to adverse market conditions, particularly in the aftermath of recessions. The post-recession recovery period can be particularly dangerous, because some of the remaining small firms have been known to take on too much business without due regard to working capital requirements and cash-flow implications.

Many authors regarded the traditional focus upon the processual nature of strategic thinking to be likely to miss the finer detail of an individual's experience of strategic thought. In particular, the small business environment has little, or no, room for full-time strategic specialists; so examination of '*strategising*' is inextricably linked to the more mundane and '*day-to-day*' management activities of the respondents. Many early researchers of strategic thinking in SMEs identify the need to discriminate between "*operational*" thinking applied to activities such as business forecasting and production planning, and the "*strategic*" deliberation given to issues such as innovation and marketing (Smith *et al.*, 1996; Lyles *et al.*, 1993; Schrader *et al.*, 1989; Carpenter, 1986). They see the problem for the researcher as being one of segregation between these two types of activity. More recently, Ibrahim *et al.* (2004) have identified three discrete streams of academic interest concerning strategy within the small business literature. These are '*Operational vs. Strategic Thinking*'; '*Performance Outcomes of Planning*'; '*Formal vs. Informal Planning*'. The authors also posited '*The use of Strategy Tools*' as a fourth stream.

The main thrust of research into small business strategy has been achieved by the examination of various dualisms (e.g. '*Formal vs. Informal*', '*Operational vs. Strategic*', or '*Planned vs. Unplanned*'). Atherton (2003) takes a different view. He suggests that knowledge within the small business can be categorised as a set of loose groupings they can be mapped onto a two-dimensional field that has the quadrants, '*Engaged*', '*Considered*', '*Embedded*', and '*Justified*'. The full diagram is shown in Figure 2.11.

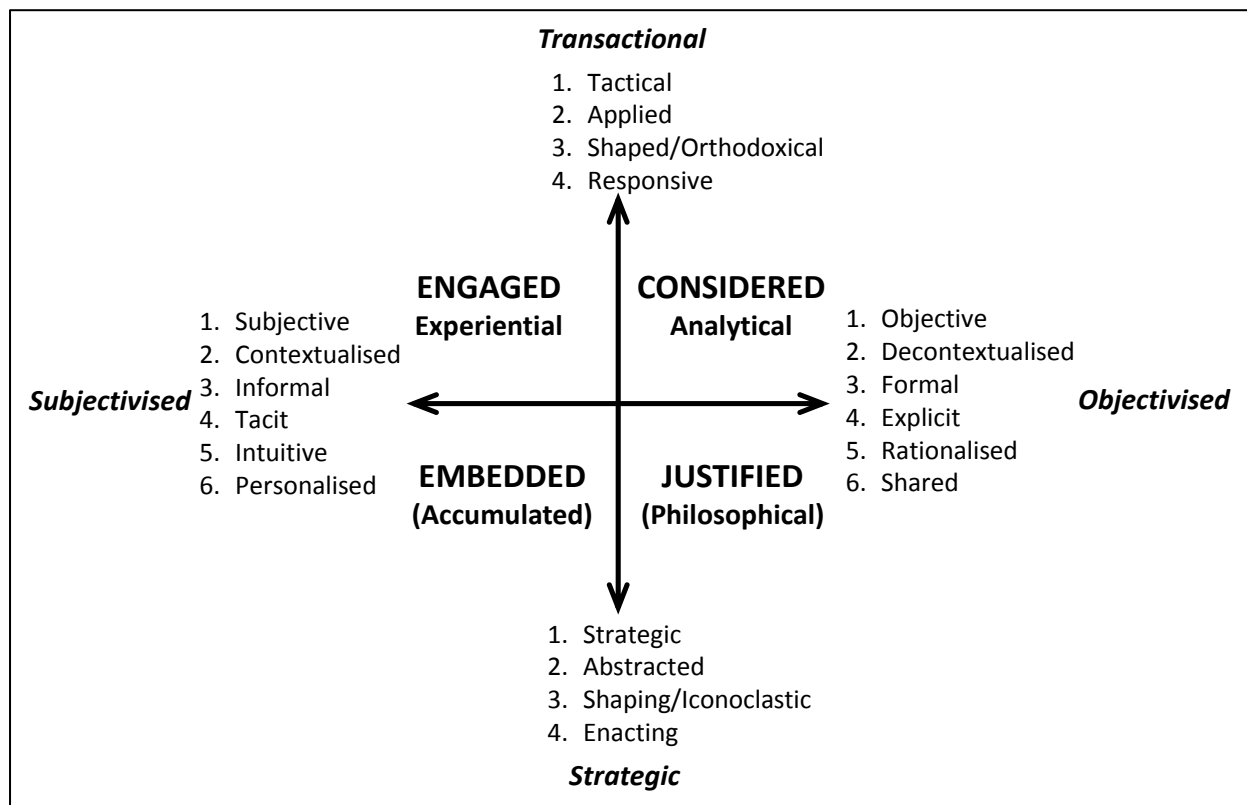


Figure 2.11 Model of knowledge in small businesses, Atherton (2003)

From the point of view of this literature review, the interesting part is Atherton's vertical delineation in the diagram. He shows the difference between '*Strategic*' and other forms of thinking which he terms '*Transactional*'. The examples used in the diagram for strategic knowledge suggests processes of '*abstraction*', '*shaping*', '*iconoclasm*', and '*enacting*'; whereas, transactional knowledge is '*tactical*', '*applied*', '*shaped rather than shaping*', and '*responsive*'. The horizontal aspect of the Atherton Model provides the S-as-P researcher with an interesting distinction. The left hand side is somewhat suggestive of the philosophy of S-as-P in that it is focused upon the '*informal*' and '*personalised*', yet S-as-P does not preclude the '*explicit*' or the '*shared*' as seen on the other side of this framework. A reliable and explicit mapping of S-as-P to one quadrant of the framework does not appear possible to the author.

The use of the prefix "*strategic*" can often be inferred to bestow greater importance or scale on an activity in a large organisation; e.g. Strategic Marketing, or Strategic HRM. Regardless of context, some authors question the inherent merit of using such an accolade (French *et al.*, 2004). This particular use of the word '*strategic*' will not usually enter the vocabulary of the SBO when referring to internal operations (where all activities are inherently small scale). The exception to this observation is where the SBO's firm is part of a supply chain to a large corporate customer, and it becomes necessary to adopt the customer's terminology.

It could be argued that smaller businesses cannot plan '*strategically*' due to the small scale of their operations. However, there are many instances of small businesses changing, or creating, a

marketplace through the use of innovation or technological breakthrough. This is the essence of “*Strategic Intent*” and outrageous “*stretch goals*” as described by Hamel & Prahalad (1993, 1989) in cases where the smaller firm has not only outperformed larger competitors but also set a new agenda for an industry.

Woods & Joyce (2003) make the common distinction that ‘*strategic management thinking*’ involves the contemplation of various future scenarios that do not necessarily have an immediate impact on the business, whereas ‘*operational thinking*’ tends to have a shorter time horizon and is concerned with actualities rather than the ponderables. Strategic management involves consideration of the company’s future which may involve significant change over the longer term.

"Operational management is concerned with the on-going activities of the business in relation to existing products or services and in respect of existing markets. Strategic management, in contrast, is concerned with the future success of the business and may entail major changes in the benefits to be offered customers in organizational capacity, and in competitive posture", (Woods & Joyce, 2003, p.181).

Previous studies into strategic thinking in small business have shown that there is very little activity that mirrors the formalisation of the methods used in many corporate environments (Ghobadian *et al.*, 2008; O'Regan & Lehmann, 2008; Singh *et al.*, 2008; Gibbons & O'Connor, 2005; Stonehouse & Pemberton, 2002; Lyles *et al.*, 1993). The literature often describes the search for a causal link between formal planning and subsequent improved performance. However, throughout the literature the case has not been made conclusively (either way). For instance in the USA, Robinson and Pearce (1983) surveyed 85 small banks in South Carolina and found no significant performance outcomes between those that were formal planners and the rest that were not. Whereas, Bracker, Keats, and Pearson (1988) found that of the 217 owners of small electronic businesses surveyed, the formal strategic planners had significantly better financial outcomes than other types of planners (all members of the American Electronics Association, AEA).

A methodological problem common to most studies is revealed by Ramanujam & Venkatraman (1988, 1987) who find that many contributions in the literature categorise companies as ‘*those that plan*’ and ‘*those that don't*’, rather than measuring the relative level of formalisation. This echoes a similar concern expressed by Orpen:

"A major problem with earlier research into the impact of planning on performance was the arbitrary classification of firms as formal or informal planners", (Orpen, 1985, p.16).

Gibbons & O'Connor (2005) found that the degree of *entrepreneurialism* in a company is a key guide to the likely level of formalisation in the strategic thinking process. Whereas, Mazzarol and Reboud (2009, p.83) suggest that a “*lack of planning expertise*” is often responsible for the SBO’s inability to formalise the strategy formulation process.

As this review has already explained, the definition of strategy is so wide that it is difficult to compare research studies that are measuring whether formal strategic thinking occurs. A lack of such planning does not preclude a successful approach to business using a process of emergent

strategy (Mintzberg & Hunsicker, 1988). Westhead and Storey (1996) observe that although small firms may be intrinsically too busy to devote time to a formal strategy. The authors point to observed SBO perceptions that the business environment is too turbulent to make it worth the time spent on deliberate long-term plans. More recently, Gibbons & O'Connor (2005,p.181) have found that the degree of entrepreneurialism in a company is a key guide to the likely level of formalisation in the strategic thinking process.

It has been suggested that researchers interested in organisational strategic thinking have to make a mental adjustment when moving the focus of attention from a large to a small enterprise (Beaver & Prince, 2004; Hill & McGowan, 1999). This is because appreciation of the word '*strategy*' and its implications are partially linked to organisational size. An issue that would not be considered strategic in a large organisation can have profound long-term implications for the small business. In the cases that follow in this study there will be issues discussed by SBOs that would not be considered strategic in a large organisation; yet in the context of a small business they can have a profound effect.

The routine daily operation of a small business can be fraught and frenetic for the owner-manager. Making time for strategic thinking is often considered by owners to be virtually impossible in such an environment (Burt & van der Heijden, 2003; Foster, 1993). The disorganised-reactive environment where managers are constantly 'fire-fighting' will produce a sanguine response to the notion of stopping to plan the future direction of the business (Aram & Cowen, 1990, p.65). Even where the business has effective organisation for day-to-day business activities, the sheer volume of work can leave the need for long term planning being judged to be a lower priority than the immediacy of operational matters (Beaver, 2007, 2002c).

Most owner-managers have entered business without having gained the knowledge of how to conduct strategic management. The lack of an obvious short-term pay-off could also be a disincentive to making the necessary resource and time investment (Beaver, 2002c). Authors, such as Beaver, suggest that there is a lack of confidence among small business owners to apply sophisticated strategic methods to their business. Equally, they do not have the financial resources to be able to afford professional services. The small business support network in the UK (Business Link) has also suffered from a lack of suitably qualified personnel to advise owner-managers in such matters. The benefits of long range planning are mostly unrealisable in the short term, and this conflicts with the immediacy of concerns in a small business such as cash flow generation (Aram & Cowen, 1990).

Many owner-managers like '*keeping everything close to the chest*'. The thought of performing formal strategic planning with others (particularly staff) is anathema to their '*internal locus of control*' (O'Gorman *et al.*, 2005; Rotter, 1990, 1975, 1966). Where they do confide, it tends to be close friends or family members who are often the least likely individuals to give professional business advice (Beaver, 2002a). A very common reason for owner-managers having no appetite

for long-range planning is that they perceive the business environment to be too changeable. They therefore see the effort as largely wasted (Richbell *et al.*, 2006; Westhead & Cowling, 1998).

In the same way that many middle-aged people obfuscate over the decision to write a '*last will and testament*', some owner-managers refuse to plan for the succession in their business (or eventual sale). Studies have shown that the succession question is often the most fraught strategic issue for a small family run business (Chrisman *et al.*, 2005; Blackburn & Stokes, 2000). In a recent UK study of small manufacturing firms it was found that only 15% have formal succession plans in place (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2008). Although not specifically the focus of this study, this interesting question can often arise in strategy interviews with small business owners. As Blackburn & Stokes caution:

"the whole notion of business succession is far more complex than many studies and practitioners would lead us to believe", (Blackburn & Stokes, 2000, p.58).

Richbell, Watts and Wardle (2006) conducted research into whether UK owner-managers used formal written business plans. They surveyed 70 small metal-working firms in the Sheffield area of the UK, and found that several factors that made owner-managers more likely to be formal planners. These were '*better education*' and '*previous experience in larger firms or other sectors*'.

In terms of business survival, it was found that higher degrees of strategic planning had a positive effect on business longevity (Sexton & Van Auken, 1985). On the pessimistic side of the discussion, researchers conclude that the absence of long term planning can be an aggravating factor in a business failure (Bracker *et al.*, 1988; Bracker & Pearson, 1986).

Many researchers have been interested in the effect of planning on firm performance and have conducted research through longitudinal studies (Hughes & Morgan, 2008; Singh *et al.*, 2008; Gibson & Cassar, 2005; French *et al.*, 2004; Miller *et al.*, 2004; Peel & Bridge, 1998; Rue & Ibrahim, 1998; Welham, 1998; Miller & Cardinal, 1994; McKernan & Morris, 1993; Aram & Cowen, 1990). "*The highest percentage of failures (20 percent) occurred among firms at the lowest strategy level; the lowest percentage (7.9 percent) occurred among firms at the highest strategy level. Strategic planning appears to help many firms to survive in a competitive market*", (Sexton & Van Auken, 1985, p.13) Beaver & Ross (2000) studied SMEs in the Midlands and found that strategic thinking is a vital factor in firms that succeed and grow. A meta-analysis of existing literature conducted in 1993 found a positive association between strategic planning and firm performance but it only became obvious when '*unconventional analysis techniques*' had been employed (Schwenk & Shrader, 1993). A different approach was used with a longitudinal study of start-up SMEs that had entrepreneurship graduate founders from Stirling University (Fletcher & Harris, 2002). The researchers were seeking evidence of differences in performance outcome between formalised and emergent strategic thinking in SMEs. They addressed the following research question,

"Is there an association between the use of specific planning or emergent procedures by

entrepreneurs and their growth performance, and if so, what is that association?"

One of their interesting results, which appears contrary to Mintzberg's thinking, was reported thus,

"In no aspect of strategy formation [] was using only an emergent approach associated with growth. In many aspects, it was associated with low growth" (Fletcher & Harris, 2002, p.307).

In the USA, it was found that 80% of US SMEs prepare long-range written plans (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2004). Fletcher & Harris (2002) concluded that "growth firms" tend to have a pragmatic approach to the choice of planned, emergent, or mixed strategies. In the UK, Peel & Bridge (1998) found that

"perceived profitability and success in achieving primary objectives were positively and significantly associated with strategic planning intensity; when compared with competing businesses." (Peel & Bridge, 1998, p. 854)

Despite the continued academic interest in the question of whether there is a positive causal link between planning activities in small business and superior financial performance, there still has not been a definitive study (O'Gorman, 2006; Stone & Brush, 1996; Schwenk & Shrader, 1993; Cragg & King, 1988). Rauch found that the relative importance ascribed to strategy in small business was also a cultural factor. A positive causal link between planning and success was only found in societies that value 'uncertainty avoidance' (Rauch *et al.*, 2000, p.38).

Improvisation is rapidly becoming a new area of small business research. The term '*improvisation*', describes a situation where the plan-execute cycle is compressed to the extent that both are happening in parallel. Researchers have encountered owner-managers that admit to '*making it up as they go along*', or '*learning on the job*' (Alpan *et al.*, 2007). Some researchers are now wishing to expand the envelope of strategy to admit '*improvisation*' as a legitimate form of '*strategising*' (Wood, 2007; Baker *et al.*, 2003). This new academic argument bears a passing resemblance to the one that occurred between Mintzberg's emergent strategy and the Strategic Planning School in the 1980's.

A particular form of '*improvisation*' is known as '*bricolage*'. This is a term drawn from anthropological research (Levi-Strauss, 1966), it means '*drawing upon the resources to hand rather than searching further afield*' (Baker *et al.*, 2003; Weick, 1993). This is seen as part of improvisation by most authors, but Baker (2003) warns that although '*improvisation*' implies '*bricolage*', the reverse is not true. The concept is taken further in work by Jones, Macpherson & Jayawarna (2010) who observe this behaviour using the DCV perspective on new technology firms. The problem with '*bricolage*' is that it can be addictive. Gaining some success without access to external resources can be self-limiting for a small business (McKelvie & Davidsson, 2009; Baker & Nelson, 2005). It has been known for decades that many long-term owner-managers of small businesses will only contemplate '*organic growth*' (Cressy, 1995; Gibb & Scott, 1985). They steadfastly refuse to call upon the financial services of high street banks and other

lenders; even if prudent borrowing could accelerate growth in the business (Hutchinson, 2004). As will be shown later in this study, the cohort of participating companies all come from this category of 'organic growers'.

For those SBOs that are not determined to remain on an organic growth trajectory, a recession (such as the prevalent economic conditions in the UK at the time of writing this thesis) can produce profound and perverse effects in business strategy. For instance, a fear of borrowing among certain owner-managers leads to the adoption of business models that are inherently self-limiting in scope, and these sentiments have been reinforced by the 2008 Banking Crisis and the increased collateral requirements of lenders since that time.

Some small business research authors have also focused on the use of strategy tools in SMEs. The use of such techniques is considered to be a very strong indicator of strategising activity, and therefore worthy of study (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2004; Woods & Joyce, 2003). There has been a gradual increase in research that cover this area since the mid 1990's (Kaplan, 2011; Eppler & Platts, 2009; Abouzeedan & Busler, 2005; Kaplan & Norton, 2004; Savioz & Blum, 2002; Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Rue, 1974). There is sufficient evidence across a broad range of articles to strongly suggest that the use of strategy tools is a significant indicator of strategic thinking activity inside a company. For instance, Drozdow (1997) demonstrates that the use of simulation tools can improve the effectiveness of small business consultants in family firms. Hussey (1997) goes further by compiling a glossary of strategy tools. He categorises by application type, and has found the most common to be the "*information manipulation*" type (31) followed by "*financial analysis*" (15) and "*forecasting*" (3) with the rest being of a few discrete types (10).

Although studying 'strategy tool usage' could be a useful exercise, caution is required when categorising a technique as a '*strategy tool*'. Many of the studies into strategy tools have shown the predominance of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) type analysis. However, research carried out by Hill & Westbrook (1997) tracked the application of this particular technique by consultants in UK SMEs. The results were indicative of a very low propensity by firms to act upon the findings of their SWOT. The reason for this apathy was (according to Hill & Westbrook) the inadequacy of SWOT as real business strategy tool:

"... SWOT as deployed in these companies was ineffective as a means of analysis or as part of a corporate strategy review.", (Hill & Westbrook, 1997,p.50)

Some authors suggest that the paucity of SBOs that overtly strategise is mostly due to non-rational motivations that don't require strategic planning for achievement. This is particularly true if the motivation is to deliberately avoid growing the business (Wang *et al.*, 2007). In recent decades, the lack of any real growth ambition in the majority of SMEs has been the bane of Government. Most SBOs simply do not want their businesses to grow larger than their financial needs and their ability to maintain personal control. Business support practitioners in the UK call such firms '*lifestyle businesses*'. This is because of the limited aspiration of providing regular income for the

owner and comfortable retirement with perhaps a legacy business for their offspring (Beaver, 2002b).

“They [small businesses] may not be the panacea for employment growth as many politicians often claim, given that the majority of small business are non-employing and the owners prefer to remain in this state” (Walker & Brown, 2004, p.588)

An unfortunate consequence of the 2008 banking crisis has been the creation of a new class of business with no immediate growth aspiration. These are termed ‘zombie’ companies, because they are regarded by business support experts as ‘*the living dead*.’ In more prosperous economic times, the lending institutions would have foreclosed on such companies and they would have been forced into liquidation. However, with such abnormally low base interest rate in the UK they are allowed to continue trading at an almost quiescent level. This situation will persist until the UK economy establishes steady growth (and interest rates start to rise). There will no doubt be much consternation in Government when economic recovery is heralded by a massive leap in business liquidations.

Some SBOs find it difficult to articulate their strategic ideas to others around them (this was a sentiment expressed by some of the SBOs in this study). They may have a ‘*vision*’ of where the company should be heading, but fail to communicate this as a ‘*mission*’ for the staff. French, Kelly & Harrison (2004, p.774) found that the ‘*vision-mission*’ communications link was notably undervalued in their survey of small professional service firms.

There is much general criticism of academic strategy research by practitioners. The output is often accused of being rendered inaccessible to non-academics (Adcroft & Willis, 2008; Barrett & Barrett, 2003; Petts, 1997). Naturally, this concern can apply to any size of business, but the busy owner-manager is very unlikely to have the necessary time, or inclination, to access and digest academic material. Research in other areas of management, such as HR, has uncovered the same disconnection between academic publication and casual managerial readership (Rynes *et al.*, 2002).

Small business can be susceptible to economic and environmental changes. Some regions and cultures place importance on the mitigation of uncertainty and therefore regard strategising as a worthwhile investment in time and effort to provide a greater sense of security (Rauch *et al.*, 2000; Thurston, 1983). However, this need to reduce uncertainty can lead to a planning ‘*straitjacket*’ that can inhibit a new firm’s ability to evolve (Thurston, 1983).

2.3. Research spanning Strategic Management and SBOs

There is a marked conjunction of the implied developmental theoretical bases of S-as-P and Small Business Strategy. Both fields are likely to utilise theory from the social sciences. In the case of S-as-P, the influence of social theorists is already apparent.

There has been a spasmodic and very occasional influence that the endogenous stream of strategic management research has had upon the area of Small Business Strategy research (the lateral arrows in Figure 2.1). Such interventions have tended to lag behind developments in the Strategic Management stream. In other words, the small business context has been late to receive any fresh attention from a new strategy perspective. It is the author's contention that another such intervention will eventually emerge from S-as-P into small business strategy research. The literature review reveals that the anticipated research of Small Business from the S-as-P viewpoint had not occurred at the time of the writing of this thesis (late 2013). This potential gap in the existing knowledge is identified as an area that might benefit from a flow of new research, and this thesis aims to introduce an early contribution to the Small Business Strategy research field from the perspective of Strategy-as-Practice (the question mark in Figure 2.1).

This part of the Literature Review will mention briefly the previous attempts to use endogenous strategic management perspectives (those focusing on the internal capabilities of firms) within the context of small-scale enterprise. There has always been a modicum of overlap between the two streams described in this literature review; nevertheless, traditionally, they have been considered discrete fields by those authors that are active in each area.

The RBV concept of '*Strategic Intent*' (Hamel & Prahalad, 1993, p.79) applies equally to small firms because it implies that growth can be achieved with apparently meagre resources; particularly, if it is driven by the ambition of the owner-manager. Marsden and Forbes (2003) find a desire for success on the part of the owner to be a better indicator of future growth than available resources. The RBV literature has tended to neglect SMEs. However, some authors have used the concept in the context of smaller enterprise (Bhamra *et al.*, 2010; Mills *et al.*, 2003; Chaston & Mangles, 1997; Petts, 1997). The most recent work in this vein by Bharna *et al.* has shown that there is a poor understanding of the core competence concept among UK manufacturing SMEs. The prevailing misconception being that a core competence equates to something that the firm is 'good at', irrespective of whether other competing firms can match or surpass it. Their respondents equated 'core competence' with skills such as '*lean manufacturing*' and readily admitted that these were also possessed by their competitors. Yet somehow they thought they were providing a competitive advantage to their firm. Even more alarming is the lack of appreciation of '*core rigidity*' (Leonard-Barton, 1992) where the very benefits of core competence become a 'straitjacket' that inhibits vital change.

Example RBV publications in the context of SMEs					
Author(s)	Date	Title	Publication	Vol (Iss)	Page
Petts, N.	1997	Building Growth on Core Competences: A Practical Approach.	Long Range Planning	Aug	551-560
Chaston, I., & Mangles, T.	1997	Core capabilities as predictors of growth potential in small manufacturing firms.	Journal of Small Business Management	35 (1)	47-57
Rangone, A.	1999	A Resource-Based Approach to Strategy Analysis in Small-Medium Sized Enterprises.	<i>Small Business Economics</i>	12(3)	233-248
Habbershon, T. Williams, M. L.	1999	A resource-based framework for assessing the strategic advantages of family firms.	<i>Family Business Review</i>	12 (1)	1-25
Duhan, S. Levy, M. Powell, P.	2001	Information systems strategies in knowledge-based SMEs: The role of core competencies.	<i>European Journal of Information Systems</i>	10 (1)	25-40
Almor, T. Hashai, N.	2004	The competitive advantage and strategic configuration of knowledge-intensive, small- and medium-sized multinationals: a modified resource-based view.	<i>Journal of International Management</i>	10 (4)	479-500
Baker, T. Nelson, R. E.	2005	Creating something from nothing: Resource construction through entrepreneurial bricolage.	<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	50 (3)	329-366
Chrisman, J. J. Chua, J. H. Sharma, P.	2005	Trends and Directions in the Development of a Strategic Management Theory of the Family Firm.	<i>Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice</i>	29 (5)	555-575
Hughes, P. Morgan, R. E.	2008	Fitting strategic resources with product-market strategy: Performance implications.	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	61	323-331
McKelvie, A. Davidsson, P.	2009	From Resource Base to Dynamic Capabilities: an Investigation of New Firms	<i>British Journal of Management</i>	20	S63-S80
Trott, P. Maddocks, T. Wheeler, C.	2009	Core competencies for diversifying: case study of a small business.	<i>Strategic Change</i>	18 (1-2)	27-43
Bhamra, R. Dani, S. Bhamra, T.	2010	Competence understanding and use in SMEs: a UK manufacturing perspective.	<i>International Journal of Production Research</i>	49 (10)	2729-2743

Table 2.1 RBV publications with SME context

A small business could easily become locked in this way with a dangerous dependency on one particular individual, (for example the death or incapacity of the sole founding technologist). Kraaijenbrink, et al. (2010, p.356) comment that the RBV does not “sufficiently recognize the role that judgment and mental models of individuals play in value assessment and creation”. This

criticism echoes the assertion by other authors that research needed to probe deeper than the meso-level (Whittington, 1996).

“Entrepreneurial management has little to do with analyzing and optimizing. It is more about sensing and seizing—figuring out the next big opportunity and how to address it” (Teece, 2007, p.1346).

In the field of Small Business the literature base is just starting to include work that utilises the DCV (Jones *et al.*, 2010; McKelvie & Davidsson, 2009). In an investigation of small new technology-based start-up firms; Jones *et al.* (2010) found that three dynamic capabilities were present; *bootstrapping*, *bricolage* and a linking capability of *learning*.

There is less DCV research concerned with the small business or entrepreneurial context (compared to RBV equivalents). This is not surprising as the DCV is a smaller field than the RBV, and has been in existence for a shorter time.

Example DCV publications in the context of SMEs					
Author(s)	Date	Title	Publication	Vol (Iss)	Page
Zahra, S. A., Sapienza, H. J. Davidsson, P.	2006	Entrepreneurship and Dynamic Capabilities: A Review, Model and Research Agenda.	<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	43 (4)	917-955
Newey, L. R. Zahra, S. A.	2009	The Evolving Firm: How Dynamic and Operating Capabilities Interact to Enable Entrepreneurship	<i>British Journal of Management</i>	20	S81-S100
McKelvie, A. Davidsson, P.	2009	From Resource Base to Dynamic Capabilities: an Investigation of New Firms	<i>British Journal of Management</i>	20	S63-S80
Jones, O. Macpherson, A. Jayawarna, D.	2010	Learning to Grow: Dynamic Capabilities in New Technology-based Firms.	<i>Hull University</i>		

Table 2.2 DCV publications with SME context

The tenets of sociological inquiry were already being directed towards entrepreneurial activity before the emergence of S-as-P as a significant movement. For instance (Bygrave & Minniti, 2000) argued that entrepreneurial behaviour is a dynamic process with outcomes influenced by social habits that are as important as legal and economic factors. While many authors have attributed a learning metaphor to entrepreneurial thinking which encompasses the possibility of strategising (Cope, 2005; Antonites, 2003; Mumford, 1997). Learning in this sense is in the tradition of Henri Fayol (1841-1925) where experiential ‘learning by doing’ leads to the accumulation of business experience (Wren, 1995).

There has been a recent addition to the entrepreneurship debate within S-as-P in the work of Johannison (2011; 2007; 1991) who is now using ‘Enactive Research’ (i.e. starting his own

business and using auto-ethnographic methods such as Action Research) to investigate entrepreneurs from the S-as-P perspective. As yet authors known for their contribution to the area of 'Strategy in Small Business' have not explicitly adopted the theoretical focus of S-as-P in their publications (at the time of writing this thesis in 2014).

Although S-as-P research can focus upon the individual working in any size of organisation, there is a paucity of S-as-P writing that makes specific reference to small enterprise. The current evolution of S-as-P has produced some theoretical underpinnings that ought to render research in small business environments, and certain models from S-as-P should be applicable, such as Bowman & Ambrosini's (2000) model of individual strategising.

As the field of study has expanded, S-as-P has started to provoke critical articles. It is accused of concentrating too much on implementation (Whittle & Mueller, 2010, p.1). Others feel that it should be a critical discourse and pay more attention to the politics of strategy making (McCabe, 2010; Carter *et al.*, 2008; Thomas, 2006; Clegg *et al.*, 2004). These authors also point out that S-as-P is currently drawing upon a variety of work from Sociology, and not all of this work is mutually compatible. Some of the initial criticism has been answered. For instance, Carter *et al.* (Carter *et al.*, 2008) accuse S-as-P authors of not mentioning the work of Mintzberg. This is not the case, as Chia & MacKay (2007, p.226) make explicit in their research.

The author notes that there are several parallel themes that are found in both S-as-P and Small Business strategy research. For instance, the S-as-P interest in the activities of '*external strategy practitioners*' (Jarzabkowski, 2005) can be mapped across to the research directed towards external consultants who advise small businesses (Street & Cameron, 2007; Sullivan, 2000). Another area of common interest with small business research is '*the use of strategy tools*'. Authors such as Drozdow (1997) and Frost (2003) are now joined by S-as-P researchers such as Gunn & Williams (2007). However, in this case the focus of the research is different in the two streams. The traditional small business research examines the strategy tool and its usage, whereas the S-as-P researcher's interest is in the strategising of the person wielding it.

This section has explored the literature that has appeared in the Strategic Management Stream that has focused upon the internal resources and capabilities of small businesses. The tendency for such publications to appear only occasionally is noted (such incursions are indicated by the horizontal arrows in Figure 2.1). The chapter summarises the cross-over research that has emerged from each endogenous strategy perspective. S-as-P is bereft of any published academic papers (at the time of writing this thesis) that have the specific context of studying the strategising of the Small Business Owner (SBO). As the first literature review chapter will show, it can be expected that the latest strategic management perspective, S-as-P, is likely to furnish some contextual research. The current lacuna identified by this Literature Review becomes a *raison d'être* for this thesis.

2.4. Other factors inherent in endogenous strategy research

The author has extended the scope of the literature review to include recent theoretical developments in a common reference-point of understanding between researchers and business people. The author has included the “*business model*” (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2005; Seddon *et al.*, 2004; Magretta, 2002) within this literature review because primary research interviews with small business owners often have this concept within the discourse. Often the business model can be an initial contextual description of a situation that is to be discussed in terms of strategising. The strategic academic literature on this subject has developed recently into an interest in Business Model Innovation (Chesbrough, 2010; Chesbrough, 2007; Mitchell & Coles, 2003). Although not specifically tied to the endogenous management stream it is necessary to include this concept because of the tendency to use it as an aggregate descriptor of internal resources and assets of a business. The business model also features in the Small Business academic literature (Longenecker *et al.*, 2013, pp. 159-162; Tetteh & Burn, 2001).

Therefore the business model has tended to emerge in the last decade as a nexus between the two streams in this literature review. This trend is particularly prevalent in small businesses that are trading across the internet. Researchers are increasingly likely to encounter such business model references (and acronyms) during discourse with SBOs. This is also happening for strategy researchers in general Strategic Management. Some authors now talk in terms of business models when discussing strategic management issues (Teece, 2010; Chesbrough, 2007; Yip, 2004; Hedman & Kalling, 2003; Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002). Although Business Model Innovation (BMI) is not being described as a strategy perspective in academic circles, it is gaining ground among notable academics who are deeply engaged in endogenous strategy research (Teece, 2010).

The direction of research in small business strategic thinking has been profoundly affected by the emergence of the Internet in the 1990s. One of the effects has been the ability of entrepreneurs to adopt “*business models*” that are readily described, deployed and enabled by Internet communication. A whole new concept of e-Business came to the literature base in the mid-1990s. Small businesses were created on the building blocks of e-Business models. Some eventually grew into the on-line giants of today (such as Amazon and Google).

The business model tends to be regarded as a ‘snap shot’ of a business situation. It should be a blueprint of how revenue is generated and costs are incurred in the business at a particular point in development of the business (Magretta, 2002). Discussion with small business owners concerning their strategic thinking increasingly involves reference to a business model, and some authors argue that this is an articulation of strategic thinking. Zott & Amit (2008) see the business model as a “*valid and distinct construct from received notions of a firm’s product market strategy*”. Seddon *et al.* (2004) consider that business models are more “*inward looking*” than strategy, as they focus more on the activity-system side of how a firm creates economic value. Chesbrough

(2007) suggests that a business model has six attributes. The first five are consistent with the findings of other authors and can be linked to form a credible written definition, e.g.

“A business model is a Value Proposition (1) for a Target Market (2) that creates a Value Chain (3) within a Value Network (4) that sustains a reliable Revenue Mechanism (5).”

However, Chesbrough's sixth attribute is more problematic as he suggests the business model formulates the competitive strategy of the business. Seddon *et al.* (2004) disagree, and see business models as “*abstractions of strategy*” that provide a meaningful business blueprint for comparison across markets, yet do not intrinsically define the competitive advantage. The notion that the mere adoption of a successful business model taken from another market context can guarantee strategic success is counter-intuitive to them. However, other authors are prepared to concede that the choice of a business model could be an influencing factor on business success.

Recent publications by strategic management authors have observed that innovation not only has to be applied to products and processes, but also needs to address the underlying business model (Johnson *et al.*, 2008b; Skarzynski & Gibson, 2008; Chesbrough, 2007; Giesen *et al.*, 2007; Wood, 2007). A large-scale survey in the US among business leaders has found that business model innovation has emerged as “*the new strategic differentiator*”, (McManus *et al.*, 2009).

It is also suggested that increasing economic turbulence can be a major factor behind this apparent need for novel business model strategising (Bürge *et al.*, 2004). This might explain the increase in SBOs that make reference to it. The author considers that the likelihood of a Small Business Owner (SBO) responding to questions about his (or her) business with a reference to a business model is now quite high. The increasing occurrence appears to be related to the massive increase in small businesses engaged in e-business. For this reason, the author has therefore decided to include this area of research in this literature review.

It is the author's opinion, that general discussion of strategic management is incomplete without at least some consideration being given to ‘*emergent strategy*’. Whereas the chief protagonist of emergent strategy, Mintzberg, wrote almost exclusively about large organisations at a time when main-stream strategic thinking neglected small business strategy; the ‘Processual School’ authors considered the planning, actions and reactions of the entrepreneurially-minded small business owner to be just another form of strategy (Mintzberg, 1994, 1990a, 1990b; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Furthermore, Mintzberg was one of the earliest researchers to study the effect of “*routines*” in strategic behaviour (see section 2.1.4 on Strategy-as-Practice, page 25 for more discussion about routines). As he said,

“I wish to propose an additional view of the strategist - as a pattern recognizer, a learner if you will - who manages a process in which strategies (and visions) can emerge as well as be deliberately conceived.” (Mintzberg, 1987, p.73)

Mintzberg's main argument was that strategy could be emergent, as well as planned; and this observation finds redolence with the later S-as-P movement and in particular, the research

publications concerning organisational routines by Martha Feldman and Brian Pentland (Pentland & Feldman, 2008, 2007, 2005; Feldman, 2003; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002; Feldman, 2000).

The author has outlined two specific factors that ostensibly lie outside of the two research streams under consideration in this thesis ... Business Models and Emergent Strategy. The author will summarise the material covered in the first chapter of the literature review and tabulate the definitions that will be taken forward.

2.5. Chapter Summary

The central theme through this literature review is '*strategic thinking and strategy implementation by individuals in small firms*'. The contributions by the authors identified as spanning the two streams of this literature review build into the description of the contemporary situation where new knowledge might emerge. It has been demonstrated that a gap exists in the literature (prior to the writing of this thesis). The chapter map (Figure 2.1 on page 16) indicates that the gap exists where S-as-P might inform Small Business research (shown as a question mark). After an extensive review, it appears that S-as-P research has not yet reached the domain of small business. The author therefore concludes that this research study is positioned to create new knowledge in this sub-field. In conducting this literature review, the author has cited various authors' terminology. The following table summarises those definitions that are being used and carried forward into this thesis by the author. The literature review has revealed an area that has yet to be researched with a specific focus, and the author therefore proposes to investigate the strategising of individuals that work in small business. There is potential to make a specific contribution to knowledge in this relatively unexplored field. Having confirmed the *raison d'être* for this thesis, the author will discuss some of the available underpinning theories that have been used by S-as-P researchers. A suitable candidate theory for use in this study will then be selected, and this will be reviewed in terms of literary criticisms. The reasons for the selection will then be explained. The chapter summary will include a further table of definitions.

The following table summarises the terminology that has been identified and defined in the literature throughout Chapter Two. The terms are listed in order of definition with previously defined terms shown in square braces. The page number indicates where the definition is located in the literature review. A similar table will be presented at the end of the next chapter.

Used in thesis	Definition from the literature	Page	Source
STRATEGY	<i>"Strategy is the direction and scope of an organisation over the long-term: which achieves advantage of the organisation through its configuration of resources within a challenging environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfil stakeholder expectations"</i>	21	Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008, p.3)
PRACTICE	<i>"The conduct of transactional life, which involves the temporally-unfolding, symbolically-mediated interweaving of experience and action."</i>	22	(Simpson, 2009, p.1338)
STRATEGISING	<i>"The detailed processes and [PRACTICE]s which constitute the day-to-day activities of organization life and which relate to strategic outcomes."</i>	23	Johnson, Melin & Whittington (2003)
STRATEGY-AS-PRACTICE	<i>"... strategy as a social [PRACTICE], on how the practitioners of strategy really act and interact."</i>	24	Whittington (1996)
PRAXIS (pl. Praxes)	<i>"the stream of activity in which strategy is accomplished over time."</i>	27	Jarzabkowski & Spee (2009, p. 73)
SMALL BUSINESS OWNER (SBO)	<i>"The SBO is an individual who manages a business for the principal purpose of furthering personal goals. The business is intended as a major source of income and will consume the majority of the SBOs time and resources."</i>	34	Adapted from (Beaver, 2002c, p.42).
ENTREPRENEUR	<i>"Entrepreneurs are those persons who seek to generate economic and social value through the creation or expansion of economic activity, by identifying and exploiting opportunities for new products, processes, markets, and for meeting outstanding social and environmental needs."</i>	35	(Blundel & Lockett, 2011, p.6).
BUSINESS MODEL	<i>"A value proposition for a target market that creates a value chain within a value network that sustains an intended reliable revenue mechanism."</i>	50	Adapted from Chesbrough (2007)
Words in square braces are previously defined in this table.			

Table 2.3 Summary of Chapter Two definitions

3. SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES UNDERPINNING S-AS-P

3.1. Introduction

The second part of the literature review will discuss the underpinning theory choices available to the researcher wishing to use the S-as-P perspective in the small business context. As already explained, S-as-P draws upon sociological knowledge and therefore requires an underpinning theory from that domain. This part of the literature review will review some of the main theoretical choices available to researchers in the S-as-P field. For this thesis, the author will use Structuration Theory (ST). This selection for the study is justified in terms of its appropriateness for the Small Business domain and its 'fit' with the traditions of endogenous management perspectives such as the RBV and DCV. The author goes on to describe the principles of ST followed by adaptations to the theory offered by authors (other than Giddens). The theory is not without criticism, and the major problems cited by key authors are also considered in this chapter. The benefits and limitations are then discussed before moving to the Methodology Chapter that incorporates ST.

3.2. The theoretical issues associated with S-as-P

In this section the author describes the theoretical problems posed by the anticipated research agenda of this study. S-as-P inquiry requires the use of sociological theory which in turn means that the researcher inherits some of the dualistic controversies of the sociological domain. However, S-as-P has been heralded as a '*practice turn*' for strategists; so one of the solutions offered in contemporary Sociology should suffice to take this study forward. Firstly the author will outline the dualism problem, and then investigate the solutions that have been adopted by other S-as-P researchers.

"Dualism is the form of thinking in which basic categories are regarded as logically exclusive of each other." Parker (2000, p. 8)

The literature review of S-as-P reveals a constructivist agenda emerging from the majority of published research (Grand *et al.*, 2010). The cognition of the strategising SBO (central to this study) is of particular interest to a *Constructivist* researcher, whereas the shared and embedded strategy routines born out of group experience are going to attract the scrutiny of *Social Constructionists*. The origins of these two epistemological traditions are *Psychology* and *Sociology* respectively.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) in their exposition on "naturalistic" inquiry (which is now termed 'constructivist') assert that success is predicated upon methodological congruence:

"Problem, evaluand, or policy option, paradigm, theory, and context must exhibit congruence (value-resonance) if the inquiry is to produce meaningful results"

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 37-38, Corollary 5).

Gergen (1999, pp. 59-60) categorises significant distinctions between Constructivism, Social Constructivism and Constructionism. Unfortunately, there are significant differences between the psychological traditions of *Constructivism* and the sociological development of Social Constructionism. The educationalist Geelan (1997) refers to this situation as “*epistemological anarchy*”, and elucidates the point by describing no less than six distinct forms of constructivist theory (and their principle advocates).

- Personal Constructivism (Piaget *et al.*, 1969; Kelly, 1955)
- Radical Constructivism (von Glasersfeld, 1984)
- Social Constructivism (Bruner, 1990; Solomon, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978)
- Critical Constructivism (Taylor & Campbell-Williams, 1993)
- Contextual Constructivism (Cobern, 1993)
- Social Constructionism (Gergen, 1999; Berger & Luckmann, 1996)

The choice of theoretical framework for this type of research presents an immediate epistemological dilemma. On one hand, the day-to-day ‘*strategising*’ of an individual can be considered to be a cognitive process and this would suggest that the type of knowledge emerging from this study would be typical of ‘*Personal Constructivism*’ or ‘*Radical Constructivism*’. However, the extant S-as-P literature (from large organisational research) also indicates that the precursors to ‘meso-level’ strategy emergence can be socially constructed by both internal and external actors (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). This might, therefore, lead one to assume that the better epistemological starting point would be ‘*Social Constructionism*’.

Within certain academic disciplines there have been occasional attempts to ‘*span the gap*’ between ‘*Constructivism*’ and ‘*Constructionism*’. Notably, in Psychology, Raskin (2008; 2002) suggests a way forward using the constructivism of Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955) as a potential bridge to ‘*Social Constructionism*’. He particularly identified the last two of Kelly’s corollaries of ‘*Commonality*’ and ‘*Sociality*’ as means of fulfilling this function. Raskin’s contention is that socially constructed knowledge can be understood in terms of the personal constructions of others (Raskin, 2002). This notion also appears in the ‘*Radical Constructivism*’ of von Glasersfeld (1996) who contends that knowledge refinement is a continuous series of processes of ‘*Inner Construction*’, and is thus in close agreement with Kelly’s corollaries of ‘*Organisation*’ and ‘*Experience*’.

The attempt to gain pre-eminence for one constructivist perspective is seen by some as counter-productive and leading to the general decline of ‘*Constructivism*’ (Solomon, 1994). The ability of one constructivist perspective to subsume the others has already been extensively argued with no apparent victor. So, if synthesis is not possible, what about integration? This issue may only be resolved by adopting a combined epistemology that renders both aspects in the knowledge that it

supports. This might become possible where ontological basis of a theory is considered to be more immediately important than any epistemological difficulties. For instance, there ought to be an epistemological position that can cater for the social cognitive interaction of strategic thinkers within an accepted ontology.

Taylor (1996) describes '*Constructivism*' as an 'n-sided polyhedron' whose facets represent the varied forms of '*Constructivism*'. In this analogy, some facets are neighbouring and therefore fairly compatible, others are opposite and in tension (but essentially remain part of the whole). This holistic approach to the '*Constructivist*' viewpoint appears to be the way forward for researchers interested in micro-strategising of people whom may, or may not, be collaborating in their formulation endeavours.

This call to avoid a blinkered perspective from within the constructivist fold is echoed in pedagogical study. Both Geelan (1997), and Harris (1994), strongly advocate a pluralist approach to the use of '*Constructivist*' perspectives.

"By alternating between (possibly incompatible) perspectives, however, I would suggest that, it is possible to see into some of our 'blind spots'. Social constructivists may be helped to look at individual cognition, personal constructivists at the influence of culture, contextual constructivists at human interests." (Geelan, 1997)

An essential difference between '*Social Constructivism*' and '*Social Constructionism*' is focus of interest. The two traditions could look at the same situation of knowledge sharing. The '*Social Constructionist*' is concerned to understand the process of creating shared knowledge by a group of individuals; whereas the '*Social Constructivist*' is much more interested in how individuals perceive and understand that shared knowledge of the group.

Other academic traditions, such as Learning & Pedagogy or Public Policy (particularly in the EU) appear to have embraced '*Social Constructivism*'; but there is no explicit explanation of whether the apparent epistemological dilemma has been reconciled, simply ignored, or the authors are just using '*Constructivism*' and '*Constructionism*' synonymously and actually mean '*Social Constructionism*' (Kim, 2001). An example of such taxonomical arbitrariness is:

"Social scientists—and especially social scientists working in the qualitative tradition—are mostly 'constructionists (constructivists)' but do not apply this epistemology to their own knowledge." (Breuer, 2003).

The S-as-P academic community appears to have followed their educational counterparts in embracing the middle ground of '*Social Constructivism*'. For instance, Ambrosini (2001) declares her philosophical background to be that of a '*Social Constructivist*'. However, in citing Crotty, she does not follow his taxonomical rigour:

"It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term 'Constructivism' for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the 'meaning-making activity of the individual mind' and use 'constructionism' where the focus includes 'the collective generation and transmission of meaning.'" (Crotty, 1998, p.58)

S-as-P is portrayed in the extant literature as (typically) a socially constructed phenomenon that contributes eventually to the strategy of the organisation. This type of research has shown ‘*strategising*’ to be something that is practised by individuals (an SBO for instance) or a group of people that socially interact with their ‘*strategising*’ (in perhaps a corporate team). The predominance of individual, non-social, ‘*strategising*’ would be expected as the size of organisation diminishes. However, some S-as-P authors have observed that the strategy creation process is likely to transcend the apparent barriers of person, group, firm and institution (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). It is probably impossible for an individual to be unaffected to some degree by external social influences (be they internal or external to the organisation). This returns to some of the original strategic management arguments in the latter part of the last century concerning the feasibility of completely designing a comprehensive strategy prior to implementation (Mintzberg, 1994, 1990a).

Although the author is interested in small business and in particular the cognition of the SBO; the researcher cannot preclude the influence of third parties (both inside and outside the small business boundary). The author therefore requires a transcendental theory that can span the gap between the two perspectives described above. The next section will describe the variety of theories that authors in the S-as-P are currently utilising, and give reasons for his choice in this thesis.

3.3. Theoretical approaches used by S-as-P researchers

The S-as-P literature reveals a wide choice of theoretical underpinnings in use. The authors often write from a specific perspective that is associated with a well-known author from the realm of sociology. These academic papers often carry a sub-title such as “: a Heideggerian perspective” or “: a Foucauldian study”; which indicates the broad underpinning of the research is coming from a particular writer in sociology. In other instances, an S-as-P author might prefer to be less author-specific with perhaps a term like ‘*genealogy*’ (which might presuppose Foucault or Nietzsche). The most common author-specific perspectives encountered in the literature review (up to 2014) are shown in Table 3.1.

Although some S-as-P authors will embrace the life works of certain notable writers such as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Bourdieu or Foucault; others are much more focused upon a specific sociological theory (some of which have emanated from the writers already mentioned). Table 3.2 shows the sociological theories that are most commonly used by S-as-P authors.

The two tables itemise the most prevalent theoretical underpinnings used in large firm studies by S-as-P researchers, as well as the suggested approaches from authors urging more research in this growing field. The choice is wide, and perhaps symptomatic of a research movement in its early stages. This author cannot envisage any particular reason why the study of small business would specifically narrow this choice, because the small business environment would not

Sociological Perspectives	Originators	Examples from the literature of perspectives used with S-as-P	Description of perspective
Bourdieuian	Bourdieu	Gomez (2010)	Agents are socialised over time in a 'field' (social domain) where 'capital' (prestige, finance or reward) is at stake. This becomes 'Habitus' (a system of dispositions possessed by an agent).
Mouzelian	Mouzelis	<i>No S-as-P authors using a Mouzelian perspective during this literature review.</i>	Systems are the outcome, but not the medium, of social actions. Duality of structure (Giddens) breaks down under the influence of powerful agents.
Wittgensteinian	Wittgenstein	Seidl (2007); Mantere (2010)	The world view of language as a social phenomenon emanating from practice. The core concept of the "language game" as might be found in organisations' use of self-derived labels for strategic options.
Heideggerian	Heidegger	Chia & Holt (2006); Tsoukas (2010)	Non-deliberate practical coping from inherited backgrounds.
Foucauldian	Foucault	Knights (2002); Knights & Morgan (1991); Allard-Poesi & Golsorkhi (2010)	Pessimistic theory of power and knowledge. Attempts to explain how power is used to control and define knowledge.

Table 3.1 Author-based sociological perspectives used by S-as-P writers

necessarily preclude multiple strategisers. Those S-as-P authors that advocate a particular theoretical basis tend to have a preference for a theory that they have already utilised in previous studies. Familiarity with the minutiae of a particular theory would be an obvious incentive; however, as can be seen from these tables, there are a few authors that tend to use more than one theory. The inference can be drawn that the underpinning theories have their limitations and some authors are writing in sufficiently diverse areas or differing viewpoints to warrant the use of more than one theory.

Some S-as-P authors have opted to use Activity Theory (see Table 3.2). This can be considered an extension to other forms of social theory by adding an additional dimension of '*practical activity*' rather than placing emphasis upon '*agency*' or '*social structure*'. Practical activity is regarded as the observable interaction between '*actors*' and '*collective structures*'. This focus makes this theory of particular use to S-as-P researchers (Jarzabkowski, 2003).

Actor–network theory, often abbreviated as ANT, originates from the field of science studies. It is peculiar in that treats objects as part of social networks. In other words, non-sentient objects can participate in systems or networks. Actor–network theory tries to explain how material and networks of meaning act as a whole. For instance, humans might be interacting with software and the theory portrays this as a whole network. The theory holds that networks are potentially transient, and need to be repeatedly performed or the network will decay. In terms of social relations, the theory suggests constant evolution and performance.

Sociological Theories	Originators & adopters	Examples from the literature of theories used with S-as-P	Brief description of theory
Activity Theory (AT)	Leontev, Rubenstein	Jarzabkowski (2009; 2005, 2003); Jarratt & Stiles (2009)	How social artefacts and social organisation mediate social action.
Actor-Network Theory (ANT)	Callon, Latour, Law	Denis, Langley & Rouleau (2007); Giraudeau (2008)	Agent-based approach to social theory. Treats objects as part of social networks. Includes the agency of non-humans.
Structuration Theory (ST)	Giddens	Whittington (2010, 1992); Jarzabkowski (2008); Orlikowski (2010)	Agency-structure duality. Structure is reproduced through agency which is simultaneously constrained and enabled by structure
Interpretivism (otherwise known as antipositivism)	Weber, Simmel	Ambrosini (2003); Bürgi (2005; 2003); Nordqvist (2010; 2005); Balogun; Langley; Rouleau; Mantere	Systematic process by which the researcher attempts to relate to social groups from their own point of view. Examines social interaction and the subjective meanings applied, by the observed, to their own agency.
Morphogenetic Sequence Theory (Critical Realism)	Archer	<i>No S-as-P authors found expressly using Archer's morphogenetic sequences.</i>	Giddens' simultaneity is rejected. Constraint and action happen sequentially (analytical duality). Existing structures constrain and enable agents. Agency yields intended and unintended consequences. This leads to structural embellishment and the reinforcement or conversion of the existing structure.
Sense-making	Weick	Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) ; Balogun & Johnson (2005, 2004); Hendry (2000); Allard-Poesi (2005); (Rouleau, 2005)	Cognitive activity of creating meaning from experiences. Identity affects interaction. Plausible stories are preserved, retained or shared.
Critical Theory	Horkheimer, Marx, Kant, Habermas, Foucault	Levy <i>et al.</i> (2003);	Critique of society and culture. Processes by which human communication, culture, and political consciousness are created Often uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).
Situated Learning	Lave & Wenger	Jarzabkowski (2004)	Learning is a social endeavour of knowledge creation.
Critical Realism	Bhaskar	<i>No S-as-P authors found expressly using Critical Realism.</i>	A mind-dependent aspect of the World. Humans cannot directly experience reality.
Critical Discourse (CDA)	Fairclough	Vaara <i>et al.</i> (2010); Laine & Vaara (2007)	Ideologies and power relations involved in discourse. How power is exercised through language.
Narrative Analysis	McIntyre, Bruner, Czarniawska, Barry & Elmes	de La Ville (2002); Reissner (2005); Scheibelhofer (2008); Barry & Elmes (1997); Mounoud, Rouleau, Balogun	Stories told by key people, or leaders, to stakeholders.
Narratives of practice	Bertaux	Balogun (2012); (Rouleau, 2010)	Strategy-as-narrative.
Ethno-methodology	Garfinkel, Boje	Samra-Fredricks (2003)	Examines the minutiae of discourse. Neither a formally stated theory, nor a formal methodology.

Table 3.2 Theoretical underpinnings used by S-as-P writers

For the purposes of studying a small business, ANT theory might be highly appropriate if all of the participating companies made extensive use of technology. However, this research is not restricted to that type of small business. The author is concerned to avoid a loss of fidelity in the analysis due to the theory's preoccupation with non-sentient network actors.

The most popular sociological theory for S-as-P writers is also one of the most controversial. The author has selected Giddens' Structuration Theory (the third row in Table 3.2 on page 58) for the theoretical underpinning of this thesis. There are several reasons for this decision.

ST has been used in many fields and is one of the more common choices in S-as-P writing. As this thesis is intended as an early S-as-P attempt at investigation into the realm of small business, the author considers it wise to adopt one of the more common theoretical underpinning approaches to open the possibility of some measure of triangulation with existing literature. ST has also appealed to researchers that have entered this field from an interest in endogenous strategy perspectives such as the RBV and DCV (Whittington, 2010; Regnér, 2008). The author is on a similar intellectual trajectory and therefore notes the choices made by previous authors in this respect. ST uses recursion and mutuality in explaining agency and structure. This is a familiar technique to researchers in RBV, where other dualisms require explanation; for instance, '*core competence*' and '*core capability*' can be explained as being recursive elements of the same phenomenon linked to sustainable competitive advantage (Petts, 1997).

In being informed by one particular theory, the author has to accept its inherent strengths and weaknesses. The next section will explain ST and its limitations.

3.4. Structuration Theory

The following is an explanation of ST and how it can be incorporated into the research of the strategising of SBOs. The author will describe how Giddens developed this theory through a series of major publications, and how ST can be used to address the issues raised in the previous section of this thesis.

"According to Structuration theory the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life."
(Giddens, 1984, p. 26)

Anthony Giddens is a sociologist that developed a well-known social theory called Structuration. He presented this to the academic world in three major publications, *New Rules for Sociological Method* (1976), *Central Problems of Social Theory* (1979), *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (1984).

Gould (2011) explains ST's contribution to '*Constructivist*' research. Giddens contribution is seen,

by Gould, as an attempt to resolve the ‘*dualisms*’ that bedevilled many themes in social theory in the 1980s. These included ‘*Macro versus Micro*’, ‘*Subjectivism versus Objectivism*’, ‘*Constructivism versus Constructionism*’, ‘*Determinism versus Voluntarism*’, and ‘*Individual versus Society*’. To develop his thesis, Giddens had to rework the ‘*Individual versus Society*’ dualism into a new conceptualisation of ‘*Social Structure*’ and the effect of the acting individual (*Agency*).

Social research in the 1970s had become locked into a perpetual ‘*chicken and egg*’ paradox of multiple primacy arguments. Rather than looking for primacy of one concept over the other, Giddens is content to envisage the co-existence and mutual dependency of ‘*Structure*’ and ‘*Agency*’.

*“‘Structure’ is regarded as rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction”
(Giddens, 1984, p. xxxi)*

*“Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently.”
(Giddens, 1984, p. 9)*

In this way he is able to avoid another dualism, and at the same time bring about a ‘*bridging*’ between pairs of other contentions. He conceptualised this as a ‘*Duality of Structure*’, although as Parker (2000) observes, this could equally be a ‘*Duality of Agency*’ (because it is a recursive relationship). ST offered a fundamental solution for mainstream social theory in the 1980’s (that was becoming stalled by irresolvable argument and entrenched positions advocating one side of a dualism). His theory transcends mere co-existence by insisting that both ‘*agency*’ and ‘*structure*’ repeatedly interact in ‘*Space and Time*’ through their mutual bridging mechanism of ‘*Practice*’.

An immediate implication of Giddens’ view is that an ‘*agent*’ is not necessarily constrained by societal ‘*structure*’. In fact, just the opposite can be the case; as an ‘*agent*’ can draw power from ‘*structure*’ to amplify ‘*agency*’ and have a greater effect in society (Giddens, 1984, p.25). A further implication of ST is captured in the adage “*use it or lose it*”. It is the use and repeated re-use of structure that maintains its existence.

“Recursiveness, however, offers no logical guarantees about structures’ future continuity. Only by being kept current can structures remain as potentialities to be drawn upon subsequently.” (Parker, 2000, p.59)

The Giddensian notion of ‘*structure*’ contains ‘*allocative*’ and ‘*authoritative*’ resources which can be deployed or brought to bear by a key agent. Giddens studied the structural social theories (such as *Marxism*) and the interpretive sociologies (such as *Ethnomethodology*) and concluded that their ‘*dualisms*’ could be avoided by the substitution of his envisaged duality of agency and structure.

*“According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize.”
(Giddens, 1984, p.25)*

As the central tenet to ST is the ‘*Duality of Structure*’, it is inevitable when a theorist advocates transcendence over the two competing sides of a dualistic debate that such an idea will draw fierce

criticism from both sides of the schism. When Giddens proposed that agency and structure were ‘*two sides of the same coin*’, the protagonists for primacy of either agency or structure tended to be somewhat dismissive. Plaudits and furore followed in almost equal measure following Giddens’ gradual publication of his theory (1979-1984). Some critics were appalled that their particular candidate for theoretical primacy (one side of a dualism) had been inconveniently downgraded by the newcomer to the debate.

Giddens’ theory is a synthesis of a wide range of understandings from diverse academic fields; and it is therefore not surprising that ST has been adopted in various fields of academic inquiry. For example, *Accounting Systems* (Conrad, 2005; Macintosh, 1991; Macintosh Robert & Norman, 1990), *Archaeology* (Joyce & Lopiparo, 2005; Gardner, 2002; Barrett, 2001), *Learning* (Berends *et al.*, 2003), *Political Culture* (Brenner, 2001; Wendt, 1999; Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Cash, 1996), *Information Technology Systems* (Jones & Karsten, 2008; Hockersmith, 2005; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Walsham, 1993), etc.

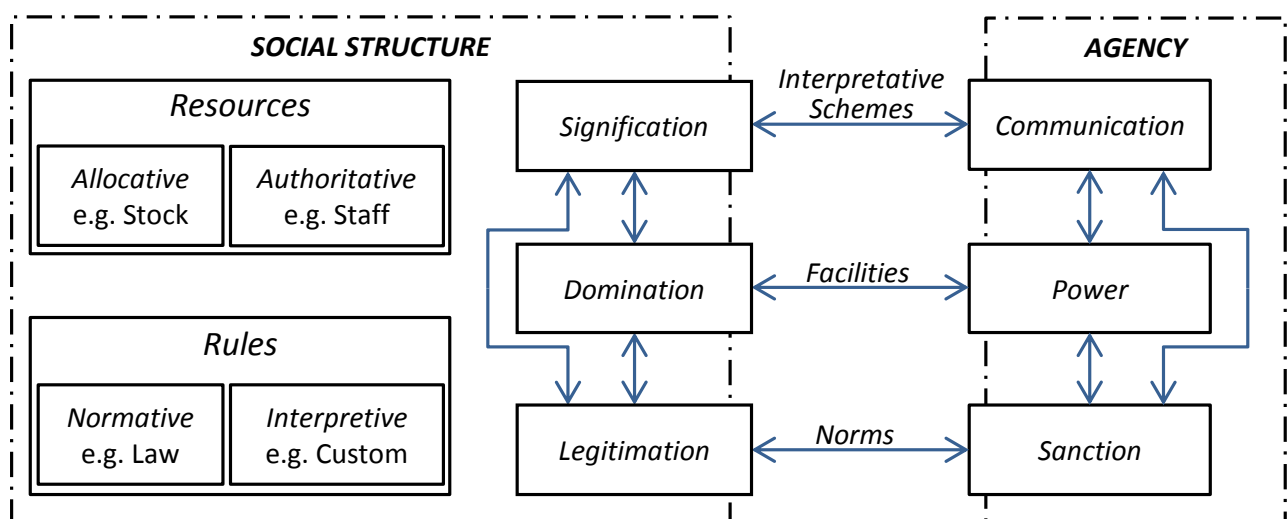


Figure 3.1 Model of Structuration Theory, adapted from Giddens (1979, p. 82)

No single diagram can do full justice to the nuances of Giddens’ theory. However, Figure 3.1 combines Giddens’ introductory writing and his famous “*structures as employed in social practices*” diagram to place the major elements of the theory into one visual adaptation for the purposes of this discussion.

The essential basis of Giddens’ theory is that human ‘agency’ is not necessarily constrained by social ‘structures’ (in contrast to the premise that had endured with previous theorists such as Parsons). Giddens sees ‘agency’ as being capable of enablement (or even amplification) by structure just as much as it might be inhibited. For Giddens, ‘structures’ are social constructions that can exist over time and confer a degree of order and stability. However, permanence over

time is not guaranteed and the '*structures*' can be progressively modified by human *agency*. His theory can be contrasted with others in the same field such as Pierre Bourdieu, Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer; who all tend to put more emphasis upon the constraint side of the relationship between '*agency*' and '*structure*'. Giddens' optimistic viewpoint is carried even further in suggesting that social '*structure*' is off itself regularly evolving under the influence of a liberated '*agency*'. This symbiotic, or mutualistic, relationship is at the heart of the theory, and can be manifest in many ways. The diagram shows the three primary feedback mechanisms through what Giddens terms as modalities of '*Interpretive Schemes*', '*Facility*' and '*Norms*'.

Giddens proposes that normally there will be combinations of modalities at work (secondary combinations of these primary interactions would be too complex to portray, but are suggested by the conjoining arrows in his diagram).

Chia & McKay (2007) propose that, rather than 'doing', '*agency*' is more about a predisposition to act. This means a weaker and slightly more ambiguous linkage between agency and structure than that envisaged by Giddens. This additional degree of separation is in agreement with some of the criticism of ST that has emanated from Archer (2010, 2003, 2000).

Another eminent thinker in this area is Bourdieu (1977). Bourdieu suggests the concept of '*habitus*', a complex web of dispositions, habitual practices and beliefs that characterises human agency in a field of operation. The Giddensian notion of the immediacy of structure wrought by agency, or the simultaneous availability of new additional or modified structure to an active agent is problematic according to Bourdieu (1992) and Archer (2010, 2003, 2000). They cannot agree with his simultaneous '*yin and yang*' relationship between agency and structure, and they both propose that time delays can come into play. Mouzelis (1989) is another writer that wrestles with Giddens' conceptualisation of ST. He is particularly critical of the lesser role of power implied in the writing of Giddens. This is despite the three categorisations of agency described by Giddens, *Communication*, *Power* and *Sanction*. He also argues against what he calls the attempted '*transcendence*' of the agency-structure divide by Giddens and Bourdieu (Mouzelis, 2000).

Giddens proposes that '*resources*' can fall into the two categories of being '*Allocative*' or '*Authoritative*'. So an '*allocative resource*' could be a way of determining the deployment and usage of objects, materials or perhaps money; whereas, '*authoritative resources*' concern the ability to influence, or decide upon, the actions of people. In the case of a small business, these *resources* may be in less plentiful supply, but the concepts should still have a bearing. If '*agency*' can be amplified by the availability and use of '*resources*', then the SBO can exert more *power* in the firm than one of his workers by virtue of the '*resources*' available to him (or her). Furthermore, an '*authoritative resource*' does not have to reside within the boundary of the firm. An external example might be a commercial agent or a trade supplier.

'*Agency*' is portrayed by Giddens as impacting upon '*structure*' through these modal forms - with

the resulting '*structural dimension*' changes. '*Signification*' refers to the structural elements that bear significance to its members in terms of the prevailing images, artefacts, and accepted social practices, that are adopted by the group. '*Domination*' is concerned with the effective deployment of '*allocative resources*'. '*Legitimation*', on the other hand, refers to the general acceptance of '*rules*' that might be formal legal constraints and obligations, or the informal custom and practices of a particular organisational culture.

The concept of what constitutes a '*rule*' in ST is also open to a very wide interpretation. For instance, '*rules*' can be formal, informal, legal, procedural, conventional, routine, or habitual as well as existing in many other ways. The researchers' questioning technique should be adapted to make sure that the wide variety of '*rule*' manifestations is captured. Giddens does typify two categories of '*rule*': '*interpretative*' and '*normative*'. As the name suggests, an '*interpretative rule*' assists the knowledgeable agent to interpret his (or her) own world view. The '*normative rule*' is apparent in the social structure to lend legitimacy or opprobrium to the actions of agents.

Giddens suggests that the capacity to act rises with an increase in the duality of rules. This apparent opportunistic approach to *agency* is evocative of entrepreneurial behaviour. There are many anecdotal instances of entrepreneurs exploiting a gap caused by two contradictory rules. This further suggests that ST is a reasonable choice of theoretical approach to this study of SBO strategy-making, particularly where entrepreneurial behaviour is concerned. In the analysis phase the author was looking for situations where SBOs were opportunistically attempting to exploit 'loop holes'.

The next section will deal with the major criticisms expressed by authors in the field of social theory. These considerations are wider than strategising, which is only one form of agency that can be enacted in an organisation. Equally these criticisms are not directly aimed at the use of this theory in the small business context.

3.5. Literary critiques of Structuration Theory

Despite the passage of time, ST is still not without its critics. Some authors see it as a '*capitulating compromise attempt in an unfinished debate*'; whereas, its advocates celebrate it as a highly creative and effective synthesis. The following section of the literature review is concerned with the commentators and critics of ST (as proposed in the works of Anthony Giddens). This subdivision is somewhat artificial as many of the commentators are critical in parts of their appraisal of the theory, likewise the critics can be partially supportive. The author will concentrate on the main arguments that persist until the current day. This part of the literature review reflects the ongoing debate between those theorists who would dispense with dualism to aid analysis, and those who advocate the separation for analytical reasons. Some commentators class Giddens and Bourdieu as 'structurationists', while Archer and Mouzelis are usually given the title of 'post-structurationists' (Parker, 2000). The author generally refers to those authors that are primarily suggesting an

alternative to ST as '*critics*'; whereas those authors content to use the theory with slight modification are deemed to be '*commentators*'.

The first criticism is one of neglect. Stones (2005), observed that Giddens had ceased to actively defend this theory through publication.

"The person one might most have expected to undertake this task, Anthony Giddens, defied any such expectations." (Stones, 2005, p.2)

Stones is therefore highly critical of Giddens for 'leaving the field' of theoretical battle to other protagonists (and offers his theory extensions to carry on the debate). The implication is that Giddens had '*moved on*' to other intellectual matters (such as the Third Way in politics) and saw a diminishing return on a continued debate concerning ST. This has been a problem for all but the earliest writers commenting on the theory.

Another common criticism is that Giddens' exposition of ST is opportunistically eclectic. Cohen excuses Giddens' unorganised exposition because of the latter's aversion to any form of congruity with established theorists such as Parsons. A bias towards one point of view would be incompatible with a project that was designed to dispense with the schisms of the past. In his attempt to bridge theoretical dualisms, Cohen feels that Giddens' caution against bias leaves an end result described thus:

"The fact that Giddens only loosely organises the exposition of his themes and concepts is responsible, in part, for the recurrent criticism that he is an 'eclectic' or 'syncretic' scholar." (Cohen, 1989, p.6)

Cohen (1989) offers an interpretation of ST as an "ontology of potentials". The work is therefore very useful to scholars that finds some of the Giddens' work somewhat impenetrable and needing of further explanation.

One of the major criticisms raised against Giddens is the shortage of any epistemological analysis in his theory. Some scholars criticise Giddens for '*being strong on ontology, whilst weak on epistemology*' (Stones, 2005, p. 32). Giddens is quite deliberate about his avoidance of the epistemological issues raised by ST. He sees such concerns as being part of the problem that bedevilled sociological inquiry in the 1970s. He feels that the epistemological debate perpetuated the dualisms that ST was attempting to transcend. In his book, *The Constitution of Society*, Giddens is blatantly unapologetic:

"... concentration upon epistemological issues draws attention away from the more ontological concerns of social theory, and it is these upon which structuration theory primarily concentrates.", (Giddens, 1984; p.xx)

In Stone's opinion, the relatively '*under-developed*' character of Giddens' version of ST is attributable to his failure to address epistemology. On the other hand, support for Giddens' position can be found in subsequent work by other scholars interested in structuration theory. For instance, Cohen makes the point that Giddens has elegantly avoided the need to formulate an

epistemological defence:

“Structuration theory departs from prevailing conventions by conceiving the generic qualities of social life prior to the point where epistemological assumptions regarding acceptable forms of knowledge are made.”, (Cohen, 1989; p.1)

Scholars are deeply divided as to whether Giddens can legitimately avoid epistemological issues, but he responded (in his defence) that this was the best way to break the intellectual *impasse* in social theory that was exemplified by the established dualisms.

A fundamental criticism that has been voiced against Structuration is that Giddens cannot claim that the recursion between agency and structure is always instantaneous. Archer has opposed ST for many years on the basis that Giddens' conceptualisation ignores discontinuities in its recursiveness. The lack of any temporal field in Giddens' description of the '*Duality of Structure*' has been a major area of contention between the two theorists. Although, as previously mentioned, Giddens no longer contests the issue through publication or debate. Archer points out that the 'pre-disposition' of agents is not being adequately considered in ST. Archer is not alone in demanding that this is taken into account. This interest in the 'formative inclination of agents prior to any action' has been exemplified in the study of human action (praxeology) of Bourdieu with his concept of a generative system of dispositions for practice or '*habitus*'. Archer has defiantly supported the analytical examination of the agency-structure dualism, something that is (by definition) impossible if one subscribes to the theoretical premise of the '*Duality of Structure*'. Her argument is made on the basis that often a temporality exists between the instantiation of '*agency*' and a corresponding creation (or reinforcement) of '*structure*'. Similarly the structural change effects upon agents are not necessarily immediately apparent. Archer abhors the idea of a '*no-go*' singularity for social researchers. She proposes her alternative theory of Morphogenesis (Archer, 2010) that permits an examination of both sides of the agency-structure duality.

Having examined the criticisms concerning a lack of epistemology in Structuration Theory, the author will now address the ontological basis of Structuration as it is critiqued in the literature. As already stated, Giddens is much more forthcoming about ontology, and this has prompted others to offer elaborations. Most notable among the suggestions is the theory of *Strong Structuration* (Stones, 2005). Stones would prefer to see the ontology of this theory placed in an '*in situ*' realm rather than the abstraction that Giddens offers. Duality of structure is central to Giddens' thesis, and Stones provides a cyclical representation that permits more elaboration. This helps to satisfy the criticisms of authors like Bourdieu. For instance, Stones envisages external structures as conditions of action which can be likened to Bourdieu's concept of '*habitus*' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.95). The consequence of this suggestion is that there are also 'internal structures' (within the agent) influencing his, or her, agency. This idea is similar to the psychological concept of cognitive structures proposed by Kelly (1955). Stones refers to this as '*active agency*' where the agent draws upon his, or her, internal structures in effecting action. Like Giddens, Stones sees

outcomes as 'new', 'adapted', or 'reinforced' structures, but also pays equal attention to events. The entire Structuration process is thereby described as a recursion cycle in four stages.

Stone criticises Giddens for "using '*institutional analysis*' as the appropriate form of bracketing to complement and support '*agent conduct analysis*'" (Stones, 2005, p.121). He fails to see how this

1. **External structures** (as conditions of action);
2. **Internal structures** (within the agent);
3. **Active agency** (including a range of aspects involved when agents draw upon internal structures in producing practical action);
4. **Outcomes** (as both external and internal structures and as events).

Figure 2.2. The Quadripartite Cycle (Stones, 2005, p.9)

can render Structuration Theory as a viable empirical tool. Stones would rather adopt 'agent context analysis' rather than 'institutional analysis'.

One of Stones' extensions to the theory is an attempt to mitigate a common complaint concerning Giddens' lack of attention to epistemological issues. His approach is divided into three aspects. Giving due regard to what he calls '*the question-at-hand*'. This is the immediate problem faced by the particular agent. He then proposes methodological bracketing (something that Giddens supposedly shuns by making the agency-structure instantaneous and inseparable). This enables the identification of distinct methodological steps in research (Stones, 2005, p.189).

Stones identifies three levels of ontology ('*philosophical*', '*meso*' and '*ontic*'). He ascribes Giddens theory to the philosophical level and complains that this has little to say about the peculiarities of any particular agency-structure context. He criticises Giddens for seeing no problem in using the 'ontology-in-general' at the philosophical level (which applies generally) to a particular practice instance.

Stones advocates the "*meso-level of ontology between the abstract, philosophical level of ontology and the in-situ, ontic level*" (Stones, 2005, p.189). He believes that this enables Strong Structuration to apply abstract ontological concepts in actual experiential occasions. The author considers it somewhat ironic that Stones has applied a bridging mechanism to Giddens' theory that in itself is an attempt to bridge the dualisms of the social sciences.

Stones conceptualises various types of causal forces and how agents may react to them. This brings Strong Structuration more into line with the praxeology of Bourdieu than the original Giddesian theory. However, Stones may have merely applied a typology of structuration events over Giddens theory. This would be helpful to those that find Structuration theory (in its original conception) too liberal and open to interpretation.

A series of other authors have taken issue with Giddens' definition of a social '*structure*'. Giddens contends that a virtual social '*structure*' can be defined in terms of '*rules*' and '*resources*'. Subsequent authors have written extensively on their criticism that such an explanation is too simplistic. Sewell maintains that resources cannot always be considered to be virtual (Sewell Jr, 1992, p.11), thereby rendering Giddens' claim that structures are composed of '*rules*' and '*resources*' as being too simplistic. Sewell observes that '*resources*' are usually difficult to conceptualise as virtual (Sewell Jr, 1992, p.11). He suggests a way out of this conundrum by considering structures to be both virtual (as '*rules*' or '*schemas*') and physical (as '*resources*'). Like many authors, Sewell struggles with the lexicography of Structuration Theory; in particular the underlying and inherent meaning of "*structure*". To Sewell the word implies '*stability*' and '*permanence*', not the constant evolution described by Giddens. Sewell makes an interesting point concerning why structural transformations are possible. He suggests a plurality of structures where '*schemas*' are exchangeable, '*resources*' are required and strengthened in unpredictable ways, and resource definitions are highly interpretable. Giddens also mentions that knowledgeable agents will exploit gaps and overlaps in '*structures*'. This opportunism (that is often seen in entrepreneurial behaviour) could be an aspect of the '*agency*' of knowledgeable agents. So even Giddens is not suggesting that structures are holistic homogenous edifices without features.

Sewell points out that '*schemas*' can be altered vicariously by agents without any predictable prospect of consequent restructuring. Furthermore, Sewell makes an interesting observation concerning how different agents can variously interpret a '*resource*'. This is particularly noticeable with agents' perception of '*intangible resources*', where a wide variety of causal factors might be attributed (a topic of much concern to those scholars interested in the RBV). He also points out that structural boundaries can be indistinct and overlap other structures (or even have interdependence). For Sewell, analysis of '*structure*' is rendered very difficult in such circumstances.

Thompson (1989) takes a different line of criticism about Giddensian '*structures*'. He is disconcerted by the breadth of definition that Giddens is prepared to bestow upon the concept of social '*rules*'. This commentary on ST extends to the apparent lack of a relative hierarchy of importance between different '*rules*' (Thompson, 1989, p. 64). Thompson postulates that a particular rule could be more potent in one context, compared to another. Thompson points out that two '*rules*' in the same '*structure*' might be conflicting with each other. In which case, would one have primacy, or would they both be nullified in an agent's cognitive dissonance? Thomson also calls for, what he terms, '*structural differentiation*'. This is a requirement for some framework to permit differentiation of '*rules*'; but such a framework could not be of itself rule-based otherwise it might become tautological. Thompson also maintains that rules can cause different behavioural

outcome depending upon the context or the individual agent's perception of the situation. He therefore believes that the isolated analysis of '*rules*' defeats most predictions of behaviour.

Although Giddens agrees that agency can be constrained by '*structure*', he is also quick to point out that it can be liberating as well. In his mind, structure can also amplify an agent's efficacy (Giddens, 1979, p. 69). To the author, this notion is reminiscent of the behaviours observed in some entrepreneurs. That is, the exploitation of opportunity that has been created by a '*structure*'. Giddens, even points out that knowledgeable and creative agents might exploit an inconsistency in structure (such as a metaphorical '*loophole*'). Such behaviour, according to ST would then immediately either reinforce or change the structure. Further agency exploitation would then be contingent upon the structure. This is somewhat similar to the theory of '*First-mover Advantage*' in Strategic Management (Lieberman & Montgomery, 1988), and that theory's later linkage to the RBV (Lieberman & Montgomery, 1998). The parallels with the RBV go even further when one considers the concept of '*Industry Foresight*' (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994b). Where senior management teams create and reinforce a narrative of their competitive situation that guides their strategising. '*Industry Foresight*' can be considered a Giddensian '*structure*' (albeit limited to the organisation) that has origins in the '*weak signals*' sensed by strategising agents. As the strategisers implement their '*meso-level*' strategy, fresh '*weak signals*' are sensed and the structure of their '*Industry Foresight*' is modified. The recursive nature of ST therefore has significant parallels that have been posited by major RBV protagonists. The author is not encumbered by previous sociological theory adherence from previous research, so his choice of an underpinning theory is relatively unfettered. After much consideration, the author considers the apparent affinity of ST to the RBV (and DCV) to be a crucial virtue in his case, and has therefore decided to use this theory for this thesis.

Some critics of ST find difficult in reconciling the theory with observed organisational settings. Mouzelis' criticism of Giddens theory revolves around his '*neglect of political power*' (i.e. that different agents are likely to have various degrees of influence in the organisation. Like Bourdieu, he is concerned that Giddens is only accounting for situations where '*duality of structure*' is feasible because the agents don't '*break the rules*' by using their organisational power. Where that occurs, he favours Archer's approach with an analytical dualism (Mouzelis, 2000, 1989). This criticism is curious because Giddens does not ignore power (e.g. the modal linkage between the agency dimension of 'Power' and the structural property of 'Domination'). However, like Thompson's criticised lack of hierarchical structural rules, his explanations do not full grasp the possible imbalance of power between co-operative or combative agents. Other authors point to the implausibility of every agent being able to effect change on the same basis. In their view, some agents are just better placed and informed to carry out their agency.

3.6. Using Structuration Theory in studying SBO strategising

It is envisaged that this study will investigate the strategising of small business owners (SBOs). It should be possible to pursue certain lines of enquiry that are informed by the theory. ST offers a convenient starting point in this regard with some clear ideas concerning the relationship between '*structure*' and '*agency*'. The interviewer can ask questions about structural '*resources*' that may have assisted the SBO to act strategically. Similarly, the theory could guide the researcher towards a deeper appreciation of the type of '*agency*' methods at work. For instance, does the described '*agency*' contain discernible elements of the '*communication*', '*power*' and '*sanction*' typology described by Giddens? On the other hand, does the prevailing social '*structure*' reveal recent dimensional alteration to '*signification*', '*domination*' or '*legitimation*'? This could be augmented by asking participants for their recall of examples from previous structures. Questions such as, "Have you always used this particular consideration when doing this?" might prompt the participant to elucidate a dimensional change of the social '*structure*'. This might also show a pattern of contextual structure change over time through the consequences of the SBO's '*agency*'. Questions can also surround the perceived structural '*rules*' that bear upon the SBO, and how that individual has operated within (or even attempted to transcend) them; for example, the perceived constraints to engagement with customers in contrast to the potential for innovative product or service offerings. The theory supports a deeper inquiry into the Giddensian '*rules*' that might have influence in the strategising of the SBO. It should be possible to ask participants for examples of '*routines-in-use*' that have emerged. Giddens also posits a '*monitoring of practice*' by knowledgeable agents. Such monitoring has the capacity to notice unexpected consequences. Reflection upon these can be very revealing for strategists, and may have a bearing upon the SBOs reaction to emergent (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) or incremental (Quinn, 1980) strategy .

The mode of any particular instance of '*agency*' should also be another line of enquiry. The responses might indicate the type *agency* in regard to Giddens classification of modality, but he warns that there is usually a combination of all three at work. For instance, the author might be able to detect '*sanctioning*' in a SBO utterance which would in turn prompt a question that verifies the degree to which '*power*' has been applied, and by what means this has been '*communicated*'.

The symbiotic relationship between '*structure*' and '*agency*' may become apparent to the researcher in the strategy map's evolution during the discussion. Furthermore, open questioning can assist in checking for this (if patterns appear to emerge). ST is acknowledged, by some, as being difficult to apply in empirical research (Whittington, 2010). The author is therefore minded to employ techniques that assist the participant to recall and articulate their strategising. Authors such as Ambrosini (2003, 2002) and Eden (1992b, 1992a) are certainly advocates of mapping to elicit tacit knowledge from strategists. However, the author notes from the literature review that the researchers in question have not ostensibly reported using ST in their publications.

For the purposes of this research, the author (like many S-as-P researchers) has decided to opt for

the less elaborate Giddensian ST, rather than, say, the extended '*Strong Structuration*' of Stones, or the more complicated '*Morphogenetic Theory*' of Archer or Bourdieu's '*Relational and Dispositional Praxeology*'. It is almost inevitable that any theory contains strengths and weaknesses, and the academic criticisms of ST in the existing literature have been duly noted by the author. The author also notes that ST has been chosen as an underpinning for many other fields of research outside that of Strategic Management. This ought to be indicative of its flexibility and pertinence.

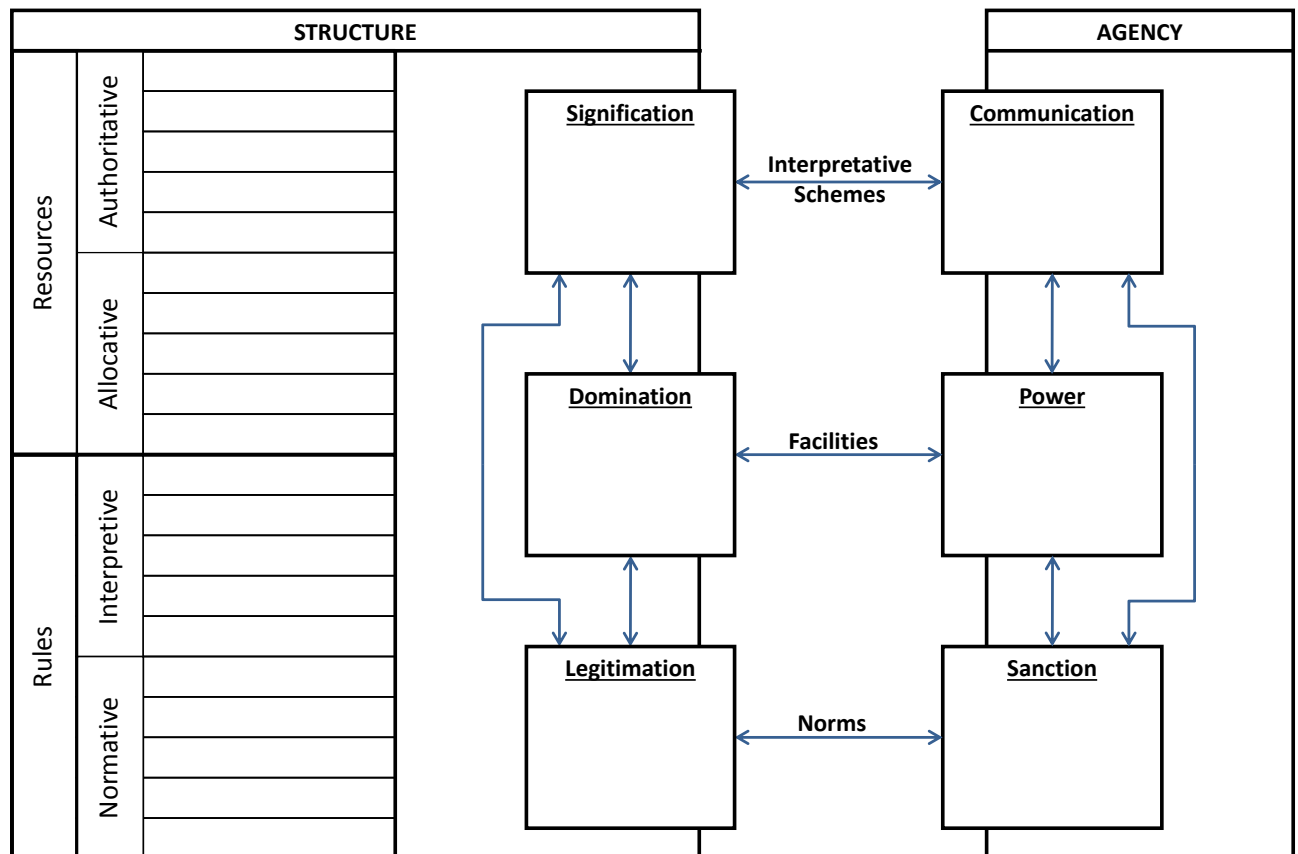


Figure 3.2 *Pro forma* note sheet derived from Giddens' Theory of Structuration

An interesting point to note is how close this potential situation of emerging explicit strategy from within the milieu of a company relates to Giddens' Structuration Theory. In a sense, the shared social constructions and the explicit '*meso-level*' strategy can be regarded as a Giddensian '*structure*' with its '*rules*' as embedded knowledge. Furthermore, the strategisers act as '*knowledgeable agents*' that are enabled by the existing informal strategy consensus and the explicit '*meso-level*' strategy (and probably constrained by both as well). Their strategising '*agency*' has the effect of modifying or reinforcing the structure of the existing strategy knowledge in the business. This might fit with the reality of formulating business strategy because the previous strategy often limits the choices available for a new strategy. Path dependency is one of the considerations of possible sustained competitive advantage in the RBV. The possible recursiveness of strategising emergence would make Structuration Theory an interesting lens to

apply. However, this gradual evolution of ‘meso-level’ strategy might be too idealistic and may not represent what is being interpreted in this investigation. For instance, the SBO may be forced to completely abandon the ‘meso-level’ strategy during a critical incident. Alternatively, the agents may be found to act in a manner that bears no resemblance to the explicit ‘meso-level’ strategy. This later point, represents the often found disconnect between intention and action when strategising is examined. Equally, the preliminary model breaks down if there is no explicit ‘meso-level’ strategy. It has been the author’s consulting experience to find many small firm’s that never committed a strategy to print unless forced to do so by a finance lender. Structuration theory is a good choice, in the author’s opinion, for S-as-P investigations because it tends to emulate the recursive pattern of the strategising process. The author has rendered the main elements of Structuration Theory into a single diagram using the two famous figures from Giddens’ 1984 book (see Figure 3.1 on page 61). The author has further adapted this to be used as a *pro-forma* note sheet for use during interviews (see Figure 3.2). It has occurred to the author that the layout will assist in guiding the researcher towards meaningful questions about strategising when interviewing SBOs. It will also be an easy way to capture field notes.

In the specific situation of the researched SBOs great care will be taken to mitigate any potential weaknesses arising from the choice of theory. Naturally, one of the conclusions that may emerge after this study is that the choice of Structuration is not the best for small business situations. This might be one of the methodological contributions emerging from this study. The author is prepared to make such recommendations if it is found that emergent data could have been better interpreted from a different perspective.

Structuration theory has been used to underpin entrepreneurship research (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Downing, 2005). This has been a gradually increasing trend (but not as great as search engine results would apparently imply).⁶ Some studies draw upon ST without naming it explicitly. For instance, the basic elements of ST are apparent in this extract (as indicated by the author’s comments in parentheses):

“... the business owner/entrepreneur as an active agent [agency] who shapes and creates his or her own reality, and as such is simultaneously the driver of the entrepreneurial process [duality of structure] operating within a reality which sets limits on choice of action possibilities [structure].” (Chell, 2000, p. 66).

Entrepreneurship is viewed by these authors as more than a mere economic process with the confines of a company or a specific behaviour pattern of entrepreneurs; they see it as an embedded and situational factor in wider society (Jack & Anderson, 2002).

⁶ The author notes that care has to be taken in on-line searching for terms such as ‘structuration + entrepreneurship’; because the French meaning of the word ‘structuration’ is ‘structuring’. The association with the French word “entrepreneurship” will have the effect of promoting a large number of papers that are not necessarily involved with Giddens’ Theory in the search results.

“We contend that a structuration theory-based perspective of entrepreneurship offers unique insights to the traditional view of entrepreneurship. The traditional view holds that the entrepreneur fills market gaps, while structuration theory suggests that the entrepreneur and social systems co-evolve.” (Sarason et al., 2006; p.288)

There has been a pattern of movement towards ST as an ancillary theoretical framework with other similar views, like *Interactionism* (Chell, 2007). There are now research sub-domains such as *Social Entrepreneurship* (Nicholls, 2010; Mair & Marti, 2006) and the *Eco-entrepreneur* (Walley & Taylor, 2005) that are also being influenced by ST. The theory therefore appears to have a growing future within the small business strategy domain of research interest.

3.7. Chapter Summary

The author considers that ST offers significant advantages in studying SBO strategising. He has explained how, and why, he has selected ST as the theoretical underpinning for this research study. There are many theories that can be harnessed to this purpose, but ultimately the choice

Used in thesis	Definition from literature	Page	Source
AGENCY	<i>“Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently.”</i>	60	Giddens (1984, p. 9)
STRUCTURE	<i>“‘Structure’ is regarded as rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction”</i>	60	Giddens (1984, p. xxxi)
DUALISM	<i>“Dualism is the form of thinking in which basic categories are regarded as logically exclusive of each other.”</i> e.g. Subjectivity [AGENCY] and Objectivity [STRUCTURE] are logically exclusive.	53	Parker (2000, p. 8)
DUALITY OF STRUCTURE	<i>“According to the notion of the duality of [STRUCTURE], the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the [PRACTICES] they recursively organize.”</i>	60	Giddens (1984, p. 25)
STRUCTURATION THEORY	<i>“According to Structuration theory the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life.”</i>	59	Giddens (1984, p. 26)
Words in square braces are previously defined in this table (or previously on page 52)			

Table 3.3 Summary of Chapter 3 definitions

has been made on the joint basis of popularity amongst published authors in the field, and an affinity towards the RBV and DVC strategy perspectives (which are familiar to the author). The discussion in the chapter required the following definitions to be identified and these are presented in Table 3.3 on page 72. The resulting taxonomy will be carried forward into this thesis. The following methodology chapter will describe how the author designed a research study adhering to S-as-P principles and encouraging research access to be granted by local SBOs. With a paucity of small business research focused upon the micro-strategising of the SBO, the author will explain how a particular epistemological view and underpinning social theory can be harnessed for practical use in this type of study.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction to Methodology Chapter

*“Studying small firms and entrepreneurship is not easy, not least because of the world views and knowledge gap between researchers, owner-managers and entrepreneurs.”
(Blackburn & Kovalainen, 2009, p.132)*

The previous two Literature Review chapters described two streams of research that inform this study. In the first of the two literature review chapters, a gap in current knowledge was identified (S-as-P research in the context of SBO strategising). In the second chapter the author reviewed possible underpinning sociological theories that would be required to inform a study that contributed to the reducing of the defined gap in academic understanding. The choice of Structuration Theory (ST) was subsequently critically evaluated.

This chapter will refer back to the research question, and then describe the methodological approach using the theoretical underpinnings that will enable this undertaking. Also, the author's ontological and epistemological positioning will be placed within the context of this field of research. The chapter concludes with a description of the analysis tools and methods used. This assists the reader to understand how the author gathered the data, and how being part of the process enabled the interpretations presented in the Cases & Findings Chapter (see page 114).

As part of the methodological recommendations at the end of this chapter, there are observations and recommendations concerning the use of video recording, QACDAS software and voice recognition transcription methods. This might be of practical use to other researchers facing a large volume of collected qualitative data.

4.2. Returning to the research question

This thesis seeks to describe, and interpret, how owner-managers strategise and create their firm's strategy by using tacit and explicit knowledge, routines, plus personal and shared experience in the mundane milieu of 'day-to-day' small business activity. As previously stated in Section 1.4 on page 13, the research question is:

'How are firm-level strategies created by the strategising activities of owner-managers working in the North East of England's small businesses?'

The first consideration is what type of knowledge can be created by successfully answering such a question? Could there be some aspect of strategising that might be captured by a quantitative study? The literature review has demonstrated that this remains an open question; because there is a distinct paucity of existing literature using quantitative methods in this field. There have been

many quantitative studies of small business, particularly in the search for a causal link between strategic management and enhanced performance. However, there appears to be little to guide the quantitative researcher towards the hypothecation of an individual's strategising in the realm of small business. Chia & MacKay express the problem in the following way:

"... to understand strategy emergence we are required to develop a certain research sensitivity to the unspoken, the inarticulate and even the oftentimes unconscious aspects of strategy-making." (Chia & MacKay, 2007, p.237)

In the very early stages of this work, the author decided that realising similar aims to Chia & MacKay would require the adoption of a qualitative approach. As has been shown in the Literature Review Chapters, this is very much in accordance with the existing S-as-P literature to date.

4.3. Ontological and epistemological positioning

The Literature Review (Chapter 2) suggests that there are no publications in existence that specifically apply the Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P) lens to the small business context. Despite strategy research being "*dominated by a positivist philosophical underpinning*" (Adcroft & Willis, 2008, p.313), the author has decided to adopt a qualitative methodology for similar reasons to those cited by authors that have researched larger enterprises from the S-as-P perspective (Balogun *et al.*, 2003). The various rationales that were found in the Literature Review included:

- the need to '*get close to the strategist*' (Johnson *et al.*, 2010b);
- the difficulty in formulating a questionnaire that can capture strategising activity, and situations where there are too many variables involved (Balogun *et al.*, 2003).

Eisenhardt (1989) recommends qualitative approaches when '*relatively little is known about an area of study*' or when a '*fresh perspective*' is needed.

"Whereas most of the quantitative studies reported in the management field might be underpinned by a positivist or modernist paradigm, those who conduct qualitative research do it from a range of different epistemological positions." (Cassell et al., 2006, p.162)

It was decided at an early stage in this study to adopt an Interpretivist approach. The reason for this decision was the exploratory nature of the investigation, and the author's interest in the evolving field of Strategy-as-Practice. The later point when combined with the literature review had led the author to the conclusion that quantitative methods would not be appropriate at this juncture.

In common with most academic endeavours, this thesis contains discussion that is underpinned by certain philosophical assumptions. This study follows the subjectivist rather than the objectivist approach (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The ontological assumption, inherent in this work, is that

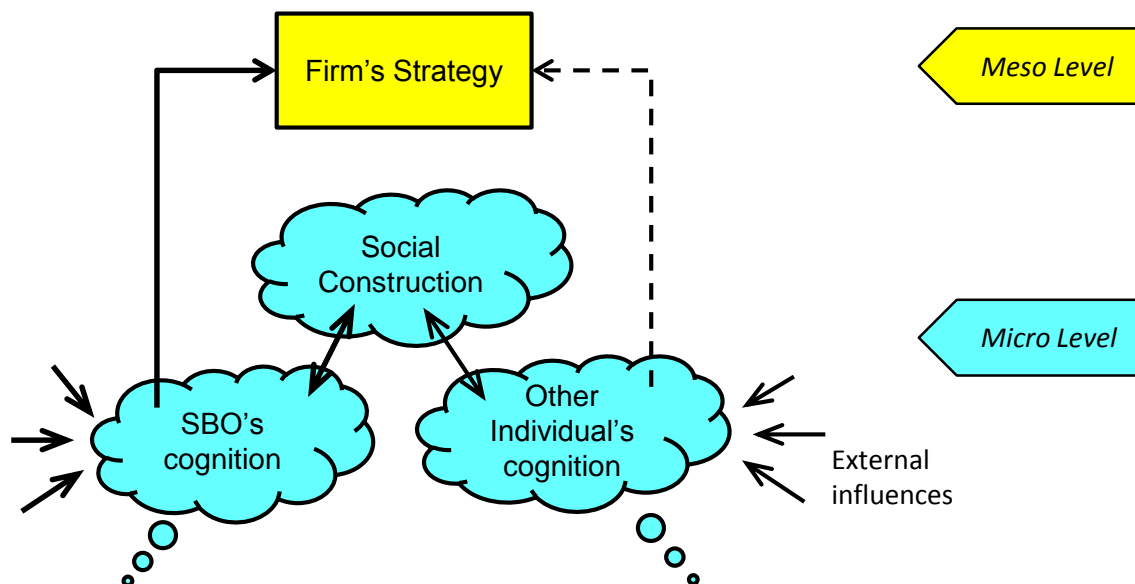


Figure 4.1 Tentative model of SBO strategising

reality is subjective and perceived differently to some extent by each individual. This assumption is combined with another that concerns reality; in that reality is not directly accessible to individuals. Therefore, research participants can be expected to perceive reality in different ways, yet be contributors to (and borrowers from) a socially constructed reality based upon their cognitions. A key consideration in undertaking such research is what sort of knowledge does a study like this create?

Johnson *et al.* (2003, p.14) define strategising as,

“... an activity-based view of strategy that focuses on the detailed processes and practices which constitute the day-to-day activities of organizational life and which relate to strategic outcomes”.

It is therefore necessary to look at the cognitive processes of strategising SBOs as well as the sociological construction of meaning that might imbue such thinking. To clarify such a situation, the tentative model shown in Figure 4.1 is offered as a possible depiction. This could be the situation in a small company that has a discernible *meso-level* strategy. The strategy is explicitly stated beyond the cognition of the owner-manager and accessible by others in the firm. The author shows this existence with a continuous outline. The assumption here is that the SBO's strategising praxis is the primary source for this document (shown as a think bubble). However, the SBO is also assumed to not be strategising *in vacuo*; but rather, drawing from a socially constructed accumulation of tacit and explicit knowledge held by a group of people within the firm. At this stage of initial speculation, the author could not rule out the possibility of others (in the firm) contributing to the formal strategy (shown as a dotted arrow). Equally, outside influence would also need to be taken into consideration (shown as impinging arrows on the cognition bubbles).

The author's tentative model presents an immediate epistemological problem. It incorporates both

individual constructivism (cognition) and social constructionism (shared meaning used in strategising). Such dualisms have been the bane of psychological and sociological research in the opinion of many authors. The search for primacy has not produced a winner. The pioneers of S-as-P were well aware that this debate continues, but some have advocated transcending theory to bridge the divide.

The outcome of individual '*strategising*' activities could vary considerably with regard to the *meso-level* strategy. The evolution of the espoused (or formal strategy) could be spasmodic or incremental. It might mean a complete change. Assuming that there is some transfer from certain '*strategising*' activities to the longer term strategy of the firm, this implies that knowledge has been created. Figure 4.1 suggests that in a small business a constructivist epistemology could apply at the level of '*strategising*' and that the tangible outcome could be the *meso-level* strategy. However, the literature base of entrepreneurship and small business is replete with anecdotal and qualitative data that suggests the physical manifestation of *meso-level* strategy may never happen (Richbell *et al.*, 2006; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2004; Perry, 2001; Berman *et al.*, 1997; Matthews & Scott, 1995; McKiernan & Morris, 1994). There are many entrepreneurs and small business owners that carry the essence of a *meso-level* strategy in their heads, rather than commit this to any formal document. This can be deliberate obfuscation for psychological reasons, or they are simply too busy to ever bother. Quite often the only time that an SBO is forced to commit any form of strategy to paper is at the time of writing a business plan. Such endeavour is perceived by many SBOs as a 'means to an end' (such as acquiring start-up finance). The document usually remains static and unused after the event.

An interpretist analysis is proposed for this research as being appropriate for the type of knowledge that is being sought. This approach can produce congruence with a wide range of methods, and encompasses all the varieties of constructivist inquiry (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). An Interpretist researcher considers that the prime objective is to understand how people interpret social actions. This normally suggests the use of research methods that emphasise ethnography or discourse analysis. Interviews, if used, tend to be unstructured.

The intent of the interpretivist researcher is not to discover some testable aspect of reality, but to understand the unremitting process whereby humans perceive and socially construct a meaning of their environment. The philosophy of social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) has been linked to constructed meaningful interpretations that is the Interpretist View (Prasad & Prasad, 2002). Interpretists refer to social reflexivity when an agent recognises how his (or her) actions can change his (or her) situation in a social structure. An individual that is more influenced by their own norms, values, opinions, politics, and motivations, would be seen as highly reflexive; whereas an individual 'moulded' by society would have low social reflexivity.

Interpretation of discourse is fraught with problems of subjectivity on behalf of the interpreter and interpreted.

“How do we render accounts of subjectively intended meanings more objective in the face of the fact that they are necessarily mediated by the interpreter’s own subjectivity?” (Chia & MacKay, 2007).

Researcher analysis bias is recognised in Giddens’ account of Structuration Theory; by what he terms the ‘*Double Hermeneutic*’ (Giddens, 1984, p.284). Put simply, the researcher is ‘*interpreting the interpretations of the subjects*’. If researcher interpretations are deemed to be of a second order compared to the first order interpretations of the studied actors; then a problem occurs if the actors adapt their agency according to the second order interpretations of the researcher. Interpretation of the data that is collected within this study will be focused upon the answers to questions posed by the researcher. However, some of the answers will be elicited by additional visualisation means (strategy mapping) made available at the time of the interview session.

As already outlined in Chapter 3, Structuration Theory has been selected as the underpinning theory for this study. The resulting research design will be discussed in the next section.

4.4. Research Design

The research design choices are justified for the particular requirements of small business research. The key features of this research methodology are described in detail. The author will relate how the consideration of minimising the intervention time in the small business has been incorporated into the design. This dimension was added to improve the chances of recruiting SBOs who might be reticent about the exercise being too costly in terms of time and effort. This study incorporates features that are designed to attract such participation by offering an attractive *quid pro quo* of a strategy workshop. Methodological design is more than just a plan to do research (Schurink, 2009). The design phase has to consider how acceptable research outputs are going to be achieved from agreed research access considerations. The specific focus of this study will be on the very small organisation, and this represents a contextual departure from the body of S-as-P literature to date (that has almost exclusively focused on larger organisations). All of the companies in the study can be categorised as inside the small firm category but most fall into the micro-sized business category of fewer than 10 employees.

It is important to state from the outset, that small businesses pose a particular problem for research access in that having fewer staff the impact of a research intervention is more profound on the business (Curran & Blackburn, 2001).

More text here ...

To facilitate research access, the research design (with its supporting epistemological and methodological frameworks) has been constructed in a form that should have an immediate appeal to a typical small firm proprietor. The use of a condensed ‘*one-to-one*’ strategy workshop format represents an opportunity cost that many SBOs should feel is affordable in terms of their management time. This design is ostensibly the same as a typical strategy ‘away-day’ but on a

reduced scale.

Although an ethnographic approach might seem appropriate for this research, the practicalities of obtaining longitudinal study access to a small business are highly problematic.

“Owner-managers of smaller businesses will find it more difficult to find the time than those with larger enterprises who have staff to whom they can delegate responsibility.”
(Curran & Blackburn, 2001, p.68)

For researchers of large firm strategy, this problem has frequently been avoided because of the regular availability of strategy ‘workshops’ or ‘away-days’ (Hodgkinson *et al.*, 2006; Hendry & Seidl, 2003). Some larger firms regularly include these exercises in their strategic repertoire, so they present researchers with predictable opportunities to observe key players engaging in their strategising (Bourque & Johnson, 2008). The strategy ‘away-day’ is often preferred by consultants (and their clients) because it alleviates the participants from the *millieu* of running a business and provides time to generate and contemplate strategic choices. For S-as-P researchers, moving the actors into a quieter (but atypical) environment could defeat the exercise of observing realistic strategising behaviour. A workshop conducted on the client’s premises has the advantage of providing contextual cues which might elicit more authentic strategising. On the other hand, some consultants might argue that fresh surroundings might stimulate increased strategic innovation. The aforementioned opportunities afforded by formal strategising events, are very unlikely to be available to the researcher interested in SBO strategising. The vast majority of small businesses do not make time available for formal strategy formulation.

4.4.1. Strategy Workshop Format

The author decided upon a research strategy that might facilitate the agreement of SBOs to participate in a short duration exercise that bore all the hallmarks of a strategy workshop. The author hoped that some SBO participants would be responsive to the idea of conducting such an exercise but without the cost or the sacrifice of a whole day’s business. The author used his network connections with local SBOs to suggest the idea, and had a positive response (albeit with some of the expected caveats). This positive feedback encouraged the author to design a purpose-built ‘one-to-one’ strategy workshop which would only involve the SBO and the author.

It was determined that some form of ‘elicitation aid’ would be required in the workshop design. The author reviewed the literature on the subject, and found that there was general agreement that participant diagram creation could help. This had been shown to be effective in researching strategic situations (Ackermann *et al.*, 2004; Eden, 2004; Hodgkinson *et al.*, 2004; Ahmad & Ali, 2003; Huff & Jenkins, 2002; Eden, 1992a). In this design for SBOs, the diagram creation is designed as an aid to discussion and assist the participants to express complex relationships between strategic concepts and his/her sense-making.

“In the process of designing an artefact, learners, by necessity, come to understand the rich interconnections between the artefacts they devise and the environmental constraints that determine whether a given design will meet with success.” (Lester et al., 1999)

The sampling strategy of this study was to offer the strategy workshops to local SBOs.. The qualifying companies had to meet the EU definition of a small or micro business (see Figure 2.10 on page 33). The choice of strategic issue to be discussed in the strategy workshop was given to the SBO. The author did not want to stipulate a strategic subject thereby limiting the appeal of the research. This was feasible because the workshops were to be conducted individually on a ‘one-to-one’ basis between the author and each participant. This format also avoided the difficulty of organising a group workshop and getting the participants to agree on a common topic.

The author did not encounter anything resembling this videoed ‘one-to-one’ workshop methodology during the literature review. A subsequent discussion with Dr. Maureen Meadows, Open University, at the British Academy of Management Symposium at Aintree Racecourse in 2013, confirmed that some video methods are being developed *ad hoc* in a few disparate research areas. At the time of writing this thesis, the only videoed strategy workshops appear to be for groups of strategisers. Most references to strategy workshops indicate a group event with several facilitators provided for one company at a time (Johnson *et al.*, 2010a; Hodgkinson *et al.*, 2006; Johnson *et al.*, 2006; Whittington *et al.*, 2006; Hodgkinson *et al.*, 2005; Bowman, 1995).

The Pilot Workshop (at Hobbyco)

The author conducted a pilot study with the first ‘one-to-one’ strategy workshop. The learning gained from this exercise was put into a revised format used for the remainder of the participants. The one hour interview was video and audio recorded. The map was constructed from Post-it™ notes that were annotated and placed on a sheet on the wall. The wall was videoed throughout the construction of the diagram and the associated audio recording was extracted from the video to create the transcript. (Experience of using a vertical wall to display the map convinced the author that it would be better to places on a horizontal surface, ideally a table. This was the method used in all subsequent cases).

The questions arose from the construction of the diagram, but were aimed at ascertaining how Sarah thought she was able to ‘do strategy’ within the daily hectic environment of this very busy SME. By concentrating on her selected strategic episode, it was possible to inquire about her various micro-strategy practices that brought about the strategic direction of the company. The author was interested to know how and where she gained her strategic thinking. Did she share this activity with others, or, was it essentially a lone endeavour? Had routines been established from past micro-strategising? The diagram building activity of the participant was useful in prompting the right questions.

The case was analysed using QSR International’s NVivo software, which was loaded with the

interview video and transcribed in situ by the author. (During the course of this research study the author has updated from QSR's NVivo 8 to NVivo 10). A further meeting was held six weeks later with the MD where the initial findings were discussed.

There were several important points that arose from the pilot exercise. The most noticeable difference was the positioning of the strategy map that the participant was asked to create during the session. The author had been influenced by prior publications concerning '*video ethnography*' that had shown multiple participants standing by a strategy map that was mounted on a wall at chest height. This proved to be rather impractical as the participant would obscure the map whenever he/she was interacting with it. The author tried moving the camera to one side which did improve matters, but later found that some *Post-it*TM notes would tend to fall off the diagram after 90 minutes had elapsed. With this experience in mind, the author decided to adopt a different arrangement whereby the map was placed flat on a table. The participant faced the author across the table and the camera was focused on the map from a low angle above (see Figure ?? on page ???). The next that was discovered during the pilot phase, was that HD video resolution is not required to capture the qualitative data generated by the workshop. However, HD resolution is currently out of the question because of the video file size and the way that it slows down the CAQDAS software. The author currently operates well below DVD level at a resolution of 352x288 with 192kbps audio. This renders a 1.5 hour video in a file approximately 350Mb in size. The author had erroneously assumed that it would be vital to be able to read the *Post-it*TM note annotations directly from the video. However, if a wide spectrum of colours and shapes for the notes are used and the author has a record of the annotations on each *Post-it*TM note, then full data capture is achievable. The researcher must retain the final map, and then transfer the annotations to modelling software (an available feature within NVivo 10). The author was able to employ both methods for all of the subsequent strategy workshops.

The Full Study Workshop Design (Cases A – G)

Following the pilot study, an introductory leaflet was circulated among local small businesses with an intention of recruiting participants for nine more workshops. The pilot study provided sufficient knowledge to then scope the full scale study for a single researcher. The target number was predetermined by the projected time of each workshop (between 90 to 120 minutes), the resulting volume of research data produced by video recording the entire sessions, and the length of time necessary for the '*in-depth*' analysis required for an S-as-P study.

The length of time that a participant devoted to the strategy workshop was crucial in recruiting SBOs. The typical small business owner is always very busy, and asking for protracted research access is problematic. This research was designed to minimise the amount of time that the SBO had to devote to the exercise. The use of video recording and strategy mapping was essential to maximise the data capture in the shortest time possible.

Once an SBO has been recruited, the author invites the SBO to sign the research ethics and confidentiality forms in a process of '*informed consent*'. With the research formalities finalised, a date and venue is chosen for the workshop. In all cases, the participants declined an offer of staging the workshop in a private room at the university. They chose to either carry out the exercise in their company premises or in their home.

A key research design parameter is to capture as much data as possible within the duration of the workshop. This requirement prompted the author to use video rather than audio. Video data has been used for ethnographic studies for many years (Forsyth *et al.*, 2009; Goldman, 2007; Pink, 2007; Margolis, 1994). Research into the cognitive processes of professional designers has made extensive use of video ethnography (Taylor *et al.*, 2004; Wasson, 2000). Teaching has also utilised video data to enhance the understanding of pedagogical methods (Chan & Harris, 2005; Tochon & Desjardins, 1999; Speidel & Tharp, 1978).

Many authors are now advocating the collection of video data and emphasise the possibilities of remote capture through means such as *Skype*[™] or *GoToMeeting*[™] (Strangelove, 2012; Harris *et al.*, 2005). The communication issues raised by this development do not particularly lend themselves to the small business context (unless the firms in question are 'high tech' and familiar with the technology). However, technological advances in this area should gradually remove this barrier to usage. The author considers that the communication distance between researcher and participant must have a detrimental effect on the quality of data collected. For instance, the researcher is likely to miss non-verbal cues when the participant is only visible using the current level of video quality available on VOIP packages such as *Skype*[™].

Another adaptation that occurred from experience in the pilot phase was to place the chart horizontally on a table rather than on a wall. The wall method seemed intuitive, but in practice the author and participant were often blocking the field of view when gesturing towards elements of the map. The table method was not disadvantaged by the parallax view of the table (from one end looking down between the author and participant). The revised positioning of the researcher and interviewee was not problematic from a confrontational point of view. It is often considered that two people sitting on either side of a table will perceive it as a psychological barrier to communication. However, the map building activity, and frequent gesticulations towards it, tended to mitigate this problem. Both researcher and participants felt that this was a shared experience without the perception of barriers.

The video field was set to cover the entire A1 sheet on a horizontal table surface (see Figure 4.2 on page 83). The author and participant faced each other across the table (left and right hand side in picture, the author is out of shot and the SBOs hands are in view). During the pilot phase, it had become obvious that the prospect of being videoed was a barrier to participation for some SBOs. However, once it was explained that only the strategy map and the pairs of hands would be visible this initial reluctance disappeared in all such cases. The author therefore emphasised the video

limitation by putting an image of 'hands placing *Post-it*TM notes' on the front of the introductory leaflet (see Figure 4.4 on page 87).

It was determined in the research design (following the pilot study) that participants would not be directed towards any particular configuration of diagram or map. If he, or she, wanted to add greater significance to the diagram such as groupings, hierarchies, timelines or causality, they



Figure 4.2 Workshop photograph extracted from video data.

were free to do so. The participants were offered the opportunity to colour code the *Post-it*TM notes if they felt this was helpful, but this option was never exercised. The use of *Post-it*TM notes in group discussions is commonplace in Higher Education, and it is still a valued visual aid in problem solving activities for business and industry (Straker, 2009; Cohen & McGee, 2004; Klemmer *et al.*, 2000). They are often used to gather opinion from a group by assembling on a blank poster (Birk *et al.*, 2002), but can also be used to create and re-create diagrammatic significance by virtue of the non-permanent adhesive.

Although the techniques already mentioned are often used in strategy workshops, using *Post-it*TM notes specifically as an elicitation aid for individuals is more unusual. The nearest technique in the strategy literature (that has been published) is that of Burgi & Roos (2003). However, they use Lego bricks rather than *Post-it*TM notes, and ask participants to construct a 3-D model of a business process or factory (Bürgi *et al.*, 2005; Bürgi *et al.*, 2004). The underlying reason for this approach is to help managers to try to explain their tacit knowledge to others.

The video recording of the session provided the author with an evolutionary record of the map's construction. It was noticeable that some participants tended to make gestures toward elements of the map without any verbal referencing; so this mandated a software analysis package that could tie the audio transcript to the video recording. Thus it was possible to avoid "*this one over here*" or

“*these factors*” becoming meaningless in a transcript taken from the audio recording alone.

The researcher’s preoccupation with methodology and research practices can become overbearing for SBOs. The research design attempted to make a fairly complicated set of research needs appear simple at the interface between the researcher and the researched. For instance, the structuration theory being applied in this study was reduced to a *pro forma* chart that could be filled in by the researcher as the workshop progressed. This simplification permitted the researcher to be more alert for visual cues coming from the participant.

The participant was invited to distribute the annotated *Post-it*™ notes as she, or he, saw fit. They were invited to use the map to support their responses. The adoption of this tactic varied between



Figure 4.3 Author's cue cards (to be placed in camera view when required)

participants depending on whether they were trying to impart something that was intrinsically difficult to describe. The analysis phase was designed to focus on these instances (often found by video searching for hands coming into view) where the author was interested to know if an attempt to articulate tacit knowledge had occurred. The author had also prepared some visual cue cards that were placed on a blank part of the map (see Figure 4.3). These were intended to help the author find a key point in the video (either for analysis, or editing out a pause in the proceedings caused by an interruption or comfort break).

It should be noted that the relevant cue card needs to be left on the map for at least two minutes, otherwise it can be missed during a fast forward scan through the video. These are explained to the SBO as ‘*video production aids*’ before the workshop commences, and the participant is asked not to ignore them.

None of the participants exhibited any form of recursion in the diagram (or expressed the desire to do so). With the available materials that would not have been particularly easy, (but directional arrows were available if any of the SBOs wanted to use them). There was a tendency with some

of the participants to reorganise the map into a time-base moving from left to right with the elapsing time. Virtually all of the participants were mapping the past and the present, but indications of the future were much rarer. No one in the study was expressing opinions about a future further than five years ahead.

As far as the author could ascertain there were no instances where a participant was being distracted by the map building exercise. The author played a deliberate role of writing out tickets using the participants' own words in an attempt to minimise any administrative burden. The author wanted each SBO to express himself (or herself) as freely as possible. Changing the method of having the map constructed on the wall to a large horizontal surface such as a table was an improvement because it engendered a sense of a collaborative venture with the participant (although the author was deliberately letting the SBO 'call all the shots').

4.4.2. Ethical considerations

Great care was taken in the preparation of a submission for this study to the institution's Research Ethics committee. The mandatory requirements of 'informed consent' were applied throughout, and any specific needs for anonymity were built in at the outset and will govern the content of future publication such as this thesis. In asking participants to discuss their strategising, there is an inevitable accumulation of content as well as process information being imparted. As part of the standard procedure for these 'one-to-one' workshop sessions, the participants were made aware of large visual cue cards (such as "*Confidential*") that could be placed in the video field of view should the participant require that the record be purged of an accidental reference. Doing so, made the task of removal much easier after the recording session has been completed.

The peculiarity with this design of study was the '*quid pro quo*' of offering a strategy workshop type environment that was potentially attractive to SBOs. The scope of the exercise needed to be carefully identified for both parties. This was never intended to be 'free consultancy', and the participants were made aware from the outset that this was a primary research exercise. However, the opportunity to "sit down somewhere without distraction and discuss you and your company's strategy" was understood to be a welcome by-product of the research design although not its '*raison d'être*'. Such managing of expectations at the very outset is an important feature of the research design. The need to give primacy to the needs of 'customers' is often seen as a weakness within commercial small business research. If too much emphasis is given to the business needs of the participating company, it can result in poor research methodologies.

"A good deal of 'quick consultancy' is dressed up as 'academic research' ..."
(Blackburn & Kovalainen, 2009, p.133).

A careful balance has been placed on this research design to ensure that this problem does not occur, and that the participants were aware that consultancy was not being provided. The all-inclusive approach to the session with no requirement for follow up sessions also pre-empted any

'drift' towards consultancy. However, the design intent was to create an experience that might encourage a future research relationship with the SBO. The need for longitudinal research is an ever present comment found in the recommendations for further research in published papers (Leitch *et al.*, 2010; Blackburn & Kovalainen, 2009; Denis *et al.*, 2007). This methodological design attempts to address common concerns held by SBOs regarding research being an expensive drain on their time.

The need for '*internal to the firm*' confidentiality arose with some participants. In these cases the SBO did not want the interview to be overheard by other people working in the business. The choice of venue was important in this regard. The agreed location needed to be quiet both in terms of background noise (machinery, traffic, etc.) and with regard to the likelihood of interruptions. Most of the participants were happy to turn off their mobiles during the session. Most of the SBOs were particular in their requirements for confidentiality. All participants have been given anonymous identities in this text. Not only was strategy considered to be secret, but some of the underlying issues were confidential within the firm. The author has respected all of the wishes of the SBOs in this thesis,

4.4.3. Recruitment

As already discussed, the typical SBO is notoriously difficult to recruit for pure research. Any time devoted to the study is time that the SBO cannot be active in the business (Curran & Blackburn, 2001). This effect is exacerbated with sole traders and micro-sized businesses. It is for that reason, that this study required a research design that incorporated features that would sufficiently appeal to SBOs. The author hoped that some SBOs would perceive the cost in time being sacrificed to be a price worth paying.

Figure 4.4 shows the combined publicity and explanation leaflet (double sided A4) that was circulated among the community of local small businesses. It appealed on several levels with a quid pro quo for SBOs that were new to academic research initiatives beyond the usual requests for questionnaire returns. Appealing at the level of potential benefit to the local community (firms, universities, students, etc.) will produce positive responses in the North East of England. The author emphasised the immediate benefit of participating (there would be no waiting for results to emerge before anything could help the SBO).



A unique research opportunity with Newcastle Business School

How do you build your firm's future?

Can you help us?

We would like to interview some small business owner-managers (or directors) on a one-to-one basis. Can you tell us about your strategy-making methods? We want to know about your experience of building a future for your firm. What obstacles do you regularly face? How do you manage to 'pull it all together'? Do you have any special routines that work for you? Is this a team game, or do you work alone? Do you consult with outsiders? How much has to be built up from scratch? Your experience will be unique, and we want to understand the issues that face people who must plan ahead.

Why are we doing this?

This is part of Newcastle Business School's commitment to long term engagement with local SMEs. If we engage with small firms at the level of business strategy, we will have a much better anticipation of their future needs. Similar research to this has been conducted internationally in very large organisations, but this is the first time anywhere that a group of small business has been studied in this way.



What exactly are we researching?

We are interested in all the minor preparatory work, activities and discussions that often precede strategic decision-making. It's the small things that people do in their daily work that eventually enable a sense of new strategic direction. This is all about the underlying micro-processes that make successful business planning possible.

How is the research conducted?

We hold a short one-to-one workshop session with you. It lasts about an hour. The interview centres around a topic relevant to the future of your business. Part of the workshop includes the creation of a wall-map made with post-it notes. Each note is marked-up with various details and this makes it easier to show the relationships between the various important issues. The map is videoed as it grows, and our questions and your answers are collected on the sound track. It takes about six weeks to analyse the session. After that, we will have a further meeting with you to discuss the findings.

Is it confidential?

Absolutely. We are governed by a strict code of research ethics that ensures your participation is confidential and anonymous. Everything is agreed beforehand.

What are the benefits for your company?

- A free opportunity to experience your own strategy workshop.
- A welcome chance to stop and think about the future?
- Try a new technique of strategy-map building that you can use in the future.
- You can inform us about the future needs of your business, so that we can build better educational products and services for companies like yours.

What are the benefits for the region?

Groundbreaking primary research in the North East can help to raise the profile of our community of SMEs. Our students also benefit from having lecturers that are more in touch with the needs of potential employers, and this helps to provide the required skilled workforce for our region.

How do we sign up?

In the first instance please contact:
Nigel Petts
nigel.petts@northumbria.ac.uk
+44 (0) 7791084520



Figure 4.4 Strategy workshop publicity and information leaflet

The author also hoped that this study could act as a catalyst for local SBOs to be more responsive to research access by making the process as quick and 'painless' as possible for participants. Although this was necessarily a cross-sectional research design, the intent was to create a post-process impression of not being a nuisance to SBOs. Future endorsement to other potential participants might be vital for the author. Blackburn and Kovalainen (2009) have called for more longitudinal research in the small business community. This study might be one way of achieving this long term goal.

There is a need for more qualitative and longitudinal research on the entrepreneur to underpin the 'snapshot' quantitative profiles of small firms and their owner-managers do undertake." (Blackburn & Stokes, 2000, p.44)

The study cohort comprised of ten individuals in seven companies. Five of the small business owners (SBOs) were happy to participate in this study, but reluctant to involve staff below the senior management (ownership level). A prevailing view among these owner-managers was a desire to sample the process before permitting any members of staff to participate (if ever). These owner-managers were later revealed (in the study) to be individuals that did share some strategising with others, but were wary of research methods that might provoke unnecessary disagreement, or 'open old wounds'.

One firm was prepared to open up the process to a senior member of staff reporting to the SBO

#	Case Company	Name	Job Title	Ownership	Sector
1	(A) Only Branding Works	Miles	Managing Director	Majority Shareholder	Brand Management
2		Marcus	Brand Director	Minority Shareholder	
3		Patrick	Operations Director	Minority Shareholder	
4	(B) Travel Bravura	Joanne	Director	Joint Owner	Travel Agency
5	(C) Chargepacks	Chester	Managing Director	Sole Owner	Electrical Goods Manufacture
6	(D) Pubrelco	Paula	Managing Director	Sole Owner	PR
7	(E) Town & Country Cleaning	Brenda	Managing Director	Sole Owner	Contract Cleaning
8	(F) Sandra Hill Consulting	Sandra	Managing Director	Sole Trader	PR
9	(G) Montague-Endeavour	Darren	Manager	None	Property & Business Investment
10	(H) HobbyCo	Sarah	Managing Director	Joint Owner	Craft Goods Design & Manufacture

Table 4.1 The case companies and participants in this study

because he could not participate. Unfortunately, the SBO was unable to participate. This case was included for comparison as the only example of an assistant that was delegated strategic decision-making duties. It was also significant that this participant was actively involved in growth projects in many other small businesses. He, therefore, not only represented the SBO in 'matters strategic', but also was the external strategic consultant for other companies that were not in this study.

The participating firms do not tend to fall under the general characterisation of family businesses. For the purposes of this assertion, and not wishing to enter the complexity of family business definitions (Wortman, 1994), the author can make the following observations. None of the SBOs revealed a succession plan involving relatives, the preference being for an eventual trade sale. Only one has a spouse working in the firm (as book-keeper). The one firm that had parent shareholders was looking to introduce non-relatives to the board. From a strategising point of view, it would be unlikely for these SBOs to be motivated towards the maintenance of family, rather than personal, control.

Just one firm was prepared to open up the process to multiple management levels. Although the extra participants were directors and minority shareholders, they were not the *de facto* owners of the business. In study terms this was remarkable, because the author was given access to the three potential strategisers at the same time. The preliminary discussions agreed a format whereby each director was individually interviewed on a confidential basis. It only became evident

during the first of three interviews why this SBO not been as reticent about the confidentiality of strategy discussion as the others in the study. The majority shareholding owner wanted to use the study as a catalyst to effect change at board level in his company. This could only be accomplished by extending the research scope to the other directors. He felt that the need was immediate, and was therefore content to forego an 'owner-only' exercise as a precursor (unlike the others in this study).

The author found that the normal reaction from small business owners that had never before been involved in research (as was the case with all of these companies) was one of caution. As has been previously mentioned, the research method had been designed to appeal to such people (particularly in terms of being immediately compelling as a process for the SBO and relatively rapid in execution). Experience in this study has shown, that although it is possible to 'unlock' access to these firms, it is not possible to gain deeper access to other members of staff unless there is an immediate issue that warrants a 'chance' being taken by the SBO.

This study confirmed that giving strategic methods assistance to small businesses requires a process rather than a discrete intervention. Confidence building is necessary, and higher education establishments such as universities are particularly well placed to provide such provision.

At a time of global recession, and widely reported difficulties for the SME sector in the UK and EU; none of these companies were about to go into liquidation (this assertion has been confirmed by their continued operation at the time of writing this thesis, in 2013). All of the firms had achieved growth organically. The problems being faced by some small businesses in accessing affordable loans from lending institutions did not appear to be 'on their radar'. Neither were they active seekers of government, or EU, funding schemes. The prevailing attitude seemed to be one of willingness to apply for grants, but only if so doing did not force them to deviate from their chosen path. The strategic issue that seemed to consume most of them could be loosely categorised as 'growing pains'. Each firm was at a slightly different stage of the process whereby a cadre of professional managers was, or was about to be, installed into the business. The transition from SBO '*hands-on control*' to SBO '*directed professional management*' is known to be traumatic for many firms and has traditionally been the focus of much research attention.

4.4.4. Typical questions posed in the workshop

An interviewer that is informed by Structuration theory needs to couch questions in a certain manner. The author has provided a typical set of generic questions in Table 4.2 that can be used as a starting point to probe for elements of agency, modality, and structural dimensions. A semi-structured interview can be assembled from such questions. It is notable that the very open nature of the enquiries is the antithesis of a quantitative instrument such as a questionnaire. Also the prepared questions can only be a guide to progress because other

questions will arise from the mapping activity of the participant. The actual scenario being discussed will dictate the appropriateness of some questions. However, the table above does give an indication to researchers unfamiliar with ST, how it might be habitualised into an interviewer's repertoire. It takes practice to be able to conceptualise ST in the midst of an interview. Having a list of opening questions is one way of keeping the discourse on track.

Structuration Factors	Typical Questions for a Small Business Owner
Authoritative Resources	How many people are working your company? How many of those are full-time? Do you outsource any of your work? Do you collaborate with any other organisations?
Allocative Resources	What can you tell me about the finances of your company? Are these your only premises? What is the typical value of your stock? What can you tell me about your online presence?
Rules	What are your terms of trade? Please tell me about any policies you have in this business? What are the typical EU or UK regulations must you abide by? Can you describe any 'rules of thumb' in this business? Do all of you have any agreed ways of doing things (written or unwritten)?
Communication	How do you make sure that all employees know something important? How do you make sure that people have understood you? Do you find some people misunderstand your vision for the firm?
Interpretive Schemes	How do employees know that you've changed your mind about something? Can you give me some examples of company jargon? Can you describe a discussion that referred back to previous shared experiences in the business?
Signification	Is there anything I can see that exemplifies how your business works? Is there anything here that is representative of the group at its best? Do you ever have trouble explaining your methods to outsiders?
Power	Do you have the final say in any argument? Can anyone overrule you? Is there anything that you cannot change in this business?
Facility	The resources in your business probably enable you to do certain things. Can you think of any examples?
Domination	Who decides 'who does what' around here? How often do you look at your resource deployment? Do you think you are getting the best out of your people and equipment?
Sanction	If people want to do something innovative, do they need your agreement? What is a typical ethical constraint in this business? Are there types of business that you won't entertain?
Norms	Can you describe an informal boundary that everyone accepts? How do people know when they are over-stepping the mark?
Legitimation	What forms of certification do you have? Is there something official, or unofficial, which tells customers that you are good?

Table 4.2 Suggested opening interview questions

The author uses a *pro forma* Structuration chart to note down any particularly interesting responses that occur during the interview, and these are mapped to the various factors within Structuration theory. The author has placed the questions in the table in the typical

order that they could be asked. Note that the order is slightly different to that used by the author in the Cases chapter. The author suggests that researchers might prefer to enquire along the 'agency <> modality <> structural dimension' lines, rather than capture all agency before modalities and structural dimensions. Experience has shown the author that it is easier to open the dialogue with questions about tangible assets in the firm, e.g. the staff or premises. It is also necessary to avoid using Giddensian words, otherwise a long and complicated explanation is needed which is not conducive to meaningful communication.

4.5. Data preparation and analysis procedure

In this section, the author will describe the data preparation and analysis procedure in detail by taking a sample *vignette* from the Travel Bravura workshop. Most of the repetitive procedure that is used for all of the workshop analyses is evident in this selection from the interview. The procedure may seem rather ‘mechanical’ but the end result is a video transcript that has been coded using the principles of the underpinning Structuration Theory. It is the opinion of the author that the vast volume of material that is collected from the one-to-one strategy workshops can only be sensibly managed using CAQDAS software. In the following procedural description the author is using NVivo 10 terminology (a ‘node’ is the named tag given to a portion of the transcript that has been ‘coded’ by the ‘node’).

It should also be noted that NVivo is somewhat unusual in its functionality (compared to Microsoft Office, for instance). Even in comparison with other CAQDAS packages it can be unusual. The following description of the NVivo 10 procedure used by the author is predicated upon some of these unusual features. In particular, transcripts are handled differently in NVivo 10 compared to text files. In most CVAQDAS packages, the user can code a single word, a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph. However, for transcripts in NVivo 10 the coding stripes can only indicate that coding has occurred within a particular transcript row (which might contain several paragraphs). NVivo does not permit anything other than a coding stripe for the entire row. If highlighting is “On” the coded words can be seen, but multiple coding in the same transcript row becomes confusing as the same highlight colour is used for different nodes. The aforementioned is not a problem where participants are refraining from long monologues. Where transcript rows are lengthy, the analyst can always break a large row into several smaller ones. This is not necessarily a problem for the analyst as most CAQDAS packages can be set to retrieve the actually coded words or a set number of words or sentences either side of the coding. The ‘broader brush’ setting is very similar to the coding of transcript rows in NVivo 10.

A notable incident from the video with Joanne Leyland, the SBO of Travel Bravura, occurred when she elucidated about a Change Management initiative that she had recently introduced to the business. She had used an external change agent to herald significant changes in the way that customer representatives work in her business. She had then initiated “Workstream”⁷ meetings to implement the changes. Prior to this section of the transcript, Joanne had explained that she had seen Change Management misused in a large organisation. She was determined not to make the same mistakes. In particular, she did not want to lose talented individuals from the team.

⁷ Terminology used by Joanne Leyland to describe meetings to discuss changes in working practices. A workstream was considered the full client experience delivered by the sales representative.

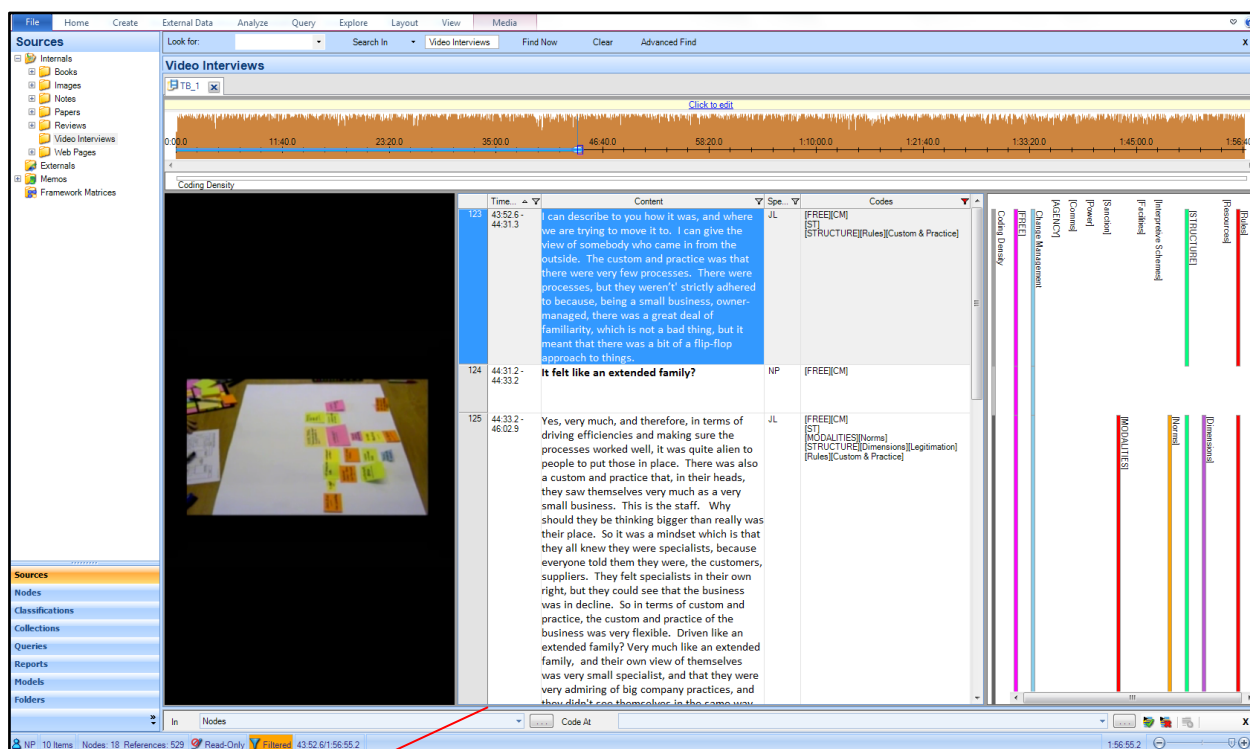


Figure 4.6 Screenshot of NVivo 10 showing example from Travel Bravura workshop.

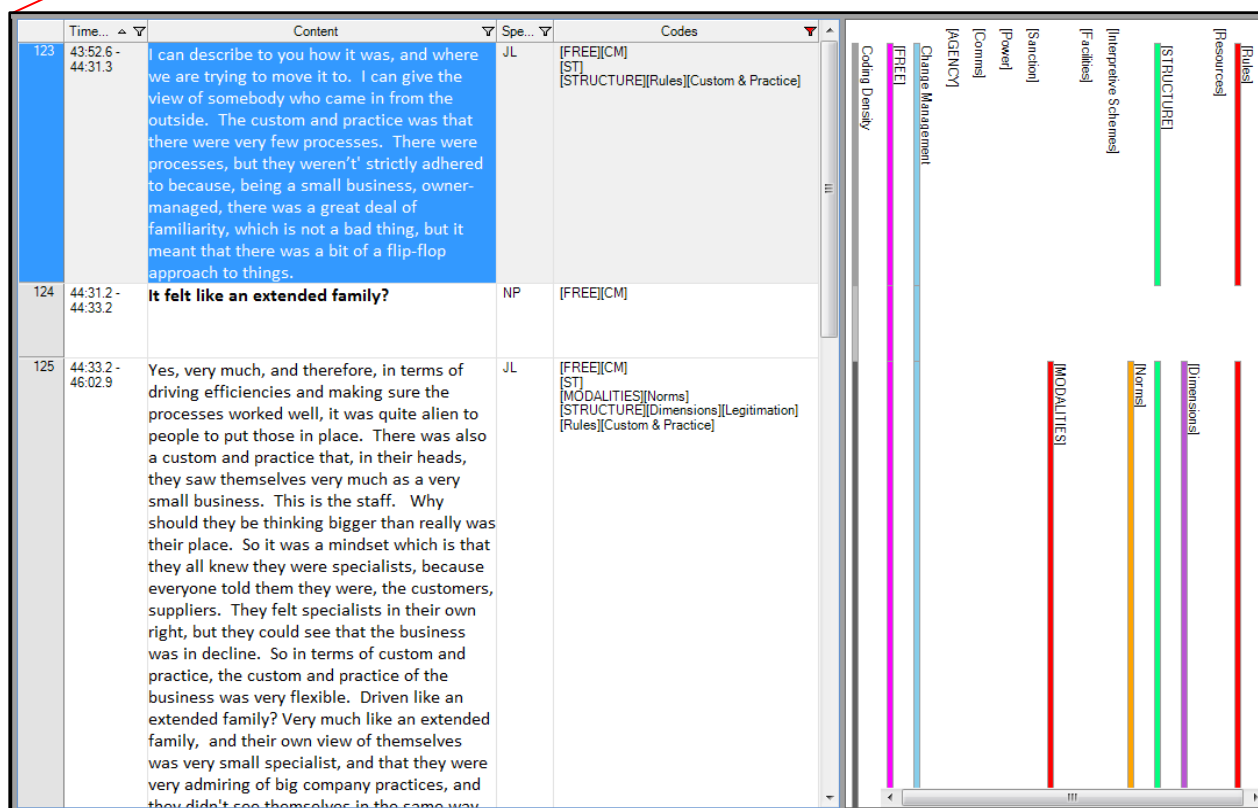


Figure 4.5 Screenshot of transcript and coding stripe detail

In the preparation stage, the author will have already completed the workshop with the participant SBO and have several data sources available. The entire session will have been videoed from a fixed vantage point. The final strategy map will have been retained by the author together with his contemporaneous notes made on the *pro forma* worksheet. The audio transcription is either extracted from the audio-visual data as an MP3 file for transcribing by a professional transcriber or the video is transcribed directly by the author within NVivo 10. If external transcription is being used, the researcher must take great care that the resulting text document of the transcription is in the correct format to be acceptable as an import into NVivo 10. The author recommends that users adopt the tabular format stipulated by QSR (the publishers of NVivo), because it is much easier to spot an error in a table than in a concatenated string. Particular care must be taken with the formatting of the timespan data which is very strict (including requisite white spaces). Any discrepancy will stop the text document being imported into NVivo. If the user is going to transcribe within NVivo all of the formatting is created automatically. Figure 4.5 (on page 93) shows the transcript already entered into NVivo 10. The transcript has columns; the leftmost three ('Row No.', 'Timestamp' and 'Content') are automatically generated by NVivo, the other two ('Speaker' and 'Coding') have to be configured by the user as 'custom columns'.

The video recording of the workshop is '*trimmed*' by editing software to remove blank passages at the start and the end of the file. It is then converted from DV format (640x576 resolution) to mp4 (352x288 resolution). It is the author's experience that this loss of fidelity is necessary to prevent NVivo 10 from running too slow⁸. No doubt future improvements in computer processing power will permit CAQDAS software to perform faster with much higher video resolutions. As already mentioned the author designed this research method to not depend upon HD video recordings. The methodological design utilising CAQDAS took this limitation into account. The author was careful to make sure that it was not necessary to be able to read the annotations on the *Post-it*™ notes directly from the video portrayed in NVivo 10.

⁸ The author was previously aware of this limitation and despite using a relatively powerful laptop (in 2013) with an i7 processor and 16Gb of RAM, it was still necessary to reduce the video resolution.

The author used professional transcription services for about half of the material in this study, and transcribed the other half within NVivo using the “*playback-repetition*” method using voice recognition software (Nuance Dragon Naturally Speaking 12). In the author’s opinion, this method of analysis preparation is preferable because it assists the researcher in ‘*keeping close to the data*’. The use of a transcriber has the advantage of a ‘*division of labour*’ (i.e. the researcher can work on something else in the meantime); however, the author found that the added familiarity that

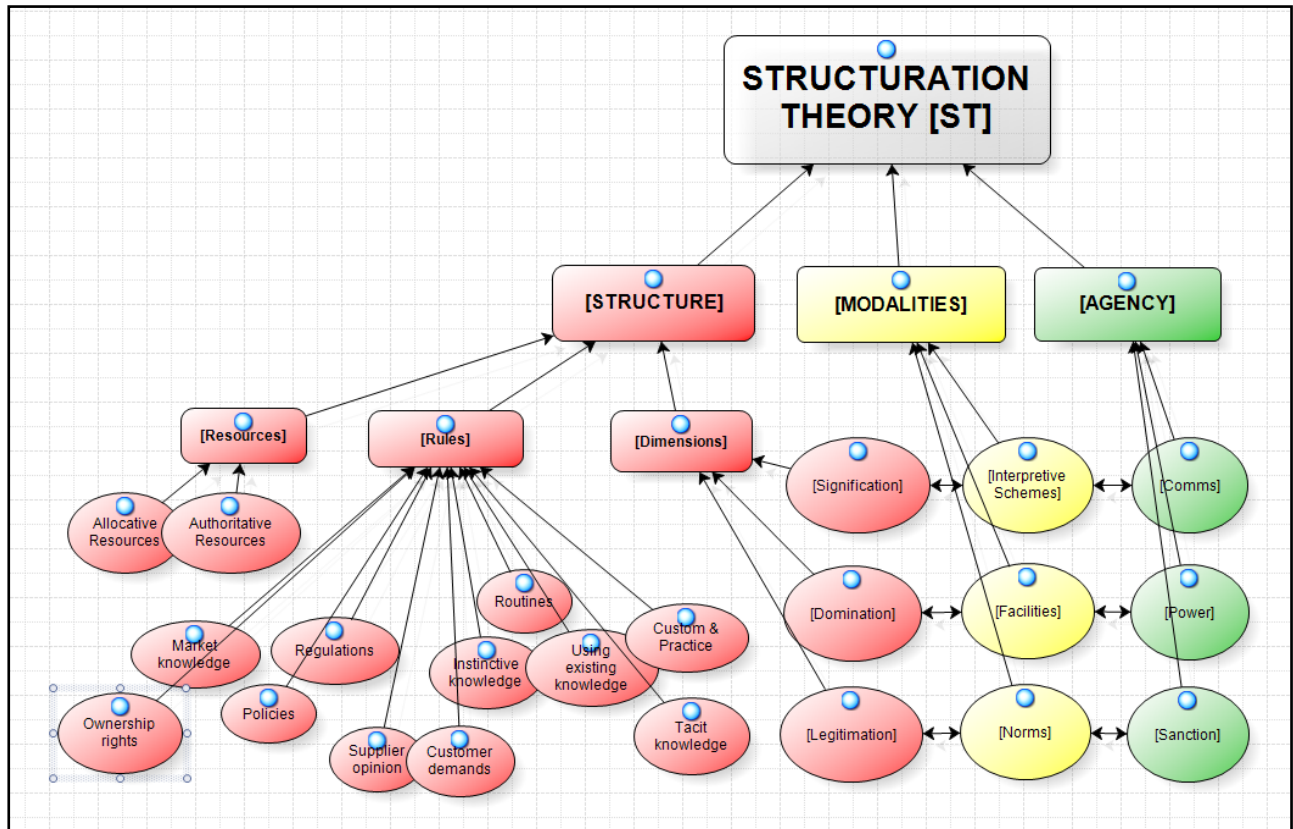


Figure 4.7 Structuration Theory [ST] Model (detail of screenshot)

he built up by transcribing was a methodological benefit.

Where the author has used a professional transcription service for a particular workshop there would be a text file that could be imported into NVivo 10.⁹ On the other hand, the author might elect to do the transcribing himself. This is accomplished by the “*repetition-recognition*” method using Voice Recognition (VR) software. The author used Nuance Dragon Naturally Speaking 12 software for his own transcribing. This involved the use of headphones to play the audio recording (under the control of a foot-pedal) in short bursts of approximately ten seconds and then repeating what he heard on the recording into Dragon NS12 via the headset microphone. The current state

⁹ Since this study QSR the publishers of NVivo are now offering a transcription service that supplies a transcription already in NVivo format.

of VR technology does not permit the direct recognition of a participant voice without extensive sessions of '*reading out loud*' to train the software to recognise the new voice. Considering that the design of this research intervention revolves around minimum disruption for the SBO, such a course of action is impractical. The '*repetition-recognition*' method of transcription represents an extremely cost-effective solution compared to professional transcription services. It also renders a much closer association between the researcher, the data and the transcript than would be afforded by professional transcription services.

The author maintained a uniform approach to the coding of transcripts. All ten workshop videos were contained in one NVivo Project. This had the advantage of making all nodes available for coding across the different case companies. An *a priori* template of hierarchical nodes (King, 2004) was created by the author from his adaptation of structuration theory using NVivo 10. The software can represent this as a table or a model (for the latter see Figure 4.7 on page 95). The model can assist the analyst by showing the entire template in a single diagram. The blue dots in each element indicate the NVivo linkage to an available node. Once the transcription is imported (or created) in NVivo, the author first plays the video straight through listening to what had occurred and making brief notes of any obvious free nodes¹⁰. He then consults his field notes that were taken during the interview (see Figure 3.2 on page 70) and adds any other nodes that had sprung to mind at the time.

Table 4.3 (ending on page 98) shows the generic approach used to prepare and analyse the video recording in NVivo 10. The first pass of coding is to allocate a marker-node "[FREE]" to initially significant portions of the video. The author would normally use his *pro forma* Structuration sheet that he had used during the interview as a guide to areas of specific interest. Allocating the node "[FREE]" is just to indicate that a more specific free node (new or existing) will be allocated later. After the first pass the author can 'filter' the transcription rows on screen to only show those carrying the [FREE] node. This makes it much easier to allocate meaningful free nodes in the required areas. In the example part of the Travel Bravura workshop, the topic of Change Management had been discussed by the SBO. After filtering for [FREE], the particular free code of [CM] for Change Management was applied where appropriate amongst the [FREE] coded transcript rows.

The second pass of coding is conducted using the Structuration Theory (ST) model. This a hierarchy of tree nodes¹¹ that are created once in the NVivo 10 Project using the Model functions (see Figure 4.7 on page 95) the ST model is then available as a set of hierarchical tree nodes for

¹⁰ The author uses the NVivo terminology whereby the analyst '*codes a node*'. A '*node*' is a searchable tag that is applied to any text, audio or video clip. A free node is not part of any node hierarchical structure.

¹¹ A tree node is a node that has a hierarchical relationship to other tree nodes

the coding of all strategy workshop videos.

#	Activity	NVivo Function
01	<p><u>"Repetition-Recognition" Method of Transcribing</u></p> <p>Play entire video through in ten second clips (using foot-pedal control). With cursor in the NVivo Transcript Row (Contents Column) listen to speaker on recording (in headphones) then repeat words into headset microphone (using VR software). The VR software writes the transcribed words into the transcript. Allocate one speaker to each transcript row. Pressing <Return> will create the next transcript row. NVivo creates an automatic timestamp (start-finish) for each transcript row.</p>	<p><u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Transcribe Media: <Play> / <Pause></p> <p><u>Transcript Window</u> Contents (column)</p>
02	<p><u>Free Coding (Marker-node [FREE])</u></p> <p>The first pass of coding is to allocate a marker-node to interesting portions of the transcript. The author would normally use his <i>pro forma</i> Structuration sheet that he had used during the interview as a guide to areas of specific interest. The author writes the marker-node "[FREE]" in the code column of every transcription row that is of interest. This just indicates that a more particular free node will be allocated later. Repeat for all transcript rows that are to be free coded.</p>	<p><u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Synchronise</p> <p><u>Transcript Window</u></p> <p>Click transcript row to play associated video/audio. Highlight all filtered rows and apply coding stripe [FREE] to all rows.</p>
03	<p><u>Free Coding (new or existing nodes) to Marker-node [FREE]</u></p> <p>Working only with those rows that have been given the marker-node [FREE] append suitable free nodes (existing or new) to the marker-node "[FREE]".</p> <p>e.g. "[FREE][Delegating]" or "[FREE][Market Research]".</p> <p>Allocate as many free codes as necessary at this stage.</p>	<p><u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Synchronise</p> <p><u>Transcript Window</u></p> <p>Set filter on Coding column to "Contains [FREE]".</p> <p>Apply coding stripe [<free node name>] to row, before moving to next row.</p>
04	<p><u>Structuration Framework Coding (Marker-node [ST])</u></p> <p>The second pass of coding is to allocate a marker-node to those portions of the transcript that might be significant to Structuration Theory. The author would normally use his <i>pro forma</i> Structuration sheet that he had used during the interview as a preliminary guide. The author writes the marker-node "[ST]" in the code column of every transcription row that is of interest. This just indicates that a more particular ST node will be allocated later. Repeat for all transcript rows that are to be coded from the ST model.</p>	<p><u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Synchronise</p> <p><u>Transcript Window</u></p> <p>Read transcript row contents. Click transcript row to play the synch'd video/audio. Highlight all filtered rows and apply coding stripe [ST] to all rows.</p>
05	<p><u>Structuration Framework Coding (1st Level ST Codes)</u></p> <p>Working only with those rows that have been given the marker-node [ST] append 1st level ST nodes ("[AGENCY]", "[MODALITIES]", or "[STRUCTURE]") to the marker-node "[ST]" depending upon whether there appears to be any relevance to any of the 1st level ST nodes.</p> <p>e.g. "[ST][AGENCY]" or "[ST][MODALITIES]" or "[ST][STRUCTURE]".</p> <p>Allocate as many 1st level ST nodes as necessary at this stage.</p>	<p><u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Synchronise</p> <p><u>Transcript Window</u></p> <p>Append nodes as necessary in Coding column.</p> <p>Apply coding stripes before moving to next row.</p>
06a	<p><u>Structuration Framework Coding (2nd Level ST Codes)</u></p> <p>Working only with those rows that have been given the node [AGENCY] append 2nd level ST nodes.</p> <p>e.g. "[ST][AGENCY][Comms]"</p> <p>or "[ST][AGENCY][Power]"</p> <p>or "[ST][AGENCY][Sanction]".</p> <p>Allocate as many 2nd level ST nodes as necessary at this stage.</p>	<p><u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Synchronise</p> <p><u>Transcript Window</u></p> <p>Set filter on Coding column to "Contains [AGENCY]".</p>
Continued on next page ...		

#	Activity	NVivo Function
06b	<u>Structuration Framework Coding (2nd Level ST Codes)</u> Working only with those rows that have been given the node [MODALITIES] append 2 nd level ST nodes. e.g. "[MODALITIES][Int. Schemes]" or "[MODALITIES][Facilities]" or "[MODALITIES][Norms]". Allocate as many 2 nd level ST nodes as necessary at this stage.	<u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Synchronise <u>Transcript Window</u> Set filter on Coding column to "Contains ... [MODALITIES]".
06c	<u>Structuration Framework Coding (2nd Level ST Codes)</u> Working only with those rows that have been given the node [STRUCTURE] append 2 nd level ST nodes. e.g. "[STRUCTURE][Signification]" or "[STRUCTURE][Domination]" or "[STRUCTURE][Legitimation]" or "[STRUCTURE][Dimensions]" Allocate as many 2 nd level ST nodes as necessary at this stage.	<u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Synchronise
07	<u>Re-evaluate free nodes against ST criteria</u> Double check that a free node cannot be expressed by some combination of [ST] nodes. The author does not delete the free node, so that reconsideration is still possible, and isolation of a topic is still possible (such as the Change Management example in this thesis).	<u>NVivo Ribbon</u> Media: Synchronise <u>Transcript Window</u> Set filter on Coding column to "Contains ... [FREE]".

Table 4.3 Analysis procedure using NVivo 10.

In the second pass, the author assigns the marker-node "[ST]" to all rows that might have a relevance to ST. The transcript rows are then filtered to show only those that require ST coding from the model. The author then works progressively down the hierarchy of the ST model, appending nodes in the transcript Coding column, and replicating a coding stripe for the same transcript row. As can be seen from Table 4.3 the author uses the assigned parent ST nodes to further filter the transcript row set so that child ST nodes (the relationships set by the ST framework model) can be coded to only those rows coded by the parent.

It is important to note that coding can overlap. For instance the [FREE] marker-node can be coded to the same row as the [ST] marker-code. These can be considered as two different points of entry into an indexation system. The [FREE] codes tend to be identifiable discursive topics, whereas the [ST] codes are theory framework relevant. This situation can be considered analogous to a textbook that has an index of authors and an index of subjects.

One of the more complex attributions to the ST framework occurs when interpretation requires multiple modal paths. Giddens warns that his theory presupposes that there will be recursion happening by single or multiple modalities. For instance, agencies of '*Power*' and '*Sanction*' might be implicated in a situation that results in '*Domination*' of '*Resources*' where an agent has drawn

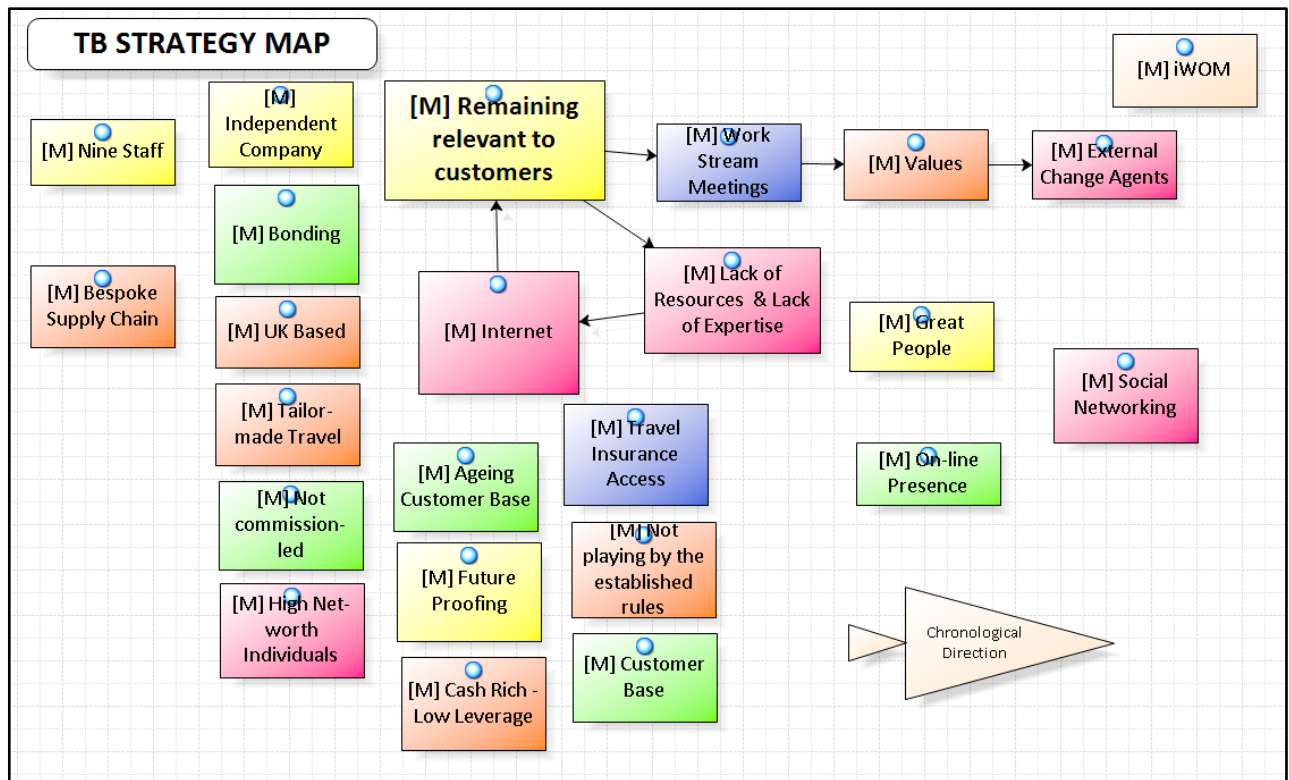


Figure 4.8 Final strategy map from TB workshop modelled in NVivo 10 (detail of screenshot)

upon 'Legitimation' from the 'Structure'.

This is one of the problems that are presented to the researcher using ST, because Giddens' framework is extremely versatile when multiple modal paths are considered. It is not necessarily a simple matter of mapping the free node across to another single node in the ST model.

It is the author's opinion, that it is not possible to thoroughly analyse ST in two hour duration videos without recourse to CAQDAS software like NVivo 10. The great benefit is to allow the analyst to rapidly navigate across large transcripts. Coding density can vary, and the coding stripe system offered in NVivo 10 can be very useful to visually display where the deeper analysis is located.

As can be seen in Table 4.4 on the next three pages, all of the transcript rows carry the "[FREE][CM]" nodes. This subset of rows from the transcript has been filtered to contain these codes. The author has also given coding stripes for the nodes "[FREE]" and "[Change Management]" to the same filtered subset of transcription entries. Although this may appear to be doubling the work involved, the coding stripes are particularly useful as an overview of the entire coded video. The author often uses the video timeline coding stripes (shadow coding) as a starting point for entry into the video transcript. The coding builds up a pattern which can show the areas of greatest interest.

Row	Timespan	Content	Spkr	Codes
123	43:52.6 - 44:31.3	I can describe to you how it was, and where we are trying to move it to. I can give the view of somebody who came in from the outside. The custom and practice was that there were very few processes. There were processes, but they weren't strictly adhered to because, being a small business, owner-managed, there was a great deal of familiarity, which is not a bad thing, but it meant that there was a bit of a flip-flop approach to things.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [STRUCTURE][Rules] [Custom & Practice]
124	44:31.2 - 44:33.2	It felt like an extended family?	NP	[FREE][CM]
125	44:33.2 - 46:02.9	Yes, very much, and therefore, in terms of driving efficiencies and making sure the processes worked well, it was quite alien to people to put those in place. There was also a custom and practice that, in their heads, they saw themselves very much as a very small business. This is the staff. Why should they be thinking bigger than really was their place. So it was a mind-set which is that they all knew they were specialists, because everyone told them they were, the customers, suppliers. They felt specialists in their own right, but they could see that the business was in decline. So in terms of custom and practice, the custom and practice of the business was very flexible. Driven like an extended family? Very much like an extended family, and their own view of themselves was very small specialist, and that they were very admiring of big company practices, and they didn't see themselves in the same way.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [MODALITIES][Norms] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [Legitimation][Rules] [Custom & Practice]
126	46:02.8 - 46:05.6	So, in a sense, it was very self-limiting?	NP	[FREE][CM]
127	46:05.6 - 46:10.5	Yes very much. I would say that that is a good phrase to describe it.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [Legitimation] [Rules] [Custom & Practice]
128	46:10.7 - 46:22.8	That was the situation presented to you on entry. What did you do? How did you act to change that?	NP	[FREE][CM]
129	46:22.7 - 48:06.4	Two things. The first thing was to look at the data and numbers, and see where, because of my background in Change Management, is to look at the profitability of the company in that area, and say let me look at the history, so that I can just get a handle on what is coming into the business. So what is sanity, what is cash that is coming into the business and how is that coming. So my first job was to say that I needed to protect that, that was my first job when I looked at, and not to go in and make huge changes to mind-sets. So my job was a protection job, because that was reality. That's money that is coming in, so that's the first thing. The second thing to do was to look at how we could re-engineer that area, to take out some of the long-winded process. Where could we use technology to take out cost and to improve efficiency. That was before I did anything. The third thing I did was to introduce change management sessions, because the key thing I learnt from my days at <UK Travel Agency> was that their change management process sometimes destroyed businesses and profitability, purely because they were either buying the business to take them out of the market, or they were buying the business and then they saw the profitability fall away, and that was because people left, and they took with them expertise or custom.	JL	[FREE][CM] [Unintended consequences] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms][Power] [Sanction] [STRUCTURE][Rules] [Custom & Practice]
130	48:06.3 - 48:12.8	So you would describe that by the old adage of ' <i>throwing the baby out with the bathwater</i> '?	NP	[FREE][CM]
131	48:12.8 - 48:54.4	That is exactly how it used to work. Having seen that I was very mindful of that, very mindful that it's not good changing something if you don't bring the people with you. So we hired a chap who had been a customer of ours, and he ran three Change Management sessions. They were quite brutal in the sense that he was a customer. He gave them some reading to do, which was, "Who stole my cheese".	JL	[FREE][CM] [Unintended consequences] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms] [STRUCTURE] [M] "External Change Agent"
134	49:22.1 - 49:27.1	How was that accepted?	NP	[FREE][CM]
137	50:06.5 - 50:08.2	They felt it was insulting ...	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms] [MODALITIES][Int. Schemes] [STRUCTURE][Legitimation][Rules]

Row	Timespan	Content	Spkr	Codes
138	50:08.2 - 50:13.5	They say they are professionals, and you are questioning their professional prowess?	NP	[FREE][CM]
139	50:13.5 - 51:14.4	Yes, and what I was trying to do was to explain to them that the business had to change. Rather than tell them that <i>"these are the changes"</i> , <i>"this is how it is going to be"</i> ; what I said was that the new style (my style) was to manage from the <i>'bottom up'</i> , not from the <i>'top down'</i> (me telling them what to do). I said that I believed that the best ideas start with the people who do the job every day. So that's how I positioned it. Which is true, and we got this chap in [External Change Agent]. The anecdotal feedback was that they were insulted that I felt (after their many years in business) that they needed to change. However, the sessions ran, and people who had been indifferent to joining the sessions were contacted at home (by other members of staff) to say how brilliant the sessions had been. Those people actually came in and changed their mind and said they wanted to be part of it.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms] [MODALITIES][Int. Schemes][Norms] [STRUCTURE][Legitimation] [Rules] [M] "External Change Agent"
141	51:19.5 - 52:14.6	I would say 90% of the people and almost then what happened was you got your own 'change agents'. So, individuals who previously had been very talented, but had no 'vision' of what lay outside of their high street location. Basically, <i>"I want to be part of it"</i> , <i>"How can I help facilitate this?"</i> (not those exact words, because it was alien to them). They had never been involved in that before. Remember, these were people that from leaving school had just had one or two jobs. So that was the key part of how we started the change.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY] [STRUCTURE][Rules] [M] "External Change Agent"
142	52:14.6 - 52:34.7	This was your idea to bring in the external change agent. Did you feel a little bit nervous about this, because it is an unusual thing to try in such a small company?	NP	[FREE][CM]
143	52:34.7 - 52:39.1	Yes, it was quite nerve-wracking.	JL	[FREE][CM]
144	52:39.1 - 52:41.3	Have you seen this tried before in a small business?	NP	[FREE][CM]
145	52:41.3 - 53:06.5	No, not a small business. I'd never seen it done anywhere, because I'd done about ten re-structures and changes of business model and the rest, and have had a lot of experience in it. I had never actually seen that done, but because the individual was an expert in change management, and had worked with SMEs.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Power] [MODALITIES][Facilities] [STRUCTURE][Domination] [M] "External Change Agent"
146	53:06.5 - 53:13.5	Ah right, so there is an expertise there ... that's interesting. He had done this before?	NP	[FREE][CM]
147	53:13.5 - 53:46.8	Yes, he had done this before. This is not somebody random. This was somebody who had been recommended to me, a customer, who is a very good customer and was recommended as someone I should speak to. Quite a high profile person in the North East, and somebody who had actually worked, who had built up a business up from an SME to a blue chip business, and then worked with a number of SME's. NB: Identity of change agent not given to researcher.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [M] External Change Agents
151	54:59.5 - 55:39.9	What then happened was, as a follow-up to those sessions, we introduced things called Workstream Meetings, and those Workstreams were chaired by me. There was a representative from each department that came to them. All the things that they felt were impeding them doing the job better, faster, in an improved way, but they essentially presented the solutions, or potential solutions. They tended to be highly personalised, and there were quite a few emotional outbursts within them, and we ran them for about a year.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms] [MODALITIES][Norms] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [Signification][Legitimation] [M] Workstream Meetings
154	56:07.1 - 56:12.1	You don't feel that you have to run them now?	NP	[FREE][CM]
155	56:12.0 - 56:30.5	That's an interesting point because people have said that they found them useful. So we also introduced values to the business, which you can see up there. [JL Points towards a small plaque on the wall].	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms] [MODALITIES][Int. Schemes] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [Signification] [M] Values
156	56:30.5 - 57:08.3	NP reads out the plaque ... "The Travel Bureau values; listen, open and honest communication, resolve don't blame, respect others and take ownership, integrity and honesty, so that's 5 categories and, finally, be proud of what we do and the contribution we all make."	NP	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms] [MODALITIES][Int. Schemes] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [Signification]

Continued.../

Row	Timespan	Content	Spkr	Codes
158	57:21.8 - 59:43.0	So these Workstream Sessions were extremely volatile. People taking criticism very literally (and personally) from comments that were made. Everybody had to bring a set. We had minutes and actions, and people had to go away and deliver the actions. It seemed to me that the processes that hadn't been written down were causing problems if someone left (or someone was off sick). In a small business it's a big risk if somebody leaves and no processes are written down. I got everyone to write down what they 'actually do', because nobody had job descriptions. The process in an organisation like this is very important, because if one individual gets 'run over by a bus', and nobody knows what they do, or they are off sick for a long time, it puts a huge strain on the organisation. It seemed to me (coming in from the outside) that there was a huge amount of stress and strain that was unnecessary because nothing was written down. So we wrote down processes. What people did. We asked the employees to tell us. I will give you an example. One particular lady who used to sit downstairs at the very back of the office and was surrounded by printers, faxes, post machines, etc. It was a very cluttered area, and she continually complained about all the equipment, and that had a really negative effect on the people who sat next to her. What we did was (and this comes under "Values") I suggested that we actually listened to what she was saying, because everybody dismissed it (as she just complained all the time). Actually, when we pulled it to bits, she had some really valid points! So we changed some of the things she had complained about for two years, and almost overnight her demeanour changed.	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms][Power] [Sanction] [MODALITIES][Int. Schemes][Facilities][Norms] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [Signification][Domination] [Legitimation] [M] "Workstream Meetings" [M] "Values"
159	59:42.9 - 59:47.0	She now thinks she is being listened to, or appreciates being listened to?	NP	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY] [STRUCTURE]
160	59:46.9 - 1:00:31.4	Her point of view (this comes back to listening and respecting what somebody says) not that she was just moaning for the sake of it. Actually, what she was saying was absolutely correct. There were too many machines there, it caused all sorts of congestion (just in terms of trying to get things on desks). So we changed it all. That whole kind of process, as she wasn't the only one. There were things about, "What really irritates about this business is X", "What really irritates me about this is Y", or "Why can't we do it this way?"	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Sanction] [MODALITIES][Norms] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [Legitimation][Resources] [Allocative] [M] "Workstream Meetings" [M] "Values"
161	1:00:31.4 - 1:00:32.4	You asked them to make their case ...	NP	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY]
162	1:00:32.3 - 1:01:35.9	What is it you would like to do? Some things are possible, some are not. So that session on Change Management was followed up by a set of Workstream meetings that were operational. Interestingly, there was also quite negative feedback because they took time out of the working day. So again, the commonest thing people said was that "I'm too busy to come to the meeting.", "I'm far too busy", "We are always having meetings", "Why are we having meetings?". It was quite painful, actually, but their feedback to me was that there were too many meetings. So, I wasn't guilty of saying we've got to have this meeting, but for running it too long. We learnt to cut them down and make them shorter. They could see that things were changing, and it led to a culture where they now drive me. If I do something that they don't like, they say, "well you said this ... and you haven't done it".	JL	[FREE][CM] [ST] [AGENCY][Comms][Sanction] [MODALITIES][Norms] [STRUCTURE][Dimensions] [Legitimation][Rules] [M] "Workstream Meetings" [M] "Values"

Table 4.4 Transcript rows from Travel Bravura workshop (Codes column filtered as "contains [CM]")

During the workshop the SBO is asked to construct a strategy map using *Post-it*™ notes. These are also coded to a node and assigned to transcript rows, where the *Post-it*™ note has featured in the conversation (or been pointed to by the participant). Such nodes are designated with a prefix "[M]" to indicate part of the map, followed by the wording on the *Post-it*™ note, e.g. "[M] Workstream Meetings". The NVivo 10 model of the final strategy map for Travel Bravura is shown in Figure ?? on page ???. Joanne had placed three notes on the map "Workstream Meetings", "Values" and "External Change Agent".

After fully coding the elements of the transcript using the ST hierarchical tree nodes, the author can then view the picture of his interpretation of structuration in the video recording. These

observations are summarised in a set of tables (see example below).

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Joanne Leyland	SBO	Change Management (CM) message imparted principally during 'workstream' meetings.	Joanne has shareholder <i>power</i> . She is able to introduce a change agent at TB as part of her CM process.	Using <i>sanction</i> agency to encourage new praxes (or 'workflows' in TB jargon), while prohibiting old practices.

MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Joanne Leyland	SBO	Workflow meetings. The book, "Who moved my cheese?" Discussions in the workstream meetings radically altered the <i>interpretive schemes</i> in use.	Applied through workstream meetings. Was able to bring in an external change agent as a temporary <i>authoritative resource</i> . Accepted that some would leave company as part of CM. Joanne had the <i>power</i> to <i>facilitate</i> resignations.	Business is no longer taken for granted. It is agreed that ageing customer base will be no guarantee of future prosperity. New business must be pursued as a practice <i>norm</i> of TB.

STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Joanne Leyland	SBO	Plaque on the wall exemplifying the new mission. Continuing Travel Bonds investment strategy is promoted through advertising.	Reconfiguration of <i>allocative resources</i> (some being initiated at a grassroots level – unintended consequence). Continual aggressive SEO for new website rendering a superior <i>allocative resource</i> for all at TB.	Joanne now being challenged by subordinates concerning <i>norms</i> . This has been an unintended consequence, that legitimates the CM programme (in Joanne's opinion).

Table 4.5 Summary Structuration Chart for Travel Bravura (with arrows added to show modal links)

It can be seen from the example Summary Structuration Chart for Travel Bravura that the 'Change Management' *vignette* has contributed to the overall analysis. This is to be expected as the participant placed great emphasis on this particular event. There are further references to it dispersed in transcript rows after this main discussion (but not shown here for brevity). The author always asked the SBO near the end of the workshop whether they would like to take some time to rearrange the *Post-it*™ notes on the strategy map (or even rename any particular note). This has proven to be a significant moment for some of the participants. The act of rearrangement seemed to liberate further insight, or they would suddenly become animated as though they had now found a better way of expressing themselves. The final map of Travel Bravura (see Figure ?? on page ???) is a case in point. Joanne reordered the map into a time-base (with elapsed time moving left to right, as shown by the arrow in the diagram). Joanne was unusual in that she vocalised the note movements into an evolving narrative, and decided to make use of the available arrows (*Post-it*™ note shapes) to elucidate her strategising. Her recapitulations were captured by the video methodology in this study, and would have been rendered meaningless by a more traditional

audio recording method. However, it should be noted that not all participants feel it necessary to reorder their map. Some seem quite content to just have very loose associations of notes with no underlying logic to their layout. This lack of graphical analysis is accompanied by little or no reference to their map as a tool of explanation for their strategising. To the author it seemed like they were just using the map to record what they had talked about, more like sub-headings in a journal.

The example vignette and its contribution to the strategy map can only be shown here as a static representation. What is very difficult to convey is the dynamic nature of the conversation captured on video. For instance, a researcher can follow the placement and movement of map items as the conversation develops (if the participant is inclined to use the map). The author considered it important not to keep prompting the participant to use the map during the workshop (except for the rearrangement 'offer' at the end), because he was conscious of not '*leading the witness*'. The map was never portrayed as being the only object of interest to the researcher. It was introduced as "... *another means of demonstrating what you mean; but you can express your thoughts in words if you prefer...*".

The author used the same generic approach (as described here with the benefit of an example) throughout the period of the analysis phase of this study. A plethora of vignettes (or issues) were analysed from the other strategy workshops in this study. These contributed to the summary structuration charts for each company. Despite the wide range of small business types in this study, ST provided a common platform for analysis. This uniform approach to analysis provided the author with the necessary overview across the cases. Otherwise any multiple case interpretation would have been extremely difficult to achieve. This in turn enabled the author's interpretation of SBO strategising based upon the '*rich thick*' data captured in this study.

The analysis method is sufficiently flexible to enable additional benefits to be derived where the data make this possible. For instance, in one case (OBW, section 5.3 on page 122) there were three SBOs from the same company (separate workshops on the same topic). It was therefore possible to create a structuration summary chart for a particular strategic issue that involved all three individuals (see page 151, issue of Delegation at OBW). The author found that the criticisms in the literature review pertaining to ST did not manifest themselves in any analytical process problems. It is the author's opinion that the researcher's time needed to mentally absorb and grasp the principles of ST is worthwhile, and proven in the use of this methodology. However, this opinion is predicated upon the extensive use of CAQDAS software that is invaluable in assisting the researcher to be able to '*see the wood for the trees*'. The amount of data generated by this methodology is immense and a manual methodology would be impractical.

4.6. Trustworthiness of the study

The trustworthiness of a study can be enhanced by certain tactics adopted by the researcher. In this study, the author had to negotiate with the potential participants to gain research access. The bargain that was agreed between the author and the participants necessitated the preclusion of some of these enhancements. Despite this, the resulting design is capable of rendering the 'rich, thick description' deemed necessary by some experts in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Williams, 2000; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

A potential reflexivity 'pitfall' in researching human opinion is 'framing-bias'. The cause for concern in strategy is that the way that a strategic issue is presented may bias the response from the subjects (Hodgkinson, 2002: p.1069). However, in this study it is the participants who determine the evolution of the diagram or map, and select the strategic issue for discussion.

In the past, researchers have been interested in whether their subjects are perceiving 'causality' in their strategic thinking. Causal Mapping was a technique used to capture both explicit and tacit knowledge from participants (Eden *et al.*, 1992). Participants were shown how they could represent two concepts in text boxes, and then link them with lines, single-headed arrows or double-headed arrows. Using this simple building block, the participants were then encouraged to create more complex representations of their thinking. Various attempts were made to minimise any facilitator bias. The most radical efforts actually had the facilitator banished from the room where the mapping exercise was being conducted (Bougon, 1983). S-as-P authors have reported that Bougon's 'Self-Q' method (as it became known) is very difficult to operationalise (Ambrosini, 2003).

In the pilot study (Case H) it became apparent to the author that causal mapping required learning on the SBO's part. This would be self-defeating for a minimum intrusion research design. The author therefore decided to abandon efforts to explicitly seek evidence of causality from SBOs. The author therefore opted to remain 'inside' the workshop situation (contrary to Bougon). The community of S-as-P researchers all seem to advocate 'closeness to the researched' (Johnson *et al.*, 2010b), so the adoption of remoteness to counter bias was not seen as a useful methodology by the author for this study. Instead, the author simply asked the interviewee to arrange the *Post-it*™ notes in '*any semblance of order*' that helped with their explanation. Some participants elected to group concepts into clusters while others did ascribe higher orders of significance such as causal linking by directional arrows. The author intended that the mapping exercise should be used primarily to help the SBOs to express themselves where mere words would not suffice (i.e. help to elicit tacit knowledge). The old adage, "*a picture paints a thousand words*" was quoted by several participants who reflected on the techniques they had used in the workshop.

A remarkable transformation did occur with some interviewees. They expressed amazement that they had never used this technique before. It certainly proved cathartic for the pilot study SBO

(Case H), who saw the benefit of using it to improve communication with her staff regarding strategic issues. It has since been implemented informally in her company.

The author has attempted to elicit information from SBOs who have found it very difficult at times to express tacit knowledge in mere words. Such strategising can inform explicitly stated strategy that is applied by the company as well as contributing to the socially-constructed knowledge of the people who engage in strategising. Such a situation is somewhat characteristic of what RBV researchers term '*core competence*'; if such shared knowledge is applied in a way that delivers long-term sustained competitive advantage (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

The research design gives visual metaphor opportunities to the interviewee through the mechanism of annotated *Post-it*™ notes and their arrangement. These are better than drawing a diagram in the sense that the notes can be moved around without redrawing as the participant offers an explanation. The interviewee may be able to articulate something about their '*strategising*' by using words together with the visual representation offered by the note arrangements. There were many instances in the workshops where the participant SBO was frequently gesturing towards elements of the map to aid explanation.

Fundamental to this research is a problem that is common to research using the RBV and DCV. Making something explicit (that was hitherto implicit) might alter the nature and attributes of that particular tacit knowledge. It will also render it less valuable because it can then be more easily replicated. An elicitation method cannot avoid the occasional revelatory experience for the informant. Therefore, the act of trying to describe something that is '*surfacing*' from tacit knowledge could alter the respondent's appreciation of such knowing. The researcher needs to be cognisant of a possible attitudinal change as conscious sense-making takes over. Possibly, the apparent *status quo* may have been disturbed by the research intervention by means of elicitation. Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (1955) suggests that the '*tacit*' becoming '*conscious*', for an individual, might force the knower to re-evaluate certain cognitive constructs that have previously evolved because of experience. The researcher's interpretation needs to account for the possibility that the informant's articulation may have irrevocably altered the tacit knowledge that is being expressed. It is therefore imperative to use techniques that best capture any revelatory moments, as they cannot be repeated. For this reason, the author determined to make sure that the maximum amount of qualitative data was captured in this research design.

There is also a problem with researcher intervention causing a change in behaviour by participants. The implication is that the researcher can unwittingly alter the structure being created, sustained, adapted and ultimately drawn upon by the actors. The author was particularly wary of doing anything in the workshops that effectively '*led the witness*'. He did not suggest any particular map formation and always tried to ask '*open*' questions. There is an inevitability that the author will have had some effect upon participants. The research design could not accommodate researcher exclusion (as used by Bourgon for causal mapping), so this will have to be one of the

limitations in this particular approach.

This research design incorporates internal methodological triangulation by using the several different methods already mentioned (interviewing, mapping and video ethnography). The possibility of external triangulation against further research by others (yet to be published) influenced the author's choice of the underpinning theory. He was minded to choose a relatively popular underpinning theory as seen in S-as-P studies of large enterprises. The reason being that this might increase the chances of useful triangulation between large and small business S-as-P studies.

There was a balance struck in the research design between methods that increase research credibility and methods that attract research participation and access. The following section describes the remaining popular methods of improving trustworthiness that had to be discarded to achieve research access.

Interpretist authors suggest a variety of methodological tactics to increase the veracity and trustworthiness of their data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Unfortunately, anything that increased the duration of the intervention would tend to deter SBO participation. The author considered it essential to try and build rigour for the researcher and sufficient value for the participant into the single two hour workshop format. The common technique of validation through informant feedback (Reissner, 2004; Creswell & Miller, 2000), otherwise known as 'member checking', was designed into the session (rather than as a follow up) by the author using the map building exercise as a form of continuous feedback.

"Member-checking is a way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with participants' experiences"
(Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p.92)

As strategic issues were discussed in the session, the author could ask for confirmation through the medium of the map. The workshop was concluded with an offer to the participant to change the arrangement of the map prior to their summing up of the strategic situation. This aspect of the design was a compromise that enabled the author to keep his promise of minimal time dedication by the SBO. Equally, if there was any latent expectancy (by the SBO) concerning consultancy advice coming from the author; this was assuaged by the absence of *post hoc* member checking.

"... traps can easily and, at times, unknowingly be set during member checking, threatening the researcher/participant relationship and possibly the stability of the study."
(Carlson, 2010, p.1103)

Prolonged engagement in the field is one of the ways that many qualitative researchers contend that they improve the veracity of their studies. This option was unacceptable for the SBOs in this study, and therefore was not incorporated into the research design. The SBOs were insistent that the intervention should be a 'one-off' and eventually agreed that a one to two hour timeslot would be granted. The SBOs did not want a team of researchers involved in the workshops so the

methods of 'collaboration' and 'peer debriefing' were equally unsuitable for the research design. There were various reasons for this. They included confidentiality, 'low key' and a preference to be balanced, i.e. 'one-to-one'.

4.7. Benefits of 'one-to-one' strategy workshops

One of the principle reasons why some larger firms spend senior management time on strategy-away days is to distance staff from the "noise" of daily business, and permit them an environment more conducive to reflective contemplation.

"Strategy away-days... aimed at creating the sort of reflective distance between the non-deliberate mode of ordinary, improvisational, practical coping and the more explicitly articulated, deliberate mode of acting that is characteristic of strategic episodes."
(Tsoukas, 2010, p.49)

The 'one-to-one' workshops in this study provided a similar benefit according to the SBOs.

"I think what this does is it kind of 'gathers your thoughts'"
(Joanne, Travel Bravura, in response #279)

The expectation of this value was one of the key inducements towards recruitment. Some of the other SBOs complained that they normally did not have enough time to 'stop and think', and found the workshop very beneficial in that regard.

The author always made it clear to potential participants that any benefit derived by them would occur within the allocated time of the workshop. They would not have to devote any more time to follow up sessions. This latter point seemed to be the 'deal clincher' for some of the recruits.

There still could be problems of access into a small business where there is an on-going (or historical) acrimonious disagreement concerning strategy between the SBO and key staff. If it was historical, why would the SBO want to open up 'old wounds'? The author could envisage difficulty in getting direct access to some of the most interesting of strategic disagreements in small business because the SBO would feel intimidated by an 'open forum' traditional format of strategy workshop. The author developed the 'one-to-one' alternative approach to allay such fears.

The gradual 'step-by-step' approach using 'one-to-one' workshops; first with the SBO, then with others, is one way that SBOs could gain sufficient confidence in the process to allow further research access. Additionally, SBOs that were struggling to impart their vision properly to staff, might welcome the opportunity to experience this methodology to gain better strategy communication skills through the use of basic visual metaphors. They would therefore welcome the opportunity to benefit in that way before exposing their strategic vision to a wider internal audience.

4.8. Limitations to the methodology employed

As already discussed, this cross-sectional study is using Structuration theory. Use of this theory implies a temporal dimension. Although Giddens theorises that ‘agency’ simultaneously creates or reinforces ‘structure’, he also gives us the notion that ‘structure’ is changing over time by repeated instances of ‘agency-structuring’ events; or as he posits “*become 'stretched' across wide spans of time-space.*” (Giddens, 1984, p.xxi). The obvious implication is that researchers would require the use of longitudinal research to fully capture structuration as ‘*action realms over time*’ (Jarzabkowski, 2008, p.624). As explained in this thesis, the SBOs in this study were cautious ‘first timers’ with regard to this type of research, this precluded the possibility of longitudinal research. However, it may be possible to re-engage (using the same research design) with these people in future studies as all of the participants thought afterwards that the experience had not been too demanding in terms of their time.

Despite the negotiated time restriction it is possible for the researcher to accommodate the needs of a Giddensian investigation within the confines of a cross-sectional study. This can be achieved by the careful consideration of the questions that are going to be asked during the research. These questions need to be carefully phrased to ask the participants to try and recall when key events happened. Querying the order or sequence of events can be useful. The participants were given the opportunity to rearrange their *Post-it*™ notes near the end of the workshop. Many elected to arrange on a time base (earliest to the left and most recent to the right). In this way, although the interview is a snapshot in time, it is possible to appreciate the recursive nature of the *agency-structure* environment that the interviewee is explaining.

The sample SBOs were not characteristic of all those found in the region, or the UK. The principal reason for this is, only those SBOs that are attracted to a strategic analysis of their business are likely to be interested in involvement. The major difficulty in recruiting participants from the micro-sized business community is that, invariably, they are required to effectively ‘suspend business’ while they are a participant. This is particularly true of the sole trader. Although this study has been designed to minimise their down-time; potential SBOs are still very wary of any protracted involvement with academics.

All of the participants of this study had responded positively to a marketing campaign and welcomed the opportunity of having a ‘one-to-one’ strategy workshop. This was only likely to appeal to those who considered a strategic view of their business to be important. Admittedly, three had been brought around to that viewpoint (by participation in an evening class run by the author at a local Business School).

A finding of this study was that all of the participants wanted to talk about growth issues in their business. What is more, all the businesses preferred organic growth and were determined not to borrow capital from primary lenders. The lack of available bank lending to SMEs in the prevailing

environment (2011) was not an issue for them. Although a small sample, the firms demonstrated a strong characteristic of being willing to discuss their strategy in private and means of organic growth being central to that discussion.

At the time of recruitment to the study, the participants were all aware of some of the impending implications of the 2008 banking crisis. However, the effect on their businesses was varied at that time. Since then, further manifestations of the recession have occurred. The author would anticipate that recruiting on this scale would be even more difficult in the contemporary situation (mid 2013). This problem will be likely to be even more acute if the intended group of SBOs were not on a trajectory of organic growth. Those SBOs who require affordable bank lending to maintain their business model would undoubtedly be under more financial stress than the companies in this study. The participants can therefore be characterised as being intrinsically willing to engage in a strategy workshop exercise. This cannot necessarily be said for the greater population of small business owners.

Although the recruitment method produced a coincidental gender balance in the sample of SBOs, there was a total lack of representation from ethnic minorities. Further research, replicating the methods described in this study, could be extended to such groupings.

Although it was not the research design intent of this study to investigate a particular commercial sector, this does not preclude further research focus in one of these directions. The author would suggest that the preponderance of SBOs intrinsically interested in trying a strategy workshop in any particular sector will vary. This predisposition could be an important factor in future research recruitment.

As previously mentioned, some of the participants in this study were engaged with an evening short course the Newcastle Business School. However, only two of the participants possessed a qualification from a Higher Education institution in Business Studies.

The author noted that certain themes were absent from the discourse of these companies. Obviously if he had asked specifically about these things there would have been answers given by the SBOs. However the participants were free to choose the strategic topic which seemed to be most important to them at the time.

In the author's experience, one of the most common complaints that come from SBOs is a regional shortage of suitably skilled labour. This is a recurring theme and has been a common concern among SBOs irrespective of the state of the national economy. However during these interviews (in 2011) the participants rarely mentioned this issue. The other theme that could have been anticipated by the author was a much publicised difficulty that SMEs were having in gaining funding from lending institutions. Yet again, this didn't feature as a prime concern. This lack of discussion is perhaps more explicable due to the sample demography. Each SBO wanted to talk about strategy, examination of which revealed their preference to '*grow the business organically*'.

None of the people interviewed were running a company that could be typified by the term ‘*zombie business*’.¹²

“Despite a colossal reduction in output, few firms have folded: banks are unwilling to take losses, owners shun the stigma of going bust, and cheap money allows them to avoid it. But the ‘undead firms’ keep capital away from outfits with better ideas.” (The Economist, March 9, 2013, p. 11)

None of the firms interviewed had SBOs that were worried about structural trends in the market. For instance, the plight of some high street retailers faced with lower cost competitors on the internet. Only one of the sample members had high street premises, but had embraced the internet and maintained retail premises to deliver personal service and a showcase for their product (see Travel Bravura, page 159).

The author has endeavoured to outline his full interpretation, but concedes that alternative understandings are possible. The adopted underpinning theory (Structuration) is not without dissenting voices, and other researchers might have alternative techniques at their disposal. Some of these arguments are at the boundaries outlined for this study. The intent has always been to produce a credible account with sufficient plausibility to inform the debate concerning SBO strategising.

The author concedes that another researcher with a different ‘*World-view*’ is likely to place an alternative interpretation on a specific datum. However, the *a priori* coding that can be derived from Structuration theory would be more likely to produce common ground among Giddensian adherents. Notwithstanding this, the author has read many instances where experts and commentators have disagreed in their understanding of Giddens’ intentions toward his own theory (see Section 3.5 on page 63). So even within the limits of the Giddensian structuration framework the author believes that there is latitude for differing analysis.

The author was not faced with disconfirming interpretations within, or between, the study cases. Each situation was unique although ST analysis revealed sufficient similarities to enable the construction of a conceptual framework. Another researcher would inevitably have a different perspective, but the methodology outlined in this thesis could probably render some significant overlaps in interpretation.

Despite the author’s precautions against framing-bias (see page 105), there is a problem regarding the participant learning the techniques used in the workshop. The situation captured on the first occasion would be somewhat different if repeated a few weeks later. The participants could all be considered to be active strategisers within the scope of S-as-P analysis. However, there is

¹² A pejorative term that started to emerge after the millennium for a company that cannot grow and would normally have gone out of business but has struggled on because of the abnormally low interest rates and creditor banks not wishing to foreclose. First seen commonly in the Japanese economy in the late 1990’s.

likelihood that some of the participants would embrace the techniques of strategy mapping within

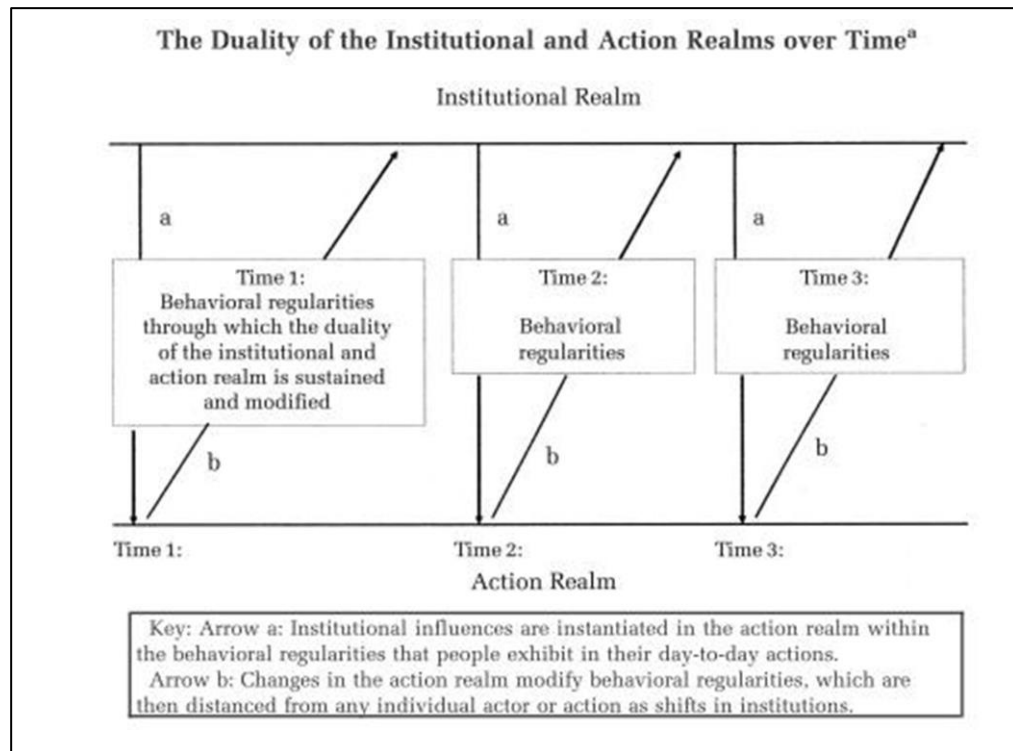


Figure 4.9. Jarzabkowski's (2008, p.624) representation of action realms over time

their future strategising praxis. The author was alert to this possibility and therefore tried to capture '*thick, rich description*' (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.128) within the timeframe of the workshop format. This imperative was central to a methodological design that might be capturing phenomena that would not be available for future scrutiny. The same effect also comes into play as tacit knowledge is made capable of expression through the workshop techniques. Once liberated, such knowledge could no longer be anticipated as '*devoid of expression*' by the SBO.

A problem inherent in any written description using ST is that it encompasses production and reproduction of structural change 'across time and space'. Jarzabkowski (2008) explains this problem and uses the diagram shown in Figure ???. Even this diagram might not capture the fully complexity of varying timeframes as different recursive patterns emerge. The interview cases all occurred in the period late 2010 to early 2011, and as already stated the study is cross-sectional in design (out of necessity, because SBOs could not be persuaded to admit a researcher for an extended period of time into their businesses.) This means that the only recursion that could be studied fell within the recall of the participant. The use of strategy mapping may have helped in that regard, (particularly those owner-managers that decided to organise the Post-it™ notes in on a time-line basis.)

4.9. Recommendations

It was found that during the course of this study a certain repertoire of 'opening gambit' questions were particularly useful for eliciting responses to questions of strategising praxis (see Table 4.2 on page 90) should any other researcher be interested in the techniques used here.

The author can recommend the use of *Post-it*TM note strategy mapping as a means of eliciting responses from participants. Used at this level, there is no need for the SBOs to be trained in any form of causal mapping techniques. Offering the participant a chance to reorganise the map at the end of the workshop proved to be a very efficacious way of gaining extra meaningful data from the session.

The methodology of video ethnography will change rapidly as technological developments occur. The ability of a researcher to remotely conduct similar research to this study will soon become feasible. Much of the technology enabling real-time discussions using strategy map elicitation already exists within the realm of video conferencing. The author recommends that future research looks towards harnessing this potential as the technology matures.

A virtue of the methodology deployed in this study is the inherent low cost for both interviewee (in terms of SBO time) and researcher (in researcher time, equipment, and travel). In a probable future scenario of reducing funding available to researchers in the HE sector, the author can recommend this methodology to obtain high density primary qualitative data from the small business sector.

4.10. Summary of Methodology Chapter

The author has explained the evolution of the methodological design used in this research, its philosophical underpinnings and provided the justifications for the design choices that are embodied within it. The author has found that this methodology is particularly useful in tempting busy SBOs to participate in primary research, and as such is a contribution to knowledge.

In the next chapter, the author will discuss the primary research data that was collected from the participants during the study.

5. CASES & FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter will describe the workshops conducted with each of the case companies. The introduction section will describe the characteristics of the case companies in the sample. It will also outline the types of issue that were selected by the participants. Each case will be interpreted using the same framework derived from Structuration theory. This will enable the portrayal of the analysis in a consistent manner. To facilitate inter-case comparison, each company will be described and interpreted in the same sub-heading order (see Table 5.1). The general manner of analysis and rationale for the order chosen are described below. Each case starts with a brief introduction to the company and its owner. The market that the company serves and its main product service offerings are described prior to analysis. Any previous contacts between the author and the participant are declared here (as well as any involvement by Newcastle Business School).

Order	Sub-headings	Content
1	BACKGROUND	Case, Company and SBO description
2	SOCIAL STRUCTURE	Allocative & Authoritative Resources, Rules
3	AGENCY	Communication, Power, Sanction
4	MODALITIES	Interpretive Schemes, Facilities, Norms
5	STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS	Signification, Domination, Legitimation
6	STRUCTURATION	Indications of structuration cycles
7	STRATEGISING	Model of SBO strategising applied to each case. ¹³

Table 5.1 Case structure used in this thesis

The recorded workshop discourses are interpreted through Structuration Theory (ST). The same order of analysis is maintained throughout this thesis. It should be noted that a serial description of the concepts cannot fully capture the recursive nature of a theory such as Structuration. However, the logic of the chosen order is as follows.

Structure > Agencies > Modalities > Structural Dimensions > Structuration

This order describes a single loop of a potential recursive cycle. The actual complexity in an interpreted situation will require additional discussion, and this is given at the end of each case. ST describes a highly interdependent set of concepts that mutually affect each other. For

¹³ Proposed model discussed in next section

instance, Giddens asserts that *resources* and *rules* cannot be conceptualised separately (Giddens, 1984, p.18). In most cases, the headings indicate the starting point in a circular argument.

A model of SBO strategising is proposed in this thesis, and used to analyse the strategising in each of the case companies. The fifth objective of this study (see Section 1.4 on page 13) is to comply with the frequently stated requirement (found in the S-as-P literature) for further research at the *micro-level* to maintain links to the *meso* or *macro* levels (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

“To synthesise strategising at the ‘micro-level’ with ‘meso-level’ strategy into a coherent model of SBO strategising and strategy formulation and implementation in small businesses.”

This study is not involved with macro-level investigation, but the proposed model can incorporate the necessary connection between the *micro* and *meso-levels*. The disaggregation of strategising (interpreted from these cases) into the structural streams of ‘agency <> modality <> structural dimension’ should enable an examination of a linkage back to ‘meso-level’ strategy formulation and implementation. However, the SBO strategising praxis at the *micro-level*, and the social structural elements that support it, is ostensibly hidden from general view.

In the proposed model ‘strategic awareness’ can be considered to be the observable ‘meso-level’ component of strategising praxis. To enable the connection between strategising at the micro-level and strategic outcomes at the ‘meso-level’ it is necessary to postulate an observable characteristic of the SBO that exemplifies the hidden strategising. This is a ‘black box’ analogy similar to the Resource-based View concept of ‘core competence’ (although now applying to an SBO rather than a team of people). The model links SBO ‘strategising’ at the ‘micro-level’ to the ‘meso-level’ by means of an SBO’s ‘strategic awareness’. This linkage is important to S-as-P strategy researchers, because micro-level strategising research must have implications for business strategy and not remain disconnected from ‘meso-level’ implications. Although the literature review of S-as-P revealed calls for linkage of individual strategising praxis to ‘meso-level’ strategy formulation; this necessity is probably not so acute in the small business domain where the SBO is usually the dominant strategist. The linkage between SBO praxis and ‘meso-level’ outcome in a small business ought to be easier to discern (compared to a larger organisation where numerous *agents* are responsible for the *social structure* of the business).

An SBO possessing a high level of ‘strategic awareness’ will be capable of formulating and implementing strategy at the right time. This capability is created and underpinned by the steady accumulation of strategising activities at the *micro-level* (which is mostly unseen by others). The linkage between ‘strategic awareness’ and ‘strategising’ enables a dual-level model of strategising (‘micro’ and ‘meso’) which fulfils the tenets of S-as-P as it is currently understood. This device also has the benefit of keeping the model relatively simple (and therefore memorable for other users).

The impression of someone proximate to one of the small businesses in this study would be that

the SBO seems to possess a degree of '*strategic awareness*'. This may have been a series of 'glimpses' that confirm such an impression (just as the author experienced with Chester, the SBO of Chargepacks, see page 173). On the other hand an observer of the SBO would probably struggle to identify the processes that underpin a "*strategic awareness*". Therefore the grouping of strategising praxes into something that manifests to observers as more nebulous and hidden at the '*meso-level*' seems appropriate for this study. Having described this linkage, the dual-level model will now be described in detail.

5.2. Proposed SBO Strategising Model

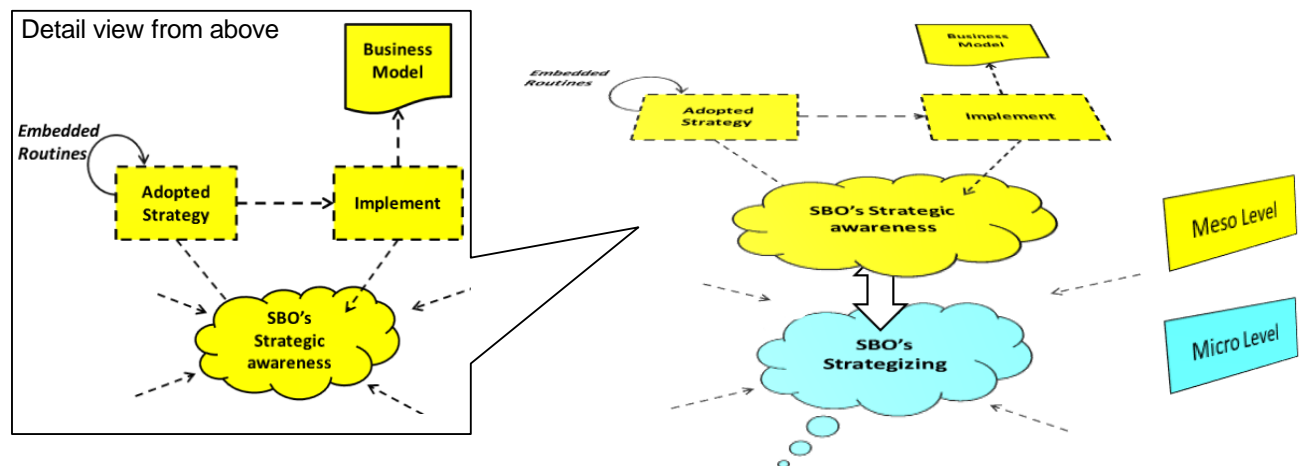


Figure 5.1 Strategising during static strategy formulation / implementation (model state 'A')

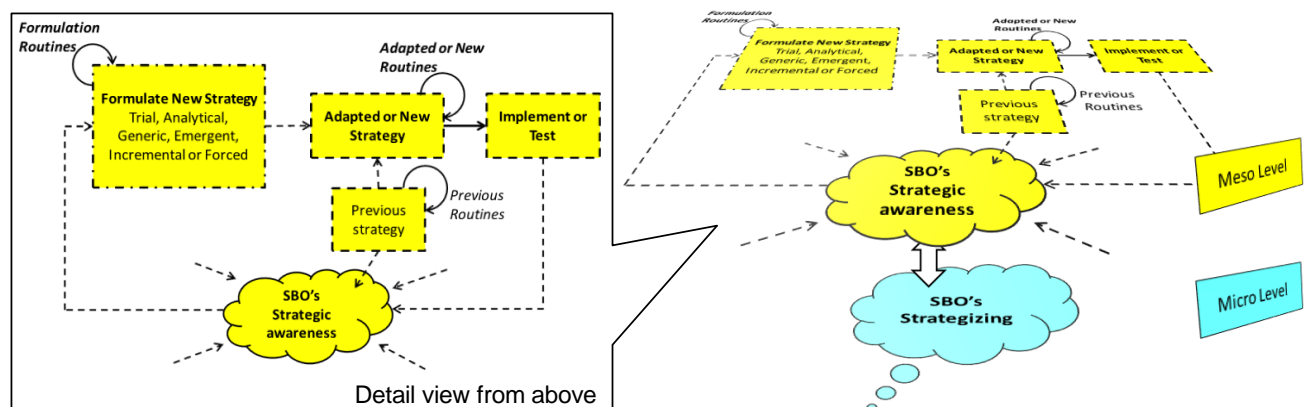


Figure 5.2 Strategising during dynamic strategy formulation / implementation (model state 'B')

Analysis of strategising in this thesis incorporates use of a proposed model of SBO strategising. It is designed to capture two exclusive situations and is therefore bifurcated (or branched) into two generic diagrams. To simultaneously show both the 'micro' and 'meso' levels the model is portrayed in three dimensions with the 'meso-level' above the 'micro-level'. Unfortunately, using this type of graphic means that some of the 'meso-level' detail is always in the perspective 'distance', which makes it difficult to read. Consequently, the 3-D representation is always accompanied by a 2-D detail view of the *meso-level* seen from above. The model in its multi-level entirety is always shown on the right.

The model was developed after the completion of all the strategy workshops (it therefore did not directly influence any of the participants). During the Literature Review, the author found few strategising models or frameworks dedicated to small or micro businesses. The closest examples have been created by Bowman & Ambrosini (2000, p.208) which depicts the cognitive processes

of an individual while strategising, Mazzarol's (2009, p.7; 2005) Strategic Management of Entrepreneurial Ventures framework, and Atherton's Model of Knowledge in Small Businesses (2003). However, none of these were entirely suitable to capture the essence of strategising in the small business for the purposes of this study.

Before starting this study, the author had an impression of how the SBOs might be strategising (see the tentative model on page 76). The pre-study model was a starting point and useful to explain the proposed field of study with other academics. There was an expectation (derived from the introductory review of the literature) that there would be a mixture of planned and emergent strategies and a low incidence of formalisation. As the study proceeded, the emerging data did not significantly contradict those initial thoughts, but did contribute to a more sophisticated model of SBO strategising.

Previous studies have shown that there is likely to be little in the way of written evidence concerning formal strategy in small businesses. Most SBOs will be readily able to articulate their business model, and this may be the only strategic documentation (an early instance can often be found inside a moribund business plan). Many SBOs have a high level of 'strategic awareness', but never commit their strategies to paper. The choice of theory (to be used in this study) is somewhat influenced by this lack of documentary evidence. Those theorists preferring to pursue the close examination of textual material would be very likely to be constrained by the paucity of such data. This research exercise may well be the first time that these particular SBOs have been asked to account for their '*strategising*'. In periods of stability for the SBO, there would not be much to impart that could not be captured within the prevailing business model. As a blueprint metaphor, the business model represents a snapshot in time of how the business is creating value and the expected generation of cash flow in a going concern.

The first situation represents a stable overall business situation where major strategic change is considered unnecessary by the SBO (see Figure 5.1). This has a static strategy at the '*meso-level*', in the sense that the strategy is established and not undergoing immediate change. Strategising is still being performed by the SBO, but this can be characterised as 'monitoring' activities rather than strategic 'action' for change. In terms of the strategising model this is designated as the state 'A'. If the researcher is engaged in a discourse that includes reference to the elements of a business model, then the 'A' side of the model will be appropriate to that situation.

The second situation portrayed by the model (see Figure 5.2) is a strategic change in the business, and therefore, depicts dynamic strategy at the '*meso-level*' (in the sense that various types of strategic change will be evident). The strategising of the SBO, at the '*micro-level*', is characterised as being active (rather than passive); and closely implicated in the changing of the strategy at the '*meso-level*'. This is represented by the 'B' state of the proposed strategising

model. Both diagrams show the “SBO’s strategic awareness” (as a diagrammatic ‘think bubble’); and as previously discussed (see page 115), this is underpinned by the strategising praxis of the individual SBO. The author deliberately uses the term “*strategic awareness*” rather than “*strategising*”. On the ‘A’ side of the model there will still be SBO strategising occurring at the ‘*micro-level*’ (such as *reflexive monitoring*), but this will not translate into any significant change of direction for the business. The embedded routines will be adequate to deal with the general business environment, and the SBOs strategic awareness will not be causing him (or her) to devote special attention to the ‘*meso-level*’ business strategy. The SBO probably sees no reason to change anything strategically with regard to a profitable ‘going concern’. The SBOs ‘*strategising*’ sustains and draws from the social ‘*structure*’ of the firm (shown as dotted impinging arrows, together with other external influences). Therefore, the ‘*micro-level*’ strategising praxis of the SBO can be represented at the ‘*meso-level*’ as a ‘*strategic awareness*’ that is not driving change (hence the absence of strategy formulation and associated routines).

The significant difference between the two halves of the model (‘A’ and ‘B’), is that only ‘A’ has a linkage to a business model. Where the ‘A’ side best explains the current situation in the firm, the SBO can articulate the elements of a business model. If it exists as a document; it may well be out of date, and is unlikely to be a working document. The actual strategising process is a cognitive exercise for the SBO with a mixture of resulting tacit and explicit knowledge. The SBO can be expected to have contemporary and archival data concerning the financial aspects of the business, because this is probably prepared monthly with the accountant. However, the chances of a formal strategy document existing are very low (in the author’s experience). Giddens suggests three levels of thought (‘*discursive conscious*’, ‘*practical conscious*’ and ‘*unconscious*’). Giddens reserves ‘*practical consciousness*’ for ‘tacit knowledge’ (Polanyi, 1966, 1962) that is practically applied but the actor is unable to articulate discursively (Giddens, 1984, p.57). ‘*Discursive consciousness*’ is capable of articulation, explanation and justification by the SBO. In contrast, the ‘B’ side of the strategising model represents a strategic ‘state of flux’ in the business, and indicates the variety of strategising praxes that might be occurring during that phase (see Figure 5.2). This side of the model represents a situation when the SBO understands that the existing strategy is no longer ‘fit for purpose’. This realisation may have come early from his (or her) strategic awareness, or late because of a deficit in that regard. In this situation, extra ‘*strategising*’ is usually required on the part of the SBO, and this is represented in the ‘B’ as a variety of forms of strategic formulation which the SBO might use to adapt the old strategy, or substitute with a completely new one. The ‘B’ side of the model can encompass a wide variety of scenarios and strategic management outcomes. For instance, the strategy formulation might be emergent (Mintzberg, 1987, 1978); in which case, there is no significant pre-deliberation occurring on the part of the SBO. Rather, he (or she) is responding to an unfolding situation. Although the strategy is not recognised as such prior to implementation, reflection upon the situation (after the event)

might bring a realisation to the SBO that strategic change has happened. (The author was enquiring about previous strategic incidents during the strategy workshops where the SBO might recall a pattern of strategic change.) In such circumstances, the SBO is going to be less likely to be able to talk about any form of business model except a *post hoc* stabilisation (essentially a future-envisaged business model). The business model is not included in the 'B' side of the strategising model to place the emphasis upon the strategising procedures occurring at that time. In a situation where the SBO is trialling a new strategy the business model may be far from finalised. The re-emergence of a business model could well be indicative that the framework has reverted to the 'A' side of the model. The 'B' side of the model can also show incremental change over time (Quinn, 1980). In this case, the cycles differ very little each time as the SBO 'fine-tunes' the strategy to match the market conditions and desired performance of the firm. Some might argue that the 'B' side always applies as the quiescent phase depicted in the 'A' never happens in practice when an SBO is constantly 'fine-tuning'. However, the author proposes the 'A' side for those SBOs who are more inclined to 'let sleeping dogs lie' when their '*strategising*' suggests that no strategic change is necessary, but are 'galvanized into action' when circumstances dictate.

SBOs will often want to test out a new strategy on a small scale. If this is possible, the same cycle indicated in 'B' side of the model could still be appropriate. The old strategy with its embedded routines would come under consideration and the SBO might opt for 'variations on a theme'; whereby he (she) can retain familiar methods for the most part. In terms of generic strategies such as those that were envisaged by Ansoff (1965) in his growth vector matrix, this situation could be typical of the quadrants 'market development' (same product – new market) or 'product development' (new product – same market).

Another consideration is the situation where the SBO really has no choice but to adopt a particular strategic move. This is included as the formulation of a 'forced' strategy. A profound change in the prevailing business legislation might provoke such a move. SBOs are particularly vulnerable in such rare events; as they will have been unable to exert any prior influence on government, and may well have ignored the potential consequences once they were alerted to the forthcoming change. Another type of forced strategy is '*bricolage*' where the allocative and '*authoritative resources*' cannot be increased or enhanced. The SBO must make do with what is immediately available. This is a more common situation when bank lending has dried up, such as the post banking crisis phase that prevails in 2013.

State 'B' of the proposed strategising model also permits examination further under the Structuration lens (see Figure 5.2). The SBO's strategic awareness can draw from the social structure that incorporates the tacit and explicit strategic knowledge (rules of discursive and practical consciousness) built up within the firm over time. Drawing upon the previous strategy is but one instance of this type of recursion.

The 'B' state of the proposed model can suffice to accommodate most strategic change eventualities. It is further proposed that successful strategic change will normally promote a return to the situation depicted in state 'A' side of the model followed by a quiescent period ensuing until the next perturbation of a 'strategic episode'. However, the SBO might be deliberately taking his (or her) company through a protracted period of strategic change; in which case, state 'B' of the model would remain pertinent for longer as the SBO takes his (or her) firm through a series of cycles of the model. The proposed bifurcated model (states 'A' or 'B') will now appear at the culmination of analysis of strategising in each case company.

5.3. Only Branding Works (Case A)

Only Branding Works (OBW) is a branding agency based in the North East of England. At the time of the strategy workshop it was located in a former industrial site that has been adapted for high-tech and media companies. This site had been created a few years ago as part of the urban regeneration in the region.

The founder, Miles Osborne, had previously been a senior executive for a local European-funded regeneration agency. Miles owns several small companies that tend to operate together in the same premises to provide the full consultancy service to other small businesses. He has a track record in partnering with individuals that possess specific business skills, or expertise, and creating a small business ventures that provide platforms for creative people to flourish. Miles is similar to Sarah at Hobbyco in this regard (see Case H, page 241). The interconnectivity of Miles' suite of small businesses is testimony to an opportunistic strategic thinker. He seems to prefer to create new start-up businesses rather than grow existing ones into large concerns, although the net effect is an increasing group capacity.

OBW's structure is similar to many branding, or marketing, agencies. It has a "front office" which provides the creative consultancy to clients, and a "back office" which provides the client delivery of the solution devised by the front office. Miles was keen to have individual strategy workshops for himself and the two fellow directors (who were each responsible for the front and back offices). OBW has an impressive web presence (for its size), and it endeavours to give the visitor a memorable experience. The company is portrayed as being precocious and 'edgy', an image which is a reflection of Miles' personality. The company has a history of courting controversy in building its reputation as the '*wild child*' of the branding sector.

This case was the only one in this study that has the participation of multiple owner-managers of the same company. Three directors of the company agreed to take part individually in confidential workshops with the author. It was agreed in the pre-meeting that they would all tackle the same strategic issue facing the firm. Of all the cases in this study, this group of three interviews produced the most emotional expression of frustration with the perceived *status quo* in the business. In particular, the majority shareholding owner (the Managing Director, Miles Osborne) was adamant that late payment by clients, and the resulting cash-flow implication, was jeopardising the growth and future of the business. This case contrasts with the other cases in this study where a single owner-manager was expressing his, or her, thoughts on a strategic issue and may have been suppressing information that could have been interpreted as a disagreement within the firm. In the Travel Bravura workshop (Case B, page 159) Joanne did actually admit to some staff resistance to her change management methods. In the OBW case, the opportunity was present to examine both agreement and disagreement. This was interesting from a structurationist viewpoint, because the researcher could look at the effect of some discord on the generation and

regeneration of structure.

The question as to whether all three participants should be interviewed simultaneously was initially considered; however, the preliminary meeting revealed a possible social structure that might be dominated by the MD. The author felt that the other two directors might be more forthcoming if the interviews were separate. This decision was vindicated during the first interview when Miles (the MD) expressed a wish to play his video recording to Patrick (the Operations Director). The author upheld the confidentiality agreement that had been signed by all parties, and respectfully declined to allow the data to be used for that purpose. Naturally, Miles was at liberty to express all that he had revealed to the author directly to Patrick without involving this research study. The author still considers this decision was the right one, as an interview of all three would have been confrontational between at least two parties and less would have been discovered ... a case of *'more heat, but probably less light'*.

Case A will contain three analyses and they will be presented sequentially. The order will be Miles Osborne (Managing Director), Marcus Turncastle (Creative Director) and Patrick Newton (Operations Director). The chosen issue was, *"How would this company adapt to the future, and, in particular, how the various parts of the business could work together more effectively."* Miles was clearly instrumental in this choice of strategic topic, and his fellow directors appeared to be in agreement concerning its importance to the business.

All three sessions were held consecutively on the same day with a short break between each one. The order was the same as presented in this chapter. A separate empty room was used at the OBW premises. This was quite large, and this resulted in an audio recording that was prone to echo. The nature of the topic under discussion required a separation from the main office for purposes of internal confidentiality.

5.3.1. Miles Osborne – Managing Director of OBW

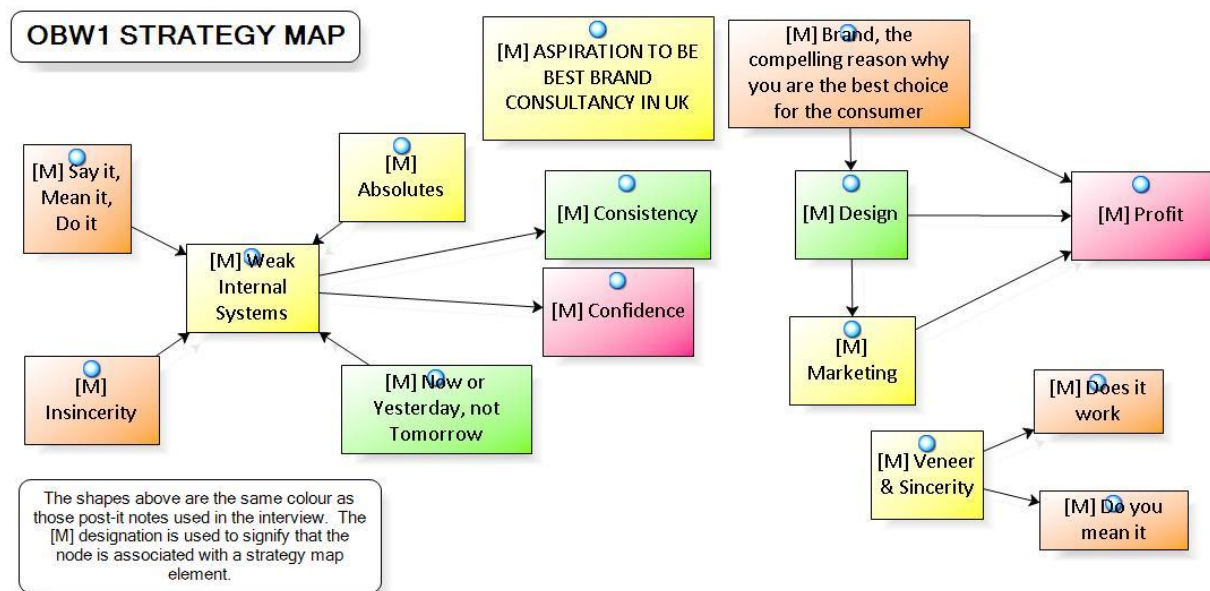


Figure 5.3. Miles' strategy map (final) at OBW

The following is an analysis of the workshop with Miles Osborne. As previously described in the Methodology Chapter, Miles was invited to create a strategy map out of post-it notes. The final version is shown here (in Figure 5.3). It was extracted from the model created in NVivo 10 (CAQDAS software). The following analysis of the workshop is ordered according to the ST framework shown in Table 5.1 on page 114.

Social structure (rules and resources)

Miles Osborne appeared to revel in the radical approach of his company to brand consultancy. He promoted an opinionated approach that he hoped would differentiate his company from the competition.

"I want to be this boutiquey type of consultancy, when people go to OBW, you either love them, or you'll think they're mental!" (Miles Osborne, response #38)

"No other brand consultancy, that we know of, is saying exactly the same thing, so that makes us unique" (Miles Osborne, response #22).

Miles claimed that many firms were getting branding wrong, and they therefore suffered from having to spend very large amounts on marketing to compensate for brand deficiency as a result. As will be seen later in this chapter, this was in exact agreement with the views of Marcus. It turned out to be almost 'word for word', although the author did not recognise it as a 'mantra' until he heard it the second time from someone else.

Miles explained that many clients approached OBW with an intent to acquire assistance with

Marketing (that for some reason was not providing the desired results). He added that, in much the way that a patient might present a symptom to a doctor, the real need was to address an underlying cause of the complaint.

"Weirdly, people knock on our door and ask for Design and Marketing, and we say to them, 'No problem, we'll design you wonderful things that market what is truly special about you. What was it again? What is truly special about you?' They always reply, 'I don't know...'," (Miles Osborne, response #18).

The interview with Miles concerned the strategic options for his company, but the focus of the discussion always tended towards the enablement of 'resources' within the organisation. His strategic intent for the firm could be interpreted by advocates of the resource-based view of strategy as a set of outrageous 'stretch' goals (Hamel & Prahalad, 1993). His pre-occupation, however, was with the 'mission' side of strategic intent (in contrast to the 'vision' side). His strategic vision appeared to be well established, coherent, and had been stable over time. However, his perception of the 'mission' to achieve his 'vision' was one of uncertainty. An enormous frustration was regularly expressed during the interview with the operations side of the business. This area was the particular responsibility of the Operations Director, Patrick Newton. The firm was divided between an operations department and a customer-facing consultancy side that was the responsibility of the Branding Director, Marcus Turncastle. Miles was less concerned about this side of the business, because as he suggested,

"... if he [Marcus] messes up at a fundamental level, we lose a client. If he [Patrick] messes up at a fundamental level, we lose the business..." Miles Osborne, response #106, areas of the map being indicated by name in square brackets)

The structure at OBW was one of the more complex ones found in this study. OBW already had a hierarchical structure of professional management. Having three directors to interview permitted a more detailed view of the social structure, which was revealed from the three respective viewpoints. In all but one of the other firms in this study, there was a single key individual (that owned the business) who created the dominant logic of the firm's strategy. In this case, the principal owner was drawing from a logic established in the social structure of the firm created by one of the other directors (Marcus Turncastle). In all cases (except OBW) the owner-manager had been reluctant to open up strategic discussion to a wider participation of staff. This prevailing view among SBOs was one of 'wanting to experience the process first', before considering or countenancing any 'widening of the research remit'. The author did create some opportunities for further research (beyond the scope of this study), because the participants felt comfortable with the process after experiencing it.

Miles (and his fellow directors) had two types of 'authoritative resource' that could be deployed - 'creative' and 'administrational'. The creative individuals had significant skills in such things as website design, PR, logo art, media products, and composing publication text (or 'copy' as it is termed this type of business). All of which could be deployed, drawing upon the social structural

elements of OBW, to generate 'products' emanating from the brand consulting 'agency' of Marcus. The administrative staff were responsible for client account maintenance together with the usual business operations such as sales ledger, purchasing, etc. These skills were also available to promote the brand of OBW itself. The comparative efficacy of this capability (when turned inwards) was examined with each participant. They all agreed that it was more difficult than an outside observer might expect. They saw the problem as being 'too close' and there being difficulty in gaining an objective and dispassionate view. This agreed difficulty went some way to explaining their willingness to cooperate with this doctoral research study. There had been previous 'consultancy' interventions by outsiders in the past (often deliberately intertwined with notorious publicity for the firm); but the underlying difficulty with operations had never been fully resolved.

The '*allocative resources*' in this business are mainly in the area of IT infrastructure and the company intranet. Most of the delivery of product that resulted from Marcus's branding consultancy was achieved through computer-based media created on the company's intranet and computer infrastructure by the creative staff. The premises were rented (two large offices, one full and one empty) so these were '*allocative resources*' within the terms of the tenancy. The arrangement of company ownership beneath Miles was somewhat complex. There were several small business entities that provided support to OBW. For the purposes of this study, they were considered to be all part of the same firm. Changing the company name to keep the offering at the edge of contemporary trends and market situations appeared to be the norm for companies owned by Miles.

The social structure (that was being described by Miles) was replete with *rules* of his own making. His personality was stamped upon the organisation, but he borrowed significantly from the capability possessed by Marcus to create or revitalise a brand. During the interview, Miles posted some notes on the map that appeared to be slogans. These probably exemplified some of the *rules* in the *social structure*, and otherwise they were those that he wished to impose in the near future. Examples of such utterances were "Say it, mean it, do it!" or "Now, or yesterday; not tomorrow!" The author pondered whether he was hearing the revealed angst of a SBO frustrated by events in his business, or were these repetitious 'cudgels' used as routines in everyday discourse with Patrick. The number of times they were vehemently repeated suggested the latter. The author noted the apparent effect of the map being created by Miles. It was possibly reinforcing the mantras that were being expressed. The video record shows that Miles was pointing at the 'slogan' tickets that had been written out when repeating these utterances. The author became aware of the reinforcing (as well as elicitation) effect of the mapping exercise during the session. However, the benefit of helping a participant to express their ideas visually was considered by the author to be outweighing any danger of fixated thinking or increased emotion.

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

From a Giddensian viewpoint, the ‘agency’ that appeared to alter the *social structure* in OBW was heavily biased towards the actions of Miles. This was not surprising considering his 90% shareholding in the company. He definitely owned the business and admitted that he ‘called the shots’. However, closer examination of the situation during the three interviews revealed that there was the potential for structural changing ‘agency’ from both Marcus and Patrick. Much of Miles’s interview was taken up with his preoccupation concerning the lack of pertinent ‘agency’ (in his opinion) from Patrick. Miles was asking for Patrick to change the operational side of the business so that it became more efficient and thus widened the margin of profitability. When quizzed concerning how he would suggest that Patrick could improve, he said that he wasn’t interested ... he just wanted results.

“So please don’t think I’m sat here with a finger-wagging [expletive] ... I can’t do this ... but why am I paying somebody [a large sum of money] a year ... let him sort it out.”
(Miles Osborne, transcript section #96)

Notably, there was an admission in the middle of this response, “... *I can’t do this* ...”. The author interpreted this as an underlying factor in Miles’ obvious frustration. He knew that he didn’t have the available capabilities (or possibly felt he could not afford the opportunity cost) of constantly intervening to rectify the situation with Patrick. Even if Miles did have the necessary skills to step in and use his ‘agency’ to establish a revised *social structure*; he failed to see why he should.

‘Communication’ within the business was a crucial form of ‘agency’. Miles was seeking adaptation of the structural *rules* to achieve a higher order of collaboration between functions. However, as already mentioned, he was apparently reluctant to communicate any form of guidance to either of his fellow directors. The underlying reason was different in each case. Miles didn’t want to inhibit the creative side of Marcus; whereas he was desperate for Patrick to become a self-sufficient senior team member who could keep pace with the operations. His preferred *modus operandi* was to identify Patrick’s shortcomings in the expectation that he would resolve them (with the minimum of input from Miles). He continually referred to how both fellow directors could double their salaries, if only Patrick’s operational side was more efficient. He seemed to feel that this incentive alone ought to be enough to precipitate the necessary changes.

Miles acknowledged an attempt by Patrick to communicate the daily operational situation to him and others in the business. This was termed the ‘dashboard’. It was just a summary sheet of the management accounts to provide an overview of the firm’s current financial position. However, this initiative was dismissed by Miles as being indicative of Patrick’s inability to maintain a ‘helicopter view’ of the business situation, because he did not persist with it when ‘firefighting’.

“If we were a sailing ship with a hole in it, he’d [Patrick] go and stick his finger in the hole, which means he’s then stuck with his finger in the hole [...] which stops him doing the core thing.” (Miles Osborne, response #159, gestures towards the map indicated in square

brackets)

The *communication* with Marcus was very different in tone. It seemed to the author, that it bordered upon the reverential.

"Marcus is a perfect person for this because, it isn't a 'veneer', it is sincere. He does mean it, and it does work." (Miles Osborne, response #94)

Miles knew that he had built the entire business around the capabilities of Marcus, and that the whole operation would be jeopardised if he suddenly left. This situation was seen as a distinct weakness by strategists such as Dorothy Leonard-Barton (1992) who termed the phrase 'core liability' as the obverse of 'core capability'.

As Giddens states:

"An agent ceases to be such if he, or she, loses the capability to 'make a difference', that is, to exercise some sort of power", (Giddens, 1984, p.14).

Power rested almost entirely with Miles, the next most powerful was Marcus because Miles felt that he could easily leave if he wasn't happy. The other two directors had 5% equity stakes in the business; but when asked what happens when 'push comes to shove', Miles admitted that he would have his way.

Miles had seemed to want to be a benevolent autocrat. For instance, he had given over the small equity stakes to the two people that he really depended upon. He said that they are friends; but the steely edge of a ruthless entrepreneur was also evident in his discourse. When asked about the 'power' that the other two might possess to affect 'every day' strategising, he succinctly stated the power balance between his two fellow directors in a Pareto style comparison:

"Marcus does 80% of what he wants to do, and 20% of what he \neg has to do. I think Patrick does 80% of what he has to do and 20% of what he \neg wants to do, but he has the power to change that, and I don't think he knows it yet." (Miles Osborne, response # 163; underlined emphasis evident in the recording)

Miles had the ultimate 'power' to deploy 'resources' as he saw fit, but he would have preferred Patrick to do this without his need to intervene. His frustration was heightened by his belief that he was offering a 'free rein' to Patrick, and his perception was that this opportunity for 'agency' was being ignored. Just prior to the interview, he had apparently narrowed down Patrick's responsibilities so that Patrick could focus on the operations in the business that Miles saw as crucial to the firm's survival. This was commented upon by Patrick in his interview (see page 145), but Patrick did not ostensibly link this action to Miles' need for a more proactive 'agency' on his part.

In terms of any 'sanctioning agency' at OBW, there was an on-going argument between Miles and Patrick concerning the disposition and deployment of 'authoritative resources'. Miles wanted proactive 'agency' from Patrick through 'facility' that might enable *domination* in their market.

Continuously playing catch-up was not the type of 'agency' that Miles wanted from Patrick. He desired continuous anticipation followed by requisite pre-emptive 'agency' on the part of Patrick. The author probed further on this line of questioning and inquired whether such 'agency' on the part of Patrick could manifestly change the social *structure* in the company. Would Miles be happy with such an outcome? His reply was affirmative, but with the caveat that he did not expect to have to get involved in such matters and that it was Patrick's job to make it happen. Miles held to this line of reasoning, even when the author broached the subject of potential constraints placed upon Patrick's authority by Miles's own 'agency'. He denied that any existed, and that Patrick was free to take executive action in such matters as credit control. The allegation by Miles (which could not be substantiated within the scope of the study) was that the business had lost £200,000 in the previous financial period because of inadequacies in the area under Patrick's jurisdiction. Despite further questions, Miles never revealed that a 20% cash flow hole in his back office operation (according to him) would be a cause for personal executive action. However, it did become apparent that despite his fury; he was constrained by a sense of camaraderie with both fellow directors. The businesses had been built up together, although the money for the venture had come from his own resources. Their 5% shareholdings were designed to be motivational towards Miles's vision of building a leading brand agency.

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

Giddens sees actors being able to sustain 'communication agency' through their stock of shared expressions and understandings. They are able to reflect upon such knowledge through the modal mechanism that he terms 'interpretive schemes'. Thus the structural dimension of 'signification' was expressed in action as 'interpretive schemes' between the actors deploying their 'communication agency'.

"Such interpretive schemes ('typifications') can be regarded analytically as generative rules for the uptake of the illocutionary force of utterances" (Giddens, 1976, p.113)

Language is replete with 'interpretive schemes'. The shared meanings are more than mere lexicography. In terms of strategising, 'interpretive schemes' can be a 'double edged sword'. For instance, if everyone in a company shares the same meaning of the word 'competition' in their day-to-day business activities. Kim and Mauborgne (1997) identify whole sectors where companies focus all their attention on competing with their 'competitors'. The danger of this lack of market acuity is that a new player can enter the market and re-concentrate on the needs of the customer. Quite often (according to the authors) the intensively competitive industry has not noticed that customers' perceptions of quality and service are drifting away from the sector's 'competitive offerings'. Although 'interpretive schemes' appear to be beneficial, they need to be considered as a spectrum ranging from the beneficial to the malign (in terms of strategising efficacy).

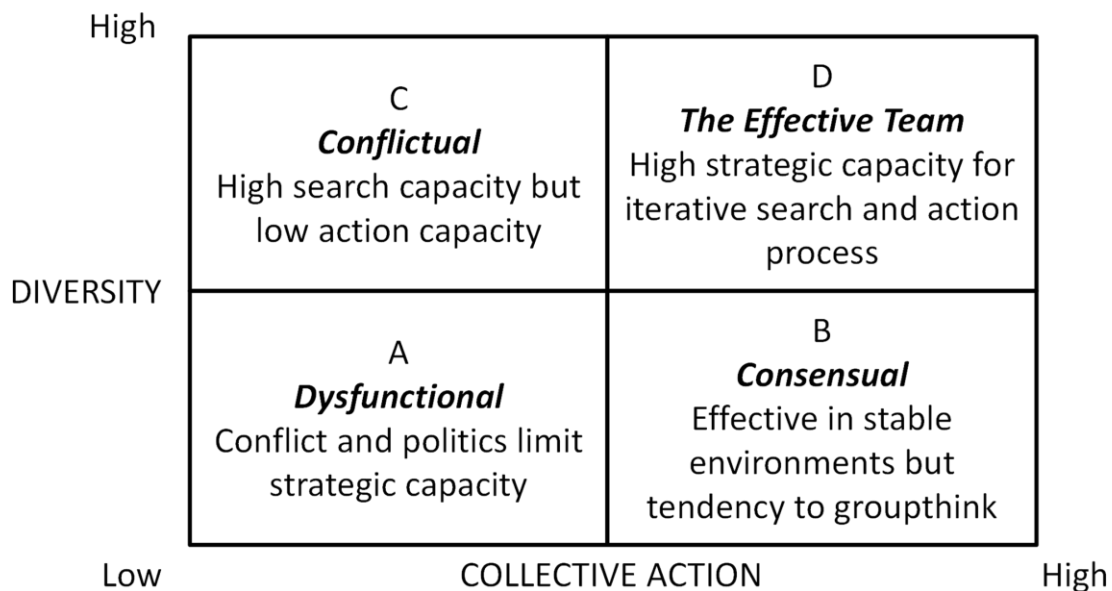


Figure 5.4. Effectiveness of Top Management Teams (Jarzabkowski & Searle, 2004, p.407)

Several '*interpretive schemes*' were evident in the interviews. For instance, there was an 'intolerance of the sub-standard' being expressed in very similar words by Miles and Patrick (this was not leading to the hoped for improvements in operational efficiency at OBW). Marcus had imbued the seniors in OBW with a set of radical branding opinions. These similarities were independently expressed by Miles and Marcus. It was evident in the interviews of Miles and Patrick that a shared vocabulary had built up concerning this issue. The most striking interpretive scheme at OBW was seen in the interplay between Marcus and Miles. Marcus has not only sold his ideas to client firms, he has also sold them to Miles.

"I want it done yesterday or now, I'm sick of it tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow." (Miles Osborne, response #76)

Research into the strategising effectiveness of Top Management Teams (TMTs) by Jarzabkowski & Searle (2004) proposed a 2x2 matrix of Team Diversity vs. Collective Action. The quadrants were termed 'Dysfunctional', 'Consensual', 'Conflictual', and 'The Effective Team' (the latter scoring high in both dimensions). In the OBW case, there appear elements of both 'Conflictual' (high 'Diversity', low 'Collective Action') and 'Consensual' (low 'Diversity', high 'Collective Action').

The 'Conflictual' was apparent in the Miles – Patrick domain whereas, the 'Consensual' appears to happen where Marcus and Patrick agree with Miles. The theory and research suggests the way to top team effectiveness was to allow team diversity to flourish so that collective action does not degenerate into 'group think'. If Miles was using *facility* to *dominate* the '*agency*' of the rest of the TMT, his objective of TMT effectiveness would be likely to remain frustrated over time.

A *norm* was described under Giddens' Theory as a means by which the boundaries of a structure

might change. These boundaries are perceived and agreed 'facts of limitation'; but as such, they are capable of being influenced by a variety of attitudes. Therefore, the *norm* was a prevailing set of attitudes that could be relatively static over time or alternatively in a state of regular flux.

Miles wanted to push the boundaries in terms of creating an environment that could effectively support the 'agency' of Marcus. His desire for a more anticipative 'agency' from Patrick was one factor where boundary movement would be welcomed and encouraged as the new *norm* of operation at OBW.

Miles was asked whether he would add *legitimation* to the 'agency' of Patrick. The author posed the question whether Miles could recall any instance where Patrick had made a change to the day-to-day decision making in the office, and he and Marcus had acted to legitimate that change. His response was negative and suggested that *legitimation* would not occur because such things were to be expected rather than supported.

"An example, no, no ... the permission to do such a thing is there in 24 foot high letters!", (Miles Osborne, response #169).

The author noted that Structuration Theory was a useful tool in this context; where the creation of shared methods and routines within the social structure are being questioned. Attitudes that inhibit such change and growth tend to be highlighted by the theory.

There are obvious artefacts of '*signification*' in this firm. Much of these relate to past clients and active accounts and can be seen in the OBW website. Endorsements by current and previous clients were, and still are, important to the marketing of OBW services to new customers. The latest manifestation of the OBW website has a series of vignettes that expound upon the branding theory of Marcus. The new buzzword is 'positioning', which is supposed to exemplify the notion of a brand that means something positive to potential customers¹⁴. Knowing what a brand 'stands for' is crucial in any marketing communication; otherwise the message is relatively meaningless. OBW cite the case of the Dyson brand vacuum cleaners, which in their terms stands for 'no loss of suction'.

¹⁴ 'Positioning' is a somewhat unfortunate choice of word for strategy researchers, because of its connotation to the works of Michael Porter in the 1980s.

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

The Giddensian notion of structural '*domination*' emerges from a theory of '*authorisation*' and resource '*allocation*'. In the case of OBW, the desired '*domination*' has not been achieved in the view of Miles Osborne. He felt that it was being stymied by Patrick's inability to keep pace with, and anticipation of, developments in the firm. The author found that Miles had a consequentialist's desire for the right outcome with the characteristic lesser regard for the means by which it might be achieved. He just wanted Patrick to fix it. When the author questioned the type of skills that someone in Patrick's position might deploy (such as a project manager); he responded with a total lack of interest in the activities of project management, he just wanted the successful project outcome. The conversation had been about a metaphorical example of bridge construction across a river. Miles had no interest in the logistical preparations that such a project would involve. He just wanted to name a date and time that he could cross the imagined river.

'*Legitimation*' is suggested by Giddens as the structural property that refers to the normative rules that govern the interaction in a social setting. In OBW, the normative *rules* all seem to emanate from Miles. The ethos of the company was very much his creation. However, this had been built around the capabilities of Marcus. Miles wanted the company to be (as he termed it) '*ballsy*'. His desire was to have an impertinent, precocious and audacious company was a reflection of his personality. It was ironic, to the author, that the key player in this radical conception gave the first impressions of being an introvert. Marcus' interview was much more measured and reflective than Miles'. The linkage between the two appeared to be a shared concept of branding and other commercial ideas. Whereas, Marcus was quietly contemplative, his analysis was certainly incisive and radical. The true audacity of OBW was in the analysis that Marcus could deliver on behalf of a client. The author was left with the impression that Marcus was happy to have someone like Miles creating the commercial vehicle for his activities. The Miles-Marcus domain of the social structure in OBW appeared to be a symbiotic relationship. So although structuration theory suggested a symbiotic and regenerative relationship between '*agency*' and '*structure*' over time, it could also encompass a similar relationship of two, or more, of the agents. Giddens does not appear to explicitly discuss mutual dependency between '*agents*' using the same '*structure*'. However, although social '*structure*' may be consensual, it could also be contested ground, or a complex mixture of both. The later appeared to be the case at OBW.

The pattern of accustomed routines of daily life in this company appeared to be held in a tension between Miles and Patrick; whereas Miles and Marcus were very much in accord. The relationship between Marcus and Patrick was not contentious according to both parties. Marcus wanted more time to think about brand strategies. Similarly, Patrick wanted to be able to release Marcus to do more at the '*front end*' of the business.

Structuration

There was some evidence of *structuration* within OBW that had been revealed in the interview. Most of it appeared to be originating from Miles, but there were also elements in the social *structure* that had been implanted in the early days by Marcus and his original thinking on brand strategy. Miles was drawing upon this on many occasions in his interview. For instance, both were asked to define brand in the first stage of the interview. Their answers were very similar. The author would be very surprised if Marcus was the plagiarist in this regard.

Miles had ambitious plans for the business and his strategising had the characteristic of a protracted narration. He was very keen to explain how this achievement would look. The only problem was that his vision was not being complemented by a mission that gave him any confidence that it was an achievable target. Hence, the frustration being expressed throughout the interview.

5.3.2. Marcus Turncastle – Brand Director



Figure 5.5. Marcus' strategy map (final) at OBW

The second interview at OBW was with Marcus Turncastle. He was a minority shareholding SBO, and a central figure in this company's competence in brand creation management. The author asked Marcus for his definition of 'brand'. His initial answer was practised and enigmatic, but required further explanation.

"A brand was a series of deceptions of the mind." (Marcus Turncastle, response #12)

He maintained that brands have nothing to do with customers, and everything to do with markets. This was controversial in comparison to the more standard definitions that can be found such as,

"Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (American Association of Marketing, 2011)

This standard and popular definition emphasises distinctiveness, there is also a presumption that such distinction is in the perception of customers. Marcus insisted that generic definitions of brand (such as the one above) were missing the point and endemic within Marketing as a profession. He believed that many well-known international firms were overspending on marketing because their brands were dysfunctional. There appeared to be a logic to Marcus' argument, because of the widely held view that brands could reduce the cost of marketing by preparing customers with the desired association to a brand. The obverse argument was being made by Marcus. He reasoned that an incorrect brand formulation could lead a company into unnecessarily expensive marketing activities to compensate for the dysfunctional branding.

Social structure (rules and resources)

Marcus considered that he was right, and most others in the Marketing profession were wrong. This apparent arrogance permeated the organisation, and Miles was a willing participant in this *interpretative scheme*. Miles used his ‘power’ to deploy the organisational resource of Marcus’ brand creation and management ability in an effort to achieve a sustained competitive advantage in the market. However, strategising in this way was causing operational problems for OBW. For instance, the quiet, but highly opinionated approach, of Marcus was not always to the taste of potential customers. Being told that most of your marketing strategy had been wrong over a sustained period of time could be distinctly unpalatable; and, particularly ‘difficult to swallow’ for those who were instrumental in its origination and implementation.

OBW require a higher level of ‘belief’ by the client (compared to other branding agencies) to be able to secure business with a client. The author followed this line of investigation by asking Marcus about how long it would take a client to know whether Marcus has done a good, or bad, job in creating their brand.

“... therein lies the problem; because brands are built over days, weeks, months, years and decades ... they need consistent investment, consistent monitoring, support ... in reality they won’t actually know the answer to that for a few years.”, (Marcus Turncastle, response #92)

Much of what was being advocated was avoidance of certain pitfalls that are identified by Marcus. For instance, sub-branding was deemed a ‘sin’ in OBW. This ‘*black mark*’ signification was evident in the work of others, notably Miles (who repeated the same mantra in his interview). Marcus explained that this was where a new brand was launched by a firm that actually undermines the original brand conception. Marcus gave an example of Holiday Inn falling into this trap with their ‘Holiday Inn Express’ brand. He contrasted that with ‘Coca-Cola’ not affecting the ‘Coke’ brand with ‘Fanta’, i.e. they didn’t create ‘Orange Coke’. (The author was slightly bemused by the fineness of this distinction, when considering ‘Cherry Coke’; but the point was made).

The ‘agency’ of Marcus was seen within the structure of OBW and his influence had a profound effect upon the *meso-level* strategy. The author inquired whether he had done this deliberately, and his reply was modest in comparison to his opinions on branding.

“I suggested we looked to differentiate ourselves and to help us work with the kind of clients that we wanted to work with; which are, people who are committed to building something, the type that you can embed with. That was something that we have followed.”, (Marcus Turncastle, response #90)

Initially, Miles created a company for Marcus to indulge his theories that might operate profitably. From those early days, OBW developed a ‘brash and daring’ persona that appealed to a small percentage of possible clients. Miles referred to this as ‘*ballsy*’, (an innuendo type description) which epitomises the audacious and risk-taking ethos of the firm. The author’s perception of this

was of a company that was not scared of being 'upfront' about a client's brand's shortcomings, but in turn promised much in the delivery of a brand concept. The three interviews at OBW revealed a consensus opinion in all three directors that their strategy of producing a dichotic response in clients was the right one for their company. The impression being created was '*love us or loathe us ... it's up to you*' (the client). A rather similar approach was used by television advertising of the 'Marmite' brand in the UK during 2009; in that, the whole premise was based upon celebrating the mythical divide between Marmite lovers and haters.

Another company has been created by Miles since the interviews at OBW. It was operating from the same premises and features (according to the website) Miles, Marcus and a financial consultant. It appears to now be the primary branding agency within OBW. Notably, Patrick does not feature in this new venture and apparently remains at OBW. The people at OBW seemed to be quite comfortable with having a multitude of brands despite their small size.

Marcus had made a significant contribution to the social *structure* of OBW, which was hardly surprising as Miles had built the entire organisation around his capabilities. During the interview, he was vague concerning the ability of others to interact with him on a technical level. He saw the *structure* as simply being conducive for someone with his talents. He wanted more time to think and consult upon branding strategies for customers. The administrative side of the business was of little interest to him, and was considered an irritation when it impinged upon his consultancy time.

The interview with Marcus revealed that he has no subordinates ('*authoritative resources*') and tends to work in isolation when providing brand consultancy. He said that he actually spent most of his time on the premises or meeting with clients. He said that he drew upon the support of others in the firm to turn his work into media products for clients (web pages, adverts, campaigns, etc.). However, he felt that too much of his time was devoted to a quality control function of inspecting all material before it went to the customer. The author suggested that this was tied into the previously discussed problem of others not being on his 'wavelength'. This highlighted a 'Catch-22'¹⁵ type dilemma; wherein, Marcus needed others to understand him - so he was released for more thinking time, but he maintained that his skills were virtually unique - so how could anyone understand him? However, he did not seem tortured by this circular logic.

Marcus used the '*allocative resources*' of OBW in performing his role of creation and communication. Ultimately, Miles could overrule him in a situation of resource conflict, but in

¹⁵ The term *Catch-22* was created by the author Joseph Heller in his eponymous novel about pilots in WWII. It refers to a problem of circular logic for which the only solution is denied by a rule inside the problem. In the book, 'asking to be declared insane to avoid flying dangerous missions, was deemed to the actions of someone who was sane; therefore, as a sane pilot, you had to fly'.

matters of branding consultancy this was very unlikely because of its core nature in the business model. Marcus never articulated something that demonstrated his awareness of 'power' over Miles (because Miles had previously admitted to the author that he was frightened of Marcus leaving the business). However, his general demeanour was of someone that was important.

Some of the *rules* that pervade the organisation appeared to originate from Marcus and his unusual brand creation ethos. His influence in such matters was deeply embedded in the social *structure* at the level of '*signification*' and verbal examples were often repeated by the other two directors. One *rule* that was noted during the interview was concerning the danger of sub-branding undermining a principal brand.

The author was interested to know how OBW became a brand consultancy. Marcus was clear that he was the instigator, and his '*agency*' clearly communicated the idea to Miles.

"I suggested we looked at brand consultancy to differentiate ourselves and to help us work with the kind of clients that we wanted to work with, which are people who are committed to building something, the type that you can embed with. That was something that we have followed.", (Marcus Turncastle Interview, Feb 2011).

The author was also intrigued to know whether client appreciation was sudden or gradual. Marcus pointed out that a fundamental difficulty arose in clients who expected a rapid payback to their investment in branding,

"... and therein lies the problem, [...] certain things will be more effective than in the past, but in reality, they won't actually know the answer to that for a few years.", (Marcus Turncastle, response # 92)

Clients could be impatient for results, and Marcus had to spend a lot of time 'educating the customer' concerning the long-term nature of successful branding.

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

For a company that specialises in finding a successful brand for other firms, it might be expected that OBW would have exemplary internal communication. However, Miles in the preliminary meeting suggested that OBW had problems in that regard. The shared topic of the three interviews led towards an investigation of how the three directors shared the 'vision' and determined the 'mission' of OBW. Communication between Miles and Marcus was seen to be adequate by both parties. Marcus appeared indifferent to the problems Miles was having with Patrick, except to the extent that it might impact negatively on his consultancy. He did not feel that it was part of his remit to help his fellow director, when in so doing he would have to devote less time to his consultancy.

Marcus possessed knowledge power in this organisation. He had almost achieved an exalted status in the firm (particularly in the perception of Miles). From a business strategy point of view, this situation revealed a vulnerability to the business if something prevented the continued

participation of Marcus. Resourced-based View authors of strategic management, such as Leonard-Barton (1992), warn of the dangers of 'core rigidity'. That is, the very strength of having such a capability in the firm could wane and become a barrier to change if external market circumstances changed to such a degree that the radical approach was no longer valid. If Marcus had left the business in the short term, the OBW business model could not survive in its current form, which was highly dependent upon him.

Marcus was not drawing upon much from within the business for his creativity in branding. Equally, his expert 'agency' was not creating much which could be shared with others. Miles was the closest in terms of sharing conceptions of branding for clients, but this in no way made him an expert.

Marcus was a mercurial character and Miles revealed that not all potential customers 'get on' with Marcus. This admission was all part of Miles's vision for the firm, and was seen as a way of differentiating from competitors.

"I want to be this 'boutiquey' type of consultancy, when people approach OBW, they either love them or they think they're mental. ", (Miles Osborne, during response #38)

The initial impression might be one of professional arrogance, and in most cases Marcus was asking an OBW client to abandon something within the customer's strategy to enable his ideas to flourish. For clients that are not 'put off' by this, the 'embedding' (as Marcus describes it) was likely to be a cathartic process. People that 'buy into' OBW are often having to admit to themselves that they have wasted money in the past on advertising a dysfunctional brand. On the positive side, OBW can point to numerous clients that are very happy with their new brand proposition and feel that the cost of consultancy has been recouped many times over. It was obviously impossible to prove otherwise because a firm would have to run on two different branding trajectories simultaneously to measure the difference.

Marcus seems to have the final say in all matters 'branding'. He conceived of the clients brand and how it would be portrayed through the media. He, therefore, oversaw all output by other staff that was to be delivered to clients, e.g. web design and copyrighting.

In terms of 'sanctioning agency' at OBW, this remained in the realm of Miles. He effectively decided where the boundaries of the structure lay. He may well have been heavily influenced by Marcus. However, boundaries seemed to be of little consequence to Marcus as long as he was happy with his personal working environment.

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

Giddens refers to three '*modalities*' in his theory, or as Whittington (Whittington, 2010, p.112) explains, "the means by which structural dimensions are expressed in action." These are '*interpretive schemes*', '*facility*' and '*norms*' respectively.

'*Signification*' was a compelling feature at OBW because it was central to the product/service offered to clients. There was as constant flow of *interpretative schemes* evident in the company. Essentially embedded within this are ways that Marcus has to help other creative staff to 'get it' with regard to the brand image that has been conceived for clients. However, Marcus does not believe that that other people in the business can fully appreciate what he was doing. The author inquired about how routines might develop in the business as the result of his creative activity. He maintains that the skill he possesses was more about 'art' than 'science'; and all he can do is transmit enough within the *interpretative schemes* to enable others to interpret his requirements and manufacture media elements for the client. However, he had the ultimate say on what left the company. The author got the impression from Marcus, that the creation was an iterative process from which he dare not disengage.

Marcus did not have to utilise facility within OBW, although he possessed significant knowledge '*power*'. The author is sure that customers of OBW were in effect buying a piece of Marcus's time. Marcus could influence the deployment of '*resources*' at OBW (*domination*) to the extent that his knowledge '*power*' gave him direct control of output content.

Giddens envisages that knowledgeable actors are drawing from, and simultaneously altering, social structure. The alteration could be creation or reinforcement. This concept necessarily includes movable boundaries in time-space. For this reason, Giddens describes a third type of '*agency*', which is '*sanctioning*'. This can affect *structural 'legitimation'* (or where, and when, the structure can be considered to be socially acceptable) through the modality of '*norms*'. It was not evident in any of the three interviews at OBW, that there had been significant changes in '*legitimation*'. The author concludes that there was '*sanctioning*' and fresh '*norms*' at the birth of OBW, and at the time of the interview the social structure was relatively stable. The same cannot be said, however, for the creation of a standalone branding agency (known as 'Mauve Writer'). This new business was created after the interviews, and involved the transfer of Marcus and the recruitment of a new consultant, under the control of Miles. The latter, retaining his CEO position with OBW. In a sense, the business had divisionalised; although the new entity was being accommodated in the same premises as OBW. It will be very likely that the prevailing '*norms*' that operate within OBW will also be transferred to Mauve Writer. This strategic move will have been '*sanctioned*' by Miles.

Ultimately, the OBW business depends upon Marcus's performance in brand management on behalf of clients. Although he now works for Mauve Writer, the operational side of the business

will still be provided by OBW. Trend measurement of client performance in terms of revenue can be established before and after OBW are consulted; however attribution to the advice given by OBW was more tenuous. Marcus made an interesting claim during his interview.

“The other interesting thing about branding as a concept was that it was probably one of the few disciplines in marketing that was purely based on fact. Rather than purely based on theory.” (Marcus Turncastle, response #92)

The author queried this for clarity, and this response was given.

“All of the principles of branding are very evident in successful companies and very non-evident in unsuccessful ones.” (Marcus Turncastle, response #94)

This sweeping statement was modified by his caveat in the same response:

“There are many things that effect business of course, but from a marketing point of view ... building a brand is the most effective thing that you can do.” (Marcus Turncastle, response #94)

One of the problems for OBW, or any other branding consultancy for that matter, is that the client has to implicitly believe that there is a problem with the existing brand or need for a new one. Marcus readily admits that there will be people inside the client organisation who will be resentful of any intervention by OBW. Marcus cites marketing professionals as being particularly difficult in this regard. Even if a branding consultancy intervention is successful, the benefits may not be immediately apparent. Selling this concept is not easy, and Miles utilises Marcus' branding skills to good effect when making initial contact with potential clients. If OBW can remain with the client long enough to show the benefits of brand engineering, the relationship can be lucrative. Brands need maintenance, and clients can experience a form of strategic 'lock-in' because they become wary of moving to another consultancy having found one that has produced beneficial results. Virtually every competitive commercial situation is dynamic in the sense that competitors do not remain static, but rather react to the creation of a new brand. So this should produce repeat business for OBW, or any other branding consultancy, over the longer term.

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

In keeping with an image conscious company there many artefacts on display in the office. The visitor first encounters a life-size model of the cartoon character 'Betty Boop' ¹⁶ in the corridor adjacent to the firm's entrance. It was not explained why with any clarity despite asking several members of staff. The main room was open plan with sub-division achieved by open shelving. Artefacts can be seen in many such locations. Their significance not being obvious to the casual observer, but probably linked to existing and previous contracts. Regarding the '*legitimation*'

¹⁶ Betty Boop was an animated cartoon character created by Max Fleischer that first appeared in films in 1930.

structure that applied to Marcus. Miles was happy when this happened as it signified to Miles that Marcus was 'doing his job' outrageously. Clearly Miles had the expectation that Marcus would sometimes 'cross the line' and upset the client. The '*line*' was one of the normative boundaries of the '*legitimation*' structure in OBW, but this indulgence only applied to Marcus. As a knowledgeable agent for a within the company, Marcus possesses knowledge '*power*', and can heavily influence Miles. The conceptualisation of OBW as a branding consultancy was very much at the behest of Marcus (this was admitted by Miles in his interview). In this area, Marcus possesses *facility* although it appears that he does not actively seek to change social structure of OBW now that it has been created.

Structuration

There was some evidence of previous structuration within OBW and impending changes in the social construction of operations at the company. The structuration that occurred due to the '*agency*' of Marcus has been the gradual adoption of Marcus' branding ontology by others in the firm. Building a company around the capabilities of one person will inevitably lead to structuration over time. However, the ability of others to operate in a similar manner to Marcus was probably limited unless the company employs another brand expert. Such a situation might not prove to be advantageous to OBW. According to Miles, few brand experts share Marcus' view of the subject and a clash of competing ideology might ensue.

5.3.3. Patrick Newton – Operations Director

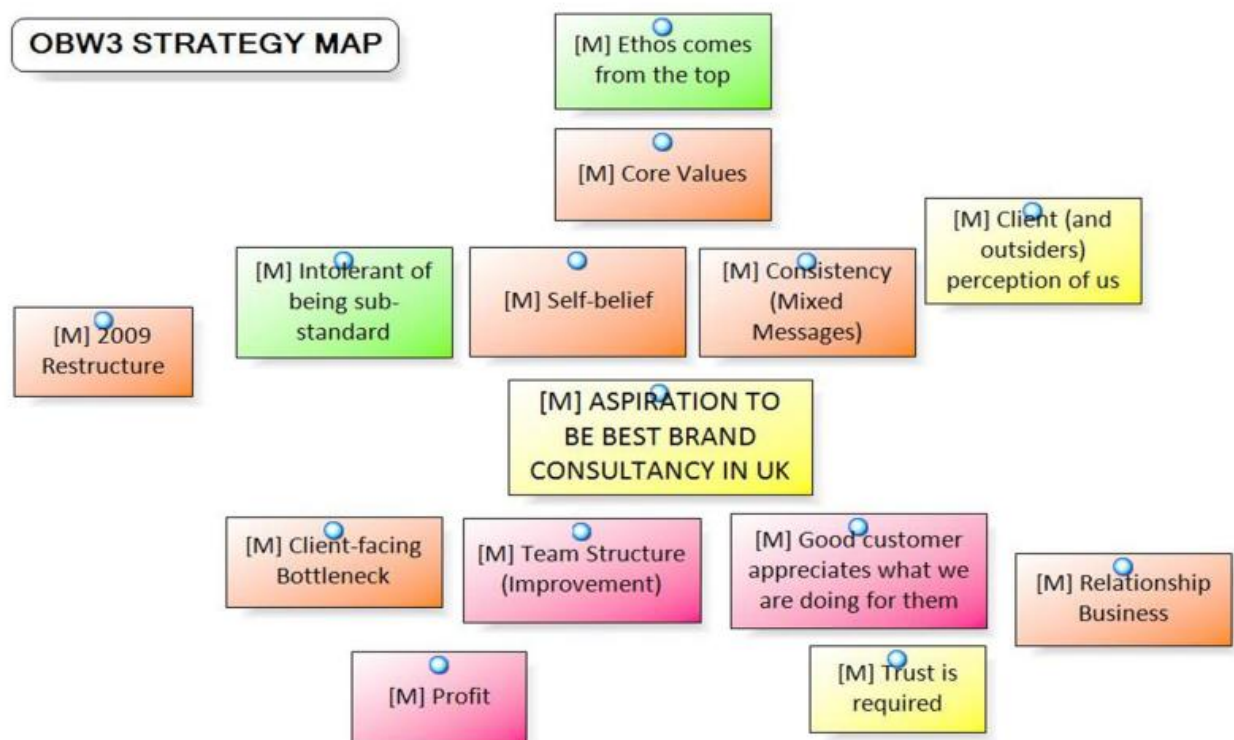


Figure 5.6. Patrick's strategy map (final) at OBW

Patrick Newton was the last interview in the series of three carried out on the same day at OBW. Having already heard the opinion of Miles, the author was expecting someone who was likely to be defensive about the strategic situation at OBW. The interview was surprising in that regard, because Patrick was a determined individual that was also frustrated by the performance of his part of the company. Patrick's emerging story revealed a struggle to operationalise the business won by Miles and Marcus in a structure that was adequately resourced; but apparently had inconsistencies and gaps in the area of rules according to Patrick.

"... where I am helped, I guess, it was by having other members of the team focused on certain things, that means I can narrow my focus." (Patrick Newton, response #197)

"Ultimately he was responsible for all of us. If he has to make a decision of, 'Patrick, I can't have you do that because you are going to jeopardize what we are doing here' or 'I think you are bonkers, but go for it, yeah, it's brilliant'." (Patrick Newton, response #199)

From a structurationist point of view, the 'agency' required to modify the social *structure* within OBW has to come from someone who can engage in the *modalities* identified by Giddens. The problem at OBW was that the person most likely to be able to accomplish this is determined to be a dormant agent in this respect. Miles wanted Patrick to change the way that OBW fulfilled its business commitments and to increase the effectiveness of operations. To do this Patrick had to understand that he had the necessary 'power' and 'sanction' to carry out the changes being

demanding by Miles. The author asked Patrick whether he had difficulty 'reading between the lines' with Miles. His response was confirmed the author's suspicion that he was not able to draw from the social '*signification*' and the '*norms*' were indistinct as far as he was concerned.

"It was very difficult actually 'reading between the lines' because it can be very confusing. A lack of focus and direction can sometimes be left (not bewildered) but a bit ... not exactly sure of what was meant ... " (Patrick Newton, response #222)

Patrick had been in the business for seven years, having as a junior placement and risen in that period to a director and shareholder of OBW. He remarked, that he had performed every role 'in-between', and reflected that it was hard sometimes to disengage from former roles. The author inquired whether this was the 'eternal apprentice syndrome', or just that he was the most experienced person available. Miles had made a disparaging comment about his Patrick using the mixed analogy of a 'sinking ship' and 'the little Dutch boy who saved the dyke'. He suggested that Patrick would stick his finger in the initial leak and then not be available for any other more important work.

The apparent schism in OBW between Patrick and Miles could be interpreted under Giddensian theory as a dysfunctional change mechanism that was probably counter-productive. The author's reticence with this interpretation is due to the apparent longevity of this situation. Obviously, it had not prevented OBW from trading profitably. The relationship between the two actors seemed to be reminiscent of an aged married couple. Both could anticipate the other, both said they were friends; but neither seemed prepared to resolve a situation that was causing recurring acrimony, because such '*agency*' might damage the relationship. Miles had admitted at one stage, that if OBW collapsed, the final person to leave and 'turn the lights off' would be Patrick.

Miles almost wanted to delegate the responsibility (as well as the authority) to change how the operations side of the business performed. The caveat, 'almost', is necessary because Miles knew that the responsibility would always be his (as long as he was the CEO). This desire to leave it all to Patrick was inhibiting '*agency*', from that quarter, because delegation needs an authority transfer by means of the modalities of *interpretive scheme*, '*facility*' and *norm*. This would therefore involve the '*agency*' of '*communication*', '*power*' and '*sanction*' from Patrick. Miles would initiate the authority transfer using his '*agency*' via the modality channel to effect change in the structure. Patrick would then have to draw upon this in his own '*agency*'. Crucially, Miles would have to abide by the structural change that would ensue over time. The *interpretative scheme* that would create '*signification*' of change in OBW would also have to not be undermined by Miles. Once underway it would be necessary for Miles to support the initiative and add *significance* to the endeavour.

Social structure (rules and resources)

The Giddensian *structure* at OBW has already been described from the viewpoint of the other two participants. Patrick ought to have been the main instigator and beneficiary of ‘*routines*’ and ‘*resources*’ that could make OBW increasingly effective in terms of profitability. However, in making this the strategic issue under consideration for this set of interviews it became apparent that this was not the case. Proactive ‘*agency*’ by Patrick had not occurred in the period since the company had restructured according to Miles, and he was expressing frustration with continuous ‘fire-fighting’ activities that he claimed had cost the company £200,000 in the previous financial period. Marcus only wanted his output to be delivered by others exactly as he envisaged and on time. Patrick and his team were therefore continuously under pressure to perform in terms of delivery and securing prompt payment.

In terms of structuration theory, there should have been significant ‘*agency*’ on Patrick’s part that would modify the *social structure* at OBW. Delegation should have become routine that reflected the policy set by Miles. This of course would be ‘*agency*’ in its own right (as previously discussed), but the ‘*sanction*’ and ‘*power*’ of that ‘*agency*’ ought to have liberated Patrick to take action that could enable the whole team to perform better.

“Patrick did this thing where he showed me a dashboard of the business, and he was very proud of it, and I was very proud of him, he does some great work, and it showed me the whole business on one page.” (Miles Osborne, response #149)

Mention had been made by Miles of an initiative by Patrick to create a ‘dashboard’ which reflected the current state of affairs in the business (this wasn’t made available to the author, and seemed to be a ‘bone of contention’ between Miles and Patrick). However, it was evidence of ‘*agency*’ upon Patrick’s part; and would probably have to be the starting point of a fresh initiative. It was the author’s opinion that ‘knowing and agreeing where we are’ was a necessary precursor to setting the mission towards the vision created by Miles for OBW.

Patrick seemed to be obsessed with a ‘bottom up’ or ‘grass roots’ strategy of change in the business. He constantly referred to an ‘intolerance of sloppiness’ that he wanted to engender in all staff. Doing this, he felt, would take the organisation towards Miles’ vision of being the best branding agency in the UK. This belief seemed to centre upon an association between tidiness and efficiency. The author questioned this in terms of effectiveness, and whether this alone could provide the anticipation being called for by Miles. In very simple terms, an exemplary office environment might be the hallmark of a best in class branding agency; but all that, could be undone by never anticipating late payment by a client and failing to implement procedures that could prevent such occurrences.

However, if Miles felt so strongly about this, why had he not intervened on a typical situation and applied the type of ‘*agency*’ that he would like to see as a routine intervention by Patrick? A typical

conversation in the aftermath between the two ought to have included something like this from Miles. Once the ‘agency’ was established and demonstrated further repeat ‘agency’ in the same vein would serve to replicate and reinforce the change to the social structure in OBW. The routine would then be invoked whenever necessary or until it was deemed that there was a better way to accomplish the desired result.

The author was surprised that this sort of *communication* was not reported by either party; as it would be indicative of the type of ‘agency’ that would be creating the future structure of the organisation that both seemed to desire. Miles retorted that he wasn’t interested in demonstrating good practice. He expected a ‘senior’ to be able to handle it, that was what Patrick was being paid for. Patrick confirmed this with his own analogy,

“I suppose because of the culture Miles developed it is, ‘Well, there are some knives over there. Why didn’t you just go cut the ropes? Why did you just stand there saying I can’t move? Why didn’t you do something to get yourself moving again?’”
(Patrick Newton, response #218)

It seemed to the author that Miles was very much of the school, “*don’t bring me your problems ... bring me your solutions*”. Desiring self-sufficiency in staff is one thing, but being inconsistent is another.

Notionally, Patrick was in charge of everybody except Miles and Marcus. There had been a variety of specialist posts reporting to him (on the creative side). These management duties had been taken away by Miles in uncharacteristic ‘agency’ (see page 128). This still left Patrick with twelve staff representing the ‘*authoritative resources*’.

“... we moved a certain role from me to Ben; and obviously my focus has gone right back [into operations]. Which was great!”
(Patrick Newton, response #199)

At the time of hearing this response, the author could not decide whether this was *post hoc* rationalisation by Patrick, or that he genuinely believed it. His working relationship with Miles had been established over at least 10 years.

“The only resources we have really are people, because we are a people based business ... I guess ... ideas and delivery are essential ... I guess ... the clients bring the budget ...”
(Patrick Newton, response #55)

The above response, the from Patrick, indicated that he did not think there was much in the way of ‘*allocative resources*’ in OBW. There was the usual IT equipment, desks, office furniture, etc. The creative staff were using high-end IT equipment; but the premises were rented.

The *social structure* that was described by Miles was generally confirmed by Patrick. The author did try to ascertain whether there were any *rules* within the *social structure* of OBW that Patrick would claim to have originated from him. He did speak about a variety of roles that he would like to implement in regard of office tidiness and cleanliness. The initial impression that the author had

on entry into the 'open plan' office was that it was pretty good in that respect. Certainly not bad enough to create a negative perception of the business!

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

The author asked Patrick whether Miles, and others, could put him in an impossible position from the outset of gaining business.

"If Miles and Chris who are currently looking at the new business if they are bringing all the wrong kinds of projects and not costing things correctly you know putting in prices to win people and just making the life difficult in the middle. We do nothing here then, yes, I have to get involved." (Patrick Newton, response #58)

His response indicated the potential for latent 'agency'. He conceded that it would be very important to get involved if the initial parameters of the business were out of bounds. Such matters were 'the price being too low', the delivery date being impossible to meet', or 'a negative impact on existing business by the double allocation of the same resources'. The author had noted in the Miles workshop, that the initial involvement of Patrick did not translate into any contact with the client prior to contract signatures. The author had asked Miles whether he thought that Patrick should be there at the handshakes to reinforce his authority with the client. Miles did not think that was important. Perhaps an important opportunity for 'agency' in the three Giddensian forms ('communication', 'power' and 'sanction') was being missed.

Patrick's lack of 'agency power' was debilitating in terms of his ability to rectify the operational performance of OBW. The author posed a theoretical situation to Patrick. He was asked to imagine Miles had an office halfway down a corridor; his own office was at one end and Marcus' at the other. If Miles came out of his own office which way would he walk? Patrick was certain that it would be in his direction. The author interpreted this answer as confirmation that Patrick felt that Miles' 'sanctioning agency' was usually directed towards his part of the business. Miles was adamant that he didn't want to take action in Patrick's area of responsibility. However, they both reported that Miles had acted recently in regard of Patrick's responsibilities. Miles seemed to strategise this as the 'corralling' of Patrick into the area of concern; by moving some of his previous responsibilities to others. Patrick stated that this as "giving him more time to focus upon the areas of concern", and seemed determined not to admit to disappointment at the loss of the other responsibilities. This 'agency' by Miles appeared to be amicable and agreed on both sides and seemed to have become part of the *social structure* in OBW at the time of the interview.

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

Giddens refers to three '*modalities*' in his theory, or as Whittington (2010, p.) explains, "*the means by which structural dimensions are expressed in action.*" These are '*interpretive schemes*', '*facility*' and '*norms*' respectively. Most of the '*interpretive schemes*' at large in the company were emanating from Miles. It was almost as if Patrick was trying to emulate this within his domain of operations; but lacking the necessary *facility* these appear doomed to failure. Patrick maintained that he would intervene if there was a breach of the business '*norms*', but the author wondered whether he would actually get to know in time for any '*agency*' to be effective. Giddens refers to '*norms*' as a modality of changing boundaries in structure.

"Norms figure as 'factual' boundaries of social life, to which a variety of manipulative attitudes are possible" (Giddens, 1984, p.4).

Miles maintained that Patrick possessed the '*power agency*' to shift '*norms*' in OBW; yet Patrick was either stymied by Miles or unaware of his supposed latent power. The author wondered how Miles would react if Patrick had the temerity to take executive action; particularly, if that action had required a rebuke of Miles.

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

Giddens' Structuration Theory posits a *social structure* subject to change. The most likely mechanism to effect that change are *modes* of interaction with that *structure* by knowledgeable *agents*. Such production, or reproduction, is manifest in dimensions of the structure that Giddens identifies as '*signification*', '*domination*' and '*legitimation*'. The Giddensian notion of a '*domination*' structural dimension emerges from a theory of *authorisation* and *resource allocation*. It is the author's opinion that, this has close parallels to the Resource-Based View (RBV). In the case of OBW, the firm is much more firmly rooted in its intangible, rather than tangible, resources. This was a problem for Patrick who seemed determined to control the tangible assets in a belief that this would rectify the intangible. His line of thinking ran "Successful firms have efficient tidy offices. If I can create a tidy office the business will be successful." He conceptualised this as '*intolerance of sloppiness*'; and wanted everyone working for him to adhere to this principle. Perversely, this stratagem stood a better chance of working now that the '*creatives*' were no longer under his control. His vision of a tidy '*back office*' operation was at least now conceivable (in the author's opinion).

Structuration

There was some evidence of structuration within OBW that has arisen from the interview. One aspect that was discussed at length was '*Delegation*'. In the third interview, the author was interested in probing the effects of Miles' behaviour upon Patrick. Whereas, Patrick appeared to

be ideally placed to be the initiator and sustainer of *social structural change* in OBW; something was clearly going wrong. The Structuration cycle showed 'agency' inhibited to the extent that embedded structural change was not occurring. Furthermore, Patrick was not able to draw from social structural change that he had previously initiated. Despite Miles' protestations, that he did not want to interfere in Patrick's management practices; the author interprets residual inhibitors in the *social structure* and Patrick's interpretation of the prevailing and somewhat confused *normative* rules within the structure.

The foregoing is typical of the complexities that, undeniably, form part of Structuration theory. In particular, Giddens expresses caution about what he terms the 'double hermeneutic'. That is, how plausible can a researcher's interpretation be when that interpretation is based upon the interpretation of the participant?

The author's interpretation of the interview with Patrick, is governed by a greater degree of caution than that felt in the other two interviews. Patrick was obviously aware of Miles' continued frustration. The author anticipated a certain level of suspicion from Patrick concerning the 'raison d'être' for the interview. (This fear was exacerbated by Miles announcing that he would like his interview video made available for playing to Patrick.) The author was therefore rather surprised at the voracity of Patrick's support for the 'party line', as expressed by Miles. At first the author thought this was just a 'defensive move', but as time progressed, it appeared more likely to be a belief. So, was Patrick drawing upon the *social structure* in his answers to the author? If he was, such reference was being made to normative *rules*, principally established by the 'agency' of Miles.

The underlying premise of Patrick's thinking in this regard was as follows. Miles's vision of the excellent Branding Agency included aspects of tidiness and attention to detail that were somewhat absent from the contemporary OBW. As a result, Patrick was determined to persuade staff to be meticulous and as he put it 'intolerant of sloppiness'. The author could certainly see this as a by-product of organisational excellence; he got the distinct impression that Patrick thought, if only he could 'smarten things up' everything would be okay from a strategic point of view. It was almost as though Patrick had got stuck in a '*strategising*' loop. He might rationalise it as, "*OBW is being less profitable than Miles would like - therefore I must instil an even greater sense of 'intolerance of sloppiness' in the staff.*"

Patrick couldn't see that he needed to pounce upon a situation where Miles and Marcus were inhibiting his efforts to raise standards in everyone else. Undoubtedly, this would have required an intellectual battle, and it would be a '*high-stakes*' gamble for Patrick. However, his normally stable and calm demeanour would be an excellent contrasting backdrop for assertiveness on his part. It would probably only take one or two instances of 'agency' to break the mould of the prevailing '*social structure*'. A well timed outburst like, "*If you want it done right Miles; then please get out my way!*", would probably suffice. Miles would have to metaphorically '*eat humble pie*' momentarily;

but, crucially, he would have to reinforce this unexpected call by Patrick, so that the new '*social structure*' (that he so desired) could be cemented.

The whole point of delegation is that a subordinate can act with the authority of the superior (while the superior remains responsible for the '*agency*' of the subordinate). It certainly was not in the best interests of Miles to have everyone in OBW looking to him for a second guessing of Patrick. However, across the three interviews, the author had interpreted the *social structure* to be exactly that. Recent events have reinforced that position, and Patrick was in an unenviable position of only being able to break out of this situation by extraordinary executive action. The three directors have been colleagues and friends, for at least a decade. A showdown on this matter would certainly have strategic implications for OBW.

Structuration at OBW

There are several structuration cycles occurring at OBW (see chart overleaf). Miles is highly satisfied with the structure being created by Marcus, and exasperated by the lack of a similar phenomenon that he can share with Patrick. Miles draws upon Marcus' creative genius to market the services of his branding agency to clients. The outrageous image of OBW is fed by the agency of Miles and Marcus, although Miles is the dominant 'voice'. The contrast between the effective Miles-Marcus and the dysfunctional Miles-Patrick structuration cycles is enormous. In the next section, the basis of the problem is expressed in terms of delegation in the company. This is followed by an analysis of strategising in the firm using the proposed SBO model.

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Miles Osborne	MD	High praise for Marcus - frequent criticism of Patrick. Has a vision of OBW as "the most audacious Branding Consultancy in the UK".	Based upon 90% shareholding in OBW. Can potentially intervene in all matters, but defers to Marcus on Branding, and wants to be 'hands off' with Patrick. Has ultimate final say in all matters OBW. Wanted to use his interview video as a 'lever' on Patrick.	Considers he has already sanctioned Patrick to change operational methods, but cannot understand why Patrick is still 'fire-fighting'. Wants a 'fix and forget' solution.
Marcus Turncastle	Brand Director	Technical aspects of branding. Content release approval to prior to delivery.	Has considerable knowledge power in OBW; whereas his 5% shareholding affords no real power.	Gradual evolution of branding consultancy ideas. Unlikely to be challenged by others on Branding issues. Adoption of ideas into social structure will be spasmodic.
Patrick Newton	Ops. Director	Trying to instil the "intolerance of sloppiness" message to all operations 'back office' staff. Lacks the power to enforce the desired regime.	Less power than Marcus (is easier to replace); again, 5% shareholding affords no real power. Tries in vain to 'domesticate' the other two directors in matters operational.	Unable to create or build upon norms because of sporadic agency of impatient Miles.
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Miles Osborne	MD	Various mantras such as "Now, or yesterday; not tomorrow!" or "Say it, mean it, do it!" (directed at Patrick in particular). Promotes an 'edgy' image for the business, and revels in being outrageous.	Asserts power unilaterally by suddenly reassigning two of Patrick's roles to another director. Will not use this power to step in and demonstrate how to run operations. Uses his power to pay well in the expectation that everything will then function flawlessly.	Would sanction change that would increase the effectiveness of Marcus, particularly increasing his consultancy time, or reduce costs. Wants to improve the OBW credit control norm by Patrick being more proactive to chase owed money.
Marcus Turncastle	Brand Director	Likes to build the 'Marcus legend'. Strong interpretive scheme promoted by Marcus that 'sub-branding is always counter-productive'.	Has power over 'final release to client' approvals. Can thereby heavily influence the deployment and priorities of staff towards quality of output.	Will appear as anecdotal evidence of success with previous clients, and become part of the OBW 'folklore'. Organic growth not borrowing.
Patrick Newton	Ops. Director	Prefers to adopt a communal and egalitarian approach to all staff duties. Will undertake a menial task to demonstrate it is not beneath him. These 'schemes tend to infuriate Miles.	Lack of facility. Inhibited in application of power because of 'second guessing' by a frustrated but usually operationally inactive Miles. Patrick's initiatives tend to be thwarted (such as 'the dashboard').	Follows the norms established by the praxis of Miles and Marcus. Often has to play catch-up (which invites criticism from Miles of not being anticipative enough). The is not effective.
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Miles Osborne	MD	Case studies and endorsements (on website). Stimulates OBW's media industry notoriety and reputation for being audacious. Various artefacts from previous work visible in the office and in the Media.	Creating new group companies. Deployment of allocative resources. Result of intervention removing some responsibilities from Patrick.	Change occurs later when OBW is split into two companies in 2012. OBW remains 'back office' and new firm 'Mauve Writer' is the <i>de facto</i> 'front office'.
Marcus Turncastle	Brand Director	Case studies on website. Increasing reputation as a Brand Consultant. Justification of radical views needs to be signified by long-term success of clients.	Can demand an environment where his talents can flourish. Effectively holds the organisation to ransom, although may not actually wish to leave.	Suggested to Miles the founding <i>norm</i> of moving into branding rather than marketing.
Patrick Newton	Ops. Director	Wanted the 'dashboard' to become an artefact of interpretive schemes (an up-to-date picture of the firm's finances and KPIs). Could have been a central factor of signification in the structure. However, Miles not interested in knowing 'boring' operational data.	Accused of repeatedly 'fire-fighting', but stymied by Miles in any long-term planning for operations. Believes that operational structural change must come from the top, i.e. the three directors themselves. Determined to make office appear like best in class. Intolerance of sloppiness.	Patrick feels that there is a mismatch between the espoused need for greater efficiency (shared by all directors) and the actual praxis.

Table 5.2 Interpretation of Structuration cycles at OBW (Case A)

5.3.4. Delegation at OBW

The following analysis has been selected to demonstrate the complete invocation of Structuration Theory (as interpreted by the author for this study) applied to strategising in a small business context. As already explained in the foreword to this section, the issue is one of strategic thinking by an SBO; although the issue would probably not be considered as such in a larger business context.

This issue emerged in the workshop discourse with Miles as a perceived underlying barrier to growth for OBW. Table 5.3 shows the ST categorisations of the delegation issue at OBW (see page 156). Miles felt that the growth of the company (or even its long-term survival) was being jeopardised by, what he saw as, the inability of Patrick Newton to successfully manage operations at OBW.

"What happens is we're going over here [consulting for the client] and being mouthy and noisy, and then this bit of the business [credit control] squeaks like a mouse."
(Miles Osborne, response #118)

Near the end of the session, the author inquired whether Miles felt that he ought to be 'leading by example'. The old English adage of, "*Why buy a dog and bark yourself?*", was the essence of his retort.

"I can't be arsed with that kind of thing. I expect a senior to sort it out; and it's not being sorted out." (Miles Osbourne, response #61)

At first sight, this vignette appears to be one of the classic issues that often arises in the development of growth oriented SMEs. Many small businesses (that are on a growth vector) reach a point where the founder/owner-manager finds that he/she can no longer provide "hands on" control of day-to-day matters. Such situations have been studied by researchers for many decades (Mazzarol & Reboud, 2009; Greiner, 1998; Schein, 1983; Perrigo, 1975). The peculiarity here is the attitude Miles has to the situation – he is steadfastly refusing to intervene (use his 'agency') with a demonstration of how it should be done. Usually, the SBO will not stop interfering, but Miles' reticence to get involved is also causing problems.

Those researchers interested in organisational strategic thinking, have to make a mental adjustment when moving the focus of attention from a large to a small enterprise (Beaver & Prince, 2004; Hill & McGowan, 1999). This is because appreciation of the word '*strategy*' and its implications are partially linked to organisational size. An issue that would not be considered strategic in a large organisation can have profound long-term implications for the small business. In the following analysis of an episode recalled by Miles, the issue of delegation has crucial strategic implications for the company. Contrast this with a large company, where delegation is a management skill promulgated by an HR department. In the larger context, delegation at various levels of management could hardly be considered to be strategic.

There has never been a consensus in the academic community concerning theory of stages of growth in a small business (Leitch *et al.*, 2010; Davidsson *et al.*, 2009; McMahon, 1998; Gibb &

Davies, 1992; Scott & Bruce, 1987; Churchill & Lewis, 1983). However, purely for ease of classification in this thesis, it could be said that the management style that was apparent in OBW could be regarded as “*Supervised Supervision*” (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). Under such circumstances the SBO finds that his/her company has outgrown his, or her, span of control. Immediately prior to this stage, the need for professional managers becomes urgent, and this is often a crisis point where external consultancy is accessed by the SBO. In the OBW case, the crisis point had passed because the functional managers (Marcus and Patrick) were already in place, and under the supervision of the majority SBO (Miles).

The psychology of the typical SBO often provides resistance to the transition to professional management. Many SBOs are desperate to maintain total personal control of all business matters. This motivation can sometimes be caused by adverse experience in a former executive role, or might be a determination to keep control restricted to family members. For whatever reason, the period of realisation that the need for professional managers is inevitable can be highly traumatic for a small business owner and existing staff. It can also be a very difficult situation for anyone who is recruited to be that professional manager. The next phase usually brings its own set of problems. The SBO is reluctant to ‘let go of the reins’. The recently recruited professional manager becomes frustrated with what is perceived as meddling by the owner. Existing staff are perplexed, not knowing who to obey. The analysis which follows is in this further phase.

It should also be noted that this issue also appeared (to a lesser degree) in two of the other participating companies - Chargepacks (see Section 5.5 on page 173) and Travel Bravura (see Section 5.4 on page 159). In Chargepacks, Chester was acknowledging this problem, but didn’t feel that his company had yet reached the situation where operations were beyond his control. In Travel Bravura, Joanne represented the change to professional management, and she was already disseminating the necessary skills throughout the organisation. Travel Bravura was already exhibiting some of the necessary foundations for sustained growth. From the companies studied, it was not unexpected (by the author) to find several of the small businesses on the verge, or having just transitioned through, this common small business dilemma.

Although categorising OBW as being in the midst of a professional management crisis, the author was interested to note that there was an unusual characteristic about this dilemma (compared to the author’s normal experience in small business consulting). Miles appeared to have no problem with the principle of the introduction of professional management. So the first phase was curtailed to the early days of start-up in this business. Miles recognised immediately that he wanted professional management in his business. He could not understand why having set it up that way, it was not happening to his satisfaction. He appears to never have wanted ‘hands-on’ control of the operations side of the business. He felt that he was being thwarted in his aspiration to delegate all operational management decisions to Patrick. The typical growth problem in an SME usually occurs where the founder has a specific skill, or knowledge, that is not shared with any other member of staff. This

was not the case in OBW. The primary 'defining' skill of OBW had always been possessed by Marcus (the skill of creating, and rejuvenating, brands). This side of the business had an obvious allure for Miles. In conversation, his enthusiasm became apparent whenever he was talking about the various aspects of brand consultancy. The author soon became aware that, the day-to-day management of the company (that was ostensibly created around Marcus) had never been the focus of interest for Miles.

"I don't give a toss whether it's got all the 'bits', or 'bobs', to be honest. I've got neither the time, nor the inclination." (Miles Osborne, response #56)

Miles wanted to be a branding consultant that happened to own the majority shareholding in a well-known brand consultancy. His frustration, expressed throughout the interview, was caused by an inability to delegate everything on the operational (and apparently boring) side to Patrick. Despite Miles' predilection towards the technical side of the business, he was also well aware of the consequences of underperformance in the operational area. As he put it,

"If he [Marcus] messes up at a fundamental level, we lose a client. If he [Patrick] messes up at a fundamental level, we lose the business." (Miles Osborne, response #106, references to the map in square brackets)

This perceived dependence upon Patrick for cash flow maintenance increased Miles' vexation. What he was really looking for was a totally dependable 'stalwart' figure who could marshal employees and cajole customers into the successful resolution of profitable business.

In a consultancy intervention, the difficult question inevitably arises, "When does too much delegation become abdication?" Miles could transfer the necessary authority; but in so doing, he must still retain his responsibility. This essential part of management was freely acknowledged by Miles during the interview:

"It may be for 10 years I've neither listened, nor helped, and I would put my hands up, I bet that's part of it actually, then it's all my fault ... just as much as his; but incidentally, anything that goes wrong, or right, in this whole organisation is my fault, because I'm the Managing Director." (Miles Osborne, response #92).

When delegation is an intrinsic part of a mentoring process, this problem tends to be addressed. However, in OBW, Miles did not see any need to be mentoring Patrick. They had apparently been working together, as friends, for many years. Miles had elevated Patrick to the role of Operations Director when this business was established, and he had installed Patrick and Marcus as minority shareholders (5% each) from the outset. His current infuriation, with operational matters not being carried out to his satisfaction, was causing him to question the initial start-up ownership arrangement.

Delegation is a commonplace management activity that is interesting to scrutinise using the Structuration lens. 'Communication agency' has to impart the message that 'authority has been transferred' from Miles to Patrick. The 'interpretive schemes' within OBW ought to be capable of imparting this message to all employees. The resulting 'signification' in the social structure would be

that Patrick now had the necessary authority to carry out the delegated tasks. The retention of responsibility by Miles also needs to be *signified* rather than just being implicit. Miles stated in the interview that all of this had actually happened, as he puts it,

*"The permission to do such a thing is there in 24 foot high letters!"
(Miles Osborne, response # 169)*

The author's interpretation of that statement was that Miles might consider that Patrick understood that he had the authority to act, but in reality, Patrick was receiving mixed messages. This was pursued with Patrick during his interview (see page 145).

At a key point in the interview, Miles was asked whether he was providing Patrick with sufficient guidance concerning the running of operations in OBW. Miles responded by describing a recent intervention that he had made.

"Two weeks ago, I suggested that our Creative Director's job title should change to "Creative Director, Scheduler and Studio Manager"; and the reason was that Patrick wasn't doing this [the role of Studio Scheduler and Manager] as well as I would like. So I scared our Creative Director [not interviewed in this study – unavailable] to death. It was my idea to say, "Let's do this!" Ben [the Creative Director] went to a 'dark place'. I didn't know it was a know whether he could do it; but, he's doing it now. Patrick has arguably lost two of his responsibilities in the last two weeks. Studio Manager is gone! Scheduler is gone! Now that's an act which I'm saying, 'Why didn't you think of that?'. Yes, I want him to think of radical, fundamental changes to people's job titles, job roles, to enable him to have better focus on this [Operations]." (Miles Osborne, response #177, [explanations added by author in parantheses]).

The author will now analyse this response using hierarchical coding derived from Structuration theory. Examining this vignette from the Structuration perspective, we first need to look at the 'agency' of Miles. There is evidence of 'communication', 'power' and 'sanction' in Miles's behaviour. In terms of 'communication agency', Miles is making it plain that he is dissatisfied with the current performance of Patrick. His mode of doing this is through 'interpretive schemes' that are understood throughout the organisation. The two roles that form part of the job description of Patrick (Scheduler and Studio Manager) are being transferred to another member of staff - the Creative Director. Everyone in OBW can utilise the prevailing 'interpretive schemes' to recognise what has happened. Rather than offloading some of the tasks performed by Patrick, Miles has chosen to alter some of the 'signification' in OBW. Role-ownership tends to be a potent element of 'signification' in an organisation's structure.

Structuration theory suggests other forms of 'agency'. In this case, both 'power' and 'sanction' are evident. Miles obviously has the power in this organisation (90% shareholding), to effect such a change, even at the level of fellow directors. His ownership power is exemplified through the mode of facility. In terms of the structure at OBW, the dimension of 'domination' is one that Structuration theory implies control over authoritative and 'allocative resources'; the former being his authority over the other directors.

We will now examine the 'agency' of 'sanctioning' in this case. In this one move, Miles has

sanctioned a structural change. Change has occurred. The job descriptions of both Patrick and the creative director have changed and this has been *legitimated* within the new structure. So it can be seen, from the structural perspective, as all three dimensions of '*signification*', '*domination*' and *Legitimation* have been altered. As time moves on, actors within OBW will, to a certain extent, draw upon this new *structure* in their day-to-day strategic thinking. Although Structuration can be used to describe what has occurred, and the recursive nature of social structural change has been captured by this method, it does not of itself provide answers for a consultancy dilemma. Miles has felt the need to intervene. It could be argued that this intervention is late, and potentially fatally undermines Patrick's '*agency*' in OBW.

In another part of the workshop, Miles was asked to describe any situation that he could recall where Patrick had initiated '*agency*', with regard to the operational side of OBW. He recounted an episode where Patrick had created a software interface (nicknamed the "dashboard") that showed all of the crucial financial indicators for OBW in a single display.

"Patrick did this thing where he showed me a dashboard of the business, and he was very proud of it, and I was very proud of him, he does some great work, and it showed me the whole business on one page." Miles Osborne, response #149

Patrick, obviously, thought it was important that Miles was made aware of the key indicators. However, Miles seemed to be very dismissive of this because he wanted Patrick at the controls, not himself. The author has to conclude that this was a wasted opportunity on Miles' part. The dashboard could have become part of the OBW structural '*signification*'. Miles could then use his '*agency*' of '*power*' and '*sanction*' to require Patrick to ensure that company performance indicated on the dashboard fell within defined acceptable parameters. This operational transparency could have given Miles exactly what he wanted, because performance would have been self-evident on a day-to-day basis. Patrick's apparent power within the organisation would also have been enhanced because the dashboard, as an element of '*signification*', had been his creation.

Miles would also be using his '*agency*' of '*sanction*' by allowing the company to be a sensibly steered by the data that was portrayed as information in the dashboard. (Regrettably, the dashboard, as an artefact, was not available for scrutiny by the author at the time of the interview.)

The analysis in this section is summarised in Table 5.3 on page 156 which categorises according to Structuration Theory.

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Miles Osborne	MD	Could apply slogan "Say it, Mean it, Do it!" to his own <i>agency</i> of delegation. Communicates a lack of trust in Patrick by not doing so. Uses a series of anecdotal vignettes as evidence of need to change, but reflexive monitoring tells him that 'it isn't working'.	Has all the power, despite notional shareholding by Marcus and Patrick. Refuses to take control of operations to demonstrate how it should be done.	Could use his <i>agency</i> to sanction formal delegation to Patrick. This would be difficult for Miles because the existing the social structure militates against such action.
Marcus Turncastle	Brand Director	Is neutral. Only likely to react to communication that presages infringement upon his 'core' time or technical branding issues.	Does not possess, nor desires, power to influence delegation issues at OBW. The exception being anything involving the practice of Branding.	Marcus only seeks to use sanction agency occasionally when his branding philosophy changes. Would oppose any changes in operations that he thought would adversely affect branding practices at OBW.
Patrick Newton	Ops. Director	Only capable of 'replaying' Miles' anecdotes and slogans at a superficial level (e.g. smarter office = more efficient office). The author could not ascertain whether he really believed the mantras.	Could act decisively and present Miles with a <i>fait accompli</i> . There might just be enough latent power available in <i>social structure</i> (as legacy pronouncements by Miles) for Patrick to take the chance. . .	Could take Miles 'at his own word', and act unilaterally. The author assumes that Miles has also told Patrick that he has permission to change things (as long as operational performance improves).
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Miles Osborne	MD	Miles' overriding concern about the urgent need to improve operational effectiveness is creating an unintended consequence. Patrick thinks he has no latitude to experiment.	Undermines any authority he says he has delegated to Patrick, by taking pre-emptive action that changes role distribution in operational side of the company.	Has to establish the <i>norm</i> of delegation. To date this has meant a relatively free hand for Marcus, that is not extended to Patrick. Miles admits his own culpability in this. He also admits that he cannot do Patrick's job.
Marcus Turncastle	Brand Director	Does not add (or alter) the <i>interpretive scheme</i> that exists between Miles and Patrick in regard of delegation.	Tends not to delegate anything within his expertise. Might decide that certain resources were needed for the completion of his work, which in turn might impact upon matters delegated (or not) to Patrick.	Marcus receives much more delegation from Miles than Patrick. Will be an indirect beneficiary of a functioning delegation <i>norm</i> for Patrick.
Patrick Newton	Ops. Director	Cannot draw any delegated authority from the prevailing <i>interpretive scheme</i> . Reports that 'reading between the lines' is difficult with Miles (<i>interpretative scheme</i> not working).	The <i>facility</i> to apply <i>power</i> over <i>resources</i> must be created for Patrick to be effective (i.e. instigation of formal delegation process).	Until the <i>norm</i> is "Patrick makes the decisions on Operational matters"; this strategic issue is unlikely to be resolved. Patrick does not perceive enablement that he can draw upon in his day-to-day practice.
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Miles Osborne	MD	Says permission is there, " <i>in 24 foot high letters</i> "; however, this signification is not apparent to Patrick. Patrick seems habitualised to always disappointing Miles.	Miles has a dominion that is centred around Marcus (his key <i>authoritative resource</i>). Operations is just an unavoidable 'nuisance' to Miles that is needed to perpetuate his 'Marcus centric' business.	Believes that he has already <i>legitimated</i> delegation to Patrick, and can't understand why he isn't just getting on with it. Miles has effectively legitimated the status quo through his friendship for Patrick.
Marcus Turncastle	Brand Director	Can only see Branding as worthy of Signification. Everything else is mundane (and probably boring).	Would like more resources available (particularly his own consultancy time). Is prepared to overview the <i>resources</i> that are at his disposal.	Legitimation of the techniques of branding within OBW emanates from Marcus.
Patrick Newton	Ops. Director	The whole office probably aware that Patrick is under constant criticism from Miles. Needs to show his staff that he can overrule Miles in the best interests of the company, and that Miles will accept it.	Has responsibility for 'back office', but insufficient authority to make necessary fundamental changes to <i>authoritative resources</i> .	Has not been responsible for any legitimation in the social structure. Tried to apply 'intolerance of sloppiness' as a reflection of Miles' frustration but without apparent success.

Table 5.3 Interpretation of "Delegation of Operations" issue at OBW

Strategising at OBW

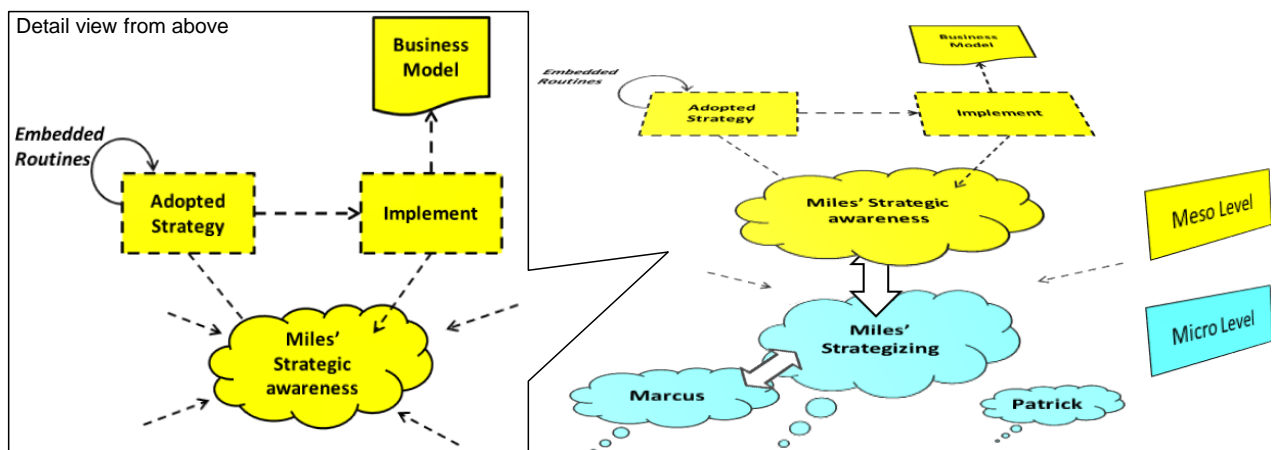


Figure 5.7 Strategising during static strategy formulation / implementation at OBW

In OBW, the author's impression of the strategising of all three participants during the workshops is captured by Figure 5.7. Each is strategising in support of a steady state condition, despite the urgency related by Miles and the recognition of his alarm by the other two directors. It appears that this situation has existed for some time. It appears that Miles' *'power agency'* will eventually change the situation at OBW from state 'A' to state 'B' (as Miles believes that the current set of strategies are unsustainable in the medium term). The situation encountered at the time of the workshops resembles Figure 5.7 even though there has been a recent pre-emptive strategic change by Miles (he reduced Patrick's responsibilities). Rather than portray the strategising at OBW with three models (one per participant); it is a better representation as a single model. The workshops established that Miles is the dominant strategist. He welcomes, and prizes, the strategising of Marcus on behalf of clients (shown as a communication arrow between Miles and Marcus on the strategising *micro-level*). There appeared to be little or no joint strategising between Miles and Patrick (hence the absence of a communication arrow in the model).

The workshops demonstrated that Miles perceives the resolution of problems in the operational 'back office' of OBW as being crucial to future business growth. He craves an efficient and smooth running 'back office' that leaves him free to indulge his interest in the 'front office'. His default strategy of deliberate non-intervention is failing (in his own terms); and routine lambasting of Patrick Newton is not helping. It is almost as though Miles is locked in. He can explain the deficiencies in the business model. The mismatch with his vision of becoming the most audacious branding company in the UK is apparent to him. This case is more about the deficiencies of the business model than the active strategy. Some of the embedded routines are also proving counterproductive. Miles has the problem that the business model (in its current configuration); it is not scalable for any appreciable revenue growth in the business. The inefficient 'back office' operations are identified by Miles as a crucial constraint to his strategic objectives. He justifies his

strategy of fixating on Patrick by pointing out that deficiencies in Patrick's side of the business could damage the entire firm; whereas Marcus is only likely to jeopardise a single client account (if he makes a mistake). This view underestimates the reputational damage that Marcus could wreak if a client publicly blamed Marcus' advice for poor resulting performance in the market.

Marcus has considerable branding skills and these encompass a deep strategic awareness of the client's business. However, when it comes to OBW he admits that is very difficult to apply those skills internally. Unlike any client account he handles (where state 'B' would apply) OBW appears to be in a default condition of state 'A'. Marcus just wants to ply his trade, and is grateful for any organisational facility that removes a bureaucratic or administrative burden from him. Devoting any of his talent towards fixing OBW is restricted to how the OBW brand appears in the market. The author concludes that Figure 5.7 is more representative of that level of strategic intervention, i.e. a steady state approach seen in the evolution of the OBW website containing client case studies and endorsements.

There is another underlying restriction imposed on OBW by the consultancy of Marcus. Any person is a finite resource, and Miles has not yet formulated a strategy to bring more individuals with brand development skills into the business. The reaction of Marcus to such a move is crucial. Miles is aware that Marcus might suddenly decide to leave, and therefore he deliberately tries to create a working environment that is conducive for a talented brand expert. However, he seems less aware that fixing the operational side of the business, will not necessarily lead to revenue growth. The ability to create a core competence in brand management (which implies having more than one brand consultant) is not being considered by Miles. His strategy is based upon risk immediacy, and therefore places much more emphasis on the 'back office' operations. However, in RBV terms, the jeopardy of losing his one branding expert represents the exact opposite - a core rigidity (Leonard-Barton, 1992). Should the worst happen, 'OBW without Marcus' would be very difficult to sell as a going concern. Patrick has also become somewhat institutionalised to Miles' routine expressions of frustration. He is drawing from the social structure created by Miles, a superficial '*signification*' of 'intolerance of sloppiness' without addressing the underlying cause. Rather than being enabled by the *social structure*, he feels constrained in his *agency*. So in a limited way, Patrick is resigned to a state 'A' approach to his own strategising.

5.4. Travel Bravura (Case B)

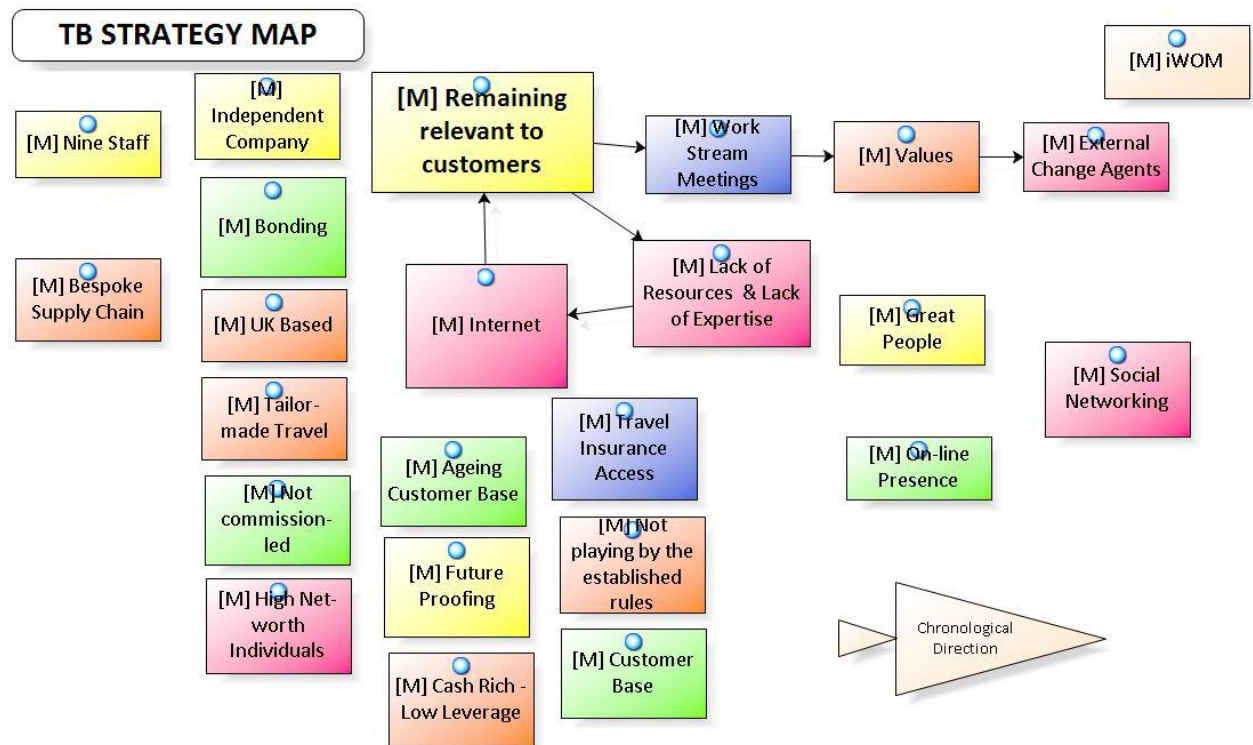


Figure 5.8. Joanne's strategy map (final) at Travel Bravura

Travel Bravura (TB) is an independent travel agency based in the North-east of England. It has a single high street premises in a prosperous part of Newcastle. The business has three target markets; 'specialist activity holidays', 'business travel accounts', and 'bespoke holidays for "high net worth" individuals and famous professionals (this study is based upon the last category). The company has a high street location in the North East, but is very different to the 'holiday shop' type of retail outlet owned by the large holiday companies such as Thomson or Thomas Cook.

Joanne Leyland has had a successful career at senior executive level with a well-known brand name high street holiday retailers. She has become a joint SBO of TB and is responsible for the operation of the portion of the business that is focused upon wealthy clientele. A common problem facing small businesses like TB is demography. The increasing average age of clients means that business will decline. Unlike generations to come, a large proportion are enjoying the fruits of generous final salary pensions. As these customers grow older their ability to travel on exotic holidays diminishes due to health reasons, and holiday travel insurance becomes more difficult to source.

Joanne has already made her presence felt in the business by instituting a Change Management programme in her part of the business. She is experienced in such matters, having delivered

similar schemes in large corporate businesses. As with all of the other participating SBOs in this study, the choice of strategic issue for discussion was given to the interviewee. Joanne is responsible for the 'high net worth individuals and professionals' side of the business, and the interview was focused upon this portion. She decided that the discussion would be centred upon business growth and specifically Joanne's Change Management (CM) process at Travel Bravura (TB). This has been the big issue for Joanne, who has brought thirty years of experience from the travel trade and was a senior level executive with one of the large well-known names in the holiday business.

The participation of TB was secured through a recommendation from a fellow director that had previously attended a set of 'Business Aware' Seminars at Newcastle Business School, which were organised by the author. Joanne is unusual in this case because she is implementing a formal change management programme in a small business based upon her experience at senior level in one of the large holiday companies. This application of large firm techniques in a small business made this an interesting case for this study into strategising. Of all of the owner-managers interviewed, Joanne was the one that had the greatest knowledge of strategic management techniques.

The session was carried out at the TB high street premises, in a room that is used for staff training purposes. The same interview methodology was maintained despite Joanne's familiarity with Strategic Management. It was explained in the methodology chapter that the study was designed to appeal to owner-managers of small businesses that had not experienced strategy workshops. Joanne was the exception in that she was very familiar with such events, and this was revealed in the preliminary meeting at TB. She was not put off by the relatively simplistic approach of using *Post-it*TM notes to aid her explanation.

Despite having strategic management technique experience, Joanne confirmed that the strategy workshop process had been very beneficial, and that it was still intrinsically useful to her. She particularly liked the opportunity to describe, reflect and graphically synthesise her thoughts on this strategic issue for her company. The author was encouraged by this response because it demonstrated that the research methodology would not deter strategically experienced participants.

Social structure (rules and resources)

As discussed in the Methodology Chapter, the author is using Giddens' Structuration Theory to analyse and interpret the findings from the interview with Joanne. There is a symbiotic and mutual dependency relationship between '*structure*' and '*agency*' in this theory. To describe a situation in these terms requires that the analyst starts with one, or the other, concept. The author elected to mention structure first in this analysis because it is where the interviewing process naturally starts. "*Please tell me about the resources in your company*", is a typical early inquiry;

and one that is usually straightforward to answer as far as ‘tangible’ resources are concerned (e.g. staff, equipment, or premises).

Giddens interprets ‘*structure*’ as ‘*structuring properties*’ and these can be resolved into two types – ‘*resources*’ and ‘*rules*’. So in interpreting from this standpoint the author is seeking examples of where this company has ‘properties’ that influence the production and reproduction of *structure*. Taking Giddens category of ‘*resources*’ first is a natural development from the interview process as these questions are easier to pose in the first instance, and act as a useful way of developing the conversation.

‘*Authoritative Resources*’ are people who can be directed to act on behalf of the enterprise (whether employees or those external to the firm that will also act in that manner, e.g. under a contractual obligation). This broader definition means that the ‘*authoritative resources*’ can be more variable, over time, than staff numbers alone would imply. TB had nine staff devoted to Joanne’s side of the business at the time of the interview. However, this does not take into account a large supply-chain of specialist holiday ‘component’ suppliers. Joanne estimates this at approximately 500 to 600 external suppliers that are trusted partners to provide a bespoke product for her ‘high net worth’ and celebrity clients.

The TB ‘Themed Evenings’, are an example of where Joanne, and her staff, can get external agents to act on behalf of the company. TB offers its exclusive clientele regular evening sessions at the premises where some of the key component suppliers are also present. The themes are offered to those ‘high net worth’ individuals who are seeking something special that cannot necessarily be found in a holiday brochure. The idea is that these clients are introduced to new ideas in holiday industry that can be incorporated into bespoke products.

Another instance of the wider community of ‘*authoritative resources*’ appeared in the interview when Joanne revealed that one of the high net worth clients had been brought into the business to act as an external ‘agent of change’ in her change management programme. He had the direct experience of being a customer, and was also skilled in the techniques of change management in SMEs.

The ‘*allocative resources*’ are effectively all things non-sentient that can be deployed within the business. TB has just the one high street premises, and this is not in a ‘prime’ city centre location. Joanne is adamant that her business does not require a prestige location. She sees it as unnecessary and the exorbitant rents could not be justified. Many years of reputation with a circle of prestigious customers offsets any need to have a status symbol presence in a city centre. The TB location is in one of the very prosperous suburbs of Newcastle that has its own high street. The author gained the impression that someone famous would probably welcome the chance to discretely visit these premises, as opposed to, being recognised going into an ostentatious shop front in a prestigious part of the city. Another allocative resource possessed by TB is its website.

The company actively maintains an effective on-line presence that is underpinned by investment in the latest IT technology, high calibre web design, and by means of thorough and persistent search engine optimisation (SEO). This later effort is designed to bring TB to the top of internet searches when the appropriate search words are used. The SEO is configured to promote TB in the search engine rankings when users link the word 'holiday' to words like 'exclusive' or 'unique' rather than 'cheap' or 'bargain'. Joanne looks upon maintaining such a web-presence of TB as a permanent operational cost rather than a series of spasmodic discrete projects.

Another type of *allocative resource* arises because the TB business model requires substantial financial investment in Travel Bonds. These are issued by organisations such as Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), Air Travel Organisers' Licensing (ATOL), International Air Transport Association (IATA), etc. The type of clients that TB attract would probably never contemplate travelling without adequate safeguards, even if they could afford the consequences of having no cover. Customers go to TB for a bespoke holiday that guarantees exemplary protection against travel disruption. Joanne understands that most of these customers are buying peace of mind for the major break in their busy business lifestyles. All of the sales staff at TB draw upon Bonding as a '*signification*' of the superior product that they sell compared to the offerings of cut-price on-line services that cannot provide that level of protection. Joanne emphasises the point thus,

"... we have also built-up a cash reserve, which is very important in our business to obtain bonding ... if your balance sheet is in the least bit suspect they will withdraw your licence ..." (Joanne Leyland, during response #102)

So bonding says more about the business than might appear to the casual observer, and Joanne feels that a spate of holiday disruption incidents (such as the 2010 Icelandic volcanic ash cloud grounding air flights in Europe, or the spate of High Street travel business failures in 2011) can only help to emphasise TB's worth in the eyes of new customers. A similar '*signification*' is sometimes encountered in small businesses where the SBO deliberately registers the firm for VAT (even if, at the outset, the business is trading beneath the VAT threshold). From a '*strategising*' point of view, these '*allocative resources*' are seen as a vital "badge of office" that that represents a competitive prerequisite.

Joanne's interview concerned a change management process that had been implemented at TB over the previous 18 months. Although an on-going process, this presented an opportunity to contrast the '*before*' and '*after*' situations as perceived by Joanne.

The existing literature contains assertions that ST is an appropriate lens for the study of CM (Cao & McHugh, 2005, p. 478). A CM programme probably contains all three of the Giddens modalities ('*interpretive schemes*', '*facility*' and '*norms*') and the entire process is also likely to be a multiplex of the interactions between '*agency*' and structure. In terms of small business, the likelihood of a researcher encountering a formal change management programme is likely to be very low. This serves to demonstrate that although small business can be characteristically different to large

business in more ways than just scale, there is always the possibility of something ostensibly from large enterprise occurring in the smaller context. Joanne, as the promulgator in this instance, was very experienced in the delivery of such programmes in a corporate environment. Interestingly, she admitted that despite her experience she was in trepidation concerning this particular application. This was because she had never seen it tried in such a small business. She saw it as an experiment with potentially fatal consequences for the business. Her principle fear was the loss of key individual sales people who could have taken most of their long-term clients with them. It was her view that the top echelon of holiday provision is founded upon long-term relationship selling techniques. The typical high net worth client wants to be treated as special and fundamental to this relationship is dealing with one holiday professional. That individual is expected by TB to be the single point of contact throughout the engagement process (from initial contact concerning the future holiday, during the period away, and securing post-purchase satisfaction when the client has returned to the UK).

A cursory financial analysis of the business would indicate that it was in an inevitable gradual decline. This sentiment would be prompted by the demographic of an ageing community of long-term customers. Apart from mortality, the significant constraint to the business was the increasing difficulty in getting travel insurance for people with complicated health issues. Joanne realised from the start that action was necessary to achieve a turnaround in that this sales trend, and in her words "Future Proof" the business.

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

According to Giddens' theory, '*agency*' is expected to have a symbiotic and mutualistic relationship with structure. Patterns of action can reinforce structure and routinise the extraordinary through repetition. The agent can draw upon elements of the structure to enable or support social action, that in turn produces, or reproduces, elements of social structure. The types of '*agency*' envisaged by Giddens are categorised as '*communication*', '*power*', and '*sanction*'. The author will elaborate on '*agency*' in TB in that order.

'*Communication*' can be considered formal or informal. The change programme that has been initiated by Joanne on her arrival in business and the subsequent 'work stream' meetings typify formal communication. During the preliminary meeting with Joanne (a week before the actual interview) it became clear to the author that this was a new phenomenon in the history of TB. From a structuration viewpoint the analysis has a ready starting point because of visual '*signification*' clues. The most obvious was the wall plaque in the interview room that extolled the new values of the business much in the same way as a corporate mission statement (this is commented upon in more detail under '*signification*' below).

As Giddens states, "An agent ceases to be such if he, or she, loses the capability to '*make a difference*', that is, to exercise some sort of power." (Giddens, 1984: p.14). In Joanne's case, she

obviously has the power to '*make a difference*'. This is exemplified by the change management process that she introduced to TB when she took joint ownership of the business. She termed this initiative as 'future proofing' the business. Her actions since joining TB are somewhat reminiscent (to the author) of a 'business angel'. This is indicated by her motivation to bring an absent skill into the business (future proofing) whilst taking an equity share in the business. The author did not directly inquire whether she was, or had ever been, a 'business angel' because the term can carry a pejorative sense for some people. Many would prefer the term "high net worth individual" instead of 'businesses angel'. The author noted the introduction of that specific term for describing clientele by Joanne. To use it at that stage would have been confusing, so the author declined to ask directly about 'business angels' in this case. The author does not consider this to be a crucial omission, because the study concerns '*agency*' and structure in a strategic episode and whether someone wants to carry that label is immaterial to the data being collected.

In terms of sanctioning '*agency*' at TB, Joanne has driven the organisational change through a formal CM process. The strategic change project is one of the three widely used practices in strategic reorganisation identified by Whittington, *et al* (2006). The other two suggested by Whittington are 'Crafting Artefacts' and 'Strategy Workshops'. This latter point could explain Joanne's interest in this research study, because of its apparent similarity to a strategy workshop.

The use of an external change agent to initiate the change process is well documented elsewhere (Jones, 2006; Ottaway, 1983; Lippitt *et al.*, 1958); however in Giddesnian terms, the author can identify this as an *authoritative resource*, despite being external to the firm. Joanne has the capacity to '*sanction*' the entry of an outsider into a very private group discussion within the firm.

The CM process was not achieved without some staff leaving. Joanne saw this as an inevitable consequence of her sanctioning the change programme, but she was anxious to manage and mitigate the effects on the business. She managed the process through the medium of 'Workstream' meetings. These constituted the formal '*communication*' between the management and staff concerning changes to the praxis of staff involved in particular types of holiday management (e.g. Professional or High Net Worth Individuals).

A key stage in CM is the realisation by affected staff that there is 'no turning back'. Elements of the old praxis are no longer acceptable. Although some staff were initially dismayed at what appeared to be an attack on their professionalism, most of them were won round by Joanne's methods.

Joanne now finds that she is being challenged by some staff that have been empowered by the CM process. Just as Giddens alerts us to the unintended consequences of '*agency*'; Joanne states that she has been surprised at this development. This, in turn, is surprising to the author as Joanne had reported that she had been involved in CM programs in the past, and this type of reaction from some staff is usually anticipated. As Giddens' theory suggests '*agency*' can be

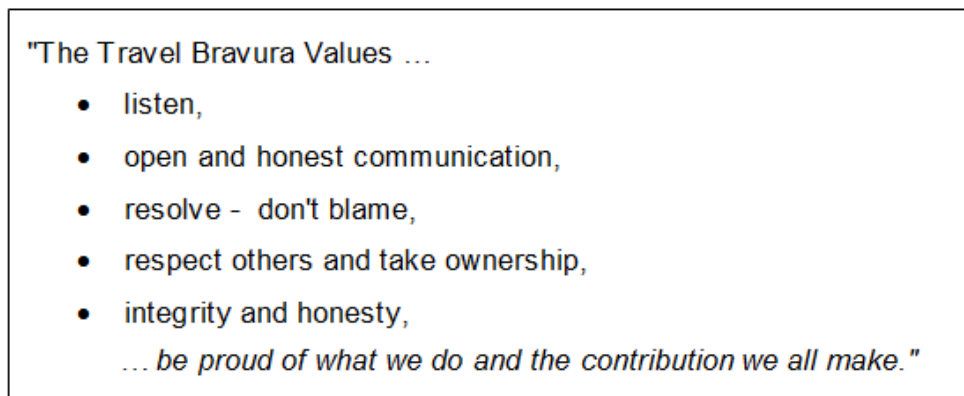


Figure 5.9. Plaque on wall of the Travel Bravura office

enhanced by structural change.

Joanne recalled one particular incident regarding a member of staff who was in a support role, rather than customer facing. This individual decided that after years of having to do printing for other members of staff in a particular way; that she was now going to do it more efficiently and effectively than before. She told Joanne that she had been aware that the operation could have been performed better from long time, but no one listened to her. The CM program had been delivered to all members of staff, and this reaction had not been anticipated. This is a good example of the unintended consequences that Giddens refers to when talking about the reflexive monitoring of knowledgeable agents.

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

Giddens refers to three *modalities* in ST, or as Whittington explains,

"the means by which structural dimensions are expressed in action."
 Whittington (2010, p.111).

These are '*interpretive schemes*', '*facility*' and '*norms*' respectively. The structuration pro-forma chart (used by the author during interviews) embodies the recursive relationship links that these modalities create between types of '*agency*' and dimensions of structure (see figure 2). The two dimensional arrows in the diagram represent, as Giddens puts it:

"relating the knowledgeable capacities of agents to structural features"
 (Giddens, 1984, p.24).

The most striking evidence of an interpretive scheme at Travel Bravura is embodied in a structural '*signification*' artefact of the CM process. This was a wall plaque that was located in the interview room, it read as follows:

It is evident from this artefact that the CM process was designed to instil new values in the staff working at TB. Joanne was clearly confident that this transition had occurred, according to plan. The author did not have the opportunity to check this with her staff.

'Facility' is used by agents with the 'power' to deploy structural 'resources' (both 'authoritative' and 'allocative'). This was obviously the case with Joanne having the 'power' to deploy 'resources' into a CM programme; both in running the workstream meetings and being able to stop the staff from doing other work while they were undertaken. In Giddens' theory 'facility' links agency 'power' to structural 'domination'. Where 'domination' is the effective deployment of structural 'resources' within the dominion of TB.

Giddens refers to 'norms' as a modality of changing the boundaries of social structure.

"Norms figure as 'factual' boundaries of social life, to which a variety of manipulative attitudes are possible", Giddens (1984, p.4).

According Joanne's description of the change process in TB the boundaries of the structure have been expanded by the CM process. 'Norms' have been set that now permit the staff to take the business forward. The workstream meetings at TB were designed to do this by questioning the praxis that had developed over decades in the business. The author inquired whether any of the staff were now sufficiently confident to challenge elements of the structure through their newly acquired 'agency'. Joanne intimated that this was just starting to emerge. Despite her experience in conducting this process (gathered from years in a large organisation) she was still surprised at the veracity of the individual she identified in this regard. At first sight, the interpretation might be an unintended consequence (which is in keeping with the potential feedback mechanism envisaged in structuration theory). However, Joanne's surprise was more about how rapidly one of her quieter staff had been transformed. The fact that she was now being challenged about better ways of performing work was a welcome outcome. To Joanne this demonstrated that the business was moving in her desired direction. She explained the transformation in this way:

"I can see the new customers coming in now, and you can see it in the figures. The person who was the worst seller (because no new customers were coming in through the door) is now the second top seller." (Joanne Leyland, response #233)

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

Giddens links 'agency' to structure through the three modalities (and combinations thereof) already discussed. The effects on structure can be seen in the three dimensions outlined below for this case. In terms of 'signification', the website exemplifies much of the ethos at TB. It has been specifically designed to bring the more discerning customer to the business. It also links with the executive travel side of the business to show the breadth of capability.

Whittington *et al.* (2006, p.622) describes the crafting of symbolic artefacts as a strategising process. As previously mentioned, there was a wall plaque that exemplified 'signification'.

Another example was introduced by Joanne during the CM process. This was a book by Spencer and Blanchard entitled “Who moved my Cheese?” (Johnson & Blanchard, 1998)¹⁷ This device was used by the change agent (already mentioned) to reinforce a perception that change was required and inevitable.

‘*Domination*’ is the result of the strategic deployment of ‘*resources*’ to achieve competitive advantage through ‘*agency*’, it is also the dominion over which the ‘*power*’ can be brought to bear. ‘*Power*’ is the ‘*agency*’ factor at work and presupposes that the possessor can influence events beyond his, or her, personal ‘*agency*’. Joanne expresses this in a football metaphor,

“I describe it to them as ... I pick up the ball ... and throw it to you ... you catch it ... and put it in the back of the net!” (Joanne Leyland, response #170)

Joanne is making the point that all of her customer facing staff should be capable of scoring metaphorical *goals*. She was also emphasising the need for business at TB to be a team game, not a performance by idiosyncratic individuals.

The third structural dimension that is mentioned by Giddens’ in his theory is ‘*legitimation*’. He sees this as the prevailing rules relating to how knowledgeable agents might behave. Repeated actions can strengthen ‘*legitimation*’ until contrary actions set another evolutionary path in the structure. The link with the ‘*agency*’ of ‘*sanction*’ is made by social ‘*norms*’ of behaviour. These are not necessarily conscious. For instance, the social norm of ‘personal space’. If someone is talking to you, and gradually moves closer, you are suddenly aware of a social norm being infringed when the person gets too close.

As with all the Giddensian modalities, we can see several elements at once in many social situations. At TB, Joanne’s desire to see winning behaviour on the part of customer facing staff is legitimated in the new structure. A new social ‘*norm*’ indicates that members of staff have intrinsic permission to take ownership of a sales situation to create customer satisfaction.

The analysis culminates in a determination whether *structuration* is occurring. The author can point towards two structuration cycles that were evident in Joanne’s testimony. The first was not wholly within the confines of the company, because it included engaged customers. The ‘*agency*’ was the acquisition of travel bonding which communicated via an interpretive scheme of advertising to clients the ‘*signification*’ of TB’s commitment to travel protection. ‘*Agency*’ also manifested itself as agency ‘*power*’ in the form of a cash reserve in the business that that is deployed to obtain bonding. This can be interpreted from a Giddensian viewpoint as ‘*facility*’ that is enabling structural ‘*domination*’. In ST, the term ‘*domination*’ can be read as meaning the most

¹⁷ The story is an allegorical fable about two mice and two little people. The underlying message can be encapsulated in the slogans that appear throughout the story ‘Change Happens’, ‘Anticipate Change’, ‘Monitor Change’, ‘Adapt To Change Quickly’, ‘Enjoy Change!’, ‘Be Ready To Change Quickly’ and ‘Enjoy It Again & Again’.

effective deployment of '*resources*'. The author equates this with similar considerations of 'competitive advantage by the application of resources' within the Resource-based View of strategy. It also represents a significant '*barrier to entry*' for would-be competitors in the exclusive end of this market. It is possible to complete this interpretation with the third leg of modalities, as envisaged by Giddens. Joanne's business sanctions the continuity of bonding *year-on-year* as a norm that confirms '*legitimation*' on the business model.

The second structuration vignette was the CM process. Yet again, it was not confined to the boundaries of the business; in that an external change agent had been employed. It was self-evident that the structure within TB had changed. It also bore the hallmarks of CM in that Joanne portrayed it as a "freeze-thaw-change-freeze" process. However, as the interview progressed, she made it clear that this was not a single cycle. The enduring message of the 'workstream' meetings was to anticipate and expect further change. Joanne had managed to liberate additional '*agency*' that thereby increased the chances of strategic structural change.

Structuration

Two structuration cycles were apparent after analysis of Joanne's workshop transcript – 'Change Management' and 'Travel Agent Bonding' (see chart overleaf). Change management had a profound effect on the business, and Joanne was very clear with her rearrangement of her strategy map that the firm had been on a change trajectory. She gave a monologue narration of the change using the map. To left she indicated where they were, in the middle how they were acting, and finally on the right was where she wanted the firm to arrive.

Travel Agent Bonding is a much longer structuration cycle than Change Management, but it was still evident that the staff were drawing upon this in their dealings with customers. At the time of the workshop, the Industry had suffered the calamity of the Iceland volcanic eruptions that had significantly disrupted air travel. TB employees were intervening ('*agency*') on behalf of clients and thereby adapting the structural dimensions of Travel Bonding to make it more pertinent to those travelling customers that were in difficulty.

Joanne was using a well practised management tool to effect change in her organisation. It is not surprising that this was the most straightforward case to find all the elements of ST. In the next section Joanne's strategising will be analysed using the SBO strategising model.

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Joanne Leyland	SBO	Change Management (CM) message imparted principally during 'workflow' meetings.	Joanne has shareholder <i>power</i> . She is able to introduce a change agent at TB as part of her CM process.	Using <i>sanction</i> agency to encourage new praxes (or 'workflows' in TB jargon), while prohibiting old practices.
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Joanne Leyland	SBO	Workflow meetings. The book, "Who moved my cheese?" Discussions in the workflow meetings radically altered the <i>interpretive schemes</i> in use.	Applied through workflow meetings. Was able to bring in an external change agent as a temporary <i>authoritative resource</i> . Accepted that some would leave company as part of CM. Joanne had the <i>power</i> to <i>facilitate</i> resignations.	Business is no longer taken for granted. It is agreed that ageing customer base will be no guarantee of future prosperity. New business must be pursued as a practice <i>norm</i> of TB.
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Joanne Leyland	SBO	Plaque on the wall exemplifying the new mission. Continuing Travel Bonds investment strategy is promoted through advertising.	Reconfiguration of <i>allocative resources</i> (some being initiated at a grassroots level – unintended consequence). Continual aggressive SEO for new website rendering a superior allocative resource for all at TB.	Joanne now being challenged by subordinates concerning <i>norms</i> . This has been an unintended consequence, that legitimates the CM programme (in Joanne's opinion).

Table 5.4 Interpretation of structuration cycles at Travel Bravura (Case B)

Strategising at Travel Bravura

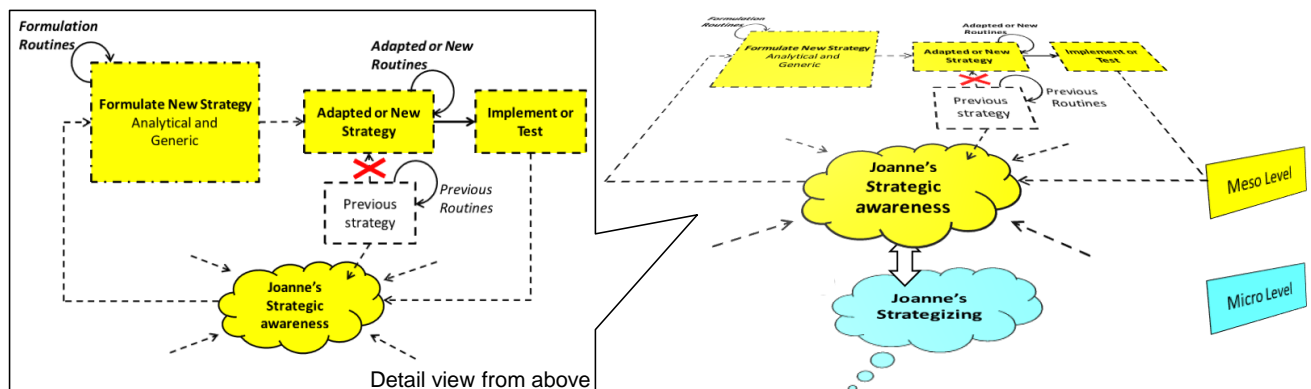


Figure 5.10 Strategising during dynamic strategy formulation / implementation at TB

Joanne is actively strategising in this business. Her point of entry was that the business desperately needed (in her opinion) to be protected against future long-term developments in the industry and a worsening economic climate in the medium term. Although she opted for a radical CM programme which resulted in some staff leaving, the majority of the *'authoritative resources'* remained intact. The structure has changed more in the last few months than it had in the decades before. The business model remains one of providing a bespoke service to those that can afford it, and is probably aspirational for those who are now emerging into that category.

Since the CM programme was invoked, Joanne has concentrated on 'locking-in' the new set of values in the social structure of the business. Her day-to-day strategising activities are designed to achieve this goal and increase the physical and virtual footfall in this business (i.e. an increase in potential local and internet customers). Once these interested parties are engaged, the staff are now expected to sell the products more effectively and not just rely on declining numbers of an established, but ageing, clientele.

The author inquired whether Joanne shared her strategy with other members of the team in her *'strategising'* praxis. The example suggested was *'catching someone doing something right and publicly celebrating the fact'*. She acknowledged that she might do this, but wanted to reserve such a reaction for something exceptional. The author persisted with this line of inquiry, by then asking whether she would overtly link the 'great behaviour' to her strategy so that others could appreciate its strategic relevance. Joanne did not think this was going to happen, and her reasoning appeared to be that, as yet, strategy was still the province of the director. However, her transcript reveals instances where *'strategising'* responses to her change management programme have already occurred. The author interprets this apparent contradiction as Joanne's impression of what actually constitutes strategy. Thirty years in a large corporation could significantly reinforce the impression that strategy is a senior executive task. The author's structurationist ontology was not necessarily shared by Joanne and actions that the author could

cite as strategising by the staff may well be seen by Joanne as purely operational.

The author would like to investigate this point further if an opportunity arises to engage with TB in a longitudinal study. The research interest would focus upon whether the staff would now begin to become more proactive in '*strategising*'. As stated at the outset, this research interview was peculiar within this study, because Joanne had in-depth experience of strategic management. An interesting conclusion that can be drawn from this exercise is that the interviewer can use Structuration analysis without having to explain its complexity to the interviewee. There are many instances where Joanne was using the jargon of CM, which had correspondence and significance to the author in terms of ST. For others, interested in using Structuration theory for the examination of small business '*strategising*', the author would suggest that some form of diagrammatic note-taking is essential. He has found that it is quite difficult to maintain the '*patterns*' of Structuration linkage whilst deeply engaged in interviewing. Having a *pro forma* notepad to hand whilst in conversation proved to be invaluable. Structuration theory cannot be encompassed within a single question. It requires a series of questions culminating in an interpretive loop if Structuration is present.

The strategy map of *Post-it*™ notes that was constructed by Joanne during the interview is shown in its entirety and final guise in the figure below. The layout logic of her map is a timebase moving from left to right. Elements on the left represent the situation presented to her when she joined the company; whereas items to the right represent the future direction of TB. At one point during the interview, the author enquired whether Joanne would like to rearrange the map. She welcomed that opportunity, and then proceeded to establish her 'left to right timebase' format (see her final layout in on page 159).

The situation in Travel Bravura (TB) is the antithesis of the OBW case. Joanne is determined to drive through a new strategy under the guise of a Change Management (CM) programme. At the time of the workshop, the major elements and milestones of the CM had already occurred. The author relates Joanne's description of her strategising praxis to 'B' side of the model; although, the expectation is a move to a more stabilised condition in the near future where the 'A' side would more typical.

Joanne had recently come into the company as a major shareholder. She knew that the previous strategy (offering a personalised travel service to an ageing cohort of customers) had to be abandoned if the company was going to have a long-term future. This constituted a slowly increasing long-term market compulsion. For some SBOs this would be insufficient to provoke a strategic response at this stage. However, Joanne could see that the company was probably doomed on its existing trajectory and that change should be accomplished sooner rather than later. In her estimation the company could not grow without attracting a new type of customer.

Joanne was using her analysis (derived from 20 years in the industry) together with generic solutions for a CM programme to implant a brand-new strategy. The state 'B' of the proposed

strategising model is preferable to illustrate this situation. The model is adapted to show that the previous strategy is totally rejected (indicated by a blocking cross). Joanne's '*communication agency*' uses the change management programme protocols as the *interpretive scheme* to provide the '*signification*' to all working at Travel Bravura that the old way of doing things was no longer acceptable. The previous routines (implicit in the old strategy) also had to be rejected. Joanne was able to point to evidence of new evolving routines that were emerging at the 'grassroots' level. Joanne's expectation was that TB would revert to a situation of relatively static strategy formulation once the changes had 'bedded down'. In terms of the proposed model of strategising this would be state 'A'.

5.5. Chargepacks (Case C)

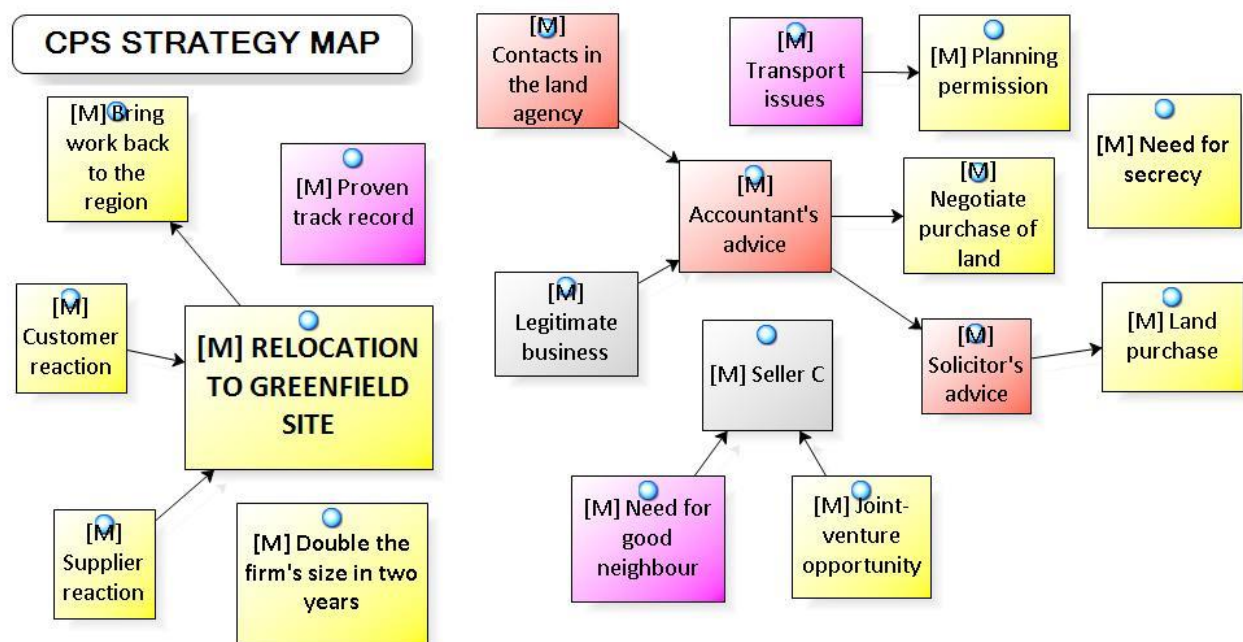


Figure 5.11. Chester's strategy map (final) at Chargepacks

Before analysing the interview at Chargepacks (CP), it is necessary to explain some of the company and owner-management history and the business context of this micro-sized firm.

This company is based in the Tyne & Wear Region and has been trading since 1999. Chester is the founder, owner and Managing Director. His wife works in the business as the book-keeper/accountant. Chester is an electronics engineer, by profession, and worked for some of the largest companies in his field before starting his own business.

Chester founded CP to provide a specialist service to owners of valuable electronic devices that had become obsolete. His company could create 'one-off replicas of battery packs that could no longer be purchased through retail outlets. Typical customers might be the proud owners of old Hasselblad large format cameras that were perfectly serviceable, but in need of a new rechargeable battery pack. The company developed a competence in unusual battery, or cell, configurations which was transferable to prototyping work for business customers. For instance the company developed specialist battery packs for environmental data-loggers that have to work in remote environments for a period of years without attention.

The CP business model was web-based from the outset and almost immediately had an International presence in the specialist market of battery replication. Chester took start-up premises in a local Business Incubation Hub, and has progressively increased his company's floor-space by taking additional units until reaching the limit permitted by the landlords.

Chester has always grown the business organically, and he has always achieved a year-on-year

increase in turnover whilst maintaining profitability. Chester's business model has evolved to include a remarkable relationship with large suppliers. These are the major portable equipment battery manufacturers that are well known brand names in retail outlets. These sizes range from hearing aid button cells to the 1.5V 'D' size batteries. There are a variety of cell chemistries provided through CP, most of the larger ones are rechargeable. Initially, Chester was sourcing cells that could be built into combinations to produce specialist battery packs; but soon his company was seen as a trusted retail outlet for a wide variety of finished products by the major battery manufacturers. In 2011, the premises includes a large amount of stock for sale through the CP website. Specialist batteries for all major brands of camcorders, laptops, mobile phones, etc. can be sourced through the company.

Chester was one the Region's earliest adopters of social networking as a marketing tool. He is an avid user of mobile communication technology and uses this for business and pleasure. His website contains a weekly blog that has been publishing for years.

The business strategy at CP is very much a child of Chester. He is entrepreneurial and always looking for the next 'big thing'; but, he wants to remain in the electrical and electronic products sector. Chester has found that entering his company into business award competitions is a particularly good way of raising local and national awareness of Chargepack's product and service offerings. The company is at the growth stage where it is effectively divisionalising, and beginning to need professional management to manage the expansion. Chester has realised that he will require additional professional managers, if the business is to grow to plan. In comparison with other participants in this study, Chester is in the final phase of direct owner management; whereas others such as OBW are already in the "supervised supervision" stage of growth.

Like many manufacturing companies, CP sub-contracts some of its manufacturing. However, unlike most firms, financial justification is not the dominant factor. Chester wants to eventually repatriate all this work back into his premises. It is interesting to note, that Chester may now be ahead of the trend in wanting in-house production. There is emerging evidence that UK manufacturers are now more reluctant to outsource all production to the Far East. In the particular case of CP, there is an underlying 'regional patriotism' in his motivation to repatriate production. In his words, he wants to "*bring work back to the region*", and explains that this work goes great distances to UK subcontractors principally because he does not have the internal capacity to do the work. His intention is to stop doing this when he has secured the larger purpose-built facilities. This is not purely benevolence towards the region, because he also sees a benefit for his business.

"The ultimate aim is that we do as much of what we do in-house, because we have full control of everything then." (Chester Edwards, at end of response #148)

This exemplifies Chester's determination to control the quality of CP manufactured products. He has always been nervous of outsourcing to suppliers that might present a production problem too

late for appropriate intervention. He sees the expansion of his premises, and the repatriation of outsourced work, as a means of increasing his control of quality and deadline achievement. However, this apparent need for a high internal locus of control (Rotter, 1990, 1975, 1966) might run contrary to the necessity of professional manager recruitment into CP. The imperative of delegation that accompanies such a move might not sit well with someone who has 'run the show' for so long. Chester was asked by the author, whether he intended to take his business to an IPO. He was somewhat bewildered by the question, and professed that he'd never really considered it. He was also somewhat tentative about the inevitable need to introduce professional managers and his reaction to them if they were introduced. Like many SBOs, he disliked the bureaucracy of larger organisations; and really didn't want his company to grow into such an entity.

The author asked Chester whether he had considered succession planning for the business. His reply was typical of many SBOs, in that this issue had not entered into his strategic thinking.

"I have two daughters, and I don't think that either of them would see this as a something they would want to do. I haven't got a planned exit strategy. No, I don't think that they would actively run the business." (Chester Edwards, response #121)

Succession planning is a strategic issue for SBOs; yet in reality, this subject is often avoided (much in the same way that some people do not want to write their last will and testament). The author mentioned at the outset of this thesis that the SBOs in this study do not really conform to the categorisation of 'family businesses'. Chester response was one of the confirmations of this. Many SBOs do not have any pension provision, and are relying upon the sale of their business at retirement (either planned, or as the result of ill health). It is interesting to note that even the SBOs that think strategically, do not willingly envisage a time when they won't be running the business for reasons of old age. Gaining access to SBOs for business research is not easy; and of those who will, there are only a few who are prepared to articulate their thoughts concerning succession. Even family businesses with a clear generational lineage can have SBOs that are reticent to discuss this subject. With this in mind, the author did not press the point with any participant in this study.

What makes this small business unusual is Chester's frequent entry of his business into regional and national competitions. At the time of the interview he had won three categories of company awards in the region and was a finalist in a national competition that was sponsored by a major utility. The prize for finalists was a session with a leading photographer to produce an image that epitomised his business. The author has seen the resulting photograph, which depicts Chester holding two cables close together, such that they are electrically arcing across the gap that he is maintaining. His posture and facial grimace are all in keeping with his vibrant personality. As with all other cases in this study, the participant was given the choice of strategic issue to be discussed. Chester decided that he wanted to talk about his proposed purchase of land for the building of a purpose-built factory for the business. This was not only the biggest single issue concerning Chester, but it was the culmination of some long term planning throughout his time as a small

business owner. At the time of the interview, Chester was in the first stages of negotiating the land purchase deal and was very conscious of maintaining strict secrecy about the negotiations. No mention is made of the site or the likely vendors in this study; apart from the fact that the relocation is within the region. Chester has planned to move into new purpose-built premises for a long time. He could see that the occupation of incubation premises was limiting his business growth and that he needed to move the company into a new phase of expansion. He foresaw a doubling in turnover once the factory was commissioned. The banking crisis has not particularly adversely affected this business because growth had always been organic and Chester did not need to raise bank finance to complete this move. The irony is, even in the present era of limited bank lending to SMEs, he would probably have little difficulty in getting a lending institution to finance this move.

Chester mentioned to the author that he had received an offer to purchase his business after only 18 months of trading. His initial reaction was one of surprise that any company would be interested in buying an unproven embryonic business. After due consideration, Chester declined the offer. His reasoning was, "I hadn't even got started at that stage..." It can be seen from his anecdote, the Chester is not just in it for the money. He takes great pride in having built something from scratch, and as we will see later in this analysis, his ethos has an ethical underpinning, which appears to be a mixture of deontology and virtue.

The session was carried out at Chester's home (rather than the CP Factory Units). This was entirely his choice of venue and suggested because of the open plan arrangement in the unit offices were not consider conducive for quiet discussion. Chester also required a degree of secrecy because he wanted to avoid an auction situation against another potential buyer.

A large dining table was used for the purpose which was taken after about one hour through the session during the video tape change. It was explained to Chester during the preliminaries that the A1 sheet of card could be used as a map of the discussion using *Post-it*TM notes and other coloured adhesive shapes (such as directional arrows or triangles). The video would only capture the immediate vicinity of the table map and both participant's and interviewer's hands would be 'in-shot' when items were being placed.

There were several interruptions during the interview process. The technique being used of asking the participant to build a *Post-it*TM note montage was particularly useful in this regard; as it helped to bring the discussion '*back into focus*' for the participant after interruption. This feature of the methodology is particularly useful in gaining access to SBOs that cannot afford to be out of the business environment. Chester appeared to be very comfortable with the format of the interview and the use of a mapping technique. Tickets were offered to Chester after a key point had been raised in the discussion. The author took care to establish that the wording was hers, and rewrote the tickets where she desired a change. Placement was entirely down to Chester. His engagement with the diagram was exemplified by her complete re-arrangement of the tickets after one hour had passed. There was a particularly revealing discourse at that stage that was captured

in the transcript; where Chester was verbalising the rationale behind his arrangement.

Social structure (rules and resources)

As discussed in the Methodology Chapter the author is using Giddens' Structuration Theory to analyse and interpret the findings from the interview with Chester. To investigate whether Structuration processes can be interpreted from the testimony of Chester, it is necessary for the author to start somewhere on the Structuration loop. This interview was no exception, and the author commenced with the following question:

*"Chester, could you describe roughly what the size of the firm is, and what it does?"
(Chester Edwards, question #1)*

Enquiring about tangible assets seems to be a good place to start, in that it doesn't require any strategic thinking on the part of the interviewee.

The author has made use of a Structuration pro forma that he adapted from the two major diagrams that appear in Giddens 1984 work. This has a dual purpose. The diagrammatic form is a prompt for questions aimed at eliciting discourse that can be analysed from a structurationist viewpoint. This is achieved by virtue of the diagram on the form that depicts the arrangement and interplay of structurationist concepts. It also serves as a repository for the contemporaneous field notes taken by the author during the interview. It is helpful to make notes in places on the form that indicate the first impression of the interview with regard to its relevance to one of the concepts. The set of notes taken at CP are shown on the form in figure 2 (the handwriting has been rewritten in computerised script font to improve readability).

The social structure in Structuration Theory is considered to a combination of "*resources*" and "*rules*". The "*resources*" are sub-divided by Giddens into Authoritative and Allocative types; where "*Authoritative Resources*" refer to deployable people and Allocative to property, financial assets and material resources. In terms of "*authoritative resources*" CP has 22 staff and calls upon a UK supply-chain for part-finished subassemblies and bought-out finished components (BOF).

The "*allocative resources*" includes a substantial reserve that has been accumulated with the sole purpose of building a purpose-built industrial facility for the business in the North East of England. The annual turnover of the business lies in the range £1m-5m, and this has grown year-on-year since the firm's inception. Chester confirmed that business has always been profitable.

During the interview session certain social rules emerged that are characteristic of this business. Chester has a passionate desire to own a successful North East business. He is very supportive of the region, and has a philanthropic approach to regional issues. His extensive networking is a large part of this activity.

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

According to Giddens (1984) ‘agency’ is expected to have a symbiotic and mutualistic relationship with structure. The agent can draw upon elements of the structure to enable or support social action, that in turn produces, or reproduces, elements of *social structure*. The types of ‘agency’ envisaged by Giddens are ‘communication’, ‘power’, and ‘sanction’.

In the preliminary visit to the factory premises it was evident that there was a high degree of shared product knowledge in the company. ‘Communication’, in this respect, is partially tacit and generally unfathomable to outsiders. The firm is just on the cusp of moving towards professional management, and the envisaged move into larger premises with an increase in turnover will exacerbate this need. Chester recognises this, but worries about some of the implications that represent the culture of larger firms where he had previously worked.

“... it seems to me one of the things these [larger] companies suffer from is 'internal politics'. When I was a small company we didn't really suffer 'internal politics', but as we're getting bigger ...” (Chester Edwards, response #95)

The ‘agency’ of ‘communication’ is very important to Chester, for he now worries that a larger firm will gradually defeat his ability to communicate directly with his employees.

There is no doubt who is in charge of this business. Chester’s personality can be seen in many of its facets. For instance, the personalisation of the firm’s website. It is Chester’s Blog that is offered to site visitors, rather than the usual company news.

The team at CP are very loyal according to Chester, and this is fostered and encouraged by a benevolent attitude towards his staff.

In terms of *sanctioning* (or permitting something to happen), Chester is considered in his approach. He likes to think several moves ahead, and ascribes this tendency to his experience of competitive junior chess playing at County level in his youth.

“I wouldn’t say I take risks without having really thought about it. The perception might be that I’m doing this or I’m doing that, but really I have thought a lot about it.” (Chester Edwards, response #91)

Giddens refers to three ‘modalities’ in his theory, or as Whittington (Whittington, 2010, p.112) explains, “*the means by which structural dimensions are expressed in action.*” These are ‘interpretive schemes’, ‘facility’ and ‘norms’ respectively which are discussed in the next section.

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

The most striking '*interpretive scheme*' at CP is exemplified through Chester's determination to test his company in 'award competitions'. This has the effect of continually expanding the '*signification*' structures in the company. New ideas emerge as the company is continuously being evaluated by new judges. Chester uses the feedback he gains from these awards competitions to strategise about his company's future. As Giddens maintains throughout his three major works on structuration theory, the modalities are often working in combination or conjunction. The author can interpret a linkage here between the '*interpretive scheme*' and the '*norm*' modality (mentioned below).

The company website includes a blog by Chester, who is also a keen user of social networking software. He is always to be seen using his Blackberry in between activities at work. He is unusual in the respect of being from the previous generation to that normally associated with high volume social networking.

The '*facility*' that links available '*resources*' to the '*agency*' of '*power*' is interesting at CP. As an SBO with complete control over his business, Chester is free to manipulate his '*resources*' with strategic intent. This deliberate progress is evident in his day-to-day strategising. Unlike many owner-managers he is able to articulate his vision for the business and can anticipate the immediate steps he needs to take. The planning for the new premises has arisen from a land purchase opportunity, but the underlying intent has been there much longer. He admits that he has been building a 'war chest' for just such a move over many years. He will apply for local funding if obtaining it is not too protracted; but otherwise the whole venture will be funded by his reserves. This amassing of financial '*resources*' to make a bold expansion venture with his firm is characteristic of the agency-structure modality of '*facility*'.

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

Giddens refers to '*norms*' as a modality of changing boundaries in structure, and thereby the '*agency*' of '*sanction*' is linked to the creation (or alteration) of structural '*legitimation*'. In this case, the boundary expansion occurs because of the continuous entry into award competitions by Chester's company. He is not only continually testing his business model against others, but also learning from the process. Success in these competitions builds in '*legitimation*' for Chester's business model, and the '*signification*' appears visible on his website.

The CP website exemplifies much of the company ethos. It is highly personalised to Chester and has pages devoted to his activities such as blogging. The technical jargon in this business concerns electrical power and battery configurations. The products carry considerable specification in terms of electrical performance and charging cycles.

'*Domination*' structures are asymmetrical deployments of '*resources*', both '*authoritative*' and

'*allocative*', with an intent to produce competitive advantage. Chester's business is based upon sustained organic growth over a twelve year period, all of its assets are wholly owned (not rented or under hire purchase agreements). The one exception is the premises that are rented from a business incubation agency. The incubator has a range of different offices and warehouses on the same site. Most of these are occupied. CP is at the maximum allowance of three units. Chester uses one as an office, the next door unit is for manufacture and a third warehouse carries the wide stock of commercial batteries that are sold through the internet.

His stated determination to eventually repatriate all regularly subcontracted work is an indication of intent to bring about a commercial advantage over other firms in his sector. This should not be confused with the supply into his business of finished products such as battery cells and proprietary branded products from large suppliers. The repatriation concerns out-sourced work that would have been completed on his premises but for the lack of space.

Previously won awards and international standards such as ISO.9000 and BS.14000 are jointly '*signification*' and '*legitimation*' for Chester and his company.

Structuration

There are only a few instances where *structuration* can be directly interpreted from the workshop discourse (see chart overleaf). This is not surprising for two reasons. The cross-sectional nature of the study makes it inherently more difficult to observe a structural recursion process, except where that can be recalled or anticipated by the participant. The smaller business is less likely to generate as many examples of this phenomenon.

As with other companies in this research study, *structuration* cycles tend to be observed when the external business environment is considered together with the small business. For instance, when we consider the business relationship between CP and the large suppliers it is possible to see '*structuration*'. Chester's '*communication agency*' is constantly reinforcing and reconstituting '*signification*' in such a way that suppliers have confidence in his business as an outlet, despite the small size of the organisation. Normally, large international manufacturers prefer to sell their products through large retail chains, but this is not the case with CP. The strategy of moving to new premises is tied into this '*structuration*' process. The move will render a large increase in '*allocative resources*' for Chester. He intends to deploy them (using agency '*power*') make his business even more attractive to the biggest names in battery supply (by increasing structural '*signification*' and '*legitimation*'). In terms of Chester's strategic thinking, the interpretation of his intended acquisition of new premises is seen as part of a larger *structuration* cycle that drives the relationship between this SME and its multinational suppliers.

Chester's strategising is examined in the next section.

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Chester Edwards	SBO	Website blog. Publicity from business award competitions.	Proprietor leadership. Technical leadership. Has not yet relinquished day-to-day hands on control.	Permitting expansion up to the level of professional management. Concedes that relinquishing overall day-to-day control will become inevitable in the medium term.
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Chester Edwards	SBO	Electrical jargon. Battery designations and specifications. Being a 'good neighbour' interpretive scheme. Legacy product solutions (batteries).	Negotiating for new land and construction. Always thinking ahead about configuration of products and premises (<i>allocative resources</i>).	Recognising the need for professional management practices. In-house work to be prioritised over sub-contract. Organic growth not financed by borrowing.
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Chester Edwards	SBO	The new premises as status recognition for the business. Achieving and keeping ISO standards. National and Regional Business awards.	The new premises. Intended repatriation of outsourced work. Changes reinforce continued major battery supplier recognition.	Managerial structure. Business awards conferring legitimation on CP.

Table 5.5 Interpretation of structuration cycles at Chargepacks (Case C)

Strategising at Chargepacks

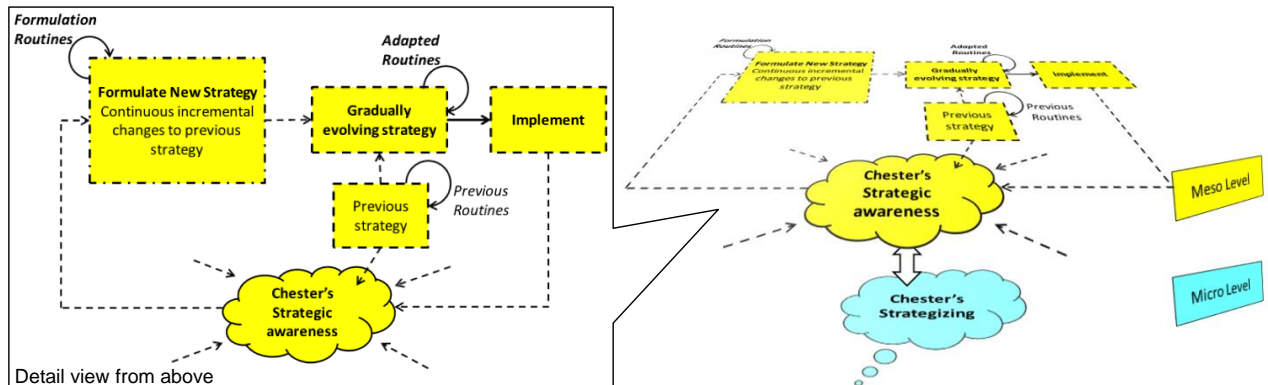


Figure 5.12 Strategising during dynamic strategy formulation / implementation at CP

Chester likes to think strategically. He admitted that he was a '*chess fanatic*' in his youth, and played for his county. However, he observes that thinking moves ahead can be futile in the business scenario and result in '*analysis paralysis*'. So his devotion to planning is tempered by his entrepreneurial instinct, or as he put it during the interview:

"I do like to think three moves ahead, what if, what if, and at some point you just have to jump and say 'I'm going to do that'", (Chester Edwards, response #85)

His entrepreneurial character takes over when he says, "*sometimes you just have to go for it*"; thereby hopefully avoiding the *Kotov Syndrome*¹⁸.

Chester created a *Post-it*™ note strategy map throughout the interview (in a similar manner to the other participants in this research study). He was given the opportunity, near the end of the interview, to rearrange the pattern of notes. He took this opportunity to apply some directional arrows, because he sensed that some linkage between the factors. There was a slight sense of left to right progression, although he didn't stipulate that this was any form of time-base (see Figure 5.11 on page 173).

Chester has been strategising over a long period of time towards the building of his own purpose-built factory. He sees this as his 'crowning achievement' and an extension of his motivation to seek legitimisation for his business. Chester's long term strategy has routines that have become embedded. An example of an embedded routine is the frequent business competition entry. This is also part of the legitimising-motivational process. The long-term nature of Chester's strategy is exemplified, as he puts it, "*the building up of a war chest*". This deliberate accumulation of reserves of more than a decade reveals a classical strategic planner. He admits to having been an accomplished chess player (and made many references in the strategy workshop to planning

¹⁸ Alexander Kotov's observation that a chess player spending too much time in analysis can suddenly make a poor move.

several moves ahead).

Chester appears to be constantly strategising, yet the ‘meso-level’ strategy only changes incrementally for most of the time. The more appropriate side of the strategising model would be state ‘B’, where the SBO is permanently in a state of strategic flux. It is debateable whether Chester ever gets out of this mode of constant incremental change. It was notable that he never referred to any elements of a defined business model (with the exception of selling on the Internet).

It’s always been his ambition to repatriate subcontracted work which could then be under his direct control. For the vast majority of the time the state ‘B’ of the strategising model will depict the situation described by Chester. He seems to adopt the long-term approach of logical incrementalism (Quinn, 1980). Ultimately his business will change as subcontracted work is taken out of the picture and he increases throughput. The author noted that he did not possess any form of written business plan or model. This may well be typical of organic growth small companies; because such SBOs never apply for bank loans, or venture capital, when such documentation might have to be created. There’s been no real reason for Chester to change strategy because Chargepacks has reported year-on-year profit growth for the last twelve years.

Chester’s workshop was based upon the imminent purchase of land for his factory. There was an element of opportunism in his strategy as the land had suddenly become available because the owner’s sale had recently fallen through. An essential part of Chester’s strategising is being able to move rapidly if an opportunity in furtherance of the strategy becomes available. The author notes how this compares to the DCV, because a vital component of maintaining a dynamic capability is the ‘ability to seize opportunities’ (Teece *et al.*, 1997), or as he later stated:

“Entrepreneurial management has little to do with analysing and optimizing. It is more about sensing and seizing—figuring out the next big opportunity and how to address it”, (Teece, 2007, p.1346).

5.6. Pubrelco (Case D)

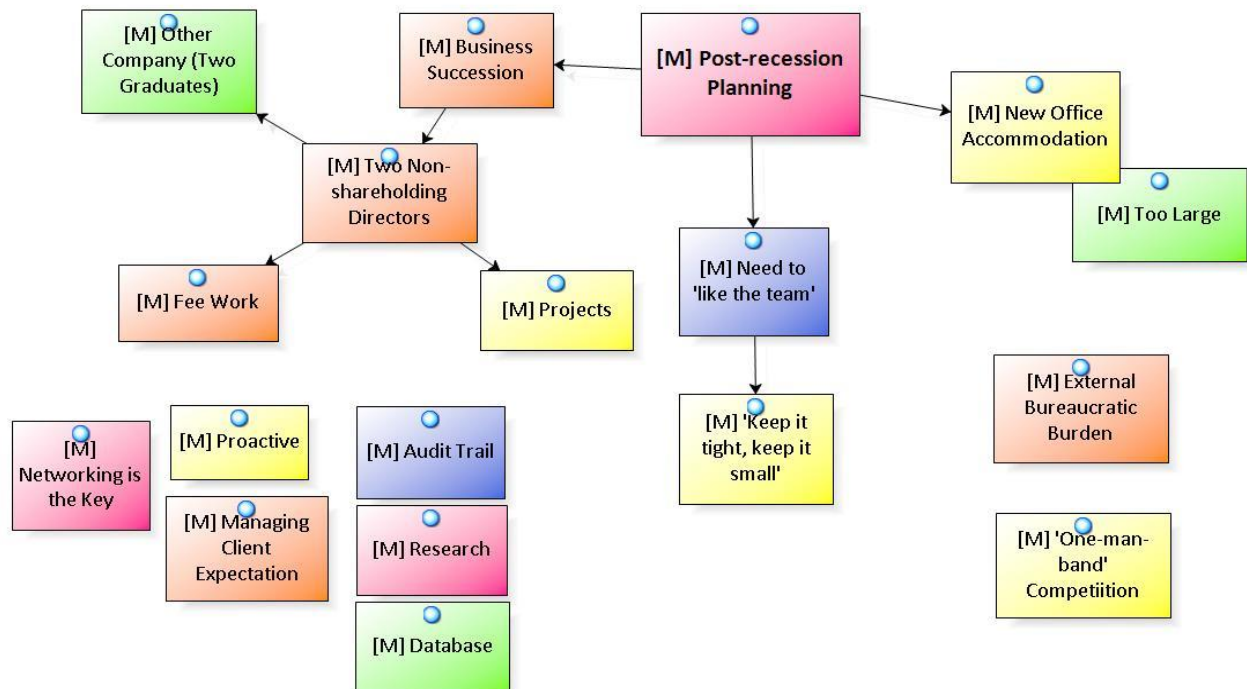


Figure 5.13. Paula's strategy map (final) at Pubrelco

Before analysing the interview at Pubrelco, it is necessary to explain some of the company and owner-management history and the business context of this micro-sized firm.

Pubrelco is a small independent public relations agency based in the North East of England, which started trading as a partnership in 1998. Paula Cooper created this business with two part-time partners out of the 'ashes' of a larger business that she had started 20 years before. She is a very experienced Public Relations (PR) and Marketing consultant and became the sole owner-manager of Pubrelco in 1999. She founded Pubrelco to use her experience in Marketing, Event Management and Advertising to offer a specialised service to organisations who understood the value of a long term communications strategy.

Pubrelco is a PR company that specialises in Marketing and Event Management, Brand Marketing and Corporate Redesign. Paula has a strong belief in the merits of forming long-term relationships with clients. She considers this to be a key strategic issue for the company, and the basis of her success in business. She also offers specialist client services including Corporate Image Management, Crisis Management and Sponsorship. Her company works with client organisations to carry out Market Research, Marketing Evaluation and helps companies to develop their own marketing strategy.

The banking crisis of 2008 has had a profound effect on her business and the public relations consultancy sector in general. At the time of her workshop, Paula has just launched an innovative

sister company to her existing business. She had noticed that many of the small business clients in the north-east of England could no longer afford the services of a traditional public relations agency. At the same time, she was being flooded with applications from newly qualified graduates wanting to enter the profession of public relations. It occurred to her that she might be able to exploit these two trends in a new business venture.

The majority of Pubrelco clients have a presence in the North East of England and they range from the regional divisions of well-known corporates, all the way down to local sole traders. Pubrelco tends to work with professional services clientele, such as Solicitors or Consulting Engineers. Other sectors, such as retail businesses, are considered by Paula to be more difficult for her firm to deliver client-perceived value. This opinion is based upon the difficulties of trying to work on long-term issues with clients' staff who are usually driven by the expediency of short-term targets. Consequently, Paula does not aspire to actively compete with other agencies that specialise in servicing the retail sector.

The long-term relationship approach by Paula has enabled Pubrelco to become a *de facto* extension of many organisations. Great care has been taken by Paula to create and continue generation of this specialist capability for clients. This situation should not be confused with the sudden decision to 'out-source' Marketing and PR by long established concerns that traditionally had their own internal PR and Marketing capabilities. The reason is that in many cases that internal function never existed as an identifiable entity within the client company prior to Pubrelco's involvement. Paula considers that Pubrelco's strength lies in playing the 'long game' of PR and Marketing, and matching those functions to the evolving business strategy of the client.

Paula discriminates between 'fee work' and 'projects'. The former is the long-term relationship business with clients. 'Projects' refers to one-off distinct interventions; for instance, the creation of a website, a seminar event, or a product launch.

Only a matter of months after forming Pubrelco as a new partnership in 1998, the other partner decided that he did not want to continue with the venture. This put Paula in the difficult situation of having to continue with an early stage start-up single handed.

"I thought well I don't have very much more I could lose, so I might as well keep it going"
(Paula, response #14)

Having two fee paying clients, she decided to press on and developed the company over the next twelve years as managing director, owner-manager and sole shareholder.

Paula's practitioner and consultancy experience meant that she had all the necessary business and professional contacts, together with a personal reputation for excellent delivery. So in this sense (having started and grown a much larger firm in the past) she was a serial entrepreneur. The bitter experience of going into liquidation with a large business reinforced Paula's determination to never again to grow a big enterprise. This case represents the aftermath of the

unsuccessful introduction of professional management into a small business.

Paula has built up the long-term business relationships with key clients over the years. She admitted during the interview that it was FY 2006 that was her best trading year for profitability.

The banking crisis of 2008 took its toll on many clients of Pubrelco. Paula recounts one day when three key clients announced that they had to cut back, or postpone, any further business with her company. She instituted rigorous cost-saving measures which were still apparent and active at the time of this interview.

Despite her long-term 'growth-limiting' strategy for Pubrelco, Paula decided in 2010 that an innovative second venture 'G-train PR' needed to be formed to meet the local market needs in a period of extraordinary recession.

Paula had the idea to establish a low cost subsidiary company called 'G-train PR' as a response to market conditions which have driven a large number of small companies to cut, postpone, or even eliminate, their investment in Marketing and PR activities. She explains her motivation to act against her self-imposed business growth restriction in the following way:

"Whilst many companies have cut back on marketing activities, we continue to be deluged by job applications from well qualified graduates ... whose hopes of breaking into the PR industry are being dashed because it is a sector badly hit by the recession. At the same time, there are a number of people starting up their own businesses because they cannot find jobs; by focusing on these two strands, G-train PR has been born."

Extract from Pubrelco Website (accessed August 2011)

G-train PR now offers training and job opportunities to recently graduated individuals from local university business schools. Whereas typical marketing agencies might normally recruit and absorb a few trainee graduates into their organisations each year, G-train PR is marketed separately as an organisation that is staffed by young graduates. They gain the experience they need by working with local micro-sized and start-up businesses, while being under the supervision of the experienced staff of Pubrelco. This innovative business model offers quality PR services at affordable rates to qualifying local small businesses that cannot afford the prevailing fee structures of agencies staffed by more experienced PR and Marketing professionals. The model works because the graduates who do the bulk of the activity earn less money than established PR professionals. It is not envisaged that the firm will grow massively (the reasons are discussed further into this analysis), but the model does offer potential for other entrepreneurs to tap into the availability of locally produced talent.

While new in the PR marketplace, G-train PR is backed up by the 12 year experience of the parent company. Effectively, it draws upon the capital of trust and recognition of Pubrelco. All the services provided by the G-train PR team are directly supervised by the Pubrelco senior directors. This caveat is instrumental in maintaining a limit on growth as there are only three senior directors in Pubrelco. The qualifying client is offered the prospect of being able to afford the maintenance of

some marketing and PR at a time of urgent stringency which still benefits from the underlying expertise of Pubrelco. Paula points out that previous recessions have shown the folly of cutting advertising and marketing activities during recession.

G-train PR is an interesting private venture at a time when start-up support from agencies funded by Government is in general retreat due to the need for cuts in Government spending. Paula also makes the point that many start-ups are forced to buy their marketing advice 'piecemeal' from the lowest cost sources in a serial manner, and this prevents any 'continuity of thinking' to create a coherent mid-range strategy for them.

The discussion was centred upon the post-recession strategic planning for Pubrelco, and its recently launched subsidiary company called G-train PR. Business has been particular hard in this sector since 2006, and the firm had aggressively reduced costs. Paula chose this strategic topic because of the importance she places on fostering and maintaining long-term relationships with clients. She had steered Pubrelco through difficult market conditions, and now saw the capturing and securing of future long-term business through her new venture as a key strategic issue for the company. As a strategic episode, this was an unfinished story and the full implications were yet to emerge at the time of the interview. The author wishes to return to this particular issue in future research to enable a more sustained longitudinal approach that was beyond the scope of this doctoral study.

The session was carried out at Paula's home (rather than the Pubrelco Newcastle Office). This was entirely her choice of venue and was apparently the best-fit with her schedule on that day.

A large dining table was used for the purpose which was taken after about one hour through the session during the video tape change). It was explained to Paula during the preliminaries that the A1 sheet of card could be used as a map of the discussion using Post-it™ notes and other coloured adhesive shapes (such as directional arrows or triangles). The video would only capture the immediate vicinity of the table map and both participant's and interviewer's hands would be 'in-shot' when items were being placed.

There were several interruptions during the interview process. The technique being used of asking the participant to build a Post-it™ note montage was particularly useful in this regard; as it helped to bring the discussion 'back into focus' for the participant after interruption.

Paula appeared to be very comfortable with the format of the interview and the use of a mapping technique. Tickets were offered to Paula after a key point (to her) had been raised in the discussion. The author took care to establish that the wording was hers, and rewrote the tickets where she desired a change. Placement was entirely down to Paula. Her engagement with the diagram was exemplified by her complete re-arrangement of the tickets after one hour had passed. There was a particularly revealing discourse at that stage that was captured in the transcript; where Paula was verbalising the rationale behind her arrangement.

Social structure (rules and resources)

As discussed in the Methodology Chapter the author is using Giddens's Structuration Theory to analyse and interpret the findings from the interview with Pubrelco. There is a symbiotic and mutual dependency relationship between '*structure*' and '*agency*' in this theory. To describe a situation in these terms requires that the analyst starts with one or the other. The author has elected to mention structure first in this analysis because it is where the questioning naturally starts. "*What resources does your company have?*", is an typical early question; and one that is usually straightforward to answer as far as '*tangibles*' are concerned.

The author has made use of a Structuration *pro forma* that he adapted from the two major diagrams that appear in Giddens 1984 work. This has a dual purpose. The diagrammatic form is a prompt for questions aimed at eliciting discourse that can be analysed from a structurationist viewpoint. This is achieved by virtue of the diagram on the form that depicts the arrangement and interplay of structurationist concepts. It also serves as a repository for the contemporaneous field notes taken by the author during the interview. It is helpful to make notes in places on the form that indicate the first impression of the interview with regard to its relevance to one of the concepts.

The '*structure*' in Structuration Theory is considered to a combination of '*resources*' and '*rules*'. The '*resources*' are sub-divided by Giddens into '*authoritative*' and '*allocative*' types; where '*authoritative resources*' refer to deployable people and '*allocative*' to property, financial assets and material resources.

It is only to be expected that there will be a paucity of such '*resources*' in a micro-sized agency business (such as Pubrelco) when compared to a corporate organisation. However, the '*authoritative resources*' comprises of two non-shareholding directors and two graduates that are working in G-train PR under the supervision of the directors in Pubrelco.

The '*allocative resources*' are, again, meagre by comparison with a large organisation. The premises in Newcastle are rented, and considered too large, and therefore too expensive, by Paula in the wake of the 2008 Banking Crisis Recession. (The terms of the lease were preventing any movement on that front at the time of the interview).

Paula explained that the firm has very low overheads and thereby a paucity of both authoritative and '*allocative resources*'. When asked about assets, she declared the major ones to be the senior staff in the business. As she explained, when visiting a client you are deploying your assets (the skilled staff in the firm); or as she succinctly put it, "The assets go up and down in the lift!"

The client and contact database is a considerable asset to the business and it is being used on a very regular basis. Paula admitted during the interview that this would be the most attractive feature of the business if, or when, she decided to sell it as a going concern. Her long-term strategy for Pubrelco is to sell it at her retirement; although she is sanguine about when that might be in a protracted economic downturn.

Paula was asked in the interview about having to ‘think strategically’ on behalf of the customer. Her reply was affirmative, because she felt that many of her clients were not very capable in the area of strategic marketing. The author probed deeper concerning this, with a question regarding routines of strategising that Pubrelco might employ. The answer appeared to be that there was a heavy emphasis upon the selection of a suite of ‘tried and trusted’ routines that had been built through the extensive practising experience of Paula. This appeared to be the dominant logic in the social ‘*structure*’ of the business. Paula’s rules were used to generate business solutions. The recursive nature of rule building was apparent during the interview, and it was significant that Paula emphasised how trainees were progressively exposed to the entire ‘rule-book’. She wanted to ensure that anyone working for her could take the telephone call from the client and be able to portray a sense of being well informed. However, as will be discussed in the agency ‘*power*’ section below, this did not mean that others were free to determine customer solutions without direct sanction from Paula.

Her anecdotal explanation of the typical intervention was one of a technical, or professional, consultancy company where one of the ‘experts’ was required to move up into a senior management role that encompassed the winning of business for the other professionals. She suggested that this often meant that the promoted individual was not a marketer, and urgently needed support from an agency such as her company. From an initial assessment stage there was a detailed proposal submission. This appeared to make use of selected elements from a library of techniques.

“We might use solution No.1, 3, 5 and 7 or we may use solutions 1, 2, 6 and 9. We are usually always in the same pool as those solutions all the time.” (Paula, response #84)

This is not to suggest that there is blind application of bundled techniques. As Paula observes, “*Marketing is all about common-sense, at the end of the day.*” Pubrelco’s approach can be somewhat more generic in the sense that many of its clients are ‘young’ or ‘start up’ businesses, and the ‘basics’ of establishing a new firm are somewhat similar.

The biggest asset for Pubrelco is the goodwill and long-term relationship with its established clients and the steady fee income that accompanies such a situation.

Paula said that Pubrelco could almost be run ‘virtual’ from laptops and mobile phones but has resisted that to date. The emergence of G-train PR could be the first move in that direction, but it does not exist without some of the facilities of its parent firm.

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

Using a structuration viewpoint the author sub-divides 'agency' according to the taxonomy of Giddens. The sections following on 'communication', 'power', and 'sanction' are the forms of 'agency' that he envisages in his theory. In terms of the 'agency' of 'communication', it is Paula's determination to be in total control of the external communication of her business.

"Nothing that we develop as a company, leaves the office without me seeing it. Which is really our quality control." (Paula, at end of response #20)

It is only to be expected that an SBO that sells the service of placing the right message in the right media for others would be very particular about her own 'communication'.

It is clear that there have been several radical changes in the lifetime of Pubrelco according to Paula. The almost immediate departure of one of the founding partners resulted in a careful consolidation decision with the adage, in Paula's words, "keep it tight, keep it small". This appears to have been communicated to a level that has produced 'signification' within the social 'structure' of the company. There were additional underlying reasons for this attitude that will be revealed later in this case.

In terms of external 'communication' there was an interesting aspect being performed at the time of the interview. The full ramifications had not been revealed at that time. Paula was asked during the interview whether the new business model of G-train PR might undermine the client flow to her more traditional company, Pubrelco. Her response was that G-train PR could access clients that are now being completely lost to the PR and Marketing services sector for global economic reasons. Her rationale included a signification caveat that the services of G-train PR had to be limited to clients that could not afford the normal competitive rates for such work.

"We do make it quite clear that it is just for start-up companies, or companies less than two years old, or companies with a charitable status." (Paula, from middle of response #20)

This issue was being worked through at the time of the interview, and the full implications will only be revealed as the market reacts to this idea. Careful communication will also be required to explain potential 'knock-on' effects. An example might be, how a client is migrated from Grad PR to Pubrelco when its eligibility expires. This is a problem rather similar to that encountered by the start-up business incubation sector.

External 'agency' in Pubrelco emanates from Paula because she maintains a 'hands-on' approach to her business. There was a determination in Paula's discourse that she will not relinquish overall control of this small business. Nothing leaves the firm in terms of deliverables that has not been sanctioned, and approved, by her. This could be observed in her sanguinity concerning the fate of her former business. As the sole owner of Pubrelco, Paula has been determined to never allow the business to grow beyond certain bounds and she possesses the ownership power to ensure that this happens. Her previous experience of a larger company going into liquidation in the late

nineties was cathartic in that respect. This appears to be Giddensian structural ‘*legitimation*’ by virtue of the ‘*communication*’ of “*keep it tight, keep it small*” by Paula who effectively has only ‘*sanctioned*’ modest expansion. However, this mantra has been relaxed slightly in the recent recession with the advent of the G-train PR business model innovation.

In terms of sanctioning (or permitting something to happen) Paula has a determination to be in control of all policy and the final delivery to clients, but believes that the graduates should have some discretion in how they manage day-to-day activity within a framework of ‘learning by doing’.

A possible irony was explored with Paula during the interview. This centres around a common anecdotal allegation among SMEs that PR or Marketing agencies deploy their most experienced staff to win new business, but then deploy their least experienced for fulfilment and delivery. This apparent concern among clients is considered to be an endemic sectoral problem, by Paula, and very much against the espoused ethos of Pubrelco. As mentioned, Paula maintains a high degree of personal involvement in on-going client-facing activities which is kept within feasible bounds by limiting the expansion of the company. However, the new is new G-train PR business model deliberately creates a situation of ‘junior staff delivery’; albeit offered at a much lower price compared to other competitors.

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

The most striking interpretive scheme at Pubrelco is the ‘*communication*’ that Paula creates significance in the company’s social ‘*structure*’. She terms this, ‘*Keep it tight, keep it small*’ and this appeared to be a mantra that links to the exertion of ownership power.

There has also been an interpretative scheme over time that has embedded and therefore legitimated a *norm* in the business. This is best expressed in Paula’s own words:

“We would swap them [the graduates] around so that they would have a knowledge of all the business that we handled; because it’s very important. You wouldn’t want a client ringing up and someone saying ‘Oh, I don’t really know about that ...’. You know it’s really important that everybody knows about everything.” (Paula, during response #26)

Facility is most evident in the control that Paula exerts over the strategic direction of the company. This is achieved through the control and deployment of her authoritative and ‘*allocative resources*’. She ventured an opinion that a contributory factor in her larger firm’s difficulty was having so many people that she could not oversee their day-to-day activities. If they were strategising she did not approve of it. In the protracted aftermath she had some very difficult decisions to make about the eventual outcome. She summed this up the following comment:

“I always said, after that happened, that I would really want a business that I could walk away from in three months, if I wanted to ... and that has always been the mindset” (Paula, response #38)

Paula was able to describe the working methods of Pubrelco that suggested that the market ‘in effect’ legitimated the working practices of the company. These appear to have stood the test of

time during a period of relative prosperity in her sector. The strategic question now was, 'Could that model sustain itself through a harsh economic environment?'. Paula was of the opinion in the interview that the existing practices at Pubrelco were not going to be enough, and she was very concerned about the general decline in the availability of fee work in the region.

The Giddensian '*norm*' modality can refer to moving boundaries of structural '*legitimation*'.

"Norms figure as 'factual' boundaries of social life, to which a variety of manipulative attitudes are possible" Giddens (1984, p.4).

The *norm* may not have changed much in the earlier history of Pubrelco, but the advent of G-train PR meant that a new *norm* was being established. Paula suggested that twelve people working in the business would be the greatest number she could accommodate. This was a 50% increase on the highest number in the firm's history.

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

As with all the case studies, the company website will tend to show evidence of '*signification*' if it is subject to regular change. The Pubrelco site has the update facilities that put news items to the fore. A convincing website is *de rigueur* for a PR and marketing agency, because one of the common project offerings is to create such a site for a customer. The demand for such services are always motivated either by a desire to attract more customers. In this case the website carries much of the philosophy of the business in terms of the benefits of long term relationships with clients.

As already discussed, Paula's '*power*' in the business has been virtually absolute and it has been directed through '*facility*' to the deployment of '*resources*' that control the growth of the business. Paula is an active strategist, so she is unlikely to allow the company to drift in tough economic times. The client and contact database is being deployed to effect change whilst every effort is being made to secure what might have become an economically disenfranchised class of small business customers.

As already mentioned the '*legitimation structure*' in this firm had been a fierce independence and unwillingness to grow beyond boundaries set by the owner-manager legitimised by the owner-managers bitter experience. However, the interview occurred at a time when this '*structure*' might have to change because of the '*agency*' of the SBO. Structuration theory helps to expose the possibilities, but also alerts the user to the likelihood of unintended consequences.

Structuration

There are only a few instances where structuration could be interpreted from the discourse (see chart overleaf). This is not surprising for two reasons. The cross-sectional nature of the study makes it inherently difficult to observe a structurational recursion process in progress. Even if the participant can recall evidence of the process, this does not satisfy a situation where the recursion

cycle is still in progress. In the case of Pubrelco, the probable structuration will occur due to Paula's 'agency' of launching the new venture; but this had not played out fully at the time of the workshop. This was the workshop that demonstrated how a structuration cycle can be constraining on a small business. Paula's negative attitude towards business growth was now being challenged by dire circumstances in her sector. The workshop was successful in that it left open the possibility that a further research intervention could explore the full implications (intended and unintended) of this *sanctioned* change.

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Paula Cooper	SBO	Cheap PR for those firms that cannot afford it usually (principally start-ups).	Deciding when clients lose eligibility for G-Train PR and get moved on to Pubrelco.	Sanctioning of innovative new venture for fledgling graduate PR professionals. Places a curb on maximum size of business.
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Paula Cooper	SBO	Branded as G-Train PR. New website.	May have to move clients with graduate staff into Pubrelco.	The firm will never be allowed to grow beyond the bounds of SBO control. SBO must like and trust the people in her business.
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Paula Cooper	SBO	Offer to new businesses to provide cheaper PR services. Providing employment opportunities to young graduates.	Existing firm and graduate-staffed subsidiary.	Previous bitter experience of winding up a business that had grown organically beyond SBO control.

Table 5.6 Interpretation of structuration cycles at Pubrelco (Case E)

The author is also aware that a researcher returning to a participant after a period of time has to account for the possibility that the previous intervention might influence the new field data. For instance, the interviewee might now be using graphical means (similar to that used in this study) to discuss strategies with other members of staff. This may well not have happened but for the previous workshop.

Strategising at Pubrelco

The interview revealed determined strategising by Paula in the past. Her new company has been separately branded and specialises in servicing the particular needs of start-up and small businesses that are under two years old. This has been a positive strategic move by Paula in anticipation of the harsh business environment for her potential clients that are micro-sized or start-up businesses. She has also noted the effect of the economic situation on PR / Marketing Graduate Recruitment in her sector. Young talent is being squeezed out of the job market by more highly experienced professionals, and the recent abolition of the normal retirement age will only have served to exacerbate this situation. She also mused that economic downturns always tended to create additional sole trader competitors, as redundant professionals attempted to ply their own trade.

Paula engaged with the map making process more than some of the other owner-managers. She attributed groupings to some of the issues presented, although these were not interpreted by the author as being seen as causal links by Paula. She agreed that the methodology was intrinsically useful in that it had helped her to explain the situation to the author.

Paula's strategy map portrays the determination to avoid a painful past. Like some SBOs she is not motivated to grow the business. Her explanation of this sentiment is her feelings of guilt concerning the need to liquidate the previous much larger business. She felt that she had allowed

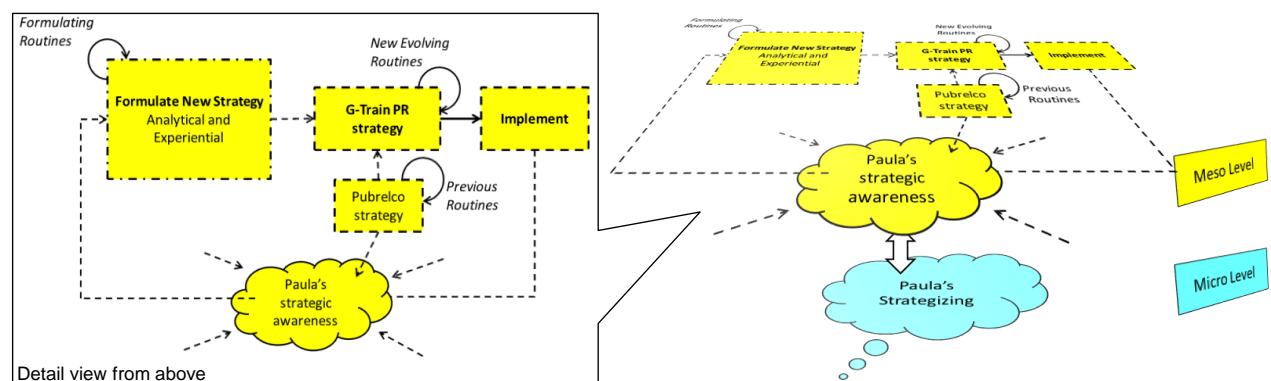


Figure 5.14 Strategising during dynamic strategy formulation / implementation at Pubrelco

it to grow beyond her control. Yet again, we see a business involved in the transition between sole owner and professional management. In contrast to the other cases in this study, the transition phase is in the past but has become part of the social '*structure*' of the company being studied. Paula draws upon this negative experience and this deeply influences her '*strategising*' praxis. There are numerous anecdotal stories about American entrepreneurs who are only considered to be worthwhile investments once they've had their third business failure. Whether true, or not, the situation in the UK is that small business failure is never without trauma. The situation for Paula was made worse by her lack of confidence in the professional managers that have been recruited in a former business. The outcome exacerbated matters by confirming her worst fears. The author could see very strong remnants of her reticence to build a company again beyond her immediate control within the social '*structure*'. Her '*sanctioning agency*' had become self-limiting. The author enquired whether there was anything that would persuade her to build a bigger business again. Her reply was negative, with her age given as the principal reason. On the other hand, she felt that she could not afford to retire. Creating and managing a small business in this particular sector is her principal skill base, so Pubrelco makes enormous sense to Paula.

The situation depicted at Pubrelco may be typical of one of the factors that works against the UK Government's attempts to stimulate growth in the SME sector. Often SBOs are deterred from growing their businesses due to negative experiences when working for large organisations. There is little Government can do about this except to cajole some of the SBO community with offers of targeted funding and training. Where the bitter experience emanates from a previous experience of growing a small business, the problem becomes even more intractable. The author was left in absolutely no doubt that Paula was resolute about not bringing in professional managers. Another interesting point was Paula did not only not trust them, she didn't like them either. So she now demonstrated a structural '*legitimation*' that everyone who worked for her

should be someone that she actually liked. Despite these constraints, the author interprets the situation as describe by Paula as a moment of ‘controlled’ growth. The establishment of a sister company with young graduate female staff was a concession to Paula’s need to strategically respond to the UK recessionary environment.

In the Pubrelco case, Paula is experimenting with an innovatory business model (G-Train PR). Her strategising has been prompted by the declining market for public relations services in the north-east economy. It is her belief that a service for very small and new start-up businesses can be performed by recently graduated staff in a sister business to Pubrelco. She envisages her overall strategic control of both businesses. The less experienced G-Train PR staff will be mentored by Paula and her two directors. The strategy will be to attract business from early stage start-up companies that cannot afford the full cost of PR services. Paula is using experiential strategy formulation to see whether the concept is viable in the current market conditions. This strategic experience from Pubrelco is being used to create a strategy for G-Train PR and is represented in an adaptation of the strategising model in state ‘B’ (see Figure 5.14 on page 196).

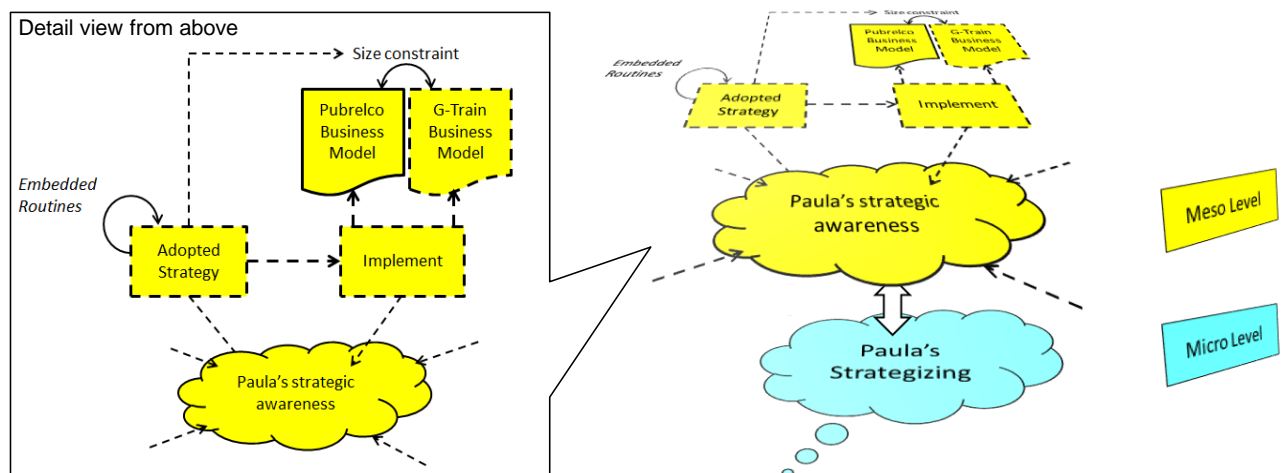


Figure 5.15 Strategising during static strategy formulation / implementation

Paula hopes to reach an eventual strategic state for Pubrelo that is represented by the strategising model in state ‘A’ (see Figure 5.1 on page 117). The two closely linked business models will have separate marketing. One of the uncertainties in this arrangement is eligibility criteria for businesses to be served by G-Train PR. Paula has yet to prove whether clients paying for the junior service will be prepared to transfer across to Pubrelco when they exceed the eligibility criteria. Whether this can be accomplished or whether these reduced-rate clients have to follow G-Train PR into a internal merger with Pubrelco, has yet to be seen. A similar issue will arise with the graduate staff of G-Train PR. Paula needs a constant supply of inexperienced PR graduates, and for incumbents to ‘move on’ for this business model to work.

Paula has an enduring routine in her strategy that constrains any significant expansion of

Pubrelco. As mentioned previously, all of the participants were thematically linked by the issue of business growth. In Paula's case this was being *sanctioned*, but within her self-imposed constraint of not growing beyond her immediate control.

5.7. Town & Country Cleaning (Case E)

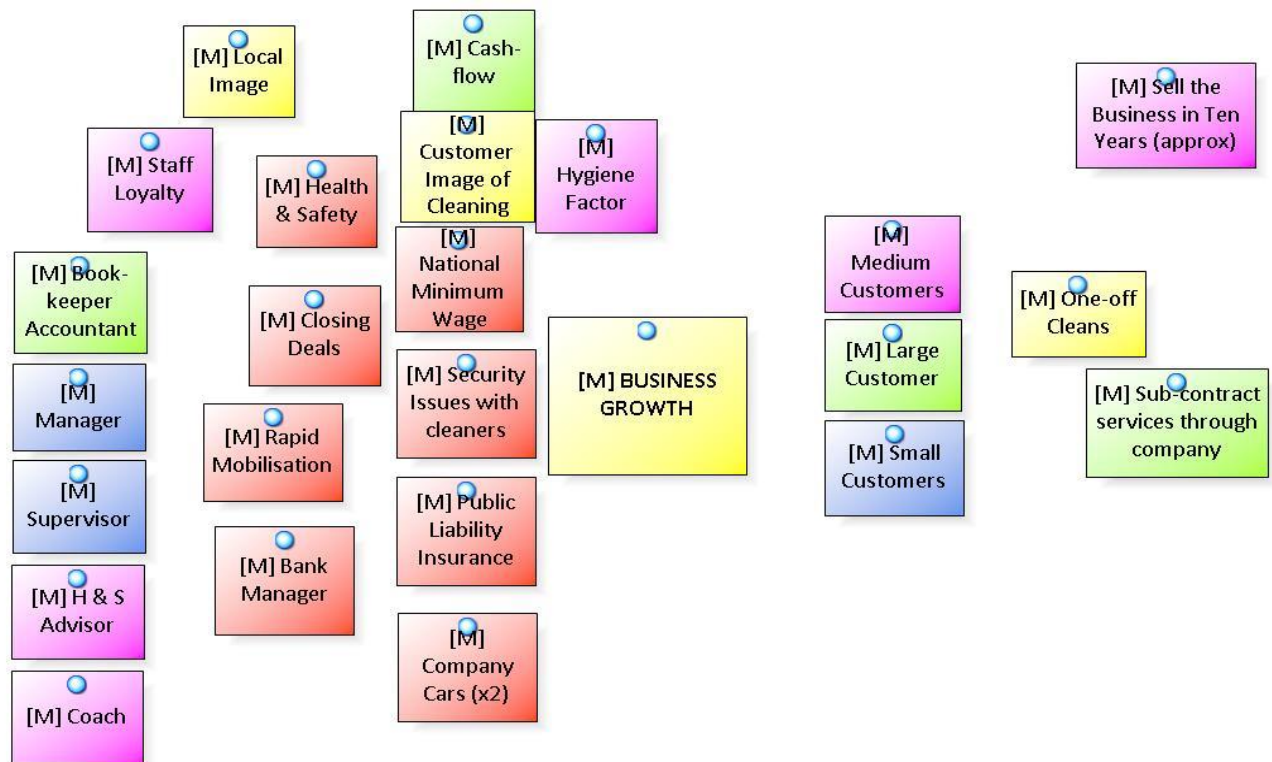


Figure 5.16 Brenda's strategy map (final) at TCC

Town and Country Cleaning has been trading for over twenty years. It was initially established as a partnership between two women in the North-east of England. One of the founders left the business after several years. She has since become one of the leading female entrepreneurs in the region, having started several highly successful businesses. The remaining SBO is the focus of this study. Brenda Cunningham has been running this business as a cleaning service to corporate customers ever since it started. She has seen many small-scale competitors start-up and rapidly fail over the years. The commercial cleaning sector has always been highly competitive. Despite the traditional high turnover of cleaners, that is associated with this type of business; Brenda has managed to retain some very long serving employees.

Brenda's workshop occurred at a time when she has noticed a trend in the North East UK commercial cleaning services market. Although city centres are well served with commercial cleaning companies (mostly branches of corporate businesses), there appeared to be a dearth of companies that were prepared to service rural clients. Brenda was therefore considering a new target market of rural businesses in Northumberland as a logical expansion from her long established base in the conurbation of Tyne and Wear.

At the time of the interview Brenda was already re-evaluating her business model that had not changed significantly for twenty years. Town & Country Cleaning (TCC) was a provider of

cleaning services to commercial organisations. The customer-base was segmented by Brenda on the basis of company size into three groups; Large, Medium and Small. Brenda estimated that her firm was generating 40% of revenue from four large firms, with 50% attributable to the medium size and just 10% from small customers. TCC had 27 staff, but only two were employed full-time. This large majority of part-time workers was a typical arrangement for a medium-sized cleaning company.

"It has been a bit of a struggle recently, because of the economic climate. I haven't put my prices up ... petrol has gone up, chemical cleaning products have gone up, and the minimum wages rise goes up each year which affects us ... so I'm out on a mission to get more business in at the right price." (Brenda Cunningham, response #3)

Brenda was looking to revitalise the business and attract new customers. The 2008 Banking Crisis had rendered the market particularly difficult as customers had tried to cut back on their cleaning budgets. Like other businesses in this study, TCC was experiencing new competition from inexperienced people starting their own business as a consequence of the recession (see Pubrelco Case, page 184). Part of Brenda's initiative was her appointment of an external consultant as her business coach. This was intended to help her towards a significant increase in her networking activities which included her recruitment upon a set of Business Awareness seminars at Newcastle Business School.

The session was carried out at Brenda's home in the Northumberland countryside. She had a summer house in her garden that was being converted to an office. The standard arrangement of video equipment and an interview table was deployed in this building. The authors recording equipment has sufficient battery power for a 90 minute interview, but this was not required as mains power was available. (The author would point out that it is worth having this capability for the rare occasion of a daytime power cut, because the recording can continue without a break.)

As described in the introduction to this chapter, the author's order of structuration analysis is maintained ('resources'; *Rules*; 'agency'; *Modalities* and *Structural Dimensions*). The structuring properties of a social context are part of the focus of Structuration Theory. Giddens resolves 'structure' into two elemental types – 'Resources' and 'Rules'. For TCC these two aspects are considered, in turn, from the interview with Brenda.

Social structure (rules and resources)

Brenda has twenty seven employees that represent her 'authoritative resources' within the scope of her business. However, the interview also revealed that she pays for the services of several outsiders.

"I have a manager and a supervisor ... and I work very closely with my book-keeper as well. We actually share an office in town with her." (Brenda Cunningham, responses #81 and #84)

Brenda has found, through admitted bitter experience, that she needs the services of a health and safety expert on a regular basis.

"Certainly bigger companies ask us for our health and safety policies, especially if you go out to tender, you have to furnish them with so much information before you are even considered for the job." (Brenda Cunningham, response #44)

UK and EU regulations in this area are strict. Commercial clients require their subcontractors to be in accordance with all current legislation. Although many people would consider Office Cleaning to be a relatively safe occupation; before cleaning contracts can be started there have to be numerous 'risk assessments' conducted. This all adds to cost and the overheads of the business. Employers' liability insurance requires compliance in these areas, and many of Brenda's potential clients are very nervous about litigation arising from incidents in the workplace.

"I know we have got to have Health & Safety, but what a nightmare! It takes up so much of my time. Cleaners can only clean to hand height ... what if you have got a small cleaner? It's just ridiculous." (Brenda Cunningham, response #40)

Brenda's sentiment about this rule in the social 'structure' of TCC is a good example of the metaphorical 'double-edged sword'. A rule that (apparently) constrains can also be an enabler. Further into the interview, Brenda talks about her firm's competitive advantage. Her use of a health and safety expert has enabled her to produce a very professional CD with all the information required by the business customer demonstrating her compliance with contemporary health and safety legislation. She sees this is one way to differentiate her business from those companies that are more lackadaisical about safety. She believes that presentation of this can 'raise the bar' of competitive advantage during the tendering process.

At the time of the interview, Brenda had just commenced sessions with a business coach. Under the terms of the contract, her access to him can be considered to be another *authoritative resource*. This is another example of how permeable the boundaries of a small business are when considering its structuring processes. As mentioned in the literature review, the work by authors such as Jarzabkowski & Spee (2009), has demonstrated the need to consider external actors (such as consultants). Brenda's motivation for entering into this business relationship was that, she felt that this might break her business activities out of the 'doldrums'. She saw the forthcoming schedule of calendar meetings as a motivator to encourage her networking of business contacts.

Brenda's business does not suffer from a high turnover of core staff. Attract many had been with her for over 20 years. However, she did observe that finding and securing new staff is a very challenging undertaking.

"... You would imagine that, in this day and age when people want work, it would be easy to find cleaners; but that's not really the case. Most of my cleaners I get through word of mouth, through the cleaners I have already got. I often interview for 10 people, and only 4 of them turn up!" (Brenda Cunningham, response #26)

Cleaning staff, that are prepared to travel more than a few miles to work, are particularly difficult to attract. Such employees are prized by Brenda, because she wants to expand her rural side of the business. The problem is that a lot of these potential clients are located away from where her cleaners are likely to be living. This is a difficulty shared by her clients, and if she could marshal a team of highly mobile cleaners; her service offering would be especially attractive to such businesses. Brenda admitted that the margins ought to be more substantial than in the urban environment, despite the fact she might have to pay some travelling expenses to her cleaners. However, this competitive advantage also brings additional liabilities, because any failure to turn up at the designated time is much more difficult for Brenda to rectify. So she places a high premium on staff reliability. The author enquired about what does she do in one of these eventualities, and she responded (in a conversation held off the record) with a sigh and said, "I put my cleaning clothes on and get going in the car!" She recalled that there have been a few instances, in the early days, where the directors of the company have had to do the cleaning themselves.

When the company was formed Brenda had a partner. However, they parted ways amicably after a few years. Brenda's erstwhile partner is still a source of valuable encouragement and information (the partner has gone on to be a small business adviser who is very active in the north-east region).

It is seen in this case that '*authoritative resources*' are not necessarily located within the organisation. This is particularly pertinent in the case of very small businesses, where external stakeholders can have a synergistic effect on the business.

"I work very closely with my book-keeper as well. We actually share an office in town with her." (Brenda Cunningham, response #84)

In Giddensian terms, '*allocative resources*' are anything non-human that can be deployed in the business. TCC is a company that provides manual cleaning services; therefore there are few '*allocative resources*' beyond the company website, cleaning equipment and consumables. Much of the equipment can be rented, although Brenda tends to purchase.

The website was being revised by a site developer at the time of the interview. Brenda was looking to publicise endorsement from long-standing, and wanted this aspect to be highlighted in the presentation. The new focus upon rural cleaning services was to be given more prominence in her service offering. Public houses in the countryside were a particular target for her efforts.

There appeared to be several unwritten rules for workers in TCC, the most important being one of reliability in terms of turning up to cleaning appointments and performing the planned tasks within the agreed timescale. Failure to do so could impact upon a schedule of cleaning for further clients during the day. Brenda said that some of her workers had been with her for many years. Brenda implied that she would never ask a cleaner to do something she could not, and said that she had performed the cleaning herself in certain instances where the cleaner could not attend rather than

let the client down. She felt that doing that also put her people under a mild moral obligation to try and turn up.

Like all businesses, TCC is subject to many rules that are invoked from an external source. Prevailing legislation has already been mentioned, but another of the most significant sources for rules is the bank. When Brenda was asked about her relationship with her lender, she identified a recent change in attitude that had occurred since the Banking Crisis of 2008.

“... they [the Banks] are much less willing to be flexible with their money than they were. if I've got a really big account, and their terms are 60 days, and I have to pay my cleaners way before I got paid by them [the client]; I would have to look to them [the Bank] as to whether I could take that on, or not. So that would actually put me out of the equation for hospitals, or something big like that.” (Brenda Cunningham, response #125)

Her response demonstrates how the tightening of lending to SMEs by the major banks has a direct impact upon the way that some SMEs trade. It is obvious from Brenda's remarks, that she was only able to bid for contracts with large clients with the short-term financial assistance of her bank. In the past, the bank has provided a cash flow 'smoothing effect' for her business, a service that she was willing to pay for. Being cut off from such a facility, makes normal trading in this sector much more precarious. However, TCC was not going out of business because bank lending had 'dried up'. The same could not be said for some of her erstwhile competitors.

The author notes that this point has implications for the wider UK economy. Many prudently managed SMEs will be forced to turn down the riskier business (in terms of late payment). This will be a constraint on any business growth by such firms. Paradoxically, the Government is hoping that SMEs can increase the nation's wealth earning potential to rescue the economy from recession; while simultaneously placing ever-increasing demands for capital reserves in the lending institutions.

The author enquired whether Brenda had any 'rules of thumb' regarding the business that she would intentionally pursue. Response was as follows:

“I'd actually prefer to have medium-sized customers, because if you lose a medium sized account it's less of a blow. If you lose a large firm, it's a huge chunk of your turnover taken away, and it takes a long time to get that back!” (Brenda Cunningham, response #22)

Discussing this point with Brenda, it became evident that this was one of her *structural rules*. There had been previous experience that had reinforced this component of '*strategising*'. It appeared that Brenda could no longer be enticed by the allure of a large contract, and preferred a 'safety in numbers' approach to the desired customer base. This strategy can be contrasted with those SMEs that have owners who envisage themselves as leading part of a supply-chain. Brenda's understanding of her market disabused her of any sense of safety from corporate supply-chain management. Cleaning contracts tend to be volatile and transitory, and individually, no basis for long term planning. The author asked Brenda why she felt the industry was the way it was. Her reply goes some way to explaining some of her '*agency*' in the business.

"I think it's the old-fashioned image of the Mrs Mop, who was 'paid in-the-hand' for a few pennies." (Brenda Cunningham, response #79)

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

According to Giddens, 'agency' has the effect of producing and reproducing 'structure' which in turn can enable, or constrain, further 'agency'. The author will examine 'agency' in TCC under the three categories of 'communication', 'power', and 'sanction'.

In terms of 'communication', Brenda displayed a somewhat evangelical attitude towards corporate cleaning. As already mentioned, the author had enquired as to why she felt that the cleaning business was so precarious.

"I think it's the perception people have of cleaning. People tend to imagine ... have this idea that cleaning is cheap. It's the old 'char lady' image. Which is ridiculous, I don't know how you get over this hurdle; because people are prepared to spend a fortune on architects, design and build, and yet are reluctant to spend a realistic amount on cleaning!" (Brenda Cunningham, response #26)

In Brenda's terms, neglecting basic cleaning because of cost constraints is a 'false economy'. The old adage of 'spoiling the ship for a half-penny of tar' came to mind, for the author. Brenda couldn't understand why corporations that had spent enormous capital sums of prestigious buildings seem to be quite content to allow their interiors to gradually become dirty and shabby. The author got the impression that this was a well-rehearsed argument on Brenda's part.

Important social 'communication' within TCC was not restricted to company personnel. Brenda was just embarking upon a significant dialogue with her business advisor. She was also deliberately increasing her networking activity. Just as was seen in the Sandra Hill Case (see page 212) the 'communication' was necessarily beyond the bounds of the company. However the difference between these cases was that Brenda was employing two external 'resources' that could cause 'agency' within her company's 'structure'; whereas, Sandra Hill was using her position within a professional institution to extend her 'social structure'.

In the preliminary meeting, the participant and author explored whether this research exercise might also be of use to TCC. She was positive about this, and was not concerned about any mismatch with the efforts of the business adviser; principally because the sessions had not started at that stage. Also Brenda had attended business awareness sessions at the Newcastle Business School, which gave her a measure of confidence in the engagement process.

'Agency' requires some form of 'power' to make change happen. In Brenda's case, she possessed the 'power' to deploy her staff to various clients. However, most of her staff were part-time and only a few of those were long term employees of TCC.

"I could stand there to a client and tell them that we are going to be the best thing since sliced bread, but it depends on the staff I put in." (Brenda Cunningham, response #183)

Brenda also had the 'power' to say "yes" or "no" to cleaning contracts that were being offered.

However, in the post banking crisis era, declining a contract was hardly an option. This obviously worried Brenda, because she had not been in a situation where she might be tempted to take a contract 'against her better judgement' for quite a long time. Apart from being wary of the risks of large contracts to small businesses like hers, one way to avoid this dilemma (in her opinion) was to increase the pool of available clients. Hence, her determination to network more extensively; and to try to expand in a business area she considered to be underserved, i.e. rural business clients.

"If you cut it down too fine, what happens if your really fast cleaner is off sick and you put a normal cleaner in? They're not going to get the job done properly." (Brenda Cunningham, response #187)

Brenda was quite candid about her suspicions that some of her competitors were cutting corners to such an extent that they were probably breaking the law.

In terms of sanctioning action at TCC, Brenda has plans for the future but does not want to grow too fast. She was asked about succession (or sale) in the future. She expected to sell, but not for another ten years. In the author's experience, building a business up for eventual sale is often a viable strategy for a small business. It can avoid the problems of growth associated with the need for professional managers (see cases of OBW and TB in this study). The author asked Brenda to speculate as to whom might be the purchaser. She replied that hopefully it would be one of the large contract cleaning companies. In those circumstances the biggest asset would be her established clientele. So this appeared to be consistent with her current strategy of increasing her customer base.

Brenda is also sanctioning the advisory capacity of her business trainer. In a larger company this role might be a non-executive director.

"Probably, I don't really need him. It's just with being in the business for so long, and on my own for quite a lot of that time, I feel it would benefit for me to set targets when I know I've got another meeting with him." (Brenda Cunningham, response #133)

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

Giddens refers to three 'modalities' in his theory, or as Whittington (2010, p.) explains, "*The means by which structural dimensions are expressed in action.*" These are 'interpretive schemes', 'facility' and 'norms' respectively. The most striking interpretive scheme at TCC will be regarding the new website.

"Businesses invest in architects, design and build in order to create the right image yet the same businesses are averse to placing the equivalent importance on cleaning in order to maintain this image. A clean building may go unnoticed but a dirty one will certainly register. First impressions count!"
(TCC Website, accessed February 2013)

The structurationist lens does not reveal much in the way of modal 'facility' at TCC. As the SBO in this case, Brenda can determine the deployment of the cleaners (*authoritative resource*). Although this has all the appearances of being routine operational matters, it could be argued that this has

slight elements of '*strategising*'. There is a tenuous link to Brenda's desire to expand her service offering to rural clients. Crucial to this endeavour would be the '*power*' to deploy cleaning staff over a wide geographical area. In her '*strategising*' praxis, Brenda is estimating and testing whether she has sufficient '*authoritative resources*' at her disposal, to undertake that strategic move.

The social '*structure*' around Brenda had been fairly static (within the bounds of the business) in the period leading up to the interview. Brenda's efforts to increase her networking and moving to a new area of business were likely to change the '*norms*'. The perceived wisdom that urban business was easier than rural (principally because of distances between premises and location away from areas where staff were typically live) is now being questioned. One of the problems with Brenda's idea was that rural businesses are also suffering economic decline. She hoped to target rural public houses, but these were closing at unprecedented rates. This was going to be a topic for discussion with her business advisor, and it is certainly not impossible for a small business to profitably exploit a declining market. This strategy would need careful consideration.

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

The research field of semiotics figures large in Structuration Theory as the communication of shared meaning is an important interaction in a social grouping or organisation. Unlike some of the other companies in this study, there were no explicit examples of '*signification*' for the author's scrutiny during the interview; this being conducted in an outhouse in Brenda's large garden. It was in the process of being fitted out as a typical office. There was an extensive paperwork filing system, but no IT equipment had been installed at that stage.

During the interview, Brenda did mention that TCC used to deliberately signify its cleaning service presence in client reception areas. As she explained, one of the problems of cleaning is that it is almost always conducted outside of normal business hours. Her company had the practice of always putting a fresh flower display in a prominent position in the reception area with the requisite business card attached. The author enquired whether this was still the practice for the company. She replied that it had now been abandoned on the grounds of cost. From a structural '*signification*' point of view, the author could interpret this as an artefact that would have meaning to both Brenda and her staff. This was beyond the obvious opportunistic marketing message that was being conveyed to the clients' business visitors, because it emphasised the need for a quality job by the cleaning staff. They would appreciate that the owner of the business had confidence in their ability to produce work that was worthy of her marketing effort. Brenda explained that the real problem was the maintenance of fresh flowers, which could become labour-intensive far beyond the schedule of contractual cleaning. Of course, the message could be completely undermined if the flowers started to wilt. So what appeared, at first sight, to be a simple piece of free advertising, was in fact an expensive item on Brenda's cost base.

The Giddensian idea of a '*domination structure*' emerges from a theory of '*authorisation*' and '*resource allocation*'. In the case of TCC, there was a paucity of '*resources*' within the firm; but effective deployment of cleaning staff (in the most efficient manner) was paramount to success. It should be remembered that in this industry cleaning is all about the timing. Tendering competition between rival cleaning companies is normally conducted on the basis of cost alone. An adequate quality level is seen as a 'given' by customers, but the time it takes to clean an office suite is the key factor in determining how cheaply this can be done. Although cost considerations might be the private primary factor in determining which contract cleaning company succeeds, the causes of failure to keep a contract can be many. An inadequate cleaning regimen can be a reason for a customer to eventually switch suppliers; whereas, cleaners failing to turn up as agreed can be a more immediate cause. For Brenda, accuracy in the quotation is vital, as well as in the execution of cleaning services. Some cleaners have to work in two different establishments on the same morning. Underestimating the first job could be prejudicial to the second. The Giddensian structural dimension of '*domination*' infers attempted resource deployment to maximum effect. In this business, '*domination*' is akin to a 'market entry pre-requisite' or 'threshold competence'; as would be understood by a researcher in the Resource-based View of strategy. An inability to deploy cleaning staff effectively could be fatal to a firm like TCC. Such a reputation among client organisations would soon permeate the region.

'*Legitimation*' is the structural property that refers to the normative '*rules*' that govern the interaction in a social setting. These can be as tangible as laws, regulations or formal obligations; or as tacit as culturally accepted modes of behaviour or informal routines. Someone like Brenda takes her legal obligations very seriously. She has reasons to suspect that some of her competitors do not (on this particular point she was rather reticent to say anything about this that might be recorded, despite the confidentiality offered by the author and his organisation). She claimed to be prepared to walk away from business that had been quoted by competitors at a price below her threshold of quality. Her impression of these competitors is one of a nuisance. As she puts it:

"It's a very transient industry, you get people coming in one week and then they might stay a couple of weeks and then they're off again." (Brenda Cunningham, response #141)

In her opinion, anyone can set up as a cleaning business (although they don't tend to survive for very long). This means that there is a constant flow of new entrants to the market. She concludes that this has the effect of pulling prices down, whilst rendering a bad name for the entire industry. There is some evidence of structuration cycles within TCC. As with all the companies in this study, the focus is upon the SBO. However, social '*structure*' extends beyond the perception of such individuals. Even where the SBO is a sole trader, there is a shared perception with outsiders such as the bank manager or the accountant. In Brenda's case, a new outsider has engaged with her in the form of a business coach. Part of his praxis will be to create a shared view of the business with his client.

Structuration

The structuration cycles are not very obvious in this case. It appeared as though there had been a long pause in the renewal elements of the social '*structure*' in Brenda's firm. She admitted to having '*let things slip*' and the impression given was of a 'tired business'. This was the only case in the study with an apparently lethargic structuration.

The firm was profit-making but likely to decline in her estimation if nothing was done. Her determination to change matters suggests that fresh structuration will start to occur in the future. There may be a cycle of strategic learning in regard of a rural business venture; the rules may be more different than she imagines. The introduction of a business coach ought to prompt more '*strategising*' from this SBO. She saw her participation in this research, as part of the rehabilitation of the business.

Brenda's activities are examined with the aid of the proposed SBO strategising model in the next section.

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Brenda Cunningham	SBO	Good cleaning is vital to maintaining a positive corporate image.	Total ownership (was initially a partnership). Knowledge of local urban market. Growing knowledge of rural market.	Prepared to turn down 'cut-throat' priced business. Not prepared to break regulations.
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Brenda Cunningham	SBO	New web site. Health and Safety Risk Assessments represent some of the <i>structural rules</i> in TTC.	Scheduling of cleaners. Costing of new business. Recruitment of a business coach.	Organic growth - not borrowing for expansion. Has used overdraft facilities to 'smooth out' revenue stream. Constrained by Minimum Wage legislation.
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Brenda Cunningham	SBO	Fresh flower displays in the clients' reception areas (practice now discontinued).	Principally deployment of <i>authoritative resources</i> (cleaning staff).	Length of time in the industry. Having same staff for over twenty years. Creating a business that could be sold at retirement.

Table 5.7 Interpretation of structuration cycles at TCC (Case D)

Strategising at TCC

Brenda may have been guilty of not strategising enough in the past. She admits that business prospects had deteriorated gradually over the years. The industry has become more competitive with the arrival of some very large national players.

“There are a lot of companies my size. I would say that they were my direct competitors. There are the big guys like the 'Mities' and the 'Jani-Kings', that sort of thing, who are often national franchised companies. The smaller one man bands I don't really regard them as competition.” (Brenda, response #65)

Brenda built up her strategic map throughout the interview. In a similar manner to many of the other interviewees, Brenda took the opportunity to rearrange the map in a left to right timebase arrangement. The author has noticed that there appears to be a pattern amongst the participant SBOs in their opting for the left to right timebase arrangement. Their arrangements seem to be more about clustering of ideas. Only a few seem to want to extend this to a dyadic arrangement. The Post-it™ note paraphernalia provided by the author included directional arrows, but few seem to want to make use of them. In examining cultural differences, the author pondered whether the frequent choice of a left to right timebase was influenced by education, or cultural upbringing. For instance, would someone from Japan, where traditional writing is downwards from right to left, make the same choice?

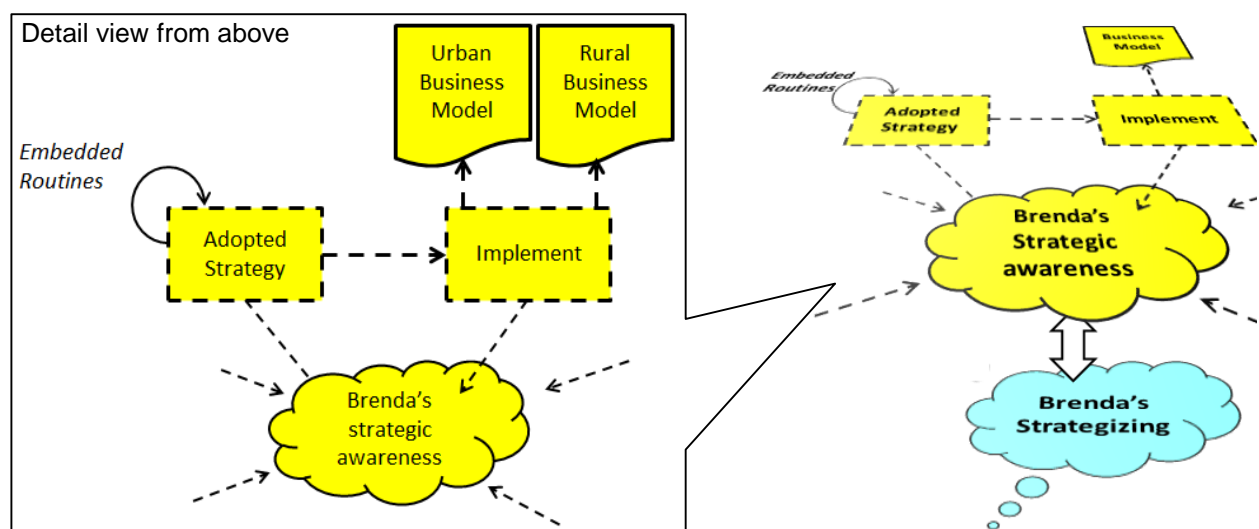


Figure 5.17 Static strategy at 'meso-level' in TCC monitored by Brenda's strategizing

Brenda's intention at TCC is business expansion by exploiting a new sector (rural cleaning business). Her strategy is very similar to before, but rolled out to a different geographic location. The rural model has changed slightly because her cleaners will have to travel greater distances between clients. This is somewhat offset by the fact that clients in rural locations have great difficulty in engagement with any type of cleaning company. This should mean the Brenda has more profit to play with to cover additional costs incurred by her cleaning staff.

Brenda is now considering a trial routine of using the services of a business coach. She feels that this will provide additional motivation to network more in the region. Whether this will prompt strategic change is yet to be seen. Apart from this, the routines available in Brenda's existing strategy seem to suffice. Although two business models may co-exist, it appears unlikely that Brenda aspires to have two separate businesses. Brenda's main concern is maintaining and acquiring '*authoritative resources*' (cleaning staff) that can service the operations described in both business models.

5.8. Sandra Hill Consulting (Case F)

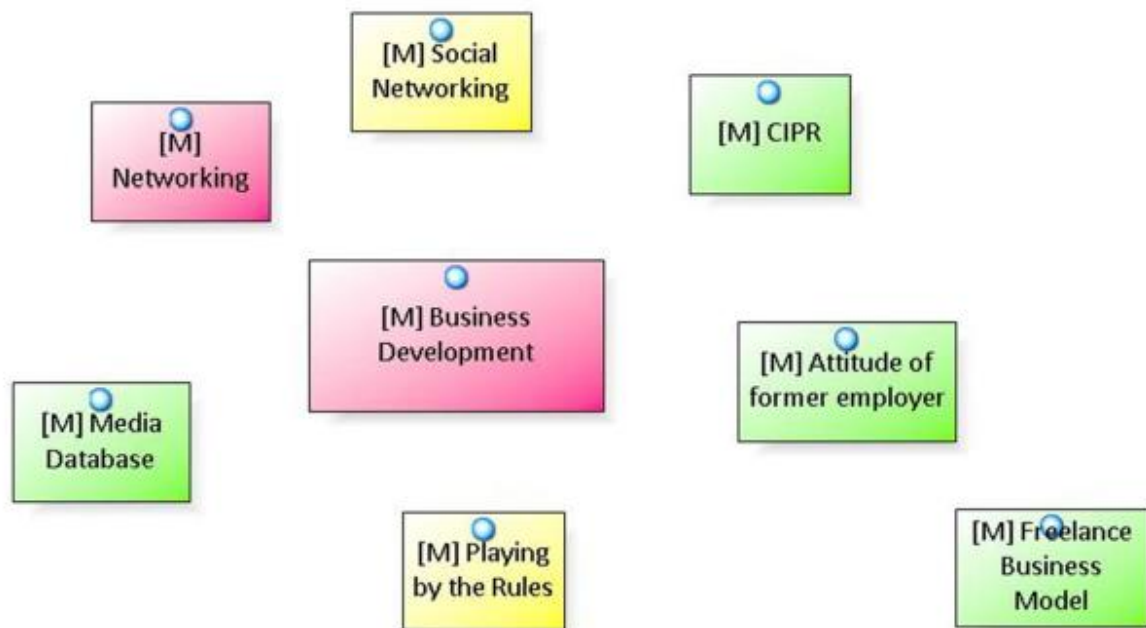


Figure 5.18 Sandra's strategy map (final) at SHC

At the time of the workshop, Sandra Hall was a sole-trading marketing consultant. She had established her business after her first post-graduate job in the sector. She had been a client of OBW in the past, and the two businesses have maintained close contact ever since. Her consultancy website portrays her business as being a highly experienced consultancy with an impressive client list. She has also built up an enviable reputation as a stalwart member of her professional institution. Sandra is still overshadowed by the terms and conditions of her severance from her first employer. Although legally questionable, such agreements can be very inhibiting (and time-consuming) for the would-be entrepreneur. At the time of her workshop, Sandra is planning for business expansion beyond her sole-trader status.

The session was carried out at Sandra's home. Sandra was characteristically different to the other owner-managers in that she had neither employees¹⁹ nor a dedicated premises in her business at the time of the interview. However, it should be noted from the outset that she has significant skills and experience in team management from her previous team leading roles in her previous employment.

Of all the participants, Sandra is the participant that engaged the least with the map building exercise. It became immediately evident (to the author) that she far preferred to use verbal rather

¹⁹ It has since transpired that two consultants have been recruited to her business Sandra Hill Consulting (SHC).

than graphical forms of discourse. However, this did not completely negate the advantages offered by this methodology; as she did glance at the map on many occasions, and it did serve to restore the discourse flow after minor interruptions. As can be seen from her map (see page 212), she only devoted major headings to the map and they were not structured in any particular way.

The author found that Sandra's very rapid speech was a challenge for the transcription phase. (The professional transcriber was forced to leave a few passages for the author to complete, commenting that the task had been one of the most difficult she had attempted). Audio recording quality was important in this type of situation, and fortunately the author had opted for a high level (MPEG-2 192kB CBR). Inadequate recording equipment, or a highly compressed audio format, could have been extremely problematic in the analysis preparation phase.

The author took the risk of proceeding without asking the participant for slower speech. The reason was the passion that Sandra has for this subject (evident in the audio from the video recording), and the author did not want to do anything that might subdue her discourse flow. Besides, asking someone with naturally fast speech to slow down will probably not work for very long.

The scope of the interview encompassed all of Sandra's business activities in the Public Relations and Marketing fields. It also related to her previous employment with one of the leading agencies in the UK. Sandra wanted to discuss how she had modified her strategising to suit the circumstances of operating as a freelance consultant, and the constraints and freedoms she had experienced in the role change.

Sandra is a prominent figure in the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and attends Institute of Directors (IoD) meetings. The author met her at an event hosted by Northumbria University for the IoD. As will be mentioned later, there is a business linkage between Sandra and the OBW case in this study. It also became apparent to the author, during the initial discussions, that Sandra was an *alumnus* of the Newcastle Business School.

This case was destined to be the smallest scale business in this study. Being one of the later studies, the author had gained increasing familiarity and confidence in the methods deployed. It was therefore a matter of searching for salient issues within a much reduced scope.

The author was particularly interested in taking the structuration lens down to the minimalist situation of a sole trader in professional services. As will be seen in the analysis, the traditional scope of a sole trader business (as might be defined by an accountant) does not render an absurd structuration analysis. However, the interpretation of '*structure*' requires the observer not to be bounded by the scope of the company. Obviously there is a distinct lack of internal resources compared to larger firms. For Sandra, there is an external '*structure*' that encompasses her wider network of contacts. She draws upon elements of this '*structure*' in her '*agency*'.

Structuration theory has been applied in the past to the individual entrepreneur (Mair & Martí,

2006; Sarason *et al.*, 2006; Chiasson & Saunders, 2005; Jack & Anderson, 2002), so this boundary of the study is not without precedent. However, it should be noted that Sandra is not an archetypal entrepreneur (in the sense that she is profession-based and has seen self-employment as a necessary phase in her career rather than an objective in its own right). During the interview she did not intimate a willingness to discard PR in favour of a different venture that could yield superior profits. She sees herself as a PR professional.

The S-as-P movement in strategic management research has looked in the direction of small businesses sporadically in the recent past (Haag, 2010; Nordqvist & Melin, 2010; Erdélyi & Whitley, 2008; Nordqvist, 2005), the prime focus in this field has been family SME businesses (usually with issues of succession planning). In the majority of these cases Activity Theory has been the underpinning approach rather than Structuration. So far the investigation of sole traders with structuration theory has only been attempted by those researchers interested in the entrepreneur and the concept of social embeddedness. Their structuration view proposes that the entrepreneur and social systems co-evolve (Sarason *et al.*, 2006). The author selected structuration because of its conceptual similarity of recursiveness to the strategic perspective known as the Resource-based View of the firm. The conjunction of two research themes at the context of the sole-trader may render an interesting set of linkages between entrepreneurs and strategisers in general.

Social structure (resources and rules)

As described in the introduction to this chapter the author's order of structuration element analysis is maintained. Even where there is not much interpretation to be made, the elements of structuration are still highlighted. This will serve to show where the use of this lens persists into the smallest of cases, and where there is little to be achieved.

The author has found that although there is a paucity of resources in this firm, Sandra is very resourceful. She operates in a wider community of individuals that are associated with The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and other organisations such as the Institute of Directors (IoD). If the structurationist lens is only applied to just her firm then '*structure*' diminishes to her personal characteristics such as experience and knowledge. The author is following the rationale applied by previous researchers in entrepreneurialism, who looked outside the immediate vicinity of the entrepreneur at their wider social '*structure*'.

Giddens actually interprets the word '*structure*' as the 'structuring properties' of a social context. He resolves '*structure*' into two elemental types – '*Resources*' and '*Rules*'. So in interpreting from this standpoint, the author is seeking examples of where this company can influence the production and reproduction of '*structure*'. Taking Giddens category of '*resources*' first is a natural development from the interview process as these questions are easier to pose in the first instance, and act as a useful way of developing the conversation.

The interview with Sandra occurred at the end of a period of sole trading for her business. (She added two associate consultants to her business a few months later.) This was not mentioned as an imminent possibility by Sandra during the interview. However she responded positively to a growth question, and envisaged having other people in her business in the future. This increase in size presents a future research opportunity whereby the author could return to investigate the alteration in '*structure*' and how the potential '*agency*' has been affected. The author was not able to accomplish this within the timeframe of this PhD study because Sandra gave birth a few months later and had been indisposed as far as research interventions are concerned. However, she has indicated that she would like to return to this exercise when she returns to work in 2012.

As a sole trader Sandra had no employees, and therefore her firm was devoid of internal '*resources*' that would be considered 'authoritative' from a structurationist viewpoint. This did not preclude external '*resources*' that might occur subject to sub-contracting or institutional agents that might be engaged with Sandra during her consultancy. However in the majority of instances she was alone. This raised an interesting point; can there be a social '*structure*' when you act alone? This will depend upon how you define '*structure*' (or structuring properties, as Giddens prefers). In the wider societal sense we are all operating within a '*structure*' and its rules. For instance, the obligation to pay both local and national taxation.

The external '*structure*' has been the focus of researchers into entrepreneurialism and the concept of embeddedness in a '*structure*' as a means to pursue innovative opportunities (Jack). In terms of sole owner-manager strategising, the situation converges to a nexus where researchers from both backgrounds are likely to use the same theoretical approach. The entrepreneurial researchers have found structuration to be the best underpinning, and this supports the choice made in this study.

In terms of '*allocative resources*' (which are effectively all things non-sentient that can be deployed within the business); Sandra has a professional website that outlines her consultancy services and contains numerous endorsements from prestigious clients of her business. SHC has no premises (as Sandra works from home). However, there are many situations where she can co-opt facilities for the purposes of her business. Such an arrangement might materialise with OBW for instance. The author was made aware that OBW had offered their premises for Sandra's interview (as had Newcastle Business School). The website gives the impression of executive resources beyond those that are permanently available (which is a common approach in the sole consultancy sector). Sandra would hire such resources where they were required by the particular needs of a project.

The SHC freelance business model requires substantial investment in a media database. This is seen by Sandra as an essential tool of the trade. She points out that there are competitors who try to avoid this cost by gathering data from internet sources, but the end result is far inferior, in her opinion, to a professional on-line platform. She also cites the time saved each time a campaign is

mounted.

The social '*structure*' that is described by Sandra has been subject to dramatic change because of her launch into self-employment. The interview contains a large portion that is devoted to the effects that this career move had upon her.

Sandra initially suffered from business activity constraints that were designed to inhibit any commercially competitive action against by her previous employer. This is not an uncommon scenario for people who leave a large employer to set up on their own, and it presents a field of legal inquiry and jurisprudence that continues to grow.

In this study the author is interested to see whether any strategising activity reported by Sandra can be highlighted under the structuration lens. The residual non-structural factors that emerge are then forwarded for later consideration in the study.

Sandra was asked about her use of the phrase "playing by the rules" (this seemed significant, and participant and author agreed that it should become a ticket on the map). It arose in her description of the events immediately following her resignation and start-up of SHC. The author asked her about her current freelance situation and what '*playing by the rules*' now meant to her.

"So I should be driving an Audi, moving out to the country into a big country house. Do you know what? That's their [previous peers] measure of success! That's not mine anymore ... I think that's been the big eye opener!" (Sandra Hill, at start of response #69)

Sandra was aggrieved that her '*playing by the rules*' in employment seemed to count for nothing when she struck out to start up on her own. She was taken by surprise when her former employer took legal action to attempt to curtail her trade. This was an unanticipated outcome of her action in leaving the large firm. Structuration theory includes the possibility of unanticipated outcomes arising from '*agency*' in the duality of '*structure*' (Giddens, 1984: p.5). In this case, the change in Sandra's '*structure*' included a severe constraint upon her ability to ply her trade if this was not resisted. She was able to overcome this initial difficulty for her freelance business activity, but the experience has left her disappointed in her former employers. She is sanguine about the episode, but recalling events during the interview brought back some of the former emotion.

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

From a Giddensian viewpoint, '*agency*' is conceptualised as producing and reproducing '*structure*'; or as he elaborates, "one presupposes the other" (Giddens, 1979: p.53). '*Structure*' can constrain or enable '*agency*'. In the latter case, the agent can draw upon elements of the '*structure*' to enable or support social action that in turn produces, or reproduces, elements of social '*structure*'. The types of '*agency*' envisaged by Giddens are categorised as, '*communication*', '*power*', and '*sanction*'. The author will elaborate on '*agency*' in SHC according to the same taxonomy.

In the preliminary meeting, the participant and author explored whether the research exercise might be of use to SHC. The author felt that her inclusion would be interesting to test the efficacy

of structuration as a tool to identify strategising practice in the smallest business possible - the sole trader.

Obviously, '*communication*' for the sole trader has no component of discourse that is internal to the firm (apart from the owner-managers own thought processes). However, Sandra is constantly communicating with the outside world of work, and she still engages with an external social '*structure*' that she first engaged with during her period of employment with a large national agency.

The purpose of Sandra's business is to improve the communication of clients through public relations and marketing. Being able to carefully craft a firm's communication with the outside world is a vital skill for someone in her profession. Her website performs a communication role to potential and existing clients. There is a monthly blog on her website (that has also been invaluable in this case study). She also engages in social networking through media such as Twitter and Facebook. As her business is all about appropriate communication, the author has detected elements of this type of '*agency*' throughout the interview.

As Giddens states, "An agent ceases to be such if he, or she, loses the capability to '*make a difference*', that is, to exercise some sort of power" (Giddens, 1984 p.14). In Sandra's case, she does possess the *power* to 'make a difference'. Strategising in a one person business might be considered to be lonely occupation; but the transcript reveals that Sandra has a wide range of business contacts and friends. The apparent freedom from a '*boss*' is offset by the trinity relationship between the sole trader, her bank manager and her accountant. Sandra seeks opinions from an even wider variety of sources. In particular, she singles out the main institutional bodies that represent her sector such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), Public Relations consultants Association (PRCA) and the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM).

Sandra has a cooperative relationship with one of the other case companies in this study (OBW, see page 122), and has been a client in the past. There has been frequent joint marketing between the two companies. Sandra was one of the early clients of OBW.

Sandra has total control over her website and this is highly integrated with her social networking. She uploads a monthly 'blog' and has articles concerning some of the *do's and don'ts* of public relations work. In this sense she is able to project some knowledge '*power*' to the wider world.

In terms of '*sanctioning agency*' at SHC, Sandra has big plans for the future but does not want to grow too fast. She expresses this in the transcript as,

"What I am looking at is doing a partnership with some other marketing providers."
(Sandra Hill, response #69)

Subsequent to the interview this has transpired with the addition of two experienced marketing consultants. Sandra was strategising in this instance because this was not only a response to a growing workload, but also felt it necessary to get some maternity cover for her business in the

later part of 2011.

"It's been a real pleasure to welcome two very talented PR consultants [...] on board – both of whom have fantastic reputations in the North East marketplace and have been putting their skills to great use on the client portfolio. I know that when I go off on maternity leave this September, the business will be in very safe hands." (Extract taken from SHC website October 2011)

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

The most striking '*interpretive schemes*' at Sandra Hill Consulting appear in her website which is a structural '*allocative resource*' providing '*signification*' for her business. Although aimed at an outside world, the site visitors engage with her interpretative schemes as the web page contents impart an impression of the business ethos and provide guidance to those inexperienced in PR. It is not a neutral message, there are elements of opinion that typify her view on the world of PR and are there to provide a distinct differentiation from other providers.

The interview repeatedly exposed linkages through her association with (and climb to prominence within) the local and national aspects of the CIPR. Her forthright approach coupled with the experienced gained in serving the institutions makes the website particularly interesting. She skilfully intertwines these aspects of her career into the central themes of the website. After visiting the site, the author's first impression was that Sandra Hill Consulting is an embryonic brand. It was later confirmed, that this was partly due to the influence of OBW (another case herein) that is a branding agency.

The structurationist view of SHC does not reveal much in the way of modal '*facility*'. If '*power*' is the ability to influence outcomes that are not necessarily the product of single '*agency*', then any '*power*' Sandra wields will be external to her freelance business. As already stated, she is resourceful and apparently influential through a wide variety of channels into the local community of PR companies.

At any point in time she has several active accounts with clients. When engaged in this way, '*power*' is evident because the PR work she undertakes requires the active participation of the client. The Giddensian view that '*power*' can build '*resources*' which can be deployed effectively to dominate a situation is echoed in this case through the steady accumulation of client business. This trend continued after the interview, and her website *blog* for September 2011 states that despite the recession she has 'retained all of her existing clients and grown the business'.

It appears that the social '*structure*' around Sandra had remained fairly constant (within the scope of her business) in the period before the strategy workshop. This was due to the freelance business model that she had been following. This will now change with the recruitment of two consultants to form a team of three. '*Agency*' has occurred in bringing about this recruitment and the '*structure*' in SHC will now change. The author is intrigued to follow this study with another into SHC so that the longitudinal effects of this structuration cycle can be observed on a before and

after comparison basis.

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

Semiotics figures large in Structuration Theory and the communication of shared meaning is an important interaction in a social grouping or organisation. As with each mode of interaction the dualism is replaced by the duality of 'structure' in the theory (Giddens, 1979).

'Signification' appears in the website as the list of endorsements from senior executives in her previous client companies. Sandra can use this resource to persuade new clients to consider her services, and thereby has the 'power' to extenuate her influence on selling outcomes. As the business continues this 'power' is likely to grow as well. She freely admits that this is a reputation-based business sector, and 'power' comes from a positive reputation in the market. It is also interesting to note that she is intent upon maintaining a gross margin percentage that reflects her standing in the PR community. It is not her strategy to offer cut price business just because there is a recession. In talking about rival freelancers she observed,

"... their fee structure's a bit different ... they might have not invested so much in their brand and they don't charge out as much as me" (Sandra Hill, response #99)

Sandra has a monthly fee-earned income figure in mind when deciding whether to take on new business, but she intimated that this was flexible if she felt that a particular account might give her an opportunity to enter a new sector. This indicated a regular strategising behaviour in her day-to-day working life.

The Giddensian notion of a '*domination structure*' emerges from a theory of authorisation and resource allocation. In the case of SHC, there is a paucity of '*resources*' within the firm; but the website can be seen as deployment vehicle for Sandra's message to potential clients. It would probably be the first place that a client would check if Sandra had been recommended. Sandra observed during the interview that some of her business originates by referral, but she would like more. The website can also be seen as a way of deploying support to her reputation in the region. It can also be interpreted by the author, that the generic message that Sandra wishes to promulgate can sometimes affect all three structural elements by a particular mix of modalities (for instance, if she sanctions an expansion in the business as has occurred since the workshop). This will be communicated through her website (particularly in her blog section). This will elucidated her readers in respect of the two new members of staff joining the business. This *facilitates* her deployment of extra '*authoritative resources*'; the aforesaid having been *sanctioned* via a modified *norm* with consequent '*legitimation*'. To an outside observer this will be accomplished through the '*signification*' it derives in her website. The author notes that Sandra Hill is one of those SBOs, in his experience, that manages to portray an impression of a larger organisation through the skilful creation of her website. Even while she was a sole trader with no permanent premises, the website created a sense of assurance in the reader that her business was highly professional. It also gave

a remarkably accurate picture of her personality to someone who had never met her (in the author's opinion).

'*Legitimation*' is the structural property that refers to the normative rules that govern the interaction in a social setting. These can be as obvious as laws, regulations or formal obligations; or as tacit as culturally accepted modes of behaviour or informal routines. Someone like Sandra, that is deeply engaged with her professional institution, will signed up to a code of professional practice. This '*legitimation*' mechanism is used by many in her type of business service. In her institutional role, she has some influence upon the structuration of the institution; and the code of practice of membership professionals is one of the more obvious areas. This is a particularly interesting concept, to the author, whereby an individual deliberately intertwines two social '*structures*' as part of their '*strategising*'.

Structuration

There is some evidence of structuration within SHC that has arisen from the workshop. One aspect that was discussed at length was Sandra's reaction to the attempted curtailment of trade. Her social '*structure*' was changed by this event as she adopted coping mechanisms. Her perception of the *rules* by which she felt she was playing the consultancy game were changed by this experience. Like many entrepreneurs, Sandra was quite prepared to question the rules that were constraining her progress. Contractual limitations on her future trading agency fall within the category of contestable. The problem for someone in her position here is that can she afford the time and the money to achieve a desired legal outcome.

In the next section Sandra's strategising is examined.

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Sandra Hill	SBO	Networking within the community of businesses in North East (mostly SMEs).	Ownership power but no authoritative resources and very limited allocative resources. Currently feels constrained by questionable legal trade restrictions by previous employer.	Permitting the expansion of the business by hiring new consultants (occurred several months after workshop).
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Sandra Hill	SBO	Website blog is actively used in networking.	Determining how her services are deployed.	Avoiding conflict with previous employer.
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Sandra Hill	SBO	Website accreditations. Functional roles within the IoD.	The current scope of business being sought by SHC limited by her own ability to service such business.	The defined extent of SHC business and sectoral networking.

Table 5.8 Interpretation of structuration cycles at SHC (Case F)

Strategising at SHC

Sandra may have been a freelance PR consultant during this interview, but this did not preclude her from strategising about her business. SHC is a growth SME, as can be seen from subsequent events. Using structuration theory to analyse the smallest of businesses is not a futile exercise. The common criticism that is levelled against S-as-P (such as the lack of a political or

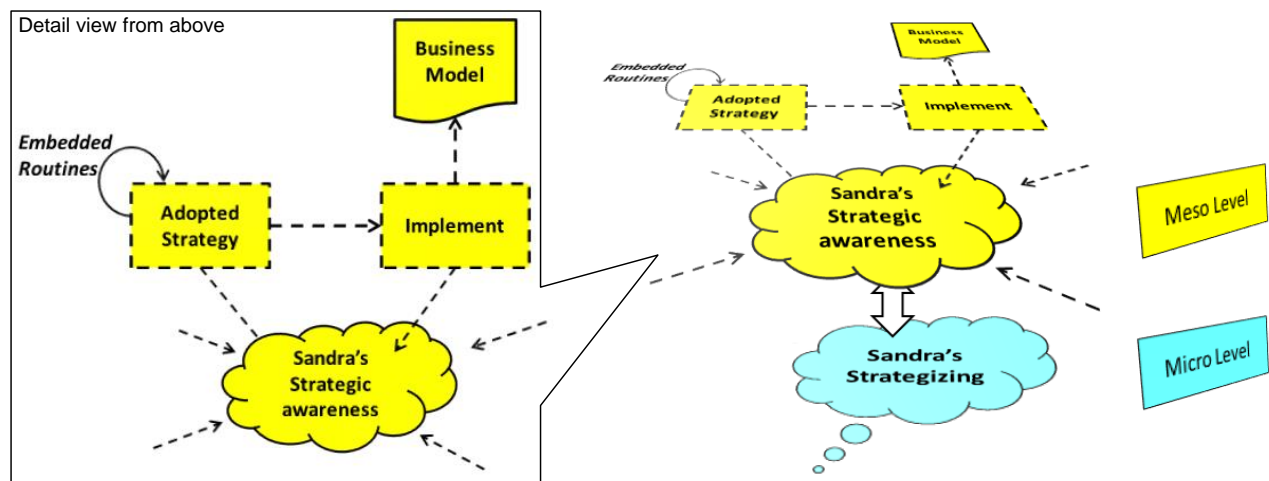


Figure 5.19 Sandra's strategising during static strategy formulation / implementation at SHC

critical viewpoint) are also alleviated by the use of structuration as the theoretical basis. The strategising in a sole trader business can be usefully examined if the researcher uses a template based on Giddens work.

Of all the participants, Sandra was the one who used her map the least. As previously mentioned, she is a very rapid speaker; and the author was left with the impression that she far prefers to express herself verbally.

Sandra's strategic awareness was fuelled by her active networking in the region. She built her business on connections through the Institute of Directors (IoD). She was an active member and also utilised her institution as a vehicle for promoting her professional qualifications. Her strategy was inhibited by legal clauses placed in her contract of employment by her previous employer. She was now finding ways to circumnavigate this. The strategic situation can be depicted by the state 'A' of the strategising model (see Figure 5.19). As a sole trader she had no '*authoritative resources*' and very little in terms of the *allocative*. Her best asset (apart from herself) is her website, which portrayed her as a substantial company rather than a person. She works from home and hires facilities whenever necessary. She has maintained access membership of certain databases which enable her to perform her marketing and PR services.

5.9. Montague-Endeavour Ltd (Case G)

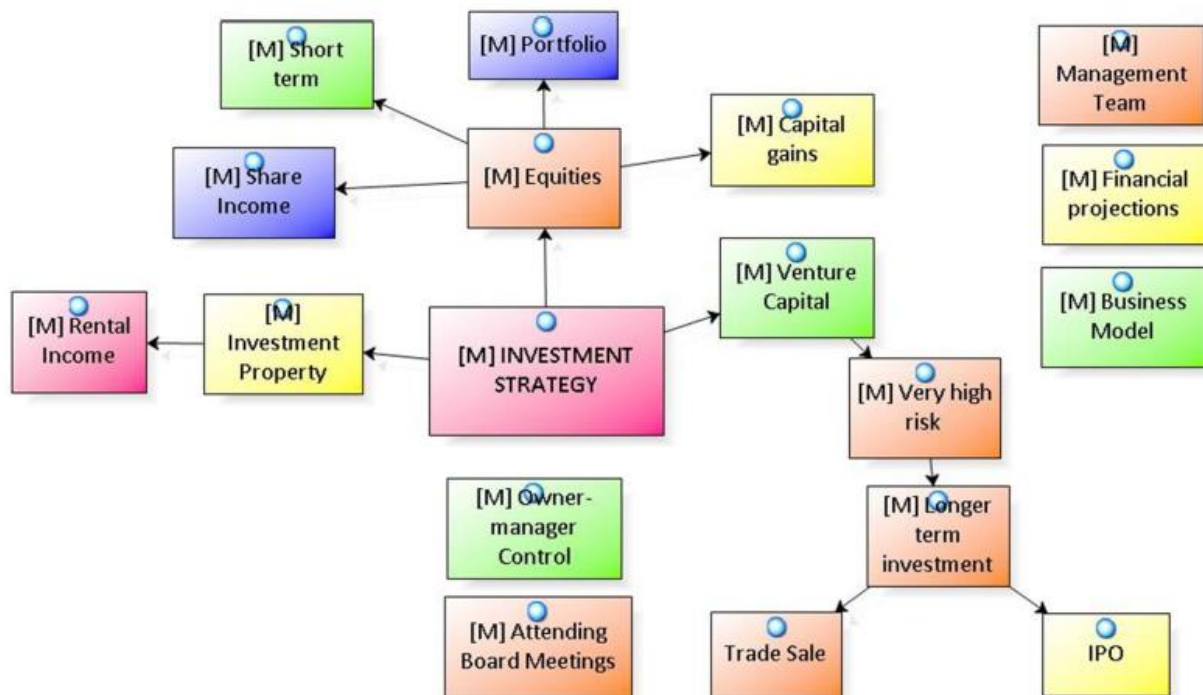


Figure 5.20 Darren's strategy map (final) at M-E

John Montague is a well-known entrepreneur and politician in the North-east of England. John is a leading light in the Institute of Directors and is often asked by the media to comment on matters financial affecting the North-east. He owns Montague-Endeavour (M-E) a property investment company that also operates as a private venture capital business. He is a multi-millionaire having built up a very successful services company in the UK. M-E manages John Montague's substantial investment portfolio, and it also operates as a venture capitalist that specialises in local small businesses.

John Montague has very little day-to-day dealings with this business and delegates the effective running to Darren Anderson, the investment manager for M-E. In the normal course of events, Darren would not qualify as an SBO in this study. However, he 'project manages' in investee companies on a regular basis. As such, he becomes of interest in this study because of his strategising activities. Investment decisions are predicated upon Darren's ability to 'add value' to a business and thereby increase the value of the M-E equity stake. His inclusion in this study is justified because he was the *de facto* strategist in many investee client businesses of M-E.

Any external business entity that deals with M-E will know Darren Anderson. He works very closely with John on the strategy of the business and has wide discretion in investment choices. As a notable personality John is frequently away from the business and delegates much of the running of the company (including 'strategising'). Research access to John Montague is very difficult to

secure. The author now realises, having interviewed Darren; that such a facility would only be available after 'testing' with Darren. The author decided that there were sufficient grounds to include this case, on the basis that it would be interesting to contrast a non-SBO who exemplified 'strategising' with those SBO's who had volunteered. The additional benefit would be that, subject to a satisfactory outcome for M-E; it also might gain future research access to John Montague.

Darren outlined some of the history behind M-E. He explained John Montague's previous venture that had created the necessary wealth for him to become a venture capitalist. :

"He [John] was involved in starting the business 'Homecentre', obviously became a listed company and is now a Footsie 200 company worth about £1.5 million and still has a shareholding in the business." (Darren Anderson, response #14)

John Montague started the Homecentre business in approximately 1990, and Darren's response indicated the phenomenal growth that laid the basis for his next venture, Montague-Endeavour. During the interview Darren demonstrated by means of the strategy map that M-E had a business model that could be subdivided into three sections. The major portion was devoted to property investment. This is a mix of commercial and domestic buildings. There was a particularly large estate of holiday lets, both in the UK and abroad. Second portion was involved in general investment opportunities on stock market. The share portfolio was actively managed by Darren on a day-to-day basis. There were several professional institutional investment managers who were constantly on the phone to Darren. The final section had more affinity to the cohort of participants in this study. This was a private venture capital operation that was constantly looking for growth companies in the North-east of England. For the purposes of this study, the author was particularly interested in this section; as Darren was functioning as a non-executive director to a group of SBOs with a particular remit to formulate their strategy. The author found that this particular aspect was particularly interesting. The interview had revealed that there were SBOs in the community who might not want to participate in a study like this without prior discussion with their venture capitalist partner. The author enquired whether the investment portfolio side of the business was providing income for venture capital. Darren confirmed that it was:

"The main income, on an annual basis, would come from rental income from the investment properties, in particular the commercial properties have quite a strong cashflow and also the other main source of income is dividends from Housecentre shares." (Darren Anderson, response #33)

The discussion then moved to the balance of the business model, because such an arrangement would require a mix of long-term and short-term investment. Darren agreed that this was the case, with the exception of the occasional opportunistic investment in the share portfolio. The author enquired about the strategy that Darren formulated for these small businesses in the North-east of England. He outlined that such strategies would be aimed at producing growth in these companies; the existing business model's ability to do this was crucial in the *due diligence* carried out by Montague-Endeavour prior to investing. The whole *raison d'être* for Montague endeavour

revolved around successful identification of growth potential and timely investment to produce maximum returns. Talking about the due diligence process, Darren outlined his usual approach:

"I would look at is the commercial viability of the business. The second thing would be the people, the management team, their experience, their successes or failures, and also whether there is any value that we could add in terms of strategic thinking." (Darren Anderson, emphasis by participant, during response #41).

The author was interested to know whether this brought about any disagreements with John. In the early stages of the workshop it wasn't absolutely clear whether Darren was just operationalising 'strategising' decisions emanating from John. As the session progressed, it became clear that Darren was a source of original thinking in this area. Although the final decision whether or not to invest in a certain company was John's, some of the analysis of up to that point was the work of Darren. The two would work as a team, with Darren providing continuity as John needed to give attention to other matters that consumed his attention. Darren was able to articulate how he was able to provide some innovation to the analysis. He saw his role as providing an additional view that could identify venture projects as sources of growth within these small businesses. Identifying these opportunities for something that Darren saw as adding value to the operation.

"I can sometimes add value in terms of being a fresh set of eyes looking at a business that John and the owners of the business have looked at, and are very familiar with; and then, if I've gone in and started looking at the business from afresh, I sometimes see things that they have overlooked." (Darren Anderson, during response #47).

The favoured mode of operation to stimulate growth in these small businesses was one of project management. Darren could be inserted into the company for a specific period of time to stimulate the new activity, or revitalising an old one. The ideal outcome would be the creation of a new revenue stream.

"I've gone in and worked with them [a venture capital recipient] on a specific project, and would work specifically as someone who can focus on that particular objective; whereas they wouldn't necessarily have the resource to do that with their own staff." (Darren Anderson, during response #47, [note by author]).

Darren was interested in the author's methodology of this study. It was explained that there was nothing proprietary about the methods being used. If Darren found anything particularly useful, he could build it into his own praxis. The strategy mapping exercise was obviously something that could be considered in this regard. Darren thought that it was a good way of supplementing discussion about strategy. He had a problem that frequently occurred when dealing with investee companies. This was the senior management team devoted to operational rather than strategic thinking. Although he could come into the company as an 'agent of change' on a project management basis; it was necessary to discuss what he was doing with the existing management team. For his efforts to flourish it was necessary to get their active approval.

"I think we [Montague-Endeavour] would be looking at it from more of a strategic and business point of view, where they [the venture capital recipient] are maybe more looking at it from an operational point of view, or what has been done historically." (Darren Anderson,

response #51, [note by author]).

Darren's problem was very similar to that encountered by the author in this study. They needed to get the attention of very busy people, and then convinced and that a strategic change was necessary and available. Ideally this would be a company starts one of the regular board meetings that he attended.

"I think sometimes the people who run the businesses can think that they are too busy or that they know better than to actually take notice of the analysis that we have done that could be very helpful." (Darren Anderson, response #57).

At about twenty minutes into the strategy map exercise, Darren explained that he had been involved in one such project with one of the companies that had sold shares to M-E for a capital stake in their business. This involved a website that was intended to provide users with a market comparison (similar to those that appeared for all forms of insurance). The firm, despite many attempts, had never been able to completely finish it with their IT developers. Darren took charge and immediately questioned the strategy of the underlying business model. The firm was prepared to try Darren's innovative approach, and after a successful trial run, agreed to this fundamental change. This has now created a secondary revenue stream for the company.

"Almost every business plan that you see the exit strategy [for venture capitalists] is a trade sale or IPO (Initial Public Offering), that's the end game in any small business investment." (Darren Anderson, response #78).

One of the dominant themes that occur throughout this case study is the reluctance of some SBOs to relinquish personal control. This issue was raised by Darren as an example of a barrier to growth which might prejudice venture capital investment.

"There's one example where there is I think one of the things that is holding back the company's growth is that the founder of the business, the entrepreneur is not allowing the business to expand, because he doesn't necessarily want to relinquish control." (Darren Anderson, response #86).

However, Darren doesn't necessarily see this as a 'deal killer'; but recognises that considerable work might be needed to persuade the reluctant SBO of the virtues of business growth to both parties. Anything that might facilitate the discussion and create the necessary persuasion would be good and Darren's point of view.

Once on board with a non-controlling share in a small business, Darren can get to work with his 'strategising' skills. He and John Montague will attempt to attend all of the regular board meetings; but specific project work will be conducted by Darren in the interim. His 'strategising' often culminates in a need for board level approval.

"I think with all the businesses the minimum would be attending monthly board meetings, and if there is any significant events, then a regular dialogue with the relevant people." (Darren Anderson, during response #97).

Previous experience gained by the author in the field of small business has led to his caution when

mentioning the term '*business angel*'. The author was careful in this interview to avoid causing offence by what might be deemed to be a pejorative term by the participant. It is the author's opinion that, the essential difference between a 'venture capitalist' and a 'business angel' is often one of ulterior motive. Whereas the venture capitalist is seeking opportunities to invest money in rapidly growing businesses; the business angel seeks faltering firms with an ostensible skill gap that he (or she) can personally fill. The motive for the venture capitalist is a profitable period of investment return, on the back of stimulated growth, that usually culminates in a trade sale or IPO flotation. However, the business angel may have an ulterior motive in wresting effective control from the current ownership. Such behaviour, if sufficiently repeated, can give an entire class of business support specialist a negative reputation in a small business community. There also appears to be a tendency towards secrecy when business angels are involved which can add to the accumulation of negative rumours. Despite the apparent lack of angelic qualities being demonstrated by some business angels; the author can see some of the best practice from such individuals reflected in the '*strategising*' actions of Darren. The business motive for M-E appears to be pure venture capitalism, but the '*agency*' of Darren is one of providing the absent skill of '*strategising*' in some of the companies receiving investment. The author was left in absolutely no doubt that Darren's motives were not acquisitive, but the parallel of a 'missing skill' injection is of particular interest. To this extent M-E represents a 'hybrid growth facilitator' for small businesses that is worthy of further investigation. It may well represent an innovative business model at a time when SMEs are struggling to achieve any form of growth. The author notes that another company in this study had adopted an innovative business model (Pubrelco's 'G-Train PR', see page 184). A cursory examination of the similarities between the two business models immediately focuses upon the age of the people involved in the delivery. Both M-E and Pubrelco were utilising young graduates (Darren was a recent *alumnus* of Newcastle Business School, and Pubrelco had sought graduates from both of the Newcastle Universities). In an era of problematic graduate employment, these initiatives demonstrated an innovative approach to business model design that could be blueprints of further graduate employment. On the other hand, it could be argued that both these initiatives represented displacement of existing services. That is, higher paid middle-aged professionals might be squeezed out of the job market by lower cost mentored graduates.

Social Structure (resources and rules)

Although Darren is not the SBO in this case company, his '*strategising agency*' verges upon that of such an individual. During the workshop, he recounted situations where he could make sizeable investment decisions (without any need to seek permission from the SBO). This level of trust is a remarkable contrast to all the other SBOs in this study. As previously mentioned in the other cases, the SBOs were very wary of including any subordinates in their workshop. An open discussion of business strategy was considered to be far too risky for these small business

owners. This did not mean that they weren't conversing about strategy with subordinates; it appeared that they did not want their '*strategising*' praxis to be questioned in front of one of their staff. Most SBOs agreed, in the aftermath, that they would be prepared to take the next step of staff inclusion. However they needed the confidence derived from the workshop before sanctioning this level of access. Contrast this with the situation presented to the author in M-E willing this will. The SBO had been content to hand over the entire process of a strategy workshop to the person who was the actual agent in terms of '*strategising*'. It was this remarkable situation that convinced the author to include M-E in the study. Furthermore, such inclusion leaves questions unanswered that can be addressed in future research. Further discussion is undertaken at the end of this study regarding group workshops that investigate the thinking of the SBO and their staff. It should also be noted that handing over the entire strategy workshop to a subordinate could be another form of avoidance behaviour by an SBO.

In Giddensian terms social '*structure*' is a mixture of '*resources*' and '*rules*' that can be accessed and used by knowledgeable agents. In the early stages of the workshop with Darren the author explored those categories in his questioning.

The '*authoritarian resources*' in M-E include a small number of staff. The SBO (John Montague) has a professional manager Darren, a personal assistant, and an accountant inside the bounds of the company. There are many other associates that M-E can influence in terms of their deployment. Typical example would be an investment manager in an equity brokers. The degree to which company holds sway over their actions varies according to business circumstances. The '*allocative resources*' in the company include office premises in Newcastle, IT equipment, etc.; but the largest deployable resource is money. M-E exists because this resource is carefully managed by investment in high growth opportunities.

In working for M-E, Darren is subject to a wide variety of financial rules. Actions must meet the criteria set down by Government agencies such as the FSA, or meeting the requirements of taxation as laid down by the HMRC. As the company also has a large estate of property investments, there are numerous regulations regarding the landlord status of the company.

"I've got a lot on file here, a lot of historical stuff kept on file."
(Darren Anderson, during response #147).

In the discourse with Darren, the social rules that have evolved between John Montague and Darren were explored. The SBO appears to have a very 'light touch' approach to controlling the '*agency*' of Darren. They appear to have a shared appreciation of the defined scope of the business (which falls into three discrete areas), as well as an on-going and evolving understanding of how investments should be managed, and most importantly, encouraged to grow. Increasing shareholder value is paramount to a company like M-E.

There is an operational heuristic for venture capitalists that involves the cost of due diligence all

the venture is that are investigated. This cost overhead could be covered by the revenue stream generated by those ventures that are progressed to investment. In effect, a venture capitalist will have a target 'hit rate' of say 'one in four'. That is, he (or she) needs to have successful investment in at least one company of four examined. Darren was extremely reticent about revealing what this figure might be. It is the author's experience at such individuals consider this to be part of the 'alchemy' of venture capitalism. The other rule, which has a profound effect on the activities of a venture capitalist, is one of 'scale'. The opportunities being investigated must be sufficiently large for one of them to produce the required revenue stream. This this rule is often cited as the reason why there is a paucity of venture capitalists in the North-east of England. The argument being, that there are insufficient investment opportunities of sufficient size in the region.

Agency (communication, power and sanction)

The author asked Darren to explain the sort of 'agency' in which he might engage on a typical day. His activities are normally split between dealing with venture capital invested companies and the M-E Equities Portfolio. Darren expounded that he knew all of the key people in the venture capital businesses. If he required information he would contact a managing director or accountant directly. With regard to the equities, he was having a daily conversation with certain stockbrokers. Any issues arising within the M-E property estate would require communication with property agents, surveyors, or management companies.

The ultimate 'power agency' in this business remains with the SBO John Montague. Unlike other companies in the study though, delegation was at the heart of the relationship between Darren and his employer. Darren certainly could invoke 'agency' with a degree of 'power'. He had already established himself as speaking with the authority of John Montague in all matters investment with external experts. Ultimately, it might not be his signature on the final document; but the majority of the 'agency' up to that point had emanated from Darren. This degree of delegation is interpreted by the author as enabling for John Montague, as he is known to pursue additional interests such as a political career. He also represents North-east regional business in many fora. For instance he is a 'leading light' in the Institute of Directors. It would not be possible to do all these things and still maintain 'hands-on' control of the minutiae of M-E. Also if such an individual is a 'mover' and a 'shaker' in the world of commerce and politics, it is almost inevitable that they must maintain a significant presence in London. Clearly John Montague's links to the region are manifest, and the author concludes that the presence of the headquarters in in the North-east is part of his commitment to the area.

In terms of 'sanctioning agency', it was not entirely clear whether Darren had the 'power' to invoke any expansion in M-E activities. However, he was not without influence in this regard. There was a large network of people and organisations interfacing with the company.

"There's a big network of people. I suppose the model that we kind of aim for is that there

is a network of people who manage a lot of these assets, well that manage all our assets, and they feed information into us and we feed recommendations and strategies out to them.” (Darren Anderson, during response #175).

Incremental growth was certainly within his purview, but an expansion into a completely new area of business would probably require the ‘*sanction*’ of John Montague. Although there was unfortunately no opportunity to engage John Montague directly in this study, there is no indication in Darren’s account of any concerns on the part of John Montague regarding the need for hands-on control. Darren’s status as a professional manager in the business have been establishing from the outset. John Montague was travelling so much on business that there was an inevitability that he required a strong professional managerial function at the company base while he was away. Although this could not be checked, the author assumes that John Montague is not overly concerned about a lack of ‘hands-on’ control.

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility, norms)

Giddens envisaged that knowledgeable agents could create, and reinforce, social ‘*structures*’ through their types of ‘*agency*’. These ‘*modi operandi*’ were typified as ‘*interpretive schemes*’, ‘*facility*’, and ‘*norms*’.

“Something that was introduced as I came into the business was to do a monthly review of what has happened within the month. So what has happened financially? How much money is being lost? A breakdown of what is happening financially in the month. A breakdown of what transactions have happened and what opportunities have arose. Indicated actions of what needs to be acted upon.” (Darren Anderson, during response #151).

This is in respect of a monthly written review of what was happening financially. This appeared to be a formalisation of the month’s day-to-day ‘*strategising*’ communication between Darren and John. As this had been running ever since Darren had joined the company, its accumulation had become part of the ‘*signification*’ dimension of the social ‘*structure*’ at M-E (in the author’s opinion). Darren’s description of the document bore resemblance to the sort of format usually required by venture capitalists from their prospective investment clients.

“I would construct a report with a one page summary, followed by 8 or 10 pages of detail, followed by half a dozen pages of appendices” (Darren Anderson, during response #153).

Darren also noted that he was frequently in communication with tax advisers. The principal reason was one of tax efficiency. The author notes that, at the time of the strategy workshop with Darren, there had not been any press, or political, campaigns against tax avoidance measures by large corporate’s (such as Amazon or Starbucks). The author considers that Darren would be less forthcoming on this point if it were asked now, concerning the current media hiatus on this subject.

“Equities reduced in value a lot, properties reduced in value, borrowings, the banks were getting tetchy about borrowings and wanting more collateral against the borrowings and I think, as a result of that, John brought in a new Financial Manager, as opposed to just a part-time accountant, and brought in me to add more management information and

control.” (Darren Anderson, during response #181).

Darren the author discussed the prevailing economic environment and in particular the effect of the 2008 banking crisis upon the fortunes of M-E. Darren said that he had joined the company just as the banking crisis colouring. He admitted that the value of the company had diminished. Like most companies in sector, it had suffered losses due to the drop in value of commercial property. He said there was also a new attitude from the major lenders. Banks were now requiring more collateral against borrowings. He surmised that John Montague had needed to services of someone like himself to feed the lenders with the additional information that they were now requesting. The part-time accountant had also been elevated to a full time post for the same reason.

“Well I think it's things that would have previously been done on a piece of A4 paper and half an hour of doing some calculations, and now I'll go away and spend a couple of weeks fully researching it and talking to different people, doing different levels of analysis and then produce a report with a recommendation with it, so yes I think there is a greater level of analysis that can be actioned now than could have previously.” (Darren Anderson, during response #187).

The author was interested to know how Darren's ‘agency’ was received in the venture capital receiving companies. Darren thought at first and foremost the directors of the assisted company were glad to get the finance from M-E. Darren had already explained that his particular ‘agency’ impact in one of these businesses would usually be conducted in terms of a discrete project. The author was interested to know whether Darren detected any hostility; because he had encountered anecdotal evidence in the past that venture capital assisted companies became alarmed at the rate of growth that was expected of them. One of Darren's projects could be ‘the point of the spear’ in that regard. However, Darren thought that was not the case; as the recipient company was usually glad to have an additional pair of skilled hands to see a project through to completion (quite often Darren adapted an existing plan that had never received enough attention prior to assistance from M-E). Darren implied that where he had met resistance, it was from the investment manager that was responsible for equity portfolio accounts (that included M-E). When Darren had suggested a reconfiguration of the portfolio to reduce the risk exposure by dispensing with volatile assets while solidifying the cash flow and earnings through the acquisition of blue-chip shares; he was met with a rather recalcitrant attitude:

“... he's the professional who does this every day, I'm a fresh graduate that's just come into the business and I'm trying to change things, shake things up, but our relationship has very much developed.” (Darren Anderson, at end of response #197).

“I kind of sold the fact that I was going to be a constant point of contact ... so I think he appreciates that, and yes, just built up a relationship from a sticky situation at first.” (Darren Anderson, at end of response #199).

Reading ‘between the lines’ of Darren's story, the author detected a situation (prior to his arrival in M-E) where it was becoming extremely difficult for outsiders to communicate with John Montague.

By providing a single point of reference, Darren was able to establish his 'agency' in the business network that surrounded M-E.

"We've gained trust in each other, and we've got a system that works and a level of trust that works." (Darren Anderson, response #205).

Darren has much more freedom of action in his 'strategising' 'agency' and he possessed at the outset. He can now make snap decisions regarding equity stock purchases when John Montague is unavailable to be contacted. A trust relationship has been built up whereby John Montague is quite happy to allow Darren to make decisions that would in the past probably been made by an investment manager in a stockbroking firm.

"I saw a plot of land that looked like a really good investment opportunity, and I hadn't even spoken to John about it. I just went off and viewed the land and spoke to the surveyor about it ... I thought it was a good opportunity, but didn't need to ask permission, or anything." (Darren Anderson, during response #209).

In terms of 'norms' the author surmises that there will be two elements particular to venture capital operations that will be a frequent use by Darren and John. These have already been alluded to in this analysis; the hit rate and the minimum investment value of any opportunity investigated. This will be shared rules in the social 'structure' of M-E. However, they would not be fixed over time by would rather be subject to occasional adjustment. External factors such as the UK economic performance and sectoral factors like construction projects, could have an effect on these rules. Experience of working together to enable both Darren and John to draw from the shared appreciation of what was right to pursue as viable investment opportunities. It should also be noted that the author's structural interest was focusing on one third of the business (venture capital for small businesses in the north-east of England). The other facets of the business needed to be functional to enable this portion to perform. It is highly doubtful whether a small venture capital operation in the north-east of England without access to external revenue streams coming from other investments would be viable. The absence of any similar competitors in the region (except under the umbrella of EU funding) only goes to reinforce this impression.

Structural dimensions (signification, domination and legitimation)

'Signification' at M-E was apparent to the author in the M-E website and the portfolio of investee companies. There were frequent publicity briefs to media concerning John Montague, who was often seen in the media. These were designed to reinforce the message. This had significantly improved the competitive advantage of the operation. M-E's 'legitimation' this was borne out by the successful improvements in profitability of M-Es investee companies that had undergone strategic projects with Darren. His 'domination' of 'authoritative resources' was less obvious to the researcher. He did not have any direct reports from staff within M-E. However, he had reconfigured the relationship between M-E and external investment managers so that there were no time delays on decisions. He made an interesting observation when questioned about the lack

of internal subordinates.

“...there will be some times when you would spend a couple days where you are just in the office and you haven't had any kind of social interaction.” (Darren Anderson, during response #214).

He missed the social interaction that would be available in a larger organisation. This workshop with Darren came at the end of the research study. Inevitably, issues can be raised in the last discourse which a researcher would prefer to have surfaced at the start. The author had not considered asking the other participants about the potential for being lonely at work. Structuration theory has an inherent focus upon communication and social interaction. It is not surprising that, a lack of communication was never captured in any of the case companies. However, ‘communication agency’ and ‘interpretive schemes’ that create ‘signification’ can all be occurring in an organisation that employs lonely individuals. Darren has the technology (BlackBerry) that enables 24/7 communication, but recognises the merits of having a social environment at work. In this particular case Darren sees the trade-off between isolation and his increased responsibility as one that is well worth paying.

“...the level of influence to actually having the ability to make some real decisions and to make some real changes, that's something you wouldn't get in a large corporation because it would all be very bureaucratic.” (Darren Anderson, during response #209).

Darren's prediction of the economic recession (that followed the Banking Crisis of 2008) is one of increasing gloom for the North-east of England. He subscribed to the same view as many of the economic commentators, that the regional dependency upon the public sector would mean that the effects of austerity would be particularly keenly felt in this region.

“I think the North East was an area that employment was heavily geared towards the public sector, whereas London, or the South East region is very geared towards the private sector, obviously public sector cuts there will be job losses. So I think the North East will be hit worse than other regions.” (Darren Anderson, during response #227).

An adapting social ‘structure’ requires ‘communication’. Darren explained his typical communication patterns with John. They might be far apart, but the technology enabled real-time and delayed conversation to occur frequently.

“We talk on the phone every day, or every other day. There will be half a dozen emails a day between both of us, and if he's round about a couple of times a week, if not, when he is around we'll have a meeting where we sit down for a couple of hours and talk about the different things that we've got going on and new ideas and things like that ...” (Darren Anderson, during response #248).

Structuration

As with the other case companies in this study, the author was looking for indications that structuration cycles were happening. In the case of M-E, it was evident in Darren's descriptions of his work patterns of the social '*structure*' was being manipulated to a certain extent by his '*agency*'. Snapshots of this interaction were occurring monthly as the report cycle was described to the author. Darren is a '*strategiser*' who can articulate factors that would alert a Structurationist to the recursive patterns of '*strategising*'.

Darren related several instances where his intervention ('*agency*') in investee companies had been pivotal. '*Structural*' change occurred in the board of the investee company that often meant that it could expand or trade more profitably. Darren and John were usually looking for investment opportunities where such an intervention could increase the value of their stake in the business. One such situation arose with a small firm that was experiencing difficulty in launching a software product. Darren was able to project manage the launch which transformed the prospects of the business.

Darren's strategising is described in more detail in the next section.

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Darren Anderson	Manager	Monthly report on business and strategy in three sectors of activity at M-E.	Ultimately rests with John Montague (SBO). Considerable referent power with investee companies.	Can sanction investment decisions in the firm. Central point of contact for investment managers.
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Darren Anderson	Manager	Criteria for selecting investment opportunities. Heuristics for evaluating equity purchases / sales..	No authoritative assets within M-E. Can deploy services of external investment managers. Has strong influencing skills upon investee managers.	Limits for due diligence cost and hit rate. Types of improvement projects conducted with investees.
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Darren Anderson	Manager	The M-E Portfolio and website. Publicity briefs to media concerning John Montague.	Had reconfigured the relationship between M-E and external investment managers so that there were no time delays on decisions. This improved the competitive advantage of the operation.	Growth patterns recorded in investee companies over time following strategic projects led by Darren.

Table 5.9 Interpretation of structuration cycles at M-E (Case G)

Strategising at Montague-Endeavour

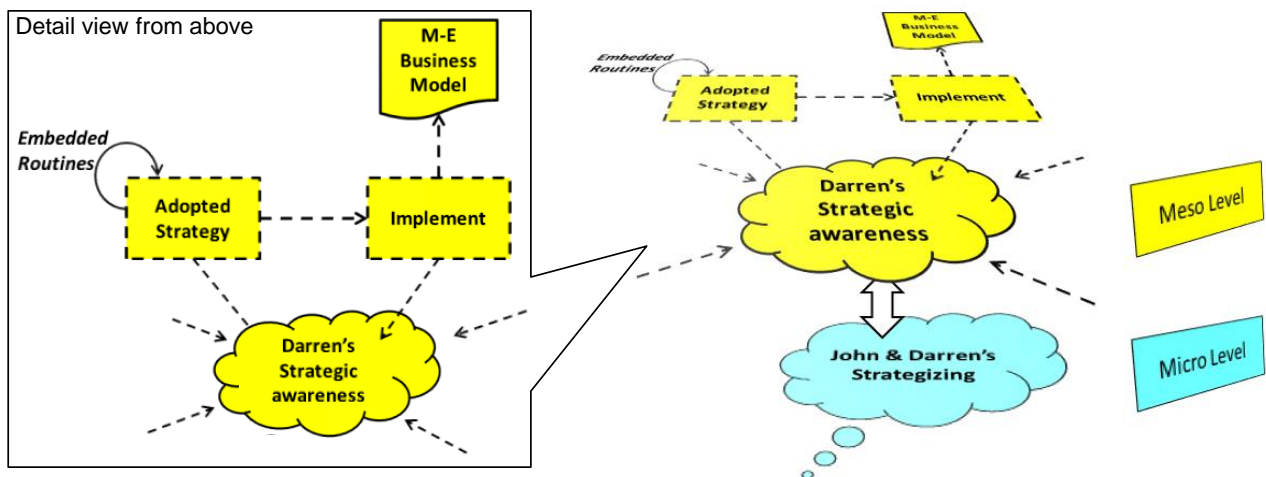


Figure 5.21 Static strategy at 'meso-level' in M-E actioned by Darren & John's strategising

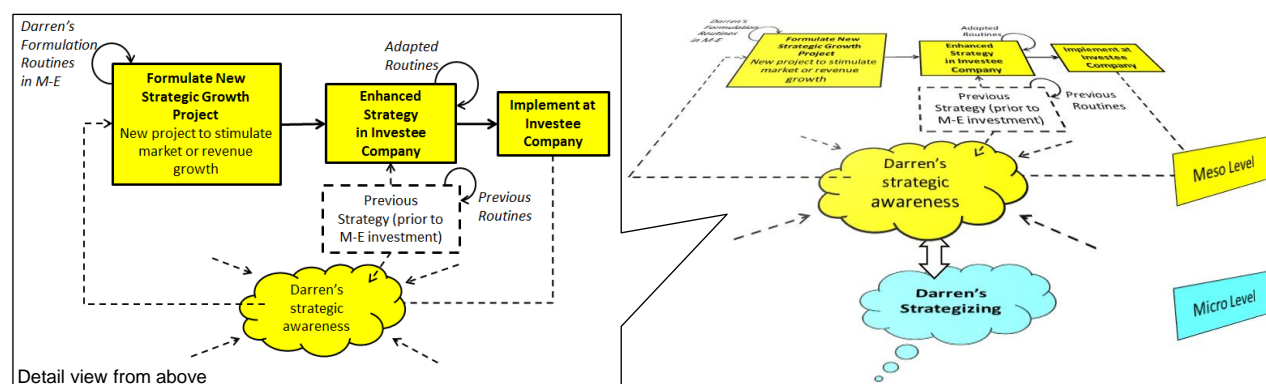


Figure 5.22 Dynamic strategy at 'meso-level' in investee firms by Darren's strategising

Darren's strategising falls into two categories depending upon which company is the beneficiary of such 'agency'. In terms of M-E, Darren's strategising is typical of the 'A' side of the strategising model (see Figure 5.21). It does not appear to be formalised in writing, and is more an on-going daily conversation with John Montague (more usually by telephone or email rather than 'face-to-face'). However, Darren was frequently mentioning elements of what could be considered a business plan when he was talking about M-E. The embedded routines appear to have been established for several years. Darren devotes some of his time to strategising with the M-E portfolio of equity investments. These can be daily interventions and are usually a recurring conversation with market analysts and investment managers.

The second category of strategising is where Darren is undertaking a special project on behalf of M-E and one of its investee companies. These strategy projects are much more akin to the 'B' side of the strategising model (see Figure 5.22) for a typical representation of one of these projects). Darren's ability to create a growth generating project within one of these investee

companies is part of the decision making process of due diligence when M-E invests. Venture capital companies such as M-E are looking for profitable investment. Companies that have missed growth opportunities for reasons that M-E can resolve are ideal candidates. It is not always the injection of capital that makes the difference. The author previously made the point that the introduction of Darren's strategising skill to an investee company resembles the *modus operandi* of a 'business angel' (albeit, without the motive of controlling ownership). Darren explained that the investee companies are glad of his strategising skills, and can see positive benefits from his interventions. Such sentiment emerges from his '*agency*' that contributes to the investee company's social '*structure*'. Darren also explained that his strategising within these companies is more formalised as such work has to be agreed at monthly board meetings. Regrettably, such documentation was considered too confidential to be made available to the author for scrutiny.

When asked, by the author, why the recipients of Darren's strategising had not done it themselves; Darren replied that in most cases, being small businesses, they were too busy with day-to-day operations. Case G is more complex to portray than any of the other cases in this study, yet the author has not felt it necessary to deviate from the strategising model proposed in this study. The situation in M-E is clarified as the participant in the study could be strategising in either mode at any particular time.

5.10. HobbyCo (Case H)

This case was the pilot for this research study. The author needed to establish whether the micro-strategy workshop was a viable methodology to attract growth-oriented small businesses. This case differed from subsequent cases in that there was more emphasis placed upon the mapping technique. In the case study proper, the mapping exercise was relegated to a means of elicitation during the workshop discussion. This case is being subjected to the same analysis as the main cases and included in the findings because it still fulfils the criteria of being a growth problem as the issue under discussion.

The participant SBO is Sarah Brown (the Managing Director of HobbyCo.) HobbyCo is a small business in the North-east of England. It has its origins in a craft-based start-up that took advantage of incubator premises that were available on a large site in Tyne & Wear. The first incarnation of this business was the production of high value collectables. All of the elements of one of these products were handmade in the premises. The business traded internationally on the Internet. The typical customer was a wealthy person of pensionable age that had always wanted a prestige toy as a child, and had now become an avid collector. Sarah was not a creative craftsman, she was an entrepreneur that could market these products internationally.

The original business morphed eight years ago into a manufacturer of components for a completely different type of hobby. It now has ten employees. This change in the business occurred because Sarah spotted an opportunity to use a by-product of manufacture in China. This material could replicate a miniature effect that modellers would appreciate. Sarah was able to use her expertise in marketing internationally to develop her small business into a franchise operation on many continents (including the USA). The other major development in the business was the early adoption of television shopping channels as a means of marketing the products. One of Sarah's employees was particularly adept at showing viewers how to apply the product in the booked one-hour slots.

Sarah is one of those individuals in the north-east of England that tends to attract business propositions from creative people who do not know how to market themselves internationally. At the time of this workshop, she is about to embark upon a new venture that requires a skill set, not available in her company. She is seriously considering adding to her board of directors two individuals who have expertise in a highly technical skill. This would be new to the company and could open up further entrepreneurial opportunities for HobbyCo.

Social Structure (rules and resources)

The workshop was conducted on a Saturday morning when there were no staff in the building. Sarah was particularly concerned about discussing the possibility of two new directors joining the business in front of staff who were not aware of the possibility. At the time of the workshop, nothing had been formalised between HobbyCo and the two individuals.

The transcript has been read several times for emerging themes. The first passes are methodical and link tree nodes to numbered elements on the diagram (which helps by gathering all discussion on each of the drawn elements). It is also possible to collect emerging themes for analysis during further readings using NVivo software. Some of the themes that emerged as nodes on the later passes through the transcript are shown in the table below (the analysis progression can be seen by reading rows from left to right).

Sarah is a leader that is constantly looking to acquire assets for perceived emerging needs in her business. In Resource-based View (RBV) terms, this behaviour is akin to 'resource leverage' (Hamel & Prahalad, 1993). This strategic episode is one such attempt, where she is contemplating (for the first time ever) the bringing into the business of two additional shareholders that appear to possess a crucial capability of web-based streaming video production. Sarah's proactive approach to strategy is based on a belief that, despite market uncertainties, competitive advantage is influenced by the firm's resources and capabilities (Alvarez & Barney, 2005).

Agency (Communication, Power and Sanction)

During the discussion the author enquired whether Sarah was the only member of staff that she thought was '*strategising*' on behalf of the business. Her response was somewhat ironic, and to the point:

"I'm the only thinker in here..." (Sarah, response #139)

However, this opinion is expressed in relation to business strategy, and "in here" is taken to mean the office. There is actually a constant flow of product design ideas and these impinge on the strategy work. The social '*structure*' in HobbyCo is most apparent in terms of product design. It is not surprising because most members of staff are creative individuals who produce a constant flow of new product ideas. These designers are constantly drawing upon the social '*structure*' to inform their product strategy. In business terms, Sarah is very much on her own with regard to her colleagues. They have very little to say that regard to the direction of the company, and are more than happy to let Sarah determine the strategic direction.

Principally, because the designer 'others' do not engage in business strategy dialogues, but they are very interested in product strategy and how it impinges upon their artistic designs. To the author, this is characteristic of a Structuration cycle. Several designers are feeding a common social '*structure*' are regarding characteristics of a HobbyCo design. What is sometimes referred to as a 'house' style. However, with regard to business matters; these same people have no desire to know about the strategy of HobbyCo. As one of the designers commented later,

"She [Sarah] has always got some business idea on the go ... it's hard to keep up with her." (Staff comment, not on transcript)

The same designer, although professing a lack of knowledge in 'business matters', has immense respect and gratitude for what Sarah is doing. There is also testament to this view in that

several external designers are now supplying designs into Hobbyco because of the MD's ability engage successfully with international markets (a capability that HobbyCo does not possess in-house).

Modalities (interpretive schemes, facility and norms)

Sarah knows that the business must constantly adapt to market trends, and that new capabilities are increasingly required. However, she worries that the firm may become too large to maintain the ability to change fast enough; and besides, she has absolutely no desire to create a corporation.

"I don't want to grow it [the firm] into ICI...!" (Sarah, response #120, author's explanation in square brackets)

The strategic issue chosen by Sarah for this case is the decision whether to introduce two new shareholders to the business. These individuals possess key business skills that are considered to be complementary to the business (by Sarah). The other shareholders (some of the designers) will obviously have a say, but they are all prepared to let Sarah 'explore the ramifications' without much discussion. This is a period of lone '*strategising*' that can be epitomised by the 'search for action' stage in Bowman and Ambrosini's (2000, p.208) model of individual strategising.

Asked about their forthcoming decision, she reduces a complex decision to a simple question of whether they are happy to have share dilution to achieve growth. They have never said "no" to one of her strategic propositions in the past, and this has allowed Sarah to transition them between businesses at the appropriate points in time. Without this leadership, the previous business would have failed; instead of being sold as a 'going concern'.

Since the last meeting with the MD, the author understands that this ownership dilution decision has not been 'put to the vote' (and now may be postponed indefinitely). The MD now deems this a closure of this particular strategic episode.

Structuration

The more obvious Structuration cycle in this case study is product design. Sarah's own '*strategising*' in business terms does evolve but she draws from a social '*structure*' that is external to the firm. As already mentioned, her colleagues are all creative individuals that do not contribute to the strategising of the business, but they are highly influential in product design terms. The principal knowledgeable agent who also contributes to business strategy is her father (who is located in the South of England).

AGENCIES				
Participant	Role	Communication	Power	Sanction
Sarah	Manager	Website. Trade Fairs across UK.	Part ownership (SBO). All business strategising deferred to Sarah.	Final say on product launches.
MODALITIES				
Participant	Role	Interpretive Schemes	Facility	Norms
Sarah	Manager	Television programmes on Shopping Channels. Direct purchasing through websites.	Has complete control over authoritative assets in HobbyCo, including final say on designs.	Sarah is the key strategic thinker in the business (a norm that is acknowledged by all staff).
STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS				
Participant	Role	Signification	Domination	Legitimation
Sarah	Manager	Brand identity with global suppliers of Hobbyco products.	Deployment of authoritative resources.	External 'creatives' want Sarah to market their designs because of her international sales and marketing track record for similar work.

Table 5.10 Interpretation of structuration cycles at HobbyCo (Case H)

Strategising at HobbyCo

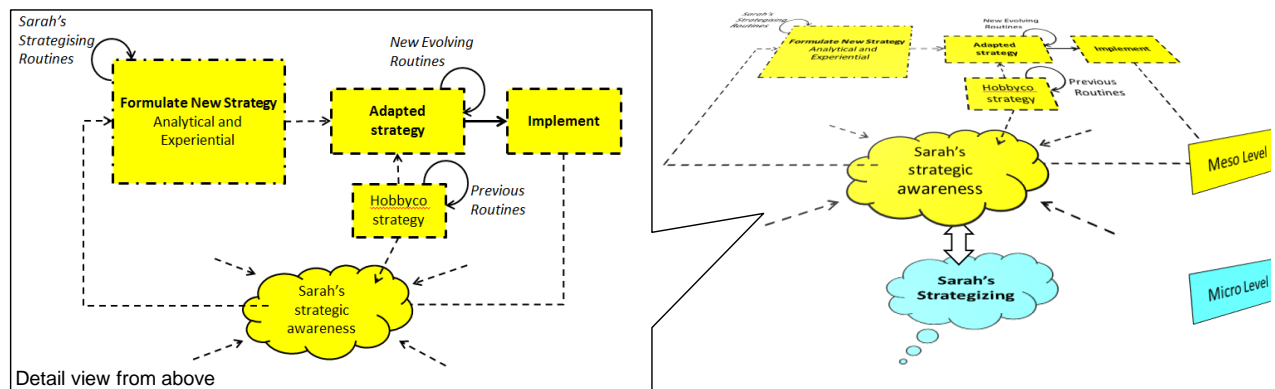


Figure 5.23 Strategising during dynamic strategy formulation / implementation at HC.

Sarah's description of her '*strategising*' gives the author an impression of it being fragmentary and subsumed within the turmoil of daily international business. However, the strategy 'cudgel' is never really 'dropped', and there is a strong impression of an 'audacity of purpose' that many researchers might identify as 'an entrepreneurial spirit'. This also has an obverse that the author has termed 'entrepreneurial indifference'. By this, the author means her lack of sentimentality concerning the business, and not worrying about radical change to the firm if she perceives this as financially necessary ...

"No. It doesn't bother me... but how other people [in here] handle change is another matter..." (Sarah, response #173)

If there has been a sentimental attachment to the previous businesses by others, their view has not prevailed.

In the HobbyCo case, Sarah is mulling over whether her firm need an injection of new expertise. As SBO, her strategic awareness is alerted her to new opportunities that require the acquisition of new technical skills. Her business has been able to reinvent itself as markets have changed. However the core of employees has remained the same. She stands out from the crowd in the business by being the only business person. Everyone house being deeply involved in the creative side of art work, sculpture and design. Consequently, Sarah draws her business social '*structure*' from outside the company. Like those SBOs that possess entrepreneurial flair, she's very good at spotting opportunities to get into an emerging market, and when to disengage prior to market decline. Such strategising has saved the business on two previous occasions.

In discussing her current strategic change, Sarah admitted that she was uncertain whether to proceed or not. Her concerns were more about the 'personality fit' of the proposed new board members, than their technical prowess. Like her they were SBOs of a going concern, but with transferable skills that she felt could take HobbyCo to a new level. The author was somewhat surprised that she was not considering a joint-venture with the other company. However her

strategic awareness informed her that the opportunity would have to be seized by HobbyCo using the company's capability to internationalise product creations.

5.11. Summary

#		Case Name and Letter	Participant	Job Title	Model State		
					Prior	Current	Next ²⁰
1	(A)	Only Branding Works	Miles	Managing Director	A	A	B
2			Marcus	Brand Director	A	A	A
3			Patrick	Operations Director	A	A	A
4	(B)	Travel Bravura	Joanne	Director	A	B	A
5	(C)	Chargepacks	Chester	Managing Director	B	B	B
6	(D)	Pubrelco	Paula	Managing Director	A	B	A
7	(E)	Town & Country Cleaning	Brenda	Managing Director	A	A	A
8	(F)	Sandra Hill Consulting	Sandra	Managing Director	A	A	A
9	(G)	Montague-Endeavour	Darren	Director	A	A	A
		Investee SMEs			A	B	A
10	(H)	HobbyCo	Sarah	Managing Director	A	B	A

Table 5.11 Summary table of strategising model state (A or B) before, during, or after workshop

Table 5.11 shows how the author has interpreted the strategising and degree of ‘*meso-level*’ strategy change in each case. Considering that all of the SBOs were inclined to discuss issues related to business growth, perhaps the expectation would be that all of the SBOs would be categorised as ‘B’ on the SBO strategising model. However, in some cases the ‘organic business growth trajectory’ is relatively modest, and can be achieved with very little disruption to the ‘*meso-level*’ strategy. Firms in this state are represented by the ‘A’ side of the strategising model. In these cases the SBO is more likely to be able to discuss elements of a business model that may (or may not) exist as a document. The reason for this is because it will have persisted over time and the main points may have been rehearsed by the SBO during previous discussions with accountants, bank managers, etc.

Other firms are deliberately in a permanent state of change and better represented by the

²⁰ Author’s prediction of the ‘near future’ state of the SBO strategising model

strategically dynamic 'B' side of the model. Chester at Chargepacks (Case C) also falls into this category. This is someone who is constantly strategising and likes to think several moves ahead; but even he admits that on some occasions you just have to 'go for it'. Chester's approach can be interpreted as logical incrementalism (Quinn, 1980). Although not purely engaged in a supply-chain, the influences from the QA processes of large manufacturers are likely to have an effect on his strategising.

The large case with the three participants from OBW is an interesting contrast to the others already mentioned. Here the SBO, Mike, is anxious to talk about operational problems in the business model; yet the underlying concern is a mismatch with his long term strategy. The current and previous situations suggest strategising model state 'A' (as the concerns held by Mike have been apparent to him for some time). The likelihood is that there will have to be a strategic change (at Mike's behest) and this will invoke strategising that is shown in side 'B' of the model.. This change in direction will mean different strategising for Marcus and Patrick, but they are not in positions where they can initiate fundamental change (and remain in the business). Equally, they are not inclined towards radical change. Marcus wants to be the specialist (and please himself), Patrick wants to tidy up behind Marcus (and please Mike). As circumstances emerged after this study, OBW did change by spawning a new company out of the OBW 'front office'. Whether this change incorporates the fundamental alterations to the prevailing business model is yet to be seen, and might be the subject of future study.

At Montague-Endeavour, Darren's strategic awareness gives rise to a steady state as far as M-E is concerned; whereas, the situation is invariably different with investee companies as he intervenes with growth-stimulating projects. The 'A-B-A' trajectory is indicative of a project management intent towards strategy.

Case A (OBW) provides more data by virtue of there being three workshops on the same day. The interpretations of the main structuration nodes are gathered into one table (see page 150). A further table is then derived from Table 5.2 by filtering down to all nodes that relate to the central issue in the company – apparent dysfunctional delegation from Miles to Patrick (see Table 5.3 on page 156). This further concentration serves to demonstrate how ST can help to capture the full complexity of an issue within a small business.

Case B (Travel Bravura) differs from Case A (OBW) in that strategic change is well underway. There is no indecision on the part of Joanne, who understands the fundamentals of her Change Management programme. Her industry experience has been brought to bear in this regard. Although CM is a well-known managerial method, it is rarely applied in such a small business. However, its inclusion is helpful in providing an issue that can use all of the elements of ST, as the small business scenario can be limited in terms of structural interest (as has been the case in this study).

Case C (Chargepacks) is an example of a long term incremental strategy that is in the final stages

of fruition. Chester could recall the steady growth that he's achieved with his company that is now enabling him to purchase land and build a brand-new factory despite the prevailing economic recession. Chester is probably the most natural strategic thinker in the group of participants, he always seems to be planning several moves ahead. However, this does not seem to hamper his entrepreneurial flair, because he knows when to pounce on an opportunity.

Case D (Town and Country Cleaning) is looking to build upon its current strategy to create a new business model for operation in a rural environment to run concurrently with the existing urban model. The strategy is based upon long term experience in the North East urban cleaning services sector.

Case E (Pubrelco) Paula at Pubrelco has a similar strategy to run two business models instead of one, but in this case she is trying to create a low cost version of her existing business using young graduate staff.

Case F (SHC) demonstrates Sandra Hill in her sole trader role, although she also has ambitions to grow her business. The case is preoccupied with structural constraint, as she tries to break free from her past employment.

Case G (M-E) is unlike the other cases because Darren Anderson is concerned with growth issues in a variety of investee companies. It is part of his job to stimulate growth in small businesses, and he does this by means of discrete projects. Although M-E is described as a venture capital company, Darren's skills are reminiscent of a business angel's repertoire.

Case H (HobbyCo) is the situation where a small company with one clearly identifiable leader (Sarah) is considering now expanding the board to bring in additional expertise.

6. CONTRIBUTIONS

This study makes a contribution to the field of S-as-P research by examining the strategising of SBOs (rather than those strategisers in large businesses). The small business owner is a useful focal point for such enquiry, because of the limited number of strategisers within a case. Having a narrower focus means that the methodological approach can be designed for maximum data collection with the minimum of disruption for the small business.

The five objectives of this study (see Section 1.4 on page 13) have been met in the following ways. 'Rich and thick' qualitative data have been collected from ten SBOs in the North-east of England. The research design has been proven to be attractive to these people (even those that have never before participated in primary research concerning their business activities). The disruption to these small businesses, by the research intervention, was minimised by design. A fundamental outcome of this achievement is the apparent willingness of the participating SBOs to repeat the exercise or recommend it to other businesses. All participants felt that the exercise of a strategy workshop was inherently beneficial to them and their business.

A finding of this study was that all of the participants expressed a preference to discuss growth issues in their businesses (having been given a free choice). Interestingly, this occurred in a prevailing economic climate of deep recession, and in the region of the UK that traditionally lags behind others in economic recovery. This research has demonstrated a methodology that can attract growth-oriented SBOs. This is a contribution to the practice of business research that endeavours to study and assist SMEs.

This study contributes to previous S-as-P research that has used an underpinning of Structuration theory, by confirming that the theory, as outlined by Giddens, can be used in the context of SBO strategising. Although cognisant of critiques concerning Structuration, the author found that the main objections did not present any significant impediments to the objectives of this study.

The workshop format designed for this study has shown that a 'free-form' use of strategy mapping can be appropriate as an elicitation technique for the studying of SBO strategising. It is crucial that participants do not have to learn specific mapping techniques before taking part. The apparatus and material used in this methodology does not require significant funding at the level of the single strategy workshop. An additional contribution to consultancy practice was achieved in this study; because, some of the SBOs continued to use the mapping techniques in their businesses with staff after the workshop. The technique was useful to them, because it helped to impart their strategic vision to those tasked with the mission of delivering that vision.

A key contribution arising from this study has emerged from the SBO strategising model. The author has found that a very useful research indicator during the workshop discourse is whether the SBO can articulate the elements of a business model. If the participant struggles in this

regard, the researcher may have an indication that the SBOs strategising is yet to produce tangible results in the business. The model encompasses deliberate and emergent strategy-making at the *meso-level* while preserving strategic awareness emerging from the individual strategising at the *micro-level*. It also has a distinct advantage in that it links together strategising, routines, *meso-level* strategy, and business models. It fulfils one of the prerequisites of the S-as-P perspective in linking *meso-level* strategy to '*strategising*' (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Johnson *et al.*, 2003). Authors are now calling for incorporation of business models into academic strategic research, because Business Model Innovation (BMI) is seen as an important source of competitive advantage (Teece, 2010; Chesbrough, 2007; Mansfield & Fourie, 2004). This framework would be one way of achieving that end for small business research. From a pedagogical point of view, the model has possible merit in providing an explanation to business strategy students how S-as-P links to *meso-level* strategy formulation in small business contexts.

Despite its origins in large firm research, S-as-P has been demonstrated as a viable frame of reference for small business. This study into SBOs has a distinct advantage over those conducted in larger organisations, in that there are fewer strategisers involved. Typically, the SBO is the only business strategist inside the organisation. An interesting finding was that some small businesses have a singular strategist in general business matters, with others that only strategise in terms of product or service delivery.

This research has made a novel use of video to analyse strategising by SBOs. The use of video ethnography is increasing in many areas of sociological enquiry, but at the time of writing this thesis there has been no reported use by S-as-P researchers (recently some interest has been expressed by contributors to the SAP-IN²¹ website, which is a focal point for those interested in S-as-P research). The use of CAQDAS software has proven necessary due to the large volume of data that is collected. This is a contribution that demonstrates how a lone researcher can undertake the depth of enquiry that is required for S-as-P.

This research shows that careful and considered research design can penetrate the wall of 'participation reluctance' that normally greets the researcher in small business. Furthermore, the study shows that a staged approach (using a series of one-to-one workshops) to gain deeper access in these small businesses is a real possibility.

²¹ www.sap-in.org

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this study makes an early contribution to S-as-P in the small business context, the field for such endeavour is likely to expand and require more research. For instance, the boundaries previously mentioned as limitations of this study could be a starting point for others. All of the SBOs in this study were business growth-oriented individuals; yet there will be many that are not so inclined. Urgent research is needed for those companies that are struggling to maintain business models that rely upon bank lending at affordable rates. More knowledge about the 'strategic awareness' of those SBOs, and their underlying praxes could enable better decision making at governmental level concerning private sector growth initiatives. It could also help to predict the effect on such small businesses of a return to higher bank interest rates.

"A third type of triangulation offered by Curtin and Fossey (2007), although not as often utilized, is triangulation of method, meaning the use of both qualitative and quantitative design to explore the same topic." (Carlson, 2010, p.1105)

Case G (Darren at M-E) was unusual in that much of his strategising praxis was on behalf of other companies in which M-E had a partial ownership interest. Other authors are already engaged in, and urging, the study of external strategist praxes (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009) engaged with large organisations. This author would advocate the same direction for the small business context.

A follow-up study using quantitative analysis would represent an opportunity for triangulation by method (Carlson, 2010; Curtin & Fossey, 2007). However, this study has considered two conceptual areas of small business strategy – the firm level and individual SBO strategising. The latter is relatively inaccessible to quantitative methods for reasons such as the SBO (or any other individual strategist) will experience difficulty in expressing tacit knowledge. The author considers that it would be very difficult to frame questions that reliably captured the nuances of strategising. The firm-level would be another matter because there would be more tangible artefacts and effects to measure. The small business field still requires more research into firm-level questions concerning the use of strategy tools and the application of business models.

In the author's opinion, the bifurcated framework of SBO strategising has been demonstrated to cater for all of the cases described in this thesis. The framework may be capable of application in other small businesses that do not fit the profile of the growth-oriented SBOs in this study, and this could be a fruitful research direction. Its application for larger businesses has not been trialled in this study. The author suspects that it might become too unwieldy when used to map the praxes of several strategisers. However, this will not be known until it is tried.

It has become apparent in this study that it is better to initially approach the SBO with the offer of a 'one-to-one' strategy workshop. The author discovered that there were some common reasons for recruitment resistance. SBOs appear to worry about matters such as:

- being made to look uncertain in front of their staff
- not wanting to provoke old arguments
- destabilising a status quo
- demonstrating a lack of strategic knowledge
- strategy workshops are only for big companies
- a guarantee of secrecy
- being far too busy
- a lack of trusted endorsement from another SBO

This could be one of the areas of the study that could be opened up to quantitative analysis. It would be useful to apply a questionnaire to all of the SBOs that are approached with this kind of offer to gain further insight into the concerns of those companies that declined to participate.

The choice of inductive inquiry has been justified because the formulation of rational research instruments (such as questionnaires) would have proved to be extremely problematic in the field at this stage. It would have been difficult to compose meaningful questions that could elicit useful responses.

“Research instruments such as surveys and structured interviews are likely to be inappropriate insofar as individuals cannot be asked to state what they cannot readily articulate.” (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2001, p.815)

Further work may reveal pockets of interest that are better served by quantitative methods; but on this limited scale; an obvious line of quantitative inquiry has not yet emerged. The author has included a series of open questions that can be used in the workshop environment described in this methodology, but these could not constitute the basis of a reliable survey instrument for the reasons already stated. They are much more of an opening gambit during a workshop, or a means to elicit further elaboration by the participant.

8. SUMMARY

This chapter concludes the thesis. It has provided an outline of the central arguments that contribute to knowledge regarding the strategising of small business owners. The author has used Strategy-as-Practice (a strategic perspective that has hitherto been focused upon large organisations). The methodology that was applied in the field is a further contribution to small business research. Consideration has been given to the limitations of this thesis, and recommendations made concerning further research into small business owner strategising.

As Whittington gave a name to the perspective that became known as Strategy-as-Practice, the author considers it appropriate to leave the last words to him:

“To work on strategy is typically to know the right tools and language, to have gone through appropriate educational and career tracks, and to borrow the authority of legitimate strategic practice. In general, analysts of conduct only notice these rules and resources locally and fleetingly as they are instantiated, alongside all the other kinds of rule and resource, in particular moments of strategizing.”
(Whittington, 2010, p.112)

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26 July 2013

9. APPENDICES

The following is a selection of definitions of business strategy, assembled from the literature review. As can be seen from this example, there is no universal agreement concerning the definition of 'strategy'. The definitions tend to emerge from specific perspectives of strategy, the main emphasis points for each definition have been added in the table below.

#	Definition	Main Emphasis	Source
1	"A plan of action or policy in business or politics, etc."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Policy 	Oxford English Dictionary
2	"A long-term approach to implementing a firm's business plans to achieve its business objectives."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long range planning • Objectives 	http://dictionary.bnet.com/definition/Business+Strategy.html
3	"The handful of decisions that drive or shape most of a company's subsequent actions; are not easily changed once made; and have the greatest impact on whether the company's strategic objectives are met."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long Range Decisions • Objectives • Irreversible 	McKinsey
4	"Seizing known opportunities and responding to known threats."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunistic • Adapting 	Coyne, K. & Subramanian, S. (1996) 'Bringing discipline to strategy', The McKinsey Quarterly, (4), pp. 15-16.
5	"Strategy is the direction and scope of an organisation over the long-term: which achieves advantage for the organisation through its configuration of resources within a challenging environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfil stakeholder expectations."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long Range Vision • Planning • Resources • Markets • Stakeholder • Meeting needs 	Johnson & Scholes
6	"Which markets should a business compete in and what kind of activities are involved in such markets."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markets • Tasks 	Anon
7	"How the business can perform better than the competition in chosen markets."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance • Markets • Competitive Positioning 	Anon
8	"What resources (skills, assets, finance, relationships, technical competence, facilities) are required in order to be able to compete."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources • Competition 	Anon
9	"A pattern in actions over time."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergent 	Mintzberg
10	"A perspective of vision and mission."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision • Mission 	Prahalad & Hamel

Continued on next page .../

#	Definition	Main Emphasis	Source
11	"The framework which guides those choices that determine the nature and direction of an organization."	Vision Guidance Mission	Kepner-Tregoe
12	"A term that refers to a complex web of thoughts, ideas, insights, experiences, goals, expertise, memories, perceptions, and expectations that provides general guidance for specific actions in pursuit of particular ends."	Complexity Objectives Experience Guidance Actions	Nickols, F. (2000)
13	"A general framework that provides guidance for actions to be taken and, at the same time, is shaped by the actions taken."	Guidance Actions	Nickols, F. (2000)
14	"Activities crucial to the development of the organisation, have a broad scope, create added value and have wide ranging consequences."	Development Value Consequences	Jacobs (2010, p.2)
15	"Decisions that are difficult to undo because they lay claim to substantial resources"	Irreversible Resources	Jacobs (2010, p.2)
16	"The determinant of the basic long-term <i>goals</i> of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of <i>action</i> and the allocation of <i>resources</i> necessary for carrying out these <i>goals</i> ."	Long range planning Actions Resources Objectives	Chandler, Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of American Industrial Enterprise [p. 13]
17	"Business strategy is less a function of grandiose predictions than it is a result of being able to respond rapidly to real changes as they occur. That's why strategy has to be dynamic and anticipatory."	Emergent Dynamic Anticipatory	Jack Welch, CEO, Texas Instruments
18	"Strategy is a term that refers to a intricate network of opinions, thoughts, knowledge, aim, skill-set, memories, perceptions, and expectations that provides general guidance for specific actions in quest of particular ends."	Complexity Guidance Actions	http://thinkahead.net.in/forum/strategy-meaning-and-definitionmanagement-strategybusiness-strategy.html
19	"Analysis of internal and external environments of the firm in order to maximize utilization of resources in relation to objectives."	Analysis Resources Objectives	Bracker (1980) p.223
20	"A personality driven, opportunistic or instinctive approach, channelled through an emergent planning process."	Entrepreneurial Emergent	Burke (2004)
21	"The framework which guides those choices that determine the nature and direction of an organization."	Guidance Decisions Direction	Tregoe & Zimmerman, <i>Top Management Strategy</i> Simon & Schuster, 1980).

Table 9.1 Various definitions of strategy

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