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STRATEGIC CHANGE
EMERGING IN TIME

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STRATEGIC CHANGE EMERGING IN TIME

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Abstract

In this study, I address the need for an in-depth understanding of the temporal nature of strategic change. Accordingly, I examine how strategic change emerges in time in a small Finnish software company. The data for the study consists of strategy-making discussions with three company managers during the course of two years.

With this study I contribute to process organization studies in general and post-processual strategy research in particular. By following a process-relational view of becoming reality and adopting an “in-time” view of temporality, I add to discussions on the temporal nature of strategy work. The in-time view enables me to examine strategic change as the fluidity of the present, in which both the past and the future are immanent. In addition to highlighting that processuality cannot be reduced to human actions, I follow the notion of agentic time, which analytically gives agency to relational events. With the in-time view, I aim to unpack especially two underlying tendencies behind theorizations of strategic change: first, the overemphasis on managers as the principle, controlling agents of strategic change, and second, the reduction of the complex and fluxing change processes into simple, static models.

With the empirical analysis, I identify five ways in which the agency of time perceptibly manifests in strategic change: unforeseen events, the becoming meaning of events, the immediacy and irreversibility of an emerging situation, the immanent past in the present, and the conditionality of time. I also show the paradoxical tension between organizing processes efficiently over time and experiencing and reacting to novel events in time. Furthermore, I illustrate the multi-event nature of strategic change and show how the managers’ intentionality emerges from within relational events.

In contrast to the prevailing view of strategic change as a pre-planned, future-oriented managerial activity, with this study I add to our understanding of strategic change as a continuous, unpredictable process emerging through the mutually constitutive relation between unowned events and human actions. Accordingly, I argue that temporality should be treated as a fundamental characteristic of reality, which defines the dynamics of strategic change, rather than as an objective background or subjective construction of strategy-making.

Keywords: becoming, change, management, process, strategy-making, temporality
Täällä tutkimuksella vastaan tarpeeseen ymmärtää syvällisemmin strategisen muutoksen ajallista luonetta. Sen vuoksi tarkastelen tässä työssä, miten strateginen muutos kehkeytyy ajassa pienessä suomalaisessa ohjelmistoyrityksessä. Tutkimusaineistoni koostuu yrityksen kolmen johtajan kanssa käydyistä strategiakeskusteluista kahden vuoden ajalta.


Tutkimuksellani kyseenaan tapahtumien kehkeytyksen strategisesta muutoksesta suunniteltuna, tulevaisuusorientointuneena prosessina. Sen sijaan kuvaan sen jatkuvana ja ennustamattomana prosessin, joka kehkeyttää hallitsemattomien tapahtumien ja yksilöiden toimien sisäisen dynamiikkaa. Väitän, että ajallisuus tulisi nähdä todellisuutta luovana voimana joka määrittää strategisen muutoksen prosessuaalisen luonteen, eikä pelkästään tapahtumien objektiivisena taustana tai ihmisten subjektiivisena tulevaisuuden ja menneisyyden tulkintana strategiatyössä.

Asiassar: ajallisuus, kehkeytyminen, muutos, prosessi, strategia, yritysjohto
To my children Lila and Niki
Acknowledgements

I am writing these acknowledgements on March 23, 2017, after going once more through my Findings chapter. This made me realize that the findings resonate also with my own journey during the writing of this dissertation. This, too, has been an unowned process where pivotal, often surprising, events have emerged through my relations with other people. Therefore, this work cannot be reduced to my own contributions alone. In addition to all of the great books and articles that have shaped my thinking, many individuals have contributed to this process as well.

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Oulu, March 23rd

Jenni Myllykoski
## Abbreviations

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<td>etc.</td>
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<td>i.e.</td>
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<td>e.g.</td>
<td>exempli gratia</td>
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<td>CEO</td>
<td>chief executive officer</td>
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<td>CFO</td>
<td>chief financial officer</td>
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<td>CIO</td>
<td>chief information officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>COO</td>
<td>chief operating officer</td>
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<td>ibid.</td>
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<td>RFQ</td>
<td>request for quotations</td>
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<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>small and medium-sized enterprise</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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# Contents

Abstract

Tiivistelmä

Acknowledgements 9

Abbreviations 13

Contents 15

1 Introduction 19

1.1 Justification for the study ................................................................. 19

1.2 Philosophical and theoretical grounding ......................................... 21

1.3 Contribution and positioning of the research ................................. 25

1.4 Defining the key concepts of the study .......................................... 27

1.5 The research setting ........................................................................ 29

1.6 The structure of the study ............................................................. 30

2 Theoretical overview 33

2.1 Overview of the research on strategy .............................................. 33

2.1.1 Strategy content and process research ..................................... 35

2.1.2 Critical approaches to strategy ............................................... 37

2.1.3 Strategy as practice research .................................................. 38

2.1.4 Towards a post-processual view on strategy ............................ 39

2.2 Overview of the research on change ............................................... 40

2.2.1 Heterogeneous field of change research .................................. 41

2.2.2 Four general types of change theories .................................... 42

2.2.3 Agency in change theories ...................................................... 44

2.3 Temporality in strategy and change research ............................... 47

2.3.1 Time as objective .................................................................. 48

2.3.2 Time as subjective ................................................................. 50

3 Philosophical grounding 55

3.1 Substance and process worldviews underpinning organizational studies ................................................................. 56

3.2 Process-relational onto-epistemology ............................................. 60

3.3 Change and stability .................................................................... 62

3.4 Organization under a continuous state of becoming .................... 65

3.5 Relational view on agency ............................................................ 67

3.5.1 Human agency ........................................................................ 68

3.5.2 Non-human agency ................................................................. 70

3.5.3 Towards an event-based view of agency ................................. 72
3.6 Process philosophy and time ................................................................. 73
  3.6.1 An ‘in-time’ view on temporality .................................................. 74
  3.6.2 Redefining temporal extensiveness ............................................... 79
  3.6.3 Time as agentic ............................................................................. 80

4 Strategic change as an unowned process 83
  4.1 Strategy emergence through building and dwelling ....................... 83
    4.1.1 Intentional strategy-making: the building mode ....................... 85
    4.1.2 Unintentional strategy-making: the dwelling mode .................. 89
  4.2 Towards an unowned view of strategic change ............................... 91
    4.2.1 Strategic change as human perception ...................................... 92
    4.2.2 Strategic change as intentional action ...................................... 93
    4.2.3 Strategic change as unowned process ..................................... 94
  4.3 Conceptual framework of the study ................................................. 97
    4.3.1 Summary of the philosophical and theoretical grounding ......... 97
    4.3.2 Agentic time and unowned strategic change ........................... 98

5 Methodology 103
  5.1 Ontological and epistemological clarifications ............................... 103
  5.2 Methods of research ........................................................................ 104
    5.2.1 My narrative of the data generation process ............................ 108
    5.2.2 The study data ........................................................................ 112
    5.2.3 Abstracting from the data ....................................................... 114
  5.3 Introduction of the examined company and the research setting ..... 118

6 Empirical findings 121
  6.1 Overview of the discussed events, challenges, and intentions .......... 122
  6.2 Manifestations of agentic time .......................................................... 126
  6.3 Varying temporalities inherent in strategic change ......................... 132
    6.3.1 Organized continuities ............................................................. 133
    6.3.2 Temporality paradox ............................................................... 135
  6.4 Strategic change as relational events .............................................. 140
    6.4.1 Customer and partner relations as temporal events ................. 140
    6.4.2 Participants in strategic change events .................................... 144
    6.4.3 Software solution’s participation in strategic change events ....... 147
  6.5 Managerial strategy-making in change .......................................... 149
    6.5.1 Managerial intentionality and strategic-change events: 
      example of the strategic expansion of customer relations .......... 150
1 Introduction

“The point is that usually we look at change but we do not see it. We speak of change, but we don’t think about it. We say that change exists, that everything changes, that change is the law of things: yes, we say it and we repeat it; but those are only words, and we reason and philosophise as though change did not exist. In order to think change and see it, there is a whole veil of prejudices to brush aside...” Henri Bergson (1946: 108)

1.1 Justification for the study

Recent years have brought the feeling that the world is changing at an increasing speed, while we struggle to keep up with the changes. The entire world is interconnected through the Internet and social media, which bring global events and competition to our doorsteps. The notions of increasing complexity and speed of change have been repeated in both practical and theoretical discussions related to business in general and strategy-making in particular. Accordingly, it has become a common statement that operating successfully in such a turbulent business environment requires that companies constantly change and adapt. However, many companies seem to be struggling to cope with such change.

Apart from business practitioners being confused by the sense of increasing complexity and speed of change, another emerging concern is that the theoretical understanding of strategic change may not resonate well enough with the current complex and dynamic organizational reality (Chia 2014, Tsoukas 2016). Consequently, our current theoretical understanding of strategic change needs to be updated. This further calls for two interrelated activities. First, the assumptions that influence theorizing about organizational phenomena in general and strategic change in particular need to be carefully analyzed and redefined (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, MacKay & Chia 2013, Nayak & Chia 2011). Second, strategic change processes should be empirically examined through a real-time study that acknowledges these redefined assumptions (Hernes, Simpson, & Söderlund 2013, Langley & Tsoukas 2010). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to better understand strategic change processes with these two activities in mind.

From a theoretical standpoint, strategic change is discussed from the intersection of strategy and change literature. The key challenges related to conventional ways of theorizing about strategic change have already been pointed out by a number of process-oriented researchers (e.g., see Chia 2014, Chia & Holt
The key concern related to theorizing about strategy-making is the prevailing methodological individualism, which has resulted in the portrayal of managers as the drivers of change processes through their rational decision-making processes (e.g., Chia & Holt 2009, MacKay & Chia 2013, Tsoukas & Chia 2011). The key concern related to theorizing about change is the prevailing lack of emphasis on the fluxing and temporal nature of change, which has led studies to view change as merely a temporary state affecting organizations and to further describe it in terms of static, linear, and over-simplified models (Nayak & Chia 2011, Tsoukas & Chia 2002, Tsoukas 2016). These challenges are further seen to stem from an underlying substance-based worldview, one which is quite apparent in conventional ways of thinking about organizations and change (Chia 1999, Nayak 2008, Rescher 1996).

Accordingly, overcoming the above-described concerns when theorizing about strategic change requires, first, a re-conceptualization of the role of human agency, especially that of managers involved in strategic change (Chia 2014, Chia & Holt 2006, 2009, Simpson 2009), and second, a more profound appreciation of the temporal, shifting, and situated nature of the process (Hernes et al. 2013, MacKay & Chia 2013, Tsoukas 2016). To address these two requirements in this study, I have adopted a process-relational worldview, which treats change as a fundamental feature of reality (e.g., Bergson 1946, Whitehead 1929). In addition, I also draw upon related process organization studies, which analyze organizational phenomenon through the notion of becoming (e.g., Langley & Tsoukas 2017, Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt 2014, Tsoukas & Chia 2002).

Some studies within process organization research have already critically addressed the role of human agency in change by redefining it as being subordinate to processes (e.g., Chia & Holt 2006, MacKay & Chia 2013, Hernes 2014a). Furthermore, a growing number of studies have highlighted the continuous, non-linear, and temporal nature of organizational change (e.g., Chia 1999, Helin et al. 2014, Langley & Tsoukas 2010, Nayak & Chia 2011, Tsoukas & Chia 2002, Tsoukas 2016). Building on this perspective, strategic change has also been theorized as an unowned process, namely as a phenomena that is beyond any strategist’s control (Chia 2014, MacKay & Chia 2013). Accordingly, process organization studies have already profoundly redefined our thinking about organizations in general and strategic change in particular at both the theoretical and conceptual level. However, being a relatively young stream of
research, extensive empirical research on strategic change is now needed for two reasons. First, in order to actualize the full potential of a process-relational approach in understanding organizational phenomena and second, in order to more firmly link abstract, conceptual process thinking with the actual dynamics of strategic change. In particular, we still have only a limited understanding of strategic change as lived experience emerging in the fluidity of the present, while being inextricably related to the past and the future. Hence, we need to study strategic change as a temporal process.

To contribute to a process-relational understanding of strategic change, I adopt an “in-time” view of temporality that gives agency to the passing of time, namely to relational events (Hernes 2014a, 2017). I argue that the in-time view makes it possible to theorize about and empirically examine strategic change in a way that is both attentive to processual dynamics and to the real-time challenges faced by managers. Consequently, this study examines how strategic change emerges in time by participating in real time strategic change. I argue that using the in-time view as theoretical grounding and a real-time empirical study will make it possible to examine strategic change in a way that leads to both a theoretically coherent and practically relevant understanding of strategic change processes. The philosophical and theoretical grounding of this research is further introduced in the following section.

1.2 Philosophical and theoretical grounding

Process philosophy is an umbrella term that is used to refer to the works of philosophers such as Alfred North Whitehead, William James, Henry Bergson, and Gilles Deleuze (e.g., see for Helin et al. 2014). Process philosophy provides with a unique ontological and epistemological grounding, that is to say, a process-relational worldview, for thinking and theorizing about organizational phenomena. In general, the process-relational worldview builds on the notion of change as naturally existing in social systems (Chia 1999) and processes as having primacy over entities/substances (Rescher 1996). Consequently, adopting a process-relational worldview will lead us to reject the idea of organizations as stable, self-sustaining entities separated from their environments (Tsoukas & Chia 2002). Instead, organizations are viewed as constellations of processes, practices, and interconnected events under a continuous state of becoming (Chia 1999, Tsoukas & Chia 2002). By acknowledging the inevitability of continuous change, the focus is on trying to understand processes “in the making” instead of
“things made” (Bergson 1946, Hernes 2008). Therefore, by being inseparable from the forever-changing world, organizational processes and practices themselves continuously change, even without intentional change actions being taken.

The process organization studies that draw upon the process-relational worldview have already broadened our understanding of organizational processuality in general and strategic change in particular (Carlsen 2006, Chia 2010, 2014, Chia & Holt 2006, Hernes, Hendrup, & Schäffner 2015, Maguire & Hardy 2013, Nayak & Chia 2011, MacKay & Chia 2013, Schulz & Hernes 2013, Wiebe 2010). In this study, I draw particularly upon the following studies, which I view as the seminal works in an emerging body of post-processual strategy research (see also Chia & MacKay 2007).

Chia and Holt (2006, 2009) have argued that in addition to intentional managerial actions, strategy can also emerge through everyday practical coping actions, which do not stem from ex ante conscious decisions. The key implication of their argument is that strategic change cannot be conceptualized merely as a process stemming from intentional decisions and actions. This focuses attention on human agency as an important issue that needs to be reconsidered and further investigated. Furthermore, their questioning of the straightforward relationship between human thinking and acting demands more empirical clarification.

Chia and MacKay (2013), on the other hand, have broadened our understanding of strategic change beyond the “owned” explanations of processes that focus only on human actions or environmental forces by proposing an unowned explanation of strategic change that highlights that processes do not emerge solely from entitative forms of agency (humans, technologies, companies). In doing so, they have argued that strategic change inherently involves unforeseen events. In addition, they highlight that the outcomes of intentional strategic actions are unpredictable by nature, which further highlights the uncertain nature of the process. In other words, human agents are seen as not being in control of strategic change; rather, the primacy in terms of agency is assigned to the unowned change processes per se. Their study can be viewed as opening up discussion on a new, unowned view of strategic change. This study bases its conceptualization of strategic change on just such a view.

I argue that the unowned view of strategic change could be elaborated by paying explicit attention to the temporal nature of processes. Temporality has already been highlighted as a key issue in management studies (Hernes et al. 2013, Langley & Tsoukas 2017, Langley et al. 2013, Tsoukas 2016), and several
works that draw on process philosophy have elaborated upon the meaning of temporality in relation to organizational phenomena (e.g., Dawson 2014a, Hernes 2008, 2014, 2017, Hussenot & Missonier 2015, Nayak & Chia 2011, Schulz & Hernes 2013, Wiebe 2010). The motivation for explicitly addressing the temporal nature of organizational phenomena comes from an acknowledgement that all experiences are inherently temporal in nature (Bergson 1910). Consequently, I argue that temporality deserves more attention than it has currently been given when examining strategic change (see also Tsoukas 2016).

In this study, I use the concept of time to better describe the processual reality at an abstract level. In addition, with temporality I am referring to a particular viewpoint on time, namely the way the ongoing present is connected to and relates to the past and future (Dawson 2014). The process-relational view of time departs from the predominant image of time as a measurable, homogeneous series of discrete, motionless instants and instead highlights the experience of time as an indivisible qualitative flow (Bergson 1946) or becoming (Whitehead 1929) of the present. Consequently, the linear objective time is seen as inadequate for explaining our temporal experiences (Bergson 1946).

Typically, studies departing from an objective view of time have suggested that time should instead be approached in terms of a subjective construction of temporal dimensions, namely the past, present and future, which manifests itself as temporal work in managerial strategy-making (e.g., Bakken, Holt, & Zundel 2013, Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Vesa & Franck 2013, Schultz & Hernes 2013, Wiebe 2010). These recent works, which elaborate on temporality as a human construction, have notably contributed to our understanding of the central meaning of temporal work in strategy-making. However, I argue that a theoretical understanding of strategic change would also benefit from greater elaboration of the other viewpoint for this relation between temporality and human strategy-making, namely more consideration of how time also works on us (Hernes 2014a). Accordingly, I follow a third way of approaching time proposed by Hernes (2014a), one which draws upon the process-relational worldview, namely an agentic view on time. I highlight that this view of time should be treated as complementing rather than substituting for these above-mentioned elaborations on time and temporality in strategy-making.

In elaborating the third way of approaching time, I draw mostly upon the works of Bergson and Whitehead to form a philosophical grounding for such a view. In addition, I particularly take on Hernes’s (2014) suggestion that the passing of time can be viewed as agentic when theorizing about processes as the
key tenet of this study. To analytically give agency to the passing of time highlights that processuality cannot be reduced to an outcome of human agency. In other words, the agentic view of time approaches processuality as something beyond human control, even though the subjective experience of the unfolding of reality is still seen as relevant. In addition, following Whitehead (1929), processuality is approached in terms of relational events that continuously redefine each other in the process of becoming. Central to this view are that past and future viewed as being immanent in the fluidity of the present (Chia 1999). From this view on temporality, it follows that the focus of this research is on trying to understand how strategic change processes emerge in time rather than over time. With the in-time concept, I am referring to a view on processes as the fluidity of the present, where temporality emerges through the connections between relational events (Hernes 2014a). Consequently, the focus of the analysis is on relational events where the agency in strategic change can be found.

I argue that conceptualizing the passing of time as agentic opens up a new way to approach and examine strategic change as an unowned process. In line with a strong focus on processuality, it leads to an approach that views time as constitutive force in strategic change processes rather than as merely constituting the background for change or one of the dimensions of subjective strategy-making. I suggest that such a viewpoint particularly makes it possible to overcome an overemphasis on the owned forms of agencies, such as viewing strategists as the only producers of change. At the same time, it provides us with a novel, in-time (Hernes 2014a) lens for analyzing how human agents are embedded in temporality. This enables us to elaborate upon the complex dynamics of understanding backwards while living forward (Tsoukas 2016: 4). In addition, adopting a process philosophical grounding per se opens up the relation between human thinking and acting in a new way. As human beings experience movement, but have learned to think in terms of entities, an emerging key avenue in need of greater clarification is how substance-based assumptions and reality as process interact with one another in strategic change (Hernes 2014a).

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to contribute to an understanding of strategic change processes by following a process-relational worldview in general and by adopting an unowned view of strategic change in particular, and subsequently by elaborating upon the notion of the passing of time as holding agency in strategic change.
The research question is as follows:
- How does strategic change emerge in time?

The research question is answered in this dissertation through a threefold process. First, I elaborate upon the main implications for adopting a process-relational worldview. Second, I present an unowned, in-time approach for theorizing about strategic change. Third, I analyze the phenomenon through empirical data from real-time strategy-making situations.

1.3 Contribution and positioning of the research

Fig. 1 below illustrates the positioning of this dissertation in relation to the existing body of research. The research is positioned within emerging post-processual strategy research, which falls into the intersection of strategy as practice research and process organization research (see also Chia & MacKay 2007). By post-processual strategy research, I refer particularly to the emerging stream of research on strategy that grounds itself in the process-relational worldview (e.g., Chia & Holt 2006, MacKay & Chia 2013). However, this study also draws significantly from process organization studies that do not explicitly discuss strategy.

![Fig. 1. Theoretical positioning of the research.](image)

The main contribution of this study is that it examines the passing of time as having agency in strategic change. I argue that this view opens up avenues for a novel, temporal understanding of strategic change processes. With such a focus on temporality, this study particularly advances the unowned view of strategic change within post-processual strategy research (MacKay & Chia 2013). Through this means, the study also contributes generally to the stream of organization studies by building on the ideas of process philosophy (Langley & Tsoukas 2010). As stated previously, this study also contributes to discussions on the temporal
nature of strategy-making (Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013) by elaborating on how time holds agency in relation to human strategists.

In a broader sense, my research also contributes to the process view of strategic change in two ways. First, it does so by redefining the ontological and epistemological assumptions related to strategic change, thereby offering a complementary approach to studying the process. Second, this research project advances our understanding of the relation between human agency and temporality in strategic change processes.

The study was conducted by participating in the strategy-making in a small Finnish software-intensive company during the course of two years, which enabled me to examine strategic change from within the process (Shotter 2006) and in real time. This kind of prospective, participatory research setting, is suitable for process-relational research, as it makes it possible to capture the complexities and uncertainties that managers face in their organization at a level that has not been reached via retrospective studies (Langley et al. 2013). I argue that there is a current need for comprehensive real-time empirical research within process organization studies when theorizing about organizational phenomena. In addition, the research setting makes it possible to elaborate on the meaning of temporality in strategic change, especially in relation to human strategy-making. The theoretical contribution of this research is summarized in Fig. 2 below.
1.4 Defining the key concepts of the study

In this section, I briefly define the key concepts used in this study. However, these definitions contain ontological and epistemological assumptions that will be further explained later in the dissertation. Therefore, the definitions might be difficult to understand without reading the dissertation, since they contain concepts and meanings that will be explained later.

**Unowned view on processes**

In this study, I draw on the unowned view of processes (Rescher 1996), which highlights that the creative advance of reality (Whitehead 1929) cannot be reduced to “owned” forms of agency, in other words, to the actions of individual entities. The unowned view of processes deviates from the “owned” view of processes by subjugating human agency to that of processes (MacKay & Chia 2013). Thus, the unowned view highlights that human actors do not control the consequences of their actions, and hence, the unfolding of processes.
**Strategy-making**

In this study, I define strategy-making as an open-ended and continuous process of practical coping that results in actual decisions and acts that retrospectively can be defined as an intentional and purposeful strategy (Chia & Holt 2006, Tsoukas 2010). It is also grounded in Chia and Holt’s (2009: 24) definition of strategy as “a latent and retrospectively identifiable consistency in the pattern of actions taken that produces desirable outcomes even though no one had intended or deliberately planned for it to be so.” This definition is attentive to both intentional (i.e. building of strategy) and unintentional human activities (i.e. dwelling) in the emergence of strategy. On the one hand, the building of strategy describes the act of abstracting from our experiences through reflection and distancing, and thereby transforming them into conceptual articulations (Nayak and Chia 2011). On the other hand, dwelling describes our everyday being-in-the-world through practical coping (Chia & Holt 2006).

**Strategic change**

The study defines strategic change as an unowned, temporal process of strategy-making in change, where *strategy-making* refers to the intentional and unintentional enactment of human agency in the processes and *change* refers to the extensive viewpoint regarding the fluxing nature of reality. In addition, the agency of strategic change is analytically seen to be located in relational events, which means that the passing of time holds agency in the process.

**Agency**

In this study, I follow the definition of agency as a relational process, where agency can be found in temporal events (Hernes 2014a, 2017, Whitehead 1929). According to this definition, agency emerges from shifting relations, and thus, is in a state of continuous unowned becoming (Barad 2003, MacKay & Chia 2013, Shotter 2013). In addition, human and non-human agency is evoked through acts of relating within events.
Agentic time

In this study, I use the concept of agentic time to highlight that when theorizing about processes, agency can be analytically located within temporal-relational events. Thus, agentic time follows the relational view of agency (see above), while highlighting that the temporal connecting that give us the experience of processuality take place between relational events (Hernes 2017). Consequently, agency is not tied to consciousness.

Temporality

This study defines temporality as an immanent presence of past and future in present duration. Accordingly, temporality refers to a specific viewpoint on time as duration concerning the relationship between past, present and future. Through this means, the concept of temporality illuminates a processual unfolding of reality where the human experience is based on the ongoingness of time, namely the becoming and perishing of events in the eternal present (Hernes 2014a: 44).

Event

In this study, I define an event by drawing on Hernes’ (2014a: 128) definition of an event as a “spatio-temporal entity of some duration.” This is further based on Whitehead’s (1929: 114) notion of “the nexus of actual occasions.” Thus, an event can be seen as an abstraction of the unity of several past moments from a particular viewpoint. This means that an abstraction can, for example, be based on the simultaneity of several entities (Hernes 2014a). However, an important notion to consider here is that the unity within an event is not absolute because events are mutually constitutive in relation to other events.

1.5 The research setting

Empirically, the research builds on a two-year investigation of strategic change. The data has been generated by participating in real-time managerial strategy-making. The qualitative data in this study has been generated through engaging in workshops and open-ended strategic discussions with three managers in a small, Finnish software-intensive company, Visual (an acronym). A real-time research project and a participatory, action-oriented research setting made it possible to
take a closer look at how events and processes are experienced by the managers (Langley & Tsoukas 2010, Vesa & Vaara 2015). Since the managers are not telling an existing story retrospectively, but instead are being engaged in real-time strategy-making, the data offers a glimpse of how and what the managers think while living with strategic change (Weick 2003).

The data were collected from 2011 through 2013 in 16 meetings (7 workshops and 9 open-ended strategic discussions) that lasted from one and half to four hours each. All of the meetings were recorded and transcribed. The topics discussed in the meetings were mostly defined by what was topical for the managers at the time the meeting took place, which makes the data very heterogeneous. However, it reflects well the temporal nature of strategic change, as managers are dealing new challenges every day.

Visual, the company examined in this project, was established in 2006. At the time the data was collected, it was run by five owners. Visual offers a software solution to manufacturers and retailers to help its customers visualize physical products during sales events. At the beginning of the data collection process, Visual had 25 employees. It operated throughout Europe, but the majority of its customers were based in Finland, where Visual was the market leader. At this time, Visual’s explicit strategic objective was rapid growth through increased internationalization. However, the management group had not yet determined how such internationalization and growth would be achieved.

1.6 The structure of the study

The study is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of past research on strategy and change. I will also elaborate on how time has been conceptualized within these two interrelated streams of research. Chapter 3 presents the philosophical grounding of the study. In the chapter, I will elaborate on the process philosophical view of reality and its implications for an understanding of change and stability, organizations, agency, and time. Chapter 4 discusses the post-processual view on strategic change and, consequently, explains how strategic change processes can be viewed as unowned processes. Finally, chapter 4 focuses on the conceptual framework adopted for this study. Chapter 5 describes the empirical research setting and the methods for generating and analyzing the empirical data. Thereafter, chapter 6 addresses the empirical analysis used in the study. Chapter 7 summarizes the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the existing body of research. Finally, chapter 8
presents the conclusions, the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of the study, as well as the limitations of the study, and it makes suggestions for further research.
2 Theoretical overview

The theoretical roots of strategic change can be looked at from both the standpoint of strategic management and organizational change research. There is a well-recognized relationship between strategy and change, a gap that needs to be closed (Bettis & Hitt 1995), but still they are treated as separate phenomena. The existence of separate, yet overlapping, discussions on strategy and change reveals the ontological assumptions of conventional research: change is seen as somehow a special, temporary characteristic in organizations. Change is also treated as a way for managers to implement their new strategies, which has made change management one sub-area of strategic management. On the other hand, chopping organizations into self-sustaining components – with strategy being one of them – has made it possible to study these different components, as well as objects of change, separately. Therefore, in a way change has been a subfield of strategy and strategy a subfield of change. Both strategy and change are fragmented fields of research, as the concepts can be approach from endless viewpoints.

This chapter briefly goes through the development of studies on strategy and change. In addition, the chapter identifies and describes two conceptualizations of time in strategy and change research. However, since the primary contribution of this dissertation is to specifically advance the process-relational view on strategic change (see Tsoukas & Chia 2002), the review of the past strategy and change literature is not extensive. In addition, the review of literature is conducted in terms of what is seen as relevant for post-processual strategy research. Accordingly, this chapter should not be treated as forming the conceptual framework for this study, as it will be presented later in section 4.3.

2.1 Overview of the research on strategy

In his elaboration of the origins and historical development of the strategy concept, Bracker (1980) explains that the concept of strategy emerged and was used already by the early Greek philosophers and writers, such as Euripides and Socrates. Even though the concept was applied to business already in ancient Greece, it was forgotten through the course of time. The concept of strategy is also mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible. The concept has its origins in the fields of military and politics (ibid.). With respect to business discourse, the concept was adopted from the military after World War II in the United States.
Bracker further mentions that Neumann and Morgenstern were the first authors to use the strategy concept within business in 1947. In the following decades, the concept started slowly to diffuse into business research and discourse. Definitions of strategy within the business sector connected the concept to actions, decisions, resources, evaluations of the present, and orientations towards future objectives (see Bracker 1980: 220).

Some of the key early writers on corporate strategy were Alfred Dupont Chandler (1962) and Igor Ansoff (1965). Chandler argued that within industrial organizations, a radically new strategy required significant structural reorganization. For example, he found that a diversification strategy, typically followed by growth and increased complexity, resulted in a separation of managerial decision-making processes into autonomous divisions. Ansoff discussed business strategy formulation, strategic decisions, and management and he argued that market conditions could be controlled through strong planning mechanisms. He saw that in some volatile industries, strategic change is a continuous rather than a cyclical process.¹

Today, strategic management is a major field in business research, one that is characterized by multiple approaches, definitions, theories, and frameworks for understanding strategy and strategy-making. Many of us are already familiar with the five forces model proposed by Michael Porter (1980, 1996), or the 5Ps of strategy proposed by Henry Mintzberg (1978, 1989, 1994), just to name a few. In addition, major fields of research linked to strategy-making include the resource-based view (RBV) of a firm (e.g., see Barney 1991) and its more recent follower, the dynamic capabilities view (e.g., see Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997).

In general, the study of strategy revolves around examining the reasons for organizational actions (Tsoukas & Knudsen 2006). Due to the broad nature of the field, there are multiple sub-classifications of strategy research. Traditionally, strategy research has been broadly categorized into content and process streams (e.g., Bourgeois 1980), where the content stream focuses on the “what” and the process stream on the “how” of strategy. The early focus on strategy after World War II had to do more with the content of strategy, whereas the process aspects of strategy followed gradually and served to complement it in terms of understanding managerial strategy-making. For example, Whittington (2001) has identified four generic approaches to strategy, which he describes as the classical approach, evolutionary approach, processual approach, and systemic approach.

¹ By strategic change, he was referring to the altering of the product-market ordering/match.
Mintzberg (1994) identifies as many as ten schools of thought on strategy formation, three of which (design school, planning school, and positioning school) he identifies as prescriptive, whereas the remaining seven (cognitive, entrepreneurial, learning, political, cultural, environmental, and configurational) are more descriptive schools of thought. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to rely on the broad categorization of strategy formation into content and process schools of strategy.

2.1.1 Strategy content and process research

Chakravarthy and Doz (1992: 5) describe the content school as examining the correlations between the firm’s strategic positions, environmental contexts, and optimal performance. Tsoukas and Chia (2011) argue that ontologically speaking, content studies rely on a rationalist view that has led them to approach strategy as a future plan that is born out of systematic environmental and organizational scanning. In their opinion, such a viewpoint further treats managers or organizations as rational thinkers and decision-makers (Vaara, Kleymann, & Seristö 2004). Likewise, the close linking of strategy with a firm’s performance has been a common characteristic of traditional content-based research.

The critique of content studies on strategy are related, for example, to the assumption that managers always act rationally (Chia 2014), to a lack of appreciation of the unique business context that firms are facing (Pettigrew 1992), and to an overemphasis on the macro aspects of strategy (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington 2003).

Strategy process research, on the other hand, is generally interested in tracing the creation of strategy over a longer period of time. Chester Barnard (1938), Herbert A. Simon (1945), and Edith Penrose (1959) have been seen as the initiators of processual management research (Chakravarthy & Doz 1992, Chia & Holt 2009). For example, in his seminal book, Administrative Behaviour, Simon (1945: 77) discussed managerial decision-making and the described strategy as a series of decisions that determine behavior over a certain amount of time. He defines decision-making as the rational selection from among a variety of different alternatives of the alternative with the best consequences. Simon briefly touches upon the issue of time when he describes how past decisions narrow the decisions available today and how this commitment to a particular line of action makes it usually preferable to continue with it in the future (ibid.).
Other notable scholars advancing the processual view on strategy have included, for example, Andrew Pettigrew (1985, 1990, 1997), and Gerry Johnson (1987, 1990). Pettigrew (1997) defines process as a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time. He also raises the issue of change as constituting a major challenge for strategic management in large, complex companies, thus connecting strategy-making and change as single united phenomenon (see Pettigrew 1985). Johnson (1990), on the other hand, depicts the successful management of strategic change as a problem that could be better understood by considering the cognitive, cultural, and political aspects of the change management process rather than portraying the process as an outcome of rational planning. He later contributed to advancing the practice view of strategy (e.g., see Johnson et al. 2003).

Chakravarthy and Doz (1992: 5) describe that strategy process research as generally being concerned with examining the shaping of and implementation of effective strategies within firms as well as the causal relationship between the administrative systems of a firm and its strategic positions. In addition, Van de Ven (1992) identified three meanings for process within strategy process research: 1) process as a logic explaining the causal relationships between independent and dependent variables; 2) process as a category of concepts for individual and organizational actions; and 3) process as a sequence of events explaining how things change over time. Finally, based on their more recent literature review, Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst (2006) identify three aspects of strategy process that are usually mentioned in the existing literature, namely the strategist, the issue, and the sequence of actions.

In referring to Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst’s (2006) review, Langley (2007) raised a concern that, surprisingly, even now little research in the strategy process field can actually be described as processual. Instead, studies have reduced the process itself to a variable. Thus, the field still primarily consists of positivistic studies, whereas the social aspects of the process have received less attention (ibid.). Thus, despite the relatively few efforts at humanizing the understanding of strategy, the rationalist roots of the phenomenon are still visible in the majority of process-oriented research. This has caused two challenges in particular for theories on strategy process. First, the analytical separation of planning and implementing a strategy makes the process appear overly static and orderly (Tsoukas & Chia 2011). Second, the latent assumption of rational, “heroic” managers that can sufficiently control an organization’s fate by creating and subsequently implementing strategy hinders an appreciation of the creative
aspects of strategy-making (Chia 2014, Tsoukas & Knudsen 2006). Consequently, rather than portraying formal strategy as something that is lying out there waiting to be discovered through intelligence, the need to continuously invent formal strategy should be acknowledged within strategy process research (Tsoukas & Knudsen 2006).

2.1.2 Critical approaches to strategy

Stemming from the concerns described in the previous paragraphs with respect to mainstream strategy content and process research, in the last couple of decades an increasing number of critical voices has emerged both within organization theory in general and strategy research in particular. Henry Mintzberg (1978, 1989, 1994) is perhaps the best-known critic of the rationalistic, management control view of strategy-making. Mintzberg (1994) saw that a formalized strategy-making process can prevent organizational dynamism through unintentionally restraining natural human creativity and the utilization of intuition. Furthermore, Mintzberg and Waters (1985) have argued that a realized strategy, in other words, retrospective consistency in organizational actions, does not emerge through the straightforward implementation of an intended strategy, but rather through the interplay of an emergent, unintentional strategy and a deliberate strategy (see also Mintzberg 1978).

The general humanizing of strategy research (Chia & Holt 2009; Pettigrew, Thomas, & Whittington 2002) personified in Mintzberg’s critique in particular has stimulated the rise of an entire field of critical approaches to strategy (Alvesson & Willmott 1991, Alvesson & Deetz 2000). Generally, critical research has aimed at unpacking the underlying assumptions within the prevailing body of research (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013) or at disrupting the ongoing, dominating, and constraining aspects of social reality (Alvesson & Deetz 2000).

For example, the linguistic aspects of strategy (Ezzamel & Willmott 2008, Mantere 2013, Vaara 2010), with the associated labels of postmodernism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, semiotics, and discourse, have received more attention of late, so much so that one can even talk about a “linguistic turn” in research (Nayak 2008). Within this stream of research, Vaara et al. (2004) define strategies as discursive constructions, whereas Mantere (2013) refers to strategy as a language game that defines how strategy vocabulary is used in organizations. In their seminal study, Knights and Morgan (1991) argue that the discourse on strategy actually creates the very problems that strategy is supposed to solve.
Thus, in a way the existing strategy discourse has created the need for more strategy. Consequently, the emergence of strategy discourse in and of itself can be seen as a force that has transformed practices within organizations (Knights & Morgan 1991). Closely linked to a research interest on strategy discourse, the issue of power has also gained attention within the critical stream of strategy research (e.g., see Hardy & Thomas 2014, Samra-Fredricks 2005, Knights & Morgan 1991). For example, studies drawing on the works of Michael Foucault focus on the relation between power and knowledge as productive with respect to strategy (Knights & Morgan 1991).

2.1.3 Strategy as practice research

In conjunction with the “linguistic turn” in strategy research, the critical stream of strategy research in the new millennium has also been characterized by the emergence of a “practice turn” (Simpson 2009). This practice turn, also called a strategy-as-practice research stream, emerged in order to disengage from mainstream theories on strategy, with their assumptions about the rationality of actors as well as their claimed detachment from the business context and actual practices of organizations (e.g., see Jarzabkowski 2003, 2004, Johnson et al. 2003, Whittington 1996, 2006). The practice perspective defines strategy as something that organizations do rather than something they have (Jarzabkowski 2004, Whittington 2006). Accordingly, the practice view focuses on strategizing rather than strategy per se and further highlights strategizing as a continuous process (Whittington, Molloy, Mayer, & Smith 2006). In this way, the practice perspective aims at bringing the theoretical understanding of strategy closer to the everyday life of organizations.

The practice view is not interested in discussing strategy in relation to competitive advantage or corporate performance, in other words, the macro-level aspects of strategy (Chia & Holt 2006). Instead, the main focus is on the everyday micro-level activities, practices, and social aspects of strategy and strategizing (Jarzabkowski 2008, Jarzabkowski & Balogun 2009, Johnson et al. 2003, Johnson, Prashantham, Floyd, & Bourgue 2010). Consequently, the practice-based approach seeks to answer questions such as “where and how is the work of strategizing and organizing actually done?” and “who does this strategizing and organizing work, and with what skills and tools?” (Whittington 2003: 119). The practices of strategizing and organizing become blurred, so that they appear very similar, if not indistinguishable (Whittington et al. 2006).
Practice-oriented research has emphasized that what can retrospectively be called consistent strategy can also emerge through the actual practices of a company, not merely through its intentional planning process (Vaara & Whittington 2012). For example, Chia and MacKay (2007) argue that this retrospective consistency, labelled as strategy, refers to an immanent logic that emerges through everyday practices. They further give this immanent logic an ontological priority over actors and agents.

### 2.1.4 Towards a post-processual view on strategy

Broadly speaking, contemporary strategy research is still struggling with the dilemma of how to simultaneously describe both strategic choices and change (Tsoukas & Knudsen 2006). An emerging body of scholars are concerned that the current “ostensibly processual” (Chia & MacKay 2007: 221) theories are not taking change seriously enough, and therefore, do not sufficiently reflect the current reality of business (e.g., see Chia 1999, 2014, Langley & Tsoukas 2010). Addressing the challenge of how to sufficiently address change in conjunction with the practices of strategy-making, Vaara and Whittington (2012: 36) suggest that the strategy-as-practice perspective should be synthetized with a “new process” perspective (e.g., Tsoukas & Chia 2002) that grounds itself in the notion of change as a fundamental aspect of reality. This new process perspective is discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4. Vaara and Whittington argue that a synthesis of practice and process views could enable researchers to better address the inherent temporal nature of strategy-making, which they see as being of particular importance.

Thus, even though originally disengaging from the strategy process perspective (Whittington 2007), several studies are now attempting to reconnect the practice view with process, however this time they are doing so by adopting the new process view. This has created an emerging stream of research that this dissertation chooses to define as *post-processual strategy research* (Chia & MacKay 2007), which also forms the theoretical grounding of this study.

Post-processual strategy research can be linked to writings that build upon an ontological sensitivity to processes and practices (e.g., Chia 2014, Chia & MacKay 2007, Chia & Holt 2006, 2009, Langley *et al.* 2013, MacKay & Chia 2013, Simpson 2009). These writings also can be linked to a broader stream of process organization studies that follow the notion of reality as process and continuous change (Langley & Tsoukas 2017, Helin *et al.* 2014). For example,
Chia and Holt’s (2006, 2009) as well as MacKay and Chia’s (2013) elaborations on strategy-making differ from the majority of strategy-as-practice research through their reconceptualization of human agency and change in relational terms (see also Chia & MacKay 2007, Chia 2014). In their widely cited paper, Chia and Holt (2006) propose that strategy can emerge both through intentional purposeful strategic activities that actors engage in and through everyday coping mechanisms. On the other hand, MacKay and Chia (2013) have theorized that strategic change is an unowned process by empirically showing the major role played by surprises in the process and how even intentional strategic actions can have unexpected consequences. I will come back to these issues later in chapter 4.

Along with the emerging interest in finding ways to rethink the processes and practices of strategy-making, there is an emerging interest in addressing its temporal nature (Bakken et al. 2013, Hydle 2015, Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Vesa & Franck 2013). Several scholars have pointed out that, despite its key role in processes, the explanations for strategy-making rarely explicitly address temporality (Hernes et al. 2013, Langley et al. 2013, Pettigrew 1992; Vaara & Whittington 2012, Tsoukas 2016). Consequently, the temporal nature of strategy-making is an issue in need of further elaboration. I will discuss temporality in strategy research in more detail in section 2.3.

This chapter has thus far briefly described the major streams of strategy research and highlighted the diverse nature of strategy research. This diversity stems from notable differences concerning the very core question underpinning such studies, namely defining what strategy actually is. For example, Tsoukas and Chia (2011) highlight that rationalistic researchers view strategy as a plan constructed via an analytical exercise, whereas processual researchers view it as a pattern emerging through an intuitive, emergent, contextual, and improvisational process and practice researchers view it as something that practitioners do (Tsoukas & Chia 2011). All of these different approaches to strategy are embedded in underlying ontological assumptions that define how strategy-making and human agency are approached in theory. This issue will be further discussed in chapter 3. Next, I will provide an overview of the other aspects of strategic change, namely the research addressing change.

2.2 Overview of the research on change

Overall, no grand theory of change (Pettigrew 1990) or solid community of change theorists exists (By, Burnes, & Oswick 2011). Change has usually been
treated as a subfield of strategic management or, alternatively, strategy has been seen as one object of change (Dominguez, Galán-González, & Barroso 2015). The reason for seeing change as one aspect of strategy-making is that the conventional research on change is grounded in an assumption that change is a special phase or aspect in the life of an organization, often with some definable duration (Garud & Van de Ven 2002). On the other hand, the theoretical treatment of strategy as one possible object of change is based on the prevailing tendency to divide organizations into components that can be analyzed separately (Tsoukas & Chia 2011).

2.2.1 Heterogeneous field of change research

With organizational research focusing on change per se, the phenomena has been described using several different concepts, for example strategic change (MacKay & Chia 2013), strategic renewal (Agarwal & Helfat 2009), strategic reorientation (Dominguez et al. 2015), change management (By et al. 2011), organizational change (Poole & Van de Ven 2004), organizational transformation (Romanello & Tushman 1994), and organizational renewal (Barr, Stimpert, & Huff 1992). These concepts cannot, however, be linked to clearly bounded, separate theoretical discussions or phenomena; instead, they have been used quite vaguely without explicitly stating why a certain concept was used.

According to Van de Ven and Poole (1995), change has often been described in two alternative ways. The first alternative seeks to compare an entity or some of its selected dimensions at two or more points in time and to look for a difference between them (e.g., see Aspara, Lamberg, Laukia, & Tikkanen 2013). Such an approach captures what actually changes in an organizational entity and usually focuses on the antecedents and consequences of the organizational change. The second alternative studies how the change unfolds. In such studies, the focus has been on describing the sequence of events and their temporal order as well as detecting patterns of change (e.g., see Dominiquez et al. 2015, Ford & Ford 1995). The first stream of studies are defined as content studies, whereas the second stream is defined as process studies (Van de Ven & Poole 1995, for an overview of the strategic change literature, see also Rajagopalan & Speizer 1997). This resonates with the effort to distinguish between content and process schools within strategic management in general.

There are a number of different ways to categorize change, usually presented as two opposing types. Distinctions have, for example, been made between
continuous or discontinuous/episodic change (Drazin et al. 2004, Weick & Quinn 1999), incremental or radical change (Romaneli & Tushman 1994), evolutionary or revolutionary change (Greenwood and Hinings 1996), recurrent or unprecedented change (Poole & Van de Ven 2004), and unowned or owned change (MacKay & Chia 2013). Furthermore, Van de Ven and Poole (1995) have divided change theories into four different typologies. These types are lifecycle (e.g., see Dominiquez et al. 2015, Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991), teleological (e.g., see Herrmann & Nadkarni 2014, Holt, Self, Thal, & Lo 2003), dialectical (e.g., see Farjoun 2002, Seo & Creed 2002), and evolutionary (e.g., see Aldrich, Hodgson, Hull, Knudsen, Mokyr, & Vanberg 2008, Baum & Rao 2004) change theories. They argue that these four types of change theories differ in terms of their generative mechanisms, that is to say, the “motor” explaining how changes unfold (see also Poole and Van de Ven 2004). In addition, the theories differ with regard to four issues: first, in terms of the predictability of the outcome based on the outset; second, in terms of the pre-determinacy of the development paths; third, in terms of the convergence or divergence of the process; and fourth, in terms of the conceptualization of time as either cyclical of event based (ibid.). Generally, each of these issues revolve around explaining how and why organizations change (Garud & Van de Ven 2002).

2.2.2 Four general types of change theories

Lifecycle theories describe change by focusing analytically on an entity that progresses through a sequence of specific stages or phases. This progress from one stage to another is driven by the realization of a pattern or logic that is either immanent in the entity or imposed on it by external institutions. In this way, the progress of the entity is regular. Consequently, the challenge in strategic management is being able to recognize what particular stage an organization is in and further managing the transitions to new stages (Garud & Van de Ven 2002, Poole & Van de Ven 2004).

Teleological theories of change, on the other hand, assume that rational, purposeful strategic decision-making and goal setting drive the change process. Such change thus proceeds towards a pre-defined goal. Consequently, the role of strategists is to set this goal, define the necessary actions to reach it, and monitor the progress of an intentional change process (Garud & Van de Ven 2002, Poole & Van de Ven 2004.) According to Garud and Van de Ven (2002), this teleological
Dialectical theories of change explain change through the dynamics and tension between an opposing, conflicting thesis and antithesis that, when confronting one another, create a synthesis. After some time, this synthesis becomes the thesis that eventually will confront its own antithesis. The change is driven either by the conflict, contradiction, and tension between the two theses as such, or by attempts to resolve the conflict. An organization, therefore, is not viewed as a unitary actor in any internal agreements regarding its actions, but rather as a system driven by a multitude of views, values, forces, and events under continuous tension and competition with each other for control and dominance. The challenge for strategic management is to cope with the multitude of different views and resolve the inherent paradoxes and tensions within the organization. The change described through dialectics is, therefore, not predetermined and can at worst lead to vicious circles (Garud & Van de Ven 2002, Poole & Van de Ven 2004).

The evolutionary theories in many ways represent the opposing view to the teleological view of change. They describe change through a repetitive cycle of variation, selection, and retention. The core mode of explanation is that dynamics stem from the competition for scarce resources, and variation is seen as the source of change. However, such theories do not address just what is the source of variation, thus meaning that variation just happens purely by chance. This makes the change process weakly predetermined. The evolutionary view of change has been applied, for example, to the resource-based view of a firm, wherein the success of firms is based on gaining a competitive advantage over other firms. However, the continuously evolving business context may create a mismatch between a firm’s key competences and the environment, which then shifts the sources of competitive advantage. Therefore, adaptation, learning and innovation are seen as central issues within strategic management (Garud & Van de Ven 2002, Poole & Van de Ven 2004).

Garud and Van de Ven (2002) argue that the above-described motors of change co-exist in organizations, which makes strategic change a multi-layered and complex process. They emphasize that this is because strategic change is a spatially and temporally dispersed process. Spatial dispersion refers to the multiplicity of actions simultaneously taking place within different parts of an organization. Temporal dispersion refers to that strategic change takes time, which
means that different motors of change may emerge as the process unfolds over time (ibid.).

Regardless of the motor used for explaining change, the majority of change studies provide a static, well-structured, and linear description of change. Falconer (2002) as well as Lawrence (2014) point out that the dominating view of change processes refers to them as discontinuous linear processes that have a clear beginning and end, follow discrete steps, and contain boundary conditions that can be clearly articulated (e.g., see Burnes & Jackson 2011, Ford 2008). Dawson (1994) and Sonenshein (2010) have both noted that many writers in the field of change management echo Kurt Lewin’s (1951) famous three-stage model of change consisting of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing phases. Consequently, the majority of empirical accounts of change revolve around defining and redefining the steps or phases of either change in general or change strategies in particular. For example, Hinings, Greenwood, Reay, and Suddaby (2004) describe institutional change using a five-stage model, whereas Kotter (1995) identifies as many as eight phases of managed change. Likewise, the punctuated equilibrium model of change (e.g., Romanelli & Tushman 1994) portrays change as a transition from one frozen state into another. According to the model, organizations evolve through long periods of stability (equilibrium) and subsequent short periods of fundamental change (ibid.). Thus, the basic assumption is that equilibrium and stability are the common states of an organization.

**2.2.3 Agency in change theories**

In addition to the varying descriptions of change as such, the agency in change has also been used as the basis for categorizing different change studies within organizational phenomena. Thus, in addition to describing how organizations change, the research has also focused on describing how change is brought about (Poole 2004). On the basis of agency, change has been categorized into a planned change view and an emergent or unplanned change view (e.g., see Poole 2004, MacKay & Chia 2013).

The planned change approach, mostly described through the concepts of change management and strategic change, views change in organizations as something that is planned, implemented, managed, and measured as a part of strategy processes (e.g., Herrmann & Nadkarni 2014, Holt et al. 2003, Huy 2001, Kotter 1995). For example, Gioia, Thomas, Clark, and Chittipeddi (1994: 364)
define strategic change as a process that involves “either a redefinition of organizational mission and purpose or a substantial shift in overall priorities and goals to reflect new emphases or direction.” Thus, change is seen as rational intervention and described as a linear process (Pettigrew 1985). This planned change resonates with the teleological change in Poole and Van de Ven’s (2005) typology.

Strategic change as planned intervention can either succeed or fail (Burnes 2011). This success or failure can be evaluated, for example, by measuring a firm’s performance (Klarner & Raisch 2013), and it can also be linked to managerial capabilities (Helfat & Martin 2015). A concurrent topic within the change management literature has also been the tension between managers that plan and try to implement change and other employees that resist the implementation process (Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince 2012, Sonenshein 2010). A key theme regarding strategic change is, therefore, the change in meaning, often described through the concepts of sensemaking and sensegiving (Balogun & Johnson 2005, Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991, Mantere et al. 2012, Sonenshein 2010). Accordingly, some scholars provide influence or communication strategies for how managers can implement change within an organization (Christensen 2014, Holt et al. 2003). The approaches also vary in that they either propose singular, large-scale interventions or, alternatively, suggest the need for more continuous change. For example, Armenakis, Harris, and Field (2000) have proposed a model that would enable managers to make change permanent by institutionalizing change interventions.

Fig. 3 below illustrates the conventional view of strategic change as a manager-controlled, rational future planning process. This conventional view is based, first, on seeing strategy-making as the managerial construction of a future plan that is based on a manager’s logical view of the world and, second, on the well-ordered implementation of the strategic change actions that lead to strategic outcomes.
Fig. 3. Conventional view of managerial agency in strategic change (adapted from Shotter 2013).

Studies adopting a more emergent view of change (e.g., MacKay & Chia 2013, Mintzberg & Waters 1985, Orlikowski 1996) emphasize the unplanned, situated, and improvisational aspects of change and contrast the heroic and often dramatic managerial interventions with the bottom-up emergence of change. A seminal paper by Mintzberg and Waters (1985) broadened the view of strategy emergence beyond managers’ intentions into actually realized actions. Following this perspective, strategic change can no longer be attributed to managers and their strategic plans alone (ibid). In addition, Orlikowski (1996) demonstrated through an empirical study how subtle changes in practices, in other words micro-level changes characterized the adoption of new technology. MacKay and Chia (2013), on the other hand, have elaborated on the non-linear nature of change and shown that it is an inherently uncontrollable and unpredictable process.

In general, Pettigrew (1985, 1990, 1992) has made the criticism that a common mistake researchers make when theorizing about change has to do with
attempting to squeeze such dynamic phenomena into an ahistorical, acontextual, and aprocessual account. Following Pettigrew, several writers (e.g., Dawson 2014a, Falconer 2002; Hernes 2014a, Poole & Van de Ven 2004) have recently argued that paying explicit attention to the role of time in change could enhance our theoretical understanding of change processes. Recalling also the previous chapter’s overview of the strategy literature, temporality can be seen as a key issue that needs further elaboration. Therefore, the next section provides an overview of different conceptualizations of time in strategy and change research.

2.3 Temporality in strategy and change research

“...it is particularly essential to our industry that our thought should be able to lag behind reality and remain attached, when need be, to what was or to what might be, instead of being absorbed by what is.” (Bergson 1946: 79)

The concept of time has puzzled us throughout history. Although time has usually remained an implicit, taken-for-granted notion in organizational studies (Bettis et al. 2014, Dawson 2014a), there is a growing recognition of the key role of time in understanding organizational processes (e.g., Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence & Tushman 2001, Hernes 2014a, Hernes et al. 2013, Langley & Tsoukas 2010, Nayak & Chia 2011, Reinecke & Ansari 2015, Schultz & Hernes 2013, Vaara & Pedersen 2013, Tsoukas 2016). Some theoretical attempts have been made to unpack the temporal nature of organizational phenomena, for example power (Clegg 2009, Costas & Grey 2014), business networks (Araujo & Easton 2012), identity (Schultz, Maguire, Langley, & Tsoukas 2012; Schultz & Hernes 2013), institutionalization (Lawrence, Winn & Jennings 2001), consumer behavior (Gibbs 1998), planned change (Huy 2001), and strategy-making (Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013). Several extensive surveys on time and temporality in organizational studies have also been done recently (see Dawson 2014a, Langley et al. 2013).

From a conceptual standpoint, time is polysemous. Contemporary research contains a multitude of different conceptualizations and classifications of time. Usually, the classifications of time make a dualistic distinction between natural and social approaches to time (Araujo & Easton 2012). The natural approach is described through various concepts, such as objective time, clock time, calendar time, classical time, cosmological time, b-series time, quantitative time, and chronological time. The social approach, on the other hand, is described as
subjective time, cyclical time, cairotic time, phenomenological time, a-series time, qualitative time, and time as duration (see Ancona et al. 2001, Bakken et al. 2013, Bergson 1910, 1946, Czarniawska 2004, Cunliffe & Boje 2004, Huy 2001, Hydle 2015, Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Ricoeur 1988). Apart from these distinctions, Lord, Dinh, and Hoffmann (2015) have proposed a radically different view of time. They have adopted a quantum approach to time, where the future is seen as a super-potential state holding multiple potentialities for defining the present. In such a view, the future is seen as flowing into the present and not the other way around, as we commonly think (ibid.). When explicitly distinguishing between different views of time, the main purpose is usually to point out the inadequacy of measured clock time to really describe temporality (e.g., Czarniawska 2004, Hydle 2015, Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013).

In this study, I follow this course of distinguishing between natural, objective, and social notions of time and subjective conceptualizations of time, where the former sees time as measurable and a divisible feature of life and the latter highlights our subjective experience of time and temporality. The assumption of objective time has enabled valuable research efforts concerning the analysis of phenomena as it unfolds over time (Pettigrew 1992). The subjective understanding of time, on the other hand, rightly draws our attention to the insight that both our past and future are subject to continuous interpretations and that these interpretations and expectations affect our actions (Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Vesa & Franck 2013).

2.3.1 Time as objective

Our predominant image of time is centered on univocal, mathematically measurable clock time, that is to say, classical time (Bergson 1910). Clock time presents time as a homogeneous series of discrete, motionless instants (Papanicolau & Gunter 1987). The passing of time is presented by aligning these instants in succession to one another and is illustrated via a two-dimensional axis. Thus, time is expressed in terms of extension (Bergson 1910). The objective time that we measure using clocks and calendars is constructed by measuring motion (Bergson 1946). Consequently, it can be divided into smaller and smaller instants, so that a year consists of 365 days and each day consists of 24 hours and each hour consists of 60 minutes, and so on. Because this conception of time is predictable, stable, measurable, and easy to visualize, we have been able to organize our entire lives around it and treat it as forming the background for
planning, sequencing, and analyzing our actions. We know exactly how many
days and hours are in each month, so we can plan our actions ahead of time. In
other words, the objective view of time enables us to represent it as a timeline and
use it as an artifact in planning (Yakura 2002).

Our reliance on objective time increased with industrialization, which tied the
valuation of human labor to the number of hours worked (Cunliffe & Boje 2004,
Ingold 2000, Lee & Liebenau 1999). Therefore, the objective measurement of
time has made time into a scarce commodity, hence the famous expression “time
is money” (Huy 2001, Ingold 2000). Thus, time has become a resource to be
managed (Roe, Waller, & Clegg 2009).

In addition to measuring time, objective time is also implicitly or explicitly
used in management. Bakken et al. (2013) have pointed out that a divisible
conceptualization of time is especially useful for enhancing the efficiency of
organizational activities through the practice of spreading activities into
sequenced acts or events. In a recent empirical study, Hydle (2015) has
demonstrated that objective time is used to coordinate activities globally among
people with varying senses of time and space, which further makes objective time
a key element of strategizing. Similarly, Waller, Zellmer-Bruhn, and Giambatista
(2002) have addressed how time is used to create deadlines in order to accomplish
group-level tasks. Tidström and Hagberg-Anderson (2012), on the other hand,
have illustrated how managers link objective “clock time” to their perceptions of
critical organizational events, whereas Yakura (2002) has discussed how
managers use timelines as artifacts when planning and managing the daily aspects
of a project, including billing and budgeting, all of which are tied to a project’s
timeline.

The objective conceptualization of time has also had implications for
organizational studies. The view of time as a divisible, linear succession has
informed processual analysis as well because it supports the practice of describing
the chronological unfolding of events and actions over time (Langley et al. 2013).
This implicit utilization of objective time has been common in both strategy
process research (Burgelman 1983, Mintzberg 1978, Pettigrew 1992, Sonenshein
2010, for an overview, see also Van de Ven 1992) as well as the strategy-as-
practice field (Vaara & Whittington 2012, Spee & Jarzabkowski 2011, for an
overview, see also Hydle 2015). In addition, the objective view of time has also
spurred an interest in exploring the speed of organizational processes (Perlow,
Okhysen, & Repenning 2002).
The view of time as constituting the objective dimension of processes and practices has certainly advanced our understanding of the patterns of organizational activities (e.g., Dominiquez et al. 2015) and it has supported the analysis of changes in contents or entities (e.g., Aspara et al. 2013). The extensive over-time approach can also be used as a stable platform for providing causal explanations of organizational phenomena. By supporting a symmetrical view of causality (Williams 2012), objective time enables researchers to analytically detect the causal relations in change processes (e.g., see Barker, Patterson, & Mueller 2001). In particular, objective time allows for the reversing of time, which further makes it possible to analyze processes starting from their effects and tracing them back to the causes (Williams 2012).

However, the strong emphasis on objective clock time has also been subject to criticism for not really reflecting the dynamics of temporal experience. For example, Bergson (1946) argued that the practice of presenting time as a linear extension is reliant upon language borrowed from the descriptions of space. Therefore, we are usually referring to the mathematical measurement of motion when we talk about time, thus a trajectory of a motion in space and not time in and of itself. This has been possible because space and time have been treated as similar. Consequently, conclusions drawn from studies of space had been straightforwardly applied to the construction of time. For example, the succession of time has been imitated through a process of juxtaposition, in other words, the succession of time has been built and described by adding individual moments next to each other. Such a view of time is passive: time adds nothing to events, and therefore, several events can be treated separately. From this perspective, it follows that adding time to descriptions of the process only adds a specific interval to different events (Bergson 1910, 1946).

### 2.3.2 Time as subjective

Time can also be approached in subjective (or intersubjective) terms. The basic argument for a subjective conceptualization of time is that we as human beings do not experience time as the discrete, sequential moments assumed by the objective approach to time; rather, we experience it as an immanent aspect informing all our actions and experiences (Dawson 2014a). Therefore, time cannot be seen as something stable and external to our experiences and actions (ibid). Instead, the subjective approach to time seeks to appreciate the temporal embeddedness of
human agency (Hydle 2015), that is, the multitude of personal experiences of time that affect our actions (Bakken et al. 2013, Vesa & Franck 2013).

In general, the subjective view of time is linked to the meaning of temporality for humans, and its conceptualization is linked to the ongoing relationship between three temporal elements: past, present, and future (Schultz and Hernes 2013). The subjective conceptualization of time refers to past, present, and future as always being inherent in each other and views temporality as an inseparable aspect of the fluidity of human experience (Bakken et al. 2013, Chia 1999, Hernes et al. 2013, Shotter 2006, Schultz & Hernes 2013, Wiebe, Suddaby & Foster 2012).

Vaara and Pedersen (2013), drawing on Ricoeur (1988), describe the subjective experience of time as being based on the meaning of the past, present, and future, which highlights that the temporal aspects of time are subject to our interpretations. Through a longitudinal study of the LEGO group, Schultz and Hernes (2013) have elaborated upon the role of the past and future in the present by examining how the past is evoked in present identity construction. According to them, a change in or stabilization of identity arises out the work of organizational members as they use the materials of the present to transform past organizational experience into ambitions for the future.

There is also an emerging interest in the role of subjective time in strategy-making. Generally, this interest is related to the insight that strategy-making is temporal work. Thus, it involves the subjective articulation of the future and past as a part of present strategy-making. It further attaches future expectations to the ways in which actions are generated (Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Vesa & Franck 2013, Vaara & Pedersen 2013).

In their empirical study of real-time, top management team meetings, Vesa and Franck (2013) observed that a systematic anticipation of the future was present in almost all of the managerial discussions. Furthermore, they noted that the experience of temporality occurs in strategy work by either bringing the future into the present, or by bringing the past into the present. They concluded that managers seek to arrange and order the past and the present into a linear and coherent experience of temporality. Similarly, Lord et al. (2015) have suggested that subjective constructions of the past and future make it possible to formulate longitudinal trajectories of change. In addition, Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013) studied the temporal embeddedness of agency by following five real-time strategic projects. They found that strategy work is very much related to negotiations about different interpretations of the past, future, and present. They
argue that the interpretations of different temporal elements shape each other, so that, for example, projections of the future are shaped by interpretation of the past and present. All three of these studies demonstrate the key role of temporal work in strategy-making.

Barry and Elmes (1997), Czarniawska (2004), Cunliffe and Boje (2004), Fenton and Langley (2011), Vaara, Sonenshein, and Boje (2016), and Vaara and Pedersen (2013) have all studied subjective time in relation to narratives. For example Vaara & Pedersen (2013) studied strategy narratives as ways to construct temporality. They emphasized the centrality of prospective stories, called antenarratives (see also Boje 2008), in strategizing and pointed out the ways in which these antenarratives affect both the present and past. Referring to Bakhtin’s concept of “literary time,” the time constructed in literature, they also emphasized how time and space are intertwined within narratives, for example in the form of presenting the passing of time as a road. Czarniawska (2004), on the other hand, has pointed out that we are not aware of that an important event is happening when it is actually taking place. Consequently, all events are made important or unimportant retrospectively (ibid.). In this way, the meaning of past events is open to reconstruction (see also Wiebe et al. 2012). Czarniawska (2004) further noticed that when she was trying to examine the history of a change made within a particular company through interviews, the interviewees gave very different answers when asked when the change had begun. This indicates how the beginning of an event or process is a subjective, retrospective construction (ibid.).

Although the subjective construction of temporality can be seen a key aspect of strategic change, it has its challenges. When an articulation of the future affects present decisions (e.g., Vaara & Pedersen 2013), the key question becomes, what kind of articulation are we talking about? Lord et al. (2015) have pointed out that forecasting and anticipating the future are deeply rooted tendencies in human beings, especially managers, and therefore they also greatly impact present activities. However, our tendency to forecast based on previous experiences can produce forecasting fallacies, precisely because radical changes are unpredictable. Relying too much on forecasts in strategic decision-making can therefore cause managers to underestimate potential change (ibid.). Dawson (2014b) and Reinecke and Ansari (2015), on the other hand, point out that different constructed temporalities (based on both objective and subjective articulations of time) can exist simultaneously and that this creates paradoxical tensions with respect to human activities.
The above notion is important because it points out how both objective and subjective conceptualizations of time position human agents as active constructors of time and the temporal world. This means that human agency is given primacy over temporality. Therefore, even though a subjective view of time highlights temporality as an ongoing, shifting human experience, it nevertheless treats time as a passive element subject to human interpretation. This same over-emphasis of human agency that was already identified when reviewing the strategy and change literature thus also applies to theorizations about time and temporality. Hence, in order to address the challenges in the prevailing theoretical understanding of strategic change, the assumptions that ground conventional theorizing need to be further unpacked and possibly redefined. Ultimately, the questions regarding change and time are questions of ontology and epistemology. Therefore, before elaborating on the theoretical approach to strategic change adopted in this study, the following chapter focuses on the philosophical and onto-epistemological issues that are relevant for theorizing about strategic change.
3 Philosophical grounding

For all the different categorizations and theories of change, the phenomenon of change has mostly been approached as change within an organization or as a change in the organization’s strategy. Thus, the majority of organization studies give ontological primacy to entities such as organizations (Tsoukas & Chia 2002). Consequently, the change itself is treated as an epiphenomenon of the entity. This means that change is seen to occur within an otherwise enduring organization (Langley & Tsoukas 2010), and the phenomenon under study is the change of something (Chia 1999). The ontological priority given to the existence of discrete entities has led researchers to construct different categories and focus on the aspects of difference and sameness within the entities as key ways of theorizing about organizational phenomena (Hernes 2008).

Ontologically, the practice of giving primacy to entities relies on an assumption of the unchangeable nature of reality (Rescher 1996), which also has been referred to as substance metaphysics (Langley & Tsoukas 2010). An alternative process metaphysics, on the other hand, gives ontological priority to change and relational processes (ibid.).

Usually, the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the practices of theorizing about organizational phenomena are not explicitly discussed in organizational studies. However, an emerging number of organization studies grounded in the process worldview have stimulated an interest in these latent assumptions underpinning theories of change (e.g., see Chia 1999, 2014, Hernes 2014a, Nayak & Chia 2011, Tsoukas & Chia 2002). Consequently, such studies have departed from the substance worldview and instead followed the process worldview in their theorizing. As I also ascribe to the process worldview in this dissertation, a philosophical discussion of the nature of reality and change is of utmost importance. Therefore, in this chapter I elucidate upon the philosophical grounding of this research. First, I briefly introduce the substance and process worldviews. The chapter further proceeds with a more profound elucidation of the process worldview, including the implications of the worldview when approaching organizations and with respect to stability and change, agency and temporality.
3.1 Substance and process worldviews underpinning organizational studies

Philosophy and metaphysics have both contributed to the general theory of reality (Rescher 1996), and therefore they each underlie either implicitly or explicitly all scientific inquiries. According to Rescher (1996: 8), metaphysics “seeks to help us understand the nature of things – to characterize and explain the realities we encounter in the world about us and to render intelligible the world as our experience presents it to us.”

Several philosophers (e.g., see Bergson 1946, Rescher 1996, Whitehead 1925), as well as organizational scholars (Chia 1999, Hernes 2008, Nayak & Chia 2011, Nayak 2014), have drawn attention to how, since the times of ancient Greece, pre-Socratic cosmologies have affected Western modes of thought. A debate on whether reality is changeable or stable is said to have been taking place already between the Greek philosophers Heraclitus and Parmenides (Rescher 1996). The view of Heraclitus highlighted the primacy of a changeable and emergent world, whereas the view of Parmenides emphasized the permanent and unchangeable nature of reality (Chia 1999). These views of reality are usually referred to as process and substance worldviews or philosophies (Langley & Tsoukas 2010). Over the years, Parmenidean substance-centered thinking has prevailed over the Heraclitean, processual mindset in the West, which is also visible in the social sciences in general and in organization studies in particular (Chia 1999). The division between substance and process views resonates also to some extent with the division between variance- and process-driven research in organization studies (Langley & Tsoukas 2010, Van de Ven & Poole 2005).

Rescher (1996: 2) has described a spectrum of four competing contentions about the world from a philosophical point of view. The first two contentions represent the process philosophy from stronger Heraclitean (1) and weaker Empedoclean (2) stances. The latter two represent the substance philosophy from weaker Democratean (3) and stronger Parmenidean (4) stances. The stronger Heraclitean stance (1) treats process as having primacy over things, and consequently substances are treated as subordinate to process. Things are treated as constellations of processes. The weaker Empedoclean (2) stance, on the other hand, gives priority to process over substance and highlights that all things are engendered, determined, and characterized by process. Similarly, the weaker Democratean stance gives substance priority, so that processes are seen as being involved in the doings of things. The stronger, Parmenidean stance gives primacy
to process, so that all the perceived changes in the world are just an appearance emerging from the endurance of things (ibid.).

The latter two stances, which represent the substance-based view, are described briefly below. In order to accentuate the difference between the process and substance worldviews, the focus is more on the two extremes, in other words, the Parmenidean stance and the Heraclitean stance.

Hernes (2008: 24) explains that Parmenides believed the nature of the world to be inherently permanent and unchangeable, which evidently means that there cannot be such a thing as change. If you saw a tree yesterday, spoke of it then and speak of it today, it means that it was, is, and must at all times be the same tree (ibid.). In practice, following the substance perspective of metaphysics means prioritizing substances over activity and process, discrete individuality and separateness over interactive relatedness and wholeness, descriptive fixity over productive energy, and classificatory stability over fluidity and evanescence (Rescher 1996: 35). Accordingly, the underlying assumption is that all things existing in reality are eventually in stasis and equilibrium (Nayak & Chia 2011: 286).

The two philosophical stances with respect to substance in Rescher’s division resonate well with the prevailing Western way of thinking. The tendency to privilege substance over process manifests itself, for instance, in the ways in which we focus on seemingly stable objects and entities as the fundamental building blocks of our reality (Mesle 2008). When privileging entities over process, the role assigned to change affects some of the attributes belonging to the entities while their identity or some kind of core that lies beneath these attributes remains stable (Cobb 1993). Even though such a way of thinking acknowledges the generation and decay of entities, the underlying assumption is that the matter they are built on will forever remain. This further means that even processes themselves can be explained as the relative motion of substances and, similarly, events as a coming together of the substances that participate in such processes (ibid.).

In contrast, the first two philosophical stances privilege process over end states and becoming over being. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (540–480 BC) is typically referred to as the father of process thinking (Nayak 2014). Even though no writings exist that can for a fact be attributed Heraclitus himself, his philosophy was written down and interpreted by other philosophers at the time (ibid.).
Embodied in the famous sentence that is widely agreed to be Heraclitus’ own words, “everything flows” (see Nayak 2014: 37), is the assumption that he believed that nature was constantly changing and in a state of constant conflict between opposites (Nayak & Chia 2011). According to Chia and Holt (2009), for Heraclitus these conflicts, struggles, and temporary reconciliations were the primary stuff of life, and without them all things would cease to exist. Entities are at any given moment the result of a striving between “opposite tensions,” and for Heraclitus, this internal struggle between opposites creates identities. Thus, the becoming of individual entities takes place through difference and tension between co-existing opposites (ibid.).

The fundamental nature of the world for Heraclitus was qualitative change, during which time “cold warms up, warms cool of, moist parches, dry dampens” (Heraclitus, as cited in Kahn 1979: 53). Every moment holds the potential for unifying both opposites, and this unity of contradictions means that a thing is and is not at the same time (Nayak & Chia 2011: 293). Rescher (1996) further highlights that this ability to fuse contrasting polarities, such as unity and plurality, as well as stability and change, into a unifying conception is one of the key strengths of processual thinking.

The Heraclitean view of a continuously changing world has been adopted and further developed within the last century by several well-established process philosophers, for example Alfred North Whitehead, Henry Bergson, William James, and Gilles Deleuze. Underneath their unique philosophies describing the processual world, they share a similar view that reality consists of process, flux, and transformation (Nayak & Chia 2011). Furthermore, time, change, and creativity are seen as the principal categories in a metaphysical understanding of process (Rescher 1996). For example, Bergson (1946: 20) describes his intuitive account of reality as “succession which is not juxtaposition, a growth from within, the uninterrupted prolongation of the past into a present which is already blending into the future.”

The process view seeks ways to appreciate complexity rather than reduce it (Langley & Tsoukas 2010). Departing from an (over)emphasis on entities, the world of the process thinker consists of events and experiences and their relation to each other (Langley et al. 2013). Consequently, the language of process centers on describing movement, activity, events, change, and temporal evolution, hence a reliance on verbs (Langley 2007, Weick 1979).

For a process thinker, nothing really ever “is,” but is under a constant state of becoming (Mesle 2008). The concept of becoming suggests that instead of
considering things as existing in a final state, they are thought of as being under continuous change through relational processes (Hernes 2014a). Consequently, rather than representing any particular object, process can be described as immanent movement (Mullarkey 2010), duration (Bergson 1946), or relational events (Whitehead 1929). When emphasizing the ontological priority of process, the meaning of the concept of change also has to be reconsidered. It can no longer be seen only as the change of something, but must be appreciated on its own terms.

“There are changes, but there are underneath the change no things which change: change has no need of a support. There are movements, but there is no inert or invariable object which moves: movement does not imply a mobile.” (Bergson 1946: 259)

Giving ontological priority to process and change makes approaching social phenomena as a solid entity problematic because such an approach only makes it possible to explain progression via temporary states of change (Hernes 2010, Nayak & Chia 2011). Consequently, any kind of substance or entity, namely individuals, organizations, or societies, is considered epiphenomena for change (Nayak & Chia 2011). In other words, entities are approached as human abstractions that arise out of processes and create the basis for further processes (Whitehead 1929). Being an inseparable part of processes, such an abstraction is always in a state of becoming. Accordingly, Cobb (1993: 171), drawing on Whitehead, replaces the notion of substance with “energy events” and “stable patterns of activity.” However, even though a strong process-orientation focus is usually described by placing processes in strict opposition to entities, Nayak (2014: 45) emphasizes that they should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as a relational pair that “works in tension and opposition as one.”

Another key issue in process thinking is the ontological recognition of relationality, namely that no actor can exist or operate separately from another (Hernes 2008). This further breaks down dichotomies that stem from Cartesian dualisms (Mesle 2008), for example the one between subject and object, where the assumption is that something (subject) is acting upon something else (object) in a one-sided relationship (Hernes 2008). Furthermore, breaking down the dualistic separation of mind and the physical world is one of the key insights of Whitehead’s (1929) process-relational philosophy.

Relationality also means that the individual and the whole are seen as constituting one another and being relative to one another (Cooper 2005, Helin et
al. 2014). Consequently, the whole cannot be understood merely by breaking it into individual parts; instead, it must be understood through considering their tangled interrelations (Cooper 2005). Therefore, rather than consisting of self-sustaining parts or actions, becoming emerges through interactions (Langley & Tsoukas 2010), or to use Barad's (2007) term, “intra-actions.” Hernes (2010) illustrates the relational way of thinking by using table as an example. Even though a table seems like a simple enduring physical object, its meaning is under a constant state of becoming through the events of its usage, such as eating a meal on it. By participating in the meal, the table becomes part of a heterogeneous whole that consists, for example, of technical and natural artifacts as well as individuals and the relationships between them. Hence, this whole does not remain the same if some element is removed from or another added to it. This means that the meaning of each element is defined through and depends on the whole, namely the meal in which they participate. Accordingly, the tangled relations between elements are given ontological priority over individual elements when one is trying to understand the meal event via relational thinking. Due to the central role of relationality in process thinking, I will refer to it from now on as the process-relational worldview.

3.2 Process-relational onto-epistemology

Adopting a process-relational worldview creates a unique ontological and epistemological approach for research. Therefore, in this section I explain process-relational ontology and epistemology in relation to the commonly utilized ontological and epistemological categories and concepts.

First of all, the process-relational ontology does not begin with a traditional division between objective and subjective views of reality. Nayak (2008: 177) highlights that instead of asking whether reality is objective or subjective, the first, more relevant, question to ask is, “what reality?” This question was addressed in the previous chapter. Despite that the process-relational ontology is sensitive to both objective and subjective views of reality, it does not fully agree with either of them (Bergson 1946, Lindstead & Thanem 2007).

The key issue that distinguishes the process-relational view from objective and subjective views of reality concerns the relation(ship) between mind and matter. Whereas the objective view follows the argument that reality exists separately from the observer (e.g., “reality is out there”) and the subjective view follows the argument that mind exists on its own terms and constructs reality
(e.g., “reality is in the mind”), the process view highlights that they are inseparable (Nayak 2008). Thus, the process-relational ontology recognizes the relationality of mind and matter as opposed to making a clear distinction between them (Whitehead 1929). Arguing that the mind and matter belong to the same reality without there being a fundamental difference between them dissolves the dualism separating them. Consequently, the process view does not participate in the debate between realists and social constructivists (Barad 2007).

The process-relational worldview accepts that our experience is constructed, but at the same time it rejects the notion that this construction is separate from reality “out there” (Mesle 2008). In other words, experiences always involve interpretation, namely a perspective on the world, but this interpretation emerges through lived experiences in the actual world. In this way, the knowledge we have of this world is based on actual experiences and should not be treated as a product of a separately existing mind (ibid.). The relationality of mind and matter is thus relevant for answering both ontological and epistemological questions (Chia & Rasche 2015). Consequently, ontology and epistemology become part of an inseparable “onto-epistemology” (Barad 2007: 43).

Adopting the process-relational onto-epistemology also leads scholars to reconsider the nature of knowledge (Chia 2002, Rescher 1996). In line with the division between substance- and process-based worldviews, our understanding of knowledge is also polarized between two viewpoints. Traditionally, knowledge has been approached as something static, divisible, additive, and cumulative; in other words, it has been viewed as an entity that we can assemble, rearrange, package, transfer, consume, and represent (Chia 1996, 2002, Nayak 2008). The process-relational view, on the other hand, highlights that both the reality that we try to know and we as knowers are under a constant state of becoming (Chia & Rasche 2015, Rescher 1996). Thus, the knower and the known emerge in relation to one another (Mesle 2008), which means that knowledge is tentative, processual, and emergent (Chia 1996). Accordingly, knowledge can never be absolute and, hence, fully represented (Chia & Rasche 2015, Nayak 2008).

In this study, I especially draw on Barad’s (2007) view of the constructed nature of knowledge and her “agential realist” framework. When discussing agential realism, she proposes adopting a performative understanding of scientific practices, meaning that knowing comes from direct material engagement rather than from detached observations. This epistemology stems from her close readings of the quantum physicist Niels Bohr (1885–1962). She particularly highlights that our empirical knowledge of quantum mechanics has been
constructed by scientific studies in which the researchers actively participated in producing the measured phenomena. From an epistemological viewpoint, this means that knowledge cannot be obtained from a phenomenon existing independently from the observer; instead, knowledge comes from encounters where the observer is part of the studied phenomena. Consequently, theorizing and experimenting are considered practices that result from intra-acting from within rather than intervening from a neutral position (Barad 2007: 56).

Barad’s view of knowledge enables to reconsider thinking and acting, namely interpretations and material practices, as inseparable temporal phenomena. In other words, both the material and discursive are interconnected. She defines matter as the continuous materialization of phenomena and discursive practices as continuously defining what is counted as a meaningful statement. Accordingly, knowing and becoming are entangled material-discursive practices that are temporal in nature (Barad 2007). Barad’s view of knowledge resonates closely with Chia and Rasche’s (2015) performative view of knowledge, which stresses that knowledge is grown and regrown through social practices.

3.3 Change and stability

“There is no stability escaping movements that give birth to it, then topple it, make it tremble, and dissolve it into novel processes, in rhythm with a multitude of open and ongoing transformations.” (Williams 2012: 181, drawing from Gilles Deleuze)

In this section, I address the tension between change and stability and assert that restating their alleged dualism or duality will shed new light on the phenomena of change in general and strategic change in particular.

The advocates of the process view have attempted to overcome the dichotomy between change and stability within organizational studies (Norbäck, Helin, & Raviola 2014). However, despite efforts to redefine the relation between change and stability (Farjoun 2010, Graetzel & Smith 2010, Hussenot & Missonier 2016), it has still remained elusive, with stability being treated as having an equivalent ontological status with change. The confusion emerges easily enough, even in process organization studies, since process ontology is usually placed in opposition to substance ontology, which builds on the notion of stability (Chia 1999, Hernes 2008, Langley & Tsoukas 2010). In this dissertation, I highlight that ontologically speaking, the concept of stability cannot be viewed as the opposite
to change if change is used to describe the fluid character of processuality. Since processual reality is viewed as incessant change, stability as non-change cannot really exist, and consequently, stability and change become ontologically false opposites (Linstead 2002). Thus, any kind of stability can only be seen as relative within the flux of process and never absolute (Mesle 2008); in other words, it must be viewed as “a set of secondary transient manifestations” (MacKay & Chia 2013: 224). Accordingly, when theorizing about strategic change, particular attention must be paid to how the concept of change is defined and used.

At a conceptual level, the relationship between the concepts of change and stability can be further illuminated with the help of Bergson’s discussion about the concepts of order and disorder. For him, “Disorder is simply an order we are not looking for” (Bergson 1946: 80). Thus, for him, disorder and order are both forms of order. They are just separated by human beings into two distinct categories, such that with the concept of disorder, we can express our regret for the absence of another type of order that we were expecting. Thus, it is impossible to suppress an order without another type of order emerging (ibid.). This line of thinking can also be applied to the ideas of change and stability. Change cannot be suppressed into stability when using the concept at an ontological level. Thus, when claiming that there is stability, there is just change we are not looking for, or else change that we do not see. Therefore, I argue that by utilizing the concept of stability to complement the concept of change, we have been able distinguish a strategic change as being an important, special period of change, one which is so powerful that the invisible change that is taking place continuously in organizations must be called something else, for example stability.

Disregarding the dichotomy between change and stability creates a conceptual challenge. Since the meaning of change is constructed by distinguishing it from non-change/stability, these concepts mutually constitute each other. Denying the existence of pure stability therefore leaves change without its other (Linstead 2002, Linstead & Thanem 2007). Due to this challenge, Linstead (2002) boldly argues that we might be able to better describe changing phenomena if we did not use the term change at all, but instead continuously reflected a sense of change via other terms in our language. On the other hand, Hernes (2014: 31) suggests that the inadequately proposed duality of change and stability could be overcome by talking about continuity in change instead of stability. In making this argument, he draws from Whitehead, who saw that there is both novelty and continuity in becoming, with both of them being
emergent accomplishments\(^2\). Similarly, Tsoukas (2016) argues against splitting stability from change and instead highlights that stability and variety as well as endurance and change are inseparable characteristics of processual phenomena.

Furthermore, adopting the process worldview often equates the processual reality with change (Nayak & Chia 2011), and through this logic organizational change means the same thing as organizational reality. Given all the discussion about the inherent difficulty of introducing change, which has been demonstrated, for example, with the help of calculated failure rates for change initiatives (e.g., Burnes 2011, Hughes 2011; Smith 2003), stating that organizational reality consists of nothing but change might sound paradoxical and even unrealistic at first. Understanding the logic of the thinking underlying this statement requires the adoption of two assumptions: first, that change takes place regardless of human intentions (Chia 2014), and second, that there are no boundaries around an organization separating it from the inherent flux of the world (Hernes 2014a).

The first assumption builds on the notion that even repetition is not really static (Hernes 2008). For example, Feldman (2000) has showed empirically that even seemingly stable structures or routines are not really stable, but are always in the making, thus ongoing, emergent accomplishments (see also Feldman & Orlikowski 2011, Tsoukas & Chia 2002). Hence, routines can be viewed as entailing creative agency (Tsoukas 2016).

The second assumption builds on the notion that no matter how standardized and repetitive the ways of operating within a formal organization might seem, the organizational processes are always connected, or, in other words, they always occur in relation to other processes within the fluxing world. Through these relations, incessant change in the world does not stay outside the organization such that we could say that while inside the organization there is stability, outside there is change (Hernes 2014a). Accordingly, I argue that intentional strategic change initiatives should only be perceived as one aspect of strategic change.

From rejecting the ontological existence of stability and, consequently, also the dichotomy between change and stability, it follows that prevailing organizational challenges that have traditionally been expressed as problems of change, problems of stability, or problems of the simultaneous demand for both need to be restated (Lewis 2000). In this research project, I follow the view

\(^2\) Although for Whitehead (1933/1967), the becoming of a new moment cannot in and of itself contain change due to its atomic, indivisible nature. Nevertheless, change can be viewed as a characteristic of processes from the standpoint of extensiveness.
asserting that what is usually described through a tension between stability and change actually describes the shifting dynamics of organizational life stemming from repetition, consistency, and continuity, on the one hand, and novelty, creativity, and uncertainty on the other (e.g., Graetz & Smith 2009, Farjoun 2010, Hernes 2014a, Linstead 2002, Linstead & Thanem 2007, see also Whitehead 1929). Consequently, I argue that in order to highlight the prevalence of change, the difficulties that are usually linked to change or stability could rather be explained in terms of inherent challenges related to the attempts to act purposefully in a world under constant flux. This dynamics produces a varying degree of perceptible patterning, surprises, and novelty in organizational becoming, and they also show at times more of an indication for environmental intervention than at other times (Linstead 2002). Accordingly, in this dissertation I assert the view that strategic change is a continuous organizational process and that no “state” other than strategic change exists. Therefore, the strategic change processes can be defined and examined as strategy-making in incessant change, which entails both continuity and novelty.

3.4 Organization under a continuous state of becoming

Adopting the process worldview also entails redefining the meaning of organization. In order to clarify the processual view of organizations and organizing, I will at first contrast it with the substance-based view. Conventional organizational research grounded in a substance worldview perceives organizations as rather stable and fixed things or entities. Processes such as change are treated as epiphenomena, thus they happen to an organization and make it a stable subject (Langley & Tsoukas 2010.)

Privileging entities has maintained a research practice wherein an organization is analytically isolated as a self-standing entity existing on its own terms and surrounded by its external environment (Carter & Jackson 2004, Hernes 2014a). This is often illustrated by drawing boundaries around an organization that separate it from the external context (Hernes & Weik 2007, Hernes 2008). This has led to treating organizational context as mere background, thus excluding it from an analysis of organizational change (Langley et al. 2013). Furthermore, granting an organization the status of entity has made it possible to view it as a unit of analysis, which has further made it the backbone of mainstream organization research (Hernes 2008).
Treating an organization as the unit of analysis has made it possible to examine a “thing” called an organization at Time point 0 and compare it to the same organization at Time point 1, thus capturing what has changed in the organization (Nayak & Chia 2011). The inherent assumption is that an organization has some other kind of core, such as an identity, that remains the same while the organization itself or some of its attributes change through different stages over time (Rescher 1996). The line of thinking here is that an organization is always something and that it can become something else after a period of change. Consequently, change is reduced to a temporary and unexceptional state that happens to an otherwise stable and enduring organization (Langley et al. 2013, Tsoukas & Chia 2002). Furthermore, treating organizations as entities that possess unproblematic self-identities and have the freedom to act has resulted in a tendency to emphasize intentional choices, intentions, and purposeful actions when theorizing about organizational behavior (Nayak & Chia 2011). This stable way of perceiving an organization is easy to understand and analyze, but it can in practice cause difficulties when trying to capture the complex, ever-changing reality of organizational life.

In contrast, by stressing that change is the fundamental condition of reality, one from which an organization spontaneously emerges, process scholars have encouraged approaching organizations as becoming instead of being (Tsoukas & Chia 2002; 2011). This organizational becoming is described in terms of tangled (Hernes 2008) and rhizomic (Chia 1999) processes. More specifically, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) describe organizational becoming as stemming from human attempts to order and control their activities through the generalization and institutionalization of specific rules and meanings. In a similar vein, Chia (1999) suggests that human beings have created organizations because, in order to be able to act collectively in a complex and constantly changing world, we need some sense of order, stability, and predictability. In addition, Bergson (1946) describes societies as consolidated islands that aim to introduce some fixity into a changing world. Even though attempts at fixing something are not unproblematic activities, Chia (1999) argues that the achievements of modern society have been largely conditioned by our abilities to stabilize and simplify the inherent complexity, in other words the ability to organize. In a fluxing world, the human acts of organizing are inherently characterized by the never-ending dynamics of attempting to make forms present within their constant recession (Cooper 2014). Chia (1999) compares this dynamic to the act of building sand-dykes to keep the
sea at bay: they both reflect the never-ending struggle to tame the fluxing forces of reality without ever reaching a state of completeness.

Cooper (2014) reminds us that we ourselves construct the ready-made structures apparent in the world. Thus, the objects we perceive are not independent from the human observer. This mutual constitution, in other words, the emergence of objects in our world, is a continuous process, and therefore, their presence should not to be taken for granted. From this starting point, it follows that it is not even sufficient to conclude that organizations are a bundle of fluxing processes or practices (Schatzki 2006); rather, organizations as such are only conceptually-stabilized abstractions, namely ostensible coherence within complexity and change (Chia 2002). Consequently, what we think of as organizations are abstractions that emerge through practices of organizing interwoven with the meaning we give an organization (Maguire & Hardy 2013). Accordingly, these organizing practices are more real than the organization themselves and serve as primary, concrete acts with respect to their abstracted and stabilized meanings. Finally, to be able to talk about organizations from the processual perspective, we need to deviate from thinking that assigning a constant name to phenomena is the same as viewing it as a constant entity (Hernes 2008).

In the next section, I will elaborate on the relational view of agency inherent in the processual worldview.

### 3.5 Relational view on agency

The relational view of agency depicts it as emergent and shifting. It is grounded on the primacy given to relations and practices over the individual or organization (Chia & Holt 2006). Therefore, rather than suggesting that an actor expresses agency through acting, it can be viewed as the other way around, that it is the action that constitutes the actors (Czarniawska 2004, Ezzamel & Willmot 2008, Hernes 2014a). From this point of view, the very acts of relating constitute the agency (Cooper 2005).

Barad (2007) describes her view of relational agency as stemming from ongoing intra-actions. Barad’s concept of intra-action, replacing the more typically used concept of interaction, reflects an ontological view that privileges relational processes over entities as agents (see also Shotter 2013). Similarly, Cooper (2005) defines relating as acts of connecting and disconnecting within the flux of events. Through these acts of relating, individuals and the environment are entangled with one another (ibid.). Adopting a relational approach to agency
highlights its temporal nature and the embeddedness of human agents in social practices (Chia & Holt 2009, Emirbayer & Mische 1998, Hernes 2014a, Simpson 2009). Consequently, agents themselves are effects of the past (Chia 2000) and can be viewed as “an evolving locus of relationships” (Chia & Holt 2009: 114). Adopting the relational view of agency, therefore, has major implications for how researchers interpret both the nature of human and non-human agency. In the next subsections, I elaborate further on these two modes of agency.

3.5.1 Human agency

“Reality is thus the continuous division and suspension of human agency as a series of infinite acts and events. It is in this sense that we have to understand the human agent as a participant observer of its world where participation also means partial and thus incomplete.” (Cooper 2014: 585)

The relational view of human agency departs from the dualistic separation of the individual and the social (Chia & Holt 2006, Cooper 2005), while also being sensitive to temporality and process (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, Hernes 2014a, Simpson 2009). Chia and Holt (2009: 60–61) argue that human agency generally refers to the “driving force or generative mechanism behind human interventions into the ongoing process of events-in-the-world.” In previous studies, the notion of the temporal nature of human agency refers to how the agents in their present actions are informed by a multitude of co-existing orientations towards their pasts in the form of habits, and towards the future through their imagination (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, see also Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013). In this way, temporality is treated as a dimension that explains human actions. I will return to this idea later in section 3.6.3.

Traditionally, the view of human agency has been either rationalistic or structurally determined (Simpson 2009). Thus, human agency is seen either as stemming from a rational, controlling individual or as being inherently bound by its surrounding structure (Chia & Holt 2009, Simpson 2009, see also MacKay & Chia 2013). This reflects the division between methodological individualism and methodological collectivism (Chia & Holt, 2009).

The prevailing, rational view of human agency sees all actions as intentional and thus assumes that humans are consciously aware of all the actions they take. As a consequence, all the order and organization seen in the world is accounted for as being a direct result of purposeful human actions to establish order and
organize. On the other hand, the collectivist viewpoint emphasizes the features of macro-entities, such as society and institutions, which can be analyzed in their own right. Social orders are therefore seen as existing prior to any individuals, who only adapt to these orders. In addition, any transformation within the social institution is due to the emergent forces of the institution itself and is therefore beyond the actions of any particular individual (Chia & Holt 2009.)

However, the relational approach to human agency departs from both the methodological individualism and methodological collectivism described above (e.g., see Chia & Holt 2006, 2009, Cooper 2005, 2006). Chia and Holt (2009) suggest that the relational view of human agency according to which the human “self” is interactively constituted reflects a weak methodological individualism. Such an approach acknowledges that all human choices, judgments, and expectations are influenced by anonymous social processes (ibid.). Similarly, Cooper (2005) highlights that rather than being a manifestation of inner subjectivity, human agency is constituted by acts of relation. In this way, human agency is seen as being embedded in several collective contexts, but actions are not determined by these contexts in a way that would compromise the inherent creativity of human agency (Tsoukas 2016).

From the relational view, individuals are seen as “relatively stabilized effects of social relations and event clusterings” (Nayak & Chia 2011: 283). Since the human agent is indivisible from his or her social context (Chia & Rasche 2015), the individual and social/collective can be treated only as abstracted categories (Hernes 2014a). Resonating to some extent also with the argument made by Chia and Holt (2006, 2009), Simpson (2009) suggests that agency could therefore be described in a way that transcends the traditional boundaries between the individual and her/his social context (e.g., Emirbayer & Mische 1998), while also being sensitive to the process view of organizations (e.g., Chia & Tsoukas 2002). Through the concept of “embodied social agency,” Simpson (2009: 1332) describes a view of agency that builds on both the notions of temporality and the social nature of organizing.

In Simpson’s practice-based view of human agency, which draws on the works of the pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead, the concept of actor refers to either specific individuals or “generalized others” (Simpson 2009: 1335). The concept of generalized other refers to a social regulation conduct through an “organized system of significant symbols that reflects the generalized attitudes, or discourse, of a social group or community” (ibid., 1335). The generalized other emerges from social habits of conduct, and membership in a community is
demonstrated by the ability of an individual to conduct himself/herself according to such habits. Thus, the generalized other enables the members of a group or community to act on behalf of or in the name of the community, while it enables others to recognize individual action as the action of an organization. In other words, organizational action is performed via the practices of individuals (Feldman, 2000). Simpson points out that without such a generalized system of significant symbols, it would not be possible to conduct complex coordinated activities. Simpson further suggests that social agency can be defined as the capacity to influence the meanings of social actions. Since social agency emerges in transactions that are mediated by significant symbols, no individual can evoke social agency on her/his own (Simpson 2009).

Another perspective on relationality concerns the assumption that mind cannot be separated from matter, which has already been discussed in previous sections. This also refers to the relation between thought and action, and consequently human agency is seen as emerging from within processes and practices rather than from detached rational thinking. From this perspective, it follows that the ostensible separation and distance between human thought and action, which manifests itself as the performance of intentional purposeful actions, is seen as being itself an outcome of social practices (Chia & Rasche 2015, Chia & Holt 2009).

This subsection has elaborated on human agency as a relational process. Consequently, priority has been given to creative acts of relating instead of to any individual actions. However, this relating does not just refer to human beings. Therefore, it is necessary to also briefly touch upon the notion of non-human agency.

3.5.2 Non-human agency

“If it were only human beings doing things, there would indeed be no surprise, no tuning, no accommodation, no resistance, no event.” (Cooren 2010: 22)

Chia and Holt define an agent as “a person or an impersonal force that produces an external effect or observable change” (Chia & Holt 2009: 60–61). Through their actions, humans clearly emerge as significant agents in strategic change. However, organizational processes also involve non-human agency (Cooren 2010, Czarniawska 2009). Thus, technologies, concepts, numbers, tools, and software solutions can also be seen as having agency in organizational processes and

Cooren (2010) gives an example of non-human agency by describing how NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope can be seen as an agent in the discovery of 16 new planet candidates. Many times humans actively produce other actors, be it machines like the telescope, computer programs, or written texts. These human-made actors then, when used or interacted with in other ways, gain agency. Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen and Clark (2011) suggest that even strategies, visions, or missions can have agency if they are participating in the definition of or justification for particular actions. Also, narratives (Vaara et al. 2015) and texts (Cooren 2010) can have agency in organizational processes and practices.

Broadening our view of actors and agency requires, first of all, an acknowledgement that agency does not require any kind of ex ante intentionality or meaning (Latour 2005). Czarniawska (2009) has used Algirdas Greimas’s notion of actants to elaborate on the view of agency especially in two ways. First, actant can be defined as “that which accomplishes or undergoes an act,” thus broadening the view of agency to include more than just human beings, such as animals, objects, and concepts. This resonates well with the relational view of agency discussed in the previous subsection, according to which actions create the agent(s). Second, the notion includes actors both as subjects and objects of an act, thus actant may act or become an object of some actor’s action (ibid.).

Broadening the conceptualization of agency beyond human beings leads also to the recognition of inherent materiality within processes, in other words, to the “agential power of materiality” (Carlile, Nicolini, Langley, & Tsoukas 2013: 6). Yates (2014) highlights that both the social and the material, for example technology, are constitutively entangled in daily life such that they should not be treated as separate entities. This entanglement of the social and material is especially emphasized in socio-material organization studies (Carlile et al. 2013, Orlikowski 2007, Orlikowski & Scott 2008).

Cooren (2010) has argued that strategy scholars need to recognize that non-human agency cannot be reduced to human agency. Highlighting the agential inseparability of the social (i.e., discursive) and the material, Barad (2007) proposes that agency emerges through material-discursive intra-actions. The material-discursive intra-actions are performative in nature, meaning that reality is enacted through material-discursive performances (Barad 2007, see also Orlikowski & Scott 2014).
3.5.3 Towards an event-based view of agency

Resonating well with the relational view of human and non-human agency, which privileges material-discursive intra-actions over agents, Hernes (2014a, 2017) suggests that agency can actually be analytically located in events where human beings and materiality, such as technologies and artifacts, encounter, act, and evoke their own agency. Drawing on this view of agency, I conceptually treat human and non-human agency as relative to the agency of events. By doing this, I am highlighting that although relational events emerge through the intra-actions of human and non-human actors, events cannot merely be reduced to such actions (see also Hernes 2017). Consequently, human and non-human agency can only be temporarily identified from within an event they participate in. This line of thinking resonates with the relational notion that parts cannot be understood without reference to the whole (Cooper 2005). Thus, both human and non-human agency can be seen as partial constituents of events. The relational view highlights that an event wherein agency is located cannot be reduced to individual actions (Hernes 2017). I suggest that this view of agency extends the relational notions of human agency (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Simpson 2009).

I see a close resonance between the event-based view and performative view of agency. However, what is distinctive about the event-based view of agency is its emphasis on the notion that the internal connecting of the social (discursive) and the material happens in temporal events (Hernes 2014a, 2017, see also Whitehead 1929). Consequently, I argue that the event-based view enables scholars to recognize organizational practices as material-discursive in nature, while explicitly emphasizing their temporal nature. Therefore, I adopt in this study the event-based view of relational agency (Hernes 2014a), while drawing also on the Barad’s notion of intra-actions when focusing on the emergence of strategic change events.

Finally, as events embody time (Hernes 2014a), an understanding of the concept of event in general and the event-based view of relational agency necessitates elaborating on how time is approached within process philosophy. Therefore, the next section returns to the discussion related to time by drawing on Bergson’s (1910) and Whitehead’s (1929) writings about time. In addition, the next section elaborates on the event-based view of agency.
3.6 Process philosophy and time

“But how can we help seeing that the essence of duration is to flow, and that the fixed placed side by side with the fixed will never constitute anything which has duration. It is not the “states”, simple snapshots we have taken once again along the course of change, that are real; on the contrary, it is flux, the continuity of transition, it is change itself that is real. This change is indivisible, even substantial.” (Bergson 1946: 6)

In Chapter 2, I concluded that time is a key issue, yet it has been insufficiently addressed in organizational theorizing (Langley et al. 2013; Hernes et al. 2013; Halinen, Medlin, & Törnroos 2012, Tsoukas 2016). I argue that appreciating the temporal nature of phenomena is especially relevant for theorizing about strategic change from a process-relational standpoint. In this section, I argue that giving time an active role in change processes makes it possible to create novel insights about strategic change.

The notion of time is one of the great mysteries of life, one which has also been troubling the minds of several process philosophers (e.g., Bergson 1910, Deleuze 1994, Heidegger 1985, Whitehead 1929). In this section, I discuss the notion of time by drawing particularly from the writings of Henri Bergson (1910, 1911, 1946, 1988) and Alfred North Whitehead (1920, 1925, 1929, 1933, 1938). They both considered time as one of the key issues in their philosophical writings, and consequently, they discussed time in great detail. Therefore, the discussion related to time takes place in this section at more of a philosophical level. Accordingly, the depth of the discussion related to time in this section is much more extensive compared to the subsequent theoretical and empirical discussions.

Whitehead described time in terms of becoming and Bergson described it as duration. For both of them, the experienced flow of time was a continuously becoming reality that could be described as immediate, irreversible, and creative (Bergson 1910, Whitehead 1929, see also Chia & Holt 2009, Mesle 2008). Bergson argued that positive science has taken us outside of time, thus it has ignored all the effects of time in order to compose a nice, tidy view of reality that could be acted upon with relative convenience. He therefore emphasized that only by considering time as indivisible duration, can we appreciate the continuous creation and emergence of novelty in reality (Bergson 1946). From this standpoint, time is an inseparable aspect of our existence; in other words, it refers
to the internal duration of matter, including humans and nonhumans (Barad 2007, Bergson 1988).

In the following paragraphs, I describe the process-relational view of time by drawing on the works of Whitehead and Bergson. Even though I acknowledge the uniqueness of both their philosophies, I argue that following both Bergson’s and Whitehead’s thinking enables me to discuss temporality as an experienced, uninterrupted flow of the present, one that includes the past and future as immanent. In addition, adopting their views of time will shed light on two interrelated implications that are relevant for an understanding of processes in general and strategic change in particular. The first insight relates to redefining the temporal extensiveness in terms of relational events, which leads us to shift our approach from an over-time to an in-time perspective. The second insight relates to viewing the passing of time as agentic in relation to human lives in general and strategic change in particular. The following subsection will explain these issues in more detail.

### 3.6.1 An ‘in-time’ view on temporality

The process-relational view of time is grounded in the notion that human experience resembles a continuous, uninterrupted flow (Mesle 2008). Our lives do not proceed through a succession of self-existing moments that have clear beginnings and endings (Papanicolaou & Gunter 1987). We live in a continuing, eternal today, yet one pregnant with incessant change (Chia 1999). Events come into being and then perish (Mesle 2008), and there is a close feeling of both past and future within this lived present (Whitehead 1938).

Whitehead presented a structured description of temporality in his process-relational metaphysics of becoming (1920, 1925, 1929). In his book, *The Concept of Nature* (1920: 54), he directly admitted that his view of time was “in full accordance with Bergson,” even though he preferred to refrain from directly using the concept of time and instead conceived of it as a “passage of nature.”

In his writings, Whitehead defined time in terms of a *becoming* reality. He further described this uninterrupted becoming as a series of atomic, yet relational, occasions of experience that gain their actual existence through both the causal power of their past and their own self-creative freedom. For Whitehead, time and space had no existence outside these occasions of experience. He used the term “actual entity,” or “actual occasion,” to refer to the smallest, atomic unit of experience, while he used the term “nexus” to refer to a set of actual entities in
the unity of such a relatedness (Whitehead 1929: 35). With the term “event,” I am referring to this nexus of actual entities, and hence, it consists of immanent relations between several moments. According to Whitehead, time is not a separately existing background for events, but rather it is the becoming of events. In his writings, the term “atomic” refers to the indivisibility of the occasions of experience, not their existence as isolated entities. In this way, Whitehead’s view of the passing of time as a series of events is not like the chain of successive events that has formed the backbone of conventional organizational process studies. Instead, following the Whiteheadian view, a series of events necessitates a relational understanding of the events. Events thus exhibit mutual agency in defining each other, and this forms the continuous becoming of reality. Consequently, events can only be described as a process where there is nothing between the events that would give an individual event an existence apart from any reference to the other events (Whitehead 1920, 1925, 1929, see also Cobb 1993, Mesle 2008, Hernes 2014a, 2014b, 2017).

In becoming, each atomic moment creates both continuity and novelty. New moments must create themselves out of the previous world. The becoming moment incorporates and absorbs, in Whitehead’s term ‘prehends’, the past; thus, each new moment is partially determined by its past. Hence, the past has causal power in the formation of new events and can be viewed as the source of continuity. From this it also follows that the past is immanent in the experienced present, and through this internal relation, the notion of an event as a prehended nexus of relational moments is relevant. Accordingly, the past is the material for the becoming of a new moment (Whitehead 1929). On the other hand, due to the immanence and relationality of events, the meaning of the past is also under a continuous state of becoming with respect to new events (Wiebe et al. 2012, Mesle 2008).

However, each becoming moment – each actual entity, in Whiteheadian terms – goes through its own self-creation process, which calls into existence a novel, unique moment that never existed before. This process is “concrescence”: the becoming of many possibilities into an actual, complex unity through which the actual entity becomes concrete. The act of becoming one particular entity, this rather than that, is an act of decision, in Whitehead’s terms “cutting off.” Collective decisions bring a new moment into being. In this way, each moment is viewed as a subject in its own creation, and this then illustrates the continuous emergence of unforeseeable novelty in the process of becoming. By describing the actual entities as subjects in their own self-creation, Whitehead proposed an
active view of time. Furthermore, by becoming specifically that type of entity and not anything else, the new moment also decides and actualizes, from among a range of possibilities, how it will in turn influence the future in the form of causal power. Thus, the passing of time forces closure upon the present moments, which turns them into events and objective data for the new moments. For Whitehead, the present therefore referred to a sense of immediacy with respect to the reality becoming actual (Whitehead 1929, see also Cobb 1993, Hernes 2014a, Mesle 2008).

Based on the notion of prehension, the past seemingly has a clear role in Whitehead’s notion of the becoming actual present, whereas the meaning and role of the future needs further elaboration. The crucial aspect in processual thinking is that the future does not exist, even though the concept of a future has a role in the notion of becoming (Mesle 2008). For Whitehead (1929: 215), “the future has objective reality in the present, but no formal actuality. For it is inherent in the constitution of the immediate, present actuality that a future will supersede it. Also conditions to which that future must conform, including real relationships in the present, are really objective in the immediate actuality.” Thus, as there is no pre-existing future waiting out there to be called into existence, a new moment must be continuously created in the present (Mesle 2008). Hence, the becoming moment is seen as the subject in its own becoming.

In practice, this non-deterministic view of the future means that it is not reasonable to automatically assume a reappearance of continuity in what has existed in the past (Bergson 1910). Furthermore, it is risky to assume that the same antecedents will always lead to identical results (ibid.). Instead, the emergence of novelty within processes needs to be highlighted. For example, Bergson (1946: 164) stressed that “no two moments are identical in a conscious being,” and similarly, for Whitehead (1929: 29) “no subject experiences twice.” Accordingly, the process-relational view of time pinpoints a multiplicity of ways for how things might turn out that cannot be predicted based on the present situation or past experiences (Hernes 2014a).

The above-described view of the future inherently connects the meaning of the future to the present, but I argue that it completely reverses the traditional thinking related to them: it is not towards the future that reality proceeds, but from the present. In other words, we can only say that the future present must arise out of the actual present moment, but due to the unique self-creation of the becoming moments, we cannot predict the future of becoming (Mesle 2008).
Bergson, on the other hand, described time as an indivisible duration and closely links the notion of duration to human consciousness. Bergson (1946) highlighted that we experience pure duration, but our intellectual habits have taken us outside of this real time by causing us to confuse time with space and to treat time as passive and external to us. In other words, our habitual abstraction presents time as a line in space, namely a trajectory. As described in subsection 2.3.1, the challenge has to do with the concepts used to describe time having been borrowed from descriptions of space that allow for a more static and fixed description. As a result, when we do think about time, we automatically think of a measurement of motion and do not consider the nature of time itself (Bergson 1910, 1946). Therefore, the view of time that Bergson put such a great effort into understanding and describing was an attempt to get back to a sense of pure duration.

In his book *Time and Free Will* (1910: 100), Bergson described pure duration as “the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states.” While linking duration to human consciousness, experience, and memory, he emphasized that our deeply rooted habits of abstract thinking — in his words our “intelligence” — intervene with our experience by dividing it into states. In his view of duration, succeeding moments penetrate and melt into one another and form a succession of qualitative changes, not a succession of individual moments or states. Therefore, with duration the past and present form an organic whole and cannot be distinguished from one another apart from via abstraction (Bergson 1910, 1911, 1946).

In quite a strange way, the pure, unconscious experience of duration could be clarified by turning to Mainemelis’s (2001) description of the experience of timelessness. He writes that such an experience emerges when human beings become deeply immersed in the present, thus forgetting their sense of temporality for a moment. Hence, we might experience duration best when we lose our conscious sense of time.

Similarly to Whitehead’s view of the influential role of the past in the present, Bergson argued that the past, due to being immanent in the present duration, is continually changing as new experiences are added to it. Through the notion of a growing past, Bergson described duration as a continuously ballooning reality. In other words, the present includes the growing past. The past is particularly intensively vivid in the present experience of conscious beings since our memory continuously imports the past into the present and connects
several moments of duration into a single intuition. This explains, for example, why we experience continuity, such as a car passing by, as a single intuition – our memory connects the past perceptions of the car moving with new perceptions of it. In this way, as the conscious spectator keeps the past in mind, succession can then be experienced. In a similar vein, continuity has to do with adding the memory of past moments to the present feeling. For tangible matter, the past succession is not visible as such in the object existing in the present. (Bergson 1946, see also Linstead 2014.) What distinguishes the past from the present is that the present is “that which is acting,” while the past is “that which acts no longer” (Bergson 1988: 68–69).

On the other hand, Bergson was disturbed by our usual conception of the future because it is analytically built upon retrospective judgment of how the present has come into being. Retrospectively, we can link preceding events with subsequent ones, detect patterns and the early signs of coming events, and pose pre-existing possibilities prior the realization of an event. Thus, when an act has been realized, we can say that the act will always have been possible. When this retrospective view of becoming is directly mirrored by the coming future, we will likewise assume that future events and patterns can be detected and predicted and that all future possibilities already exist in the present reality and are just waiting to be noticed. By thinking that all the various possibilities exist prior to their realization, we however lose our focus; we miss all the creative novelty and surprise that takes place in becoming. Furthermore, such a line of thinking results in reducing all newness to merely a rearrangement of former elements. Accordingly, Bergson highlighted that we cannot understand a sense of progressing via reversing, and hence, we cannot fully understand the future by looking at the past (Bergson 1946, 1988.) In sum, when drawing from Bergson, the future can only be treated as a dimension of temporality for the sake of stressing that novelty is always emerging in the present duration. Thus, the continuously emerging novelty in the present can be called the future in order to avoid creating a motionless image of the eternal present we are experiencing.

In sum, by drawing on both Bergson’s and Whitehead’s descriptions of time, it follows that the past and future should be seen as extensive resources for the present rather than as separate dimensions of time. This view highlights that there is no pre-existing, determined future waiting out there to happen and that the future cannot be predicted in the present. Thus, the becoming present entails the continuous emergence of novelty. In addition, this view acknowledges the causal power of the past in the becoming of the actual present. Accordingly, I approach
the past and future as concepts that are needed to explain the becoming present, and hence, our temporal experience. This has led me to explore the internal relation of the influential past and unknown future within the creative becoming of an eternal today. This further leads to a redefinition of temporal extensiveness, which will be discussed in the following subsection.

3.6.2 Redefining temporal extensiveness

One of the key implications of adopting the process-relational view of time concerns the extensiveness of time. As described earlier, the typical way of representing change is to rely on an over-time perspective of the passing of time. However, such thinking, while being helpful in some ways for understanding change, can also suppress the complexity and mobility inherent in change. The notion of “over time” contains an immanent assumption of linear, extensive time. Bergson defined the over-time perspective as homogeneous duration, and further suggested that it should be viewed as being an extensive symbol of the true duration of time (Bergson 1910). In practice, the over-time view of extensiveness means that moments, events, and/or actions are spread out in linear time, in other words, they are perceived simultaneously, as existing side by side, like an unfurled fan (Bergson 1910, 1988). Consequently, events form an order that can be expressed in terms of befores and afters and subsequently traversed in both directions: from a beginning towards the end, and from the end towards the beginning. However, such a way of constructing a view of extensity with respect to duration can lead to an ostensible ordering of processuality (ibid.).

As an alternative to the over-time view, the succession of time can also be approached from an in-time perspective (Hernes 2014a). The in-time perspective follows Whitehead’s (1929: 35) notion that “extensiveness becomes, but ‘becoming’ is not itself extensive.” The over-time view takes into account only the first part of this statement, meaning that it emphasizes the becoming of extensiveness by spreading this outcome out into a simultaneous existence. However, the process-relational view of time highlights that events per se do not hold an enduring meaning; rather, the meaning is under a continuous state of becoming in the present through the events’ immanent relations with other events. This challenges the representation of process as a series of successive events without considering their situated meaning. Consequently, the notion that becoming itself is not extensive is crucial for our understanding of change, for it encourages us to seek an understanding of change in the real succession of
qualitative changes, where all the moments permeate each other (Bergson 1910). Thus, while becoming itself is not extensive, change needs to be approached through an experienced fluidity of the present with an immanent past and future, instead of by placing it between juxtaposed dimensions of past, present, and future. This means that past events and the anticipation of the future are both approached from within the present situation.

In addition to offering a different approach to the extensiveness of time, a fundamental difference between the in-time and over-time perspectives is also related to how these perspectives address the question of agency. This issue also causes the in-time perspective to deviate from a subjective view of time. The over-time perspective treats time as a passive context for human agency, while the in-time perspective stresses that individual agency is subordinate to the agency of the passing of time (Hernes 2014a). This leads to the second implication, which is that time has agency via processes.

### 3.6.3 Time as agentic

Previously, I explained some of the concerns raised by Bergson regarding our conventional perceptions of time and change. These concerns led Bergson to argue that time needs to be taken more seriously and to propose an active approach to time:

> “I said to myself, time is something. Therefore it acts. What can it be doing? Plain common sense answered: time is what hinders everything from being given at once. [...] Would not time then be a vehicle of creation and choice? Would not the existence of time prove that there is indetermination in things? Would not time be that indetermination itself?” Bergson (1946: 75)

For Bergson, time was not an hourglass where the same sand keeps moving from one end to the other; rather, time is the creator of unforeseeable novelty, where the effects cannot reduced to the cause (Bergson 1911). Consequently, following the Bergson’s view, and thus giving time an active role in processes leads to view the passing of time is agentic.

To the best of my knowledge, Hernes (2014) can be credited with making the initial, explicit suggestion to give agency to the passing of time. The suggestion stems from his close readings of Whitehead’s account of relational becoming (1920, 1925, 1929, 1936). Whitehead encouraged us to think that there can also be forms of subjectivity other than human subjectivity, thus suggesting a form of
agency that does not stem from conscious thought. Viewing time as agentic thus highlights that time also works on us (Cobb 1993, Hernes 2014a).

Hernes (2017) equates time with relational events and explains that by giving agency to time, we acknowledge that “what happens at one event creates and recreates that which happens at other events, past and future. (Hernes 2014: 32)” In other words, the temporal connecting inherent in processes is seen to emerge through the relations between events (Hernes 2014, Hussenot & Missonier 2016). From this point of view, agency can be analytically located in temporal-relational events (recall subsection 3.5.3).

Giving agency to the passing of time deviates from our objective and subjective views of time by taking a more modest and restricted approach to human agency. This means that the creative advance of processuality (Whitehead 1929) cannot be explained as emerging from entities. Analytically speaking, this means that events cannot be reduced to the actors that participate in them; therefore, the events themselves are treated as subjects in processes (Hernes 2017). In contrast to the objective and subjective views of time, which privilege human agency, such that it is humans who continuously use time or engage in temporal work, agentic time stresses that the temporal unfolding of events has agency in relation to the human experience of reality. Consequently, when adopting the agentic view of time, I acknowledge the relevance of constructed temporality in understanding human actions, but take on a broader perspective with respect to time by arguing that we need to also understand how human experience and agency are framed by time. Hence, conceptualizing time as agentic closes the gap between human experience and that of the physical world, which has thus far prevailed within organizational research in the form of Cartesian Dualism (Mesle 2008).

I argue that the agentic view of time can be viewed as complementing or even completing the relational view of agency (Cooper 2005), which was discussed in section 3.5. Relational agency adequately highlights the non-permanent, situated nature of human and non-human agency that continuously emerges through acts of relating. However, I argue that relational agency cannot be fully understood without considering the temporal nature of these intra-actions. Consequently, viewing these intra-actions as relational events makes it possible to elaborate on the temporal nature of processes without reducing temporality to a mere matter of human construction.

I argue that in order to fully understand how the notion of agentic time complements the relational view of agency, we need to acknowledge that the
relationality of events can refer to two interrelated aspects of relationality, namely to internal and temporal relationality. First, the notions of material-discursive intra-action and relational agency (Barad 2007, Cooper 2005) illustrate the *internal relationality* of an event. This aspect of relationality refers to how a new event emerges through the human and non-human acts of relating. Second, *temporal relationality* refers to the relationality between events. In other words, I highlight that the notion of relationality not only refers to the actions of human and non-human agents within an event, but also to events in relation to one another. I suggest that the notion of agentic time adds the idea of temporal relationality to our conceptualization of relational agency, which previously has been grounded in the idea of internal relationality only.

In this subsection, I have discussed the process-relational view of time, which leads us to a view of time as agentic in the process of strategic change. In conjunction with the broader process-philosophical view on reality, chapter 3 forms the key grounding for understanding how strategic change is discussed throughout the rest of this dissertation. In the next chapter, I will discuss the process-relational view of strategic change by drawing on the post-processual strategy literature.
4 Strategic change as an unowned process

“Every step and every movement of the multitude, even in what are termed enlightened ages, are made with equal blindness to the future; and nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design.” Adam Ferguson (1782: 205).

This chapter focuses on strategic change by drawing on the post-processual view presented in the strategy literature. Section 4.1 focuses on the dynamic connection between intentional and unintentional human engagement in strategy emergence. Through this focus, the chapter then examines the interconnected issues of human thinking and acting and the social nature of them both. Section 4.2 continues by further discussing the human agency involved in change by elaborating upon how strategic change can be seen as an unowned, temporal process. Finally, section 4.3 provides a conceptual framework for the study.

4.1 Strategy emergence through building and dwelling

The conventional view of strategy-making relates it to the actions of creating intentional change (Hendry & Seidl 2003). Although this intentionality is most often linked to the definition of strategy-making, Tsoukas (2010) emphasize that our conceptualization of strategy-making should be attentive to both the intentional and unintentional emergence of strategic action. In making this argument, he refers to both Chia and MacKay’s (2007) and Chia and Holt’s (2006, 2009) suggestion that organizational actions and practices can also be immanently strategic without ex-ante intentions. Consequently, human engagement in strategy-making can be described both as intentional building and everyday practical dwelling (Chia & Holt 2006).

Chia and Holt (2006, 2009) propose that social patterns and institutional order emerges spontaneously more than as a result of intentions and circumscribed agency. Therefore, retrospective consistency in our actions can also be explained as stemming from our internalized disposition to act congruently. From this standpoint, strategic actions might also be immediate, non-deliberate responses to experiences that stem from instincts and habits, namely from the logic of practice. Thus, Chia and Holt suggest that, even without an ex-ante purposeful and conscious plan, there can be an immanent purposiveness in our actions. Consequently, they make a distinction between purposeful and purposive
acts (see also Chia 2014, Chia & Rasche 2015, Nayak & Chia 2011, Rasche & Chia 2009).

By distinguishing between purposeful and purposive acts and by drawing on Heidegger, Chia and Holt describe the emergence of strategy as either building or dwelling modes of human engagement. In their conceptualization, building resonates with purposeful and dwelling with purposive acts. Nayak and Chia (2011) further explain that building describes the act of abstracting from our experiences through reflection and distancing, and transforming them into conceptual articulations, whereas dwelling describes our everyday being-in-the-world. Chia and Holt’s purpose was not to describe the building and dwelling modes of strategy emergence as being mutually exclusive, but to point out that the building mode cannot be overlooked at the expense of the dwelling mode (Chia & Holt 2006, 2009). This is a key notion related to an understanding of these concepts, as they easily could be understood in opposition to one another.

Whereas the purposeful acts inherent in building are conscious and intentional, with a predefined end purpose in mind, the purposive acts inherent in dwelling are spontaneous and stem from internalized tendencies and dispositions. Thus, purposeful acts stem from an intelligent (see Bergson 1946) actor trying to be a detached observer of her/his situation and intentionally intervening in unfolding processes and organizational actions. Such activities entail the intention to move towards a specific end goal (Vaara & Pedersen 2013). Purposive acts, on the other hand, stem from an agent being fully engaged with the situation without knowing the consequences of his/her actions. The actions stem from an unconscious moving away from negative situations (Chia & Holt 2006, 2009, Chia & Rasche 2015).

I argue that from the standpoint of temporality, the question of purposeful and purposive actions within strategic change becomes more complex. Being inextricably embedded in an immediate experience of reality, purposive actions are always firmly grounded in the incessant becoming of the present (Chia & Holt 2009). However, purposeful actions by their very nature involve imagination and planning for the future (Carlsen 2006), and they ostensibly rely upon rationally deriving effects from causes, or vice versa (MacKay & Chia 2013). Both of these acts seem to involve temporality, even though with different orientations. The following two subsections further elaborate on the building and dwelling modes of human engagement in strategy emergence.
4.1.1 Intentional strategy-making: the building mode

The building mode of human engagement in strategy emergence resonates with the practices of formal strategic planning, which requires an intellectual detachment from the everyday practices and the forming of a thematic awareness of situations (Tsoukas 2010). Ezzamel and Willmot (2008: 191) have defined strategy-making as “a process of organizing.” Hernes (2014) views this type of organizing as the fixing of activities based on a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity. Basically, this means of organizing in the form of fixing systematically connects certain types of behavior with certain types of situations and certain types of actors (Tsoukas & Chia 2002). The systematic orchestrating of behavior is in turn dependent on two interrelated human activities: first, on generalizing (Tsoukas & Chia 2002), and second, on reducing differences among the organizing actors (Langley and Tsoukas 2010).

Bergson (1946) saw generalizing as a habit through which we arise from the field of action into the field of thought. Taken together with its sister terms, namely classifying, standardizing, ordering, and categorizing, the practice of generalizing relies on abstracting from human experience (Bergson 1946, Chia & Holt 2009; Hernes 2014a, Nayak & Chia 2011). Generalizing basically means subsuming particulars under generic, socially determined categories or classes (Tsoukas & Chia 2002). In other words, it is centered on attempts at naming and on symbolic representation (Bergson 1946, Nayak & Chia 2011).

Bergson (1946) further argued that the act of generalizing is a natural tendency for all living beings, and its value stems from it enabling us to act upon things. All the entities included in conversations in the form of words have thus been cut out of processual reality by human perception with respect to any work that still needs to be done (Bergson 1946, Hernes 2008). Thus, we abstract static categories and concepts from the fluidity of present experience, negotiate according to these abstractions, and try to further control such a state of fluidity according to static, conceptually coherent plans (Hernes 2014a). Consequently, rational human work is centered on arranging and combining concepts and handling words (Bergson 1946).

The abstracting of entities is undoubtedly useful, if not even necessary, for organizing, but it can also become a problematic practice if we forget that entities really are merely abstractions and not the experience of reality as such. Hernes (2014) points out that many challenges arise because we are tuned to think in terms of entities while experiencing flow. Bergson has argued that our
consciousness is tuned to separate and it can become problematic if it leads us to substitute reality with symbols or to perceiving reality only through constructed symbols (Bergson 1910). Whitehead (1925: 51) has defined this problem as the “Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness” — an error of confusing the abstract with the concrete. Such a mistake is similarly inherent in both science and practice. One example of such a fallacy is related to temporality, and it stems from a tendency to view things in terms of simple located terms. Whitehead (1925: 58) explained that this practice of simple location means that at any given time, we can adequately state that “it is where it is, in a definite finite region of space, and through a definite finite duration of time, apart from any essential reference of the relations of that bit of matter to other regions of space and to other durations of time.” This tendency to view everything in simple located terms neglects the temporal nature of our reality, in other words, the relationality of events discussed in section 3.6 (Hernes 2014a). Consequently, the relation between thinking and acting emerges as a relevant aspect of human strategy-making, one which requires further empirical elaboration.

Going back to the second activity, namely reducing the differences among the organizing actors, calls attention once again to the social nature of intentional strategy-making (Langley & Tsoukas 2010). Cooren et al. (2011) emphasize that the practice of organizing is inherently characterized by ambiguity, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity among the actors. Weick (1979) points out that organizational actors are continuously engaged in collective negotiations in order to reach any sort of consensus. The role of intentional strategy-making itself can be seen as that of creating consensus among organizational members (Abdallah & Langley 2014).

Ramsey (1998) emphasizes that the intentional organizing and coordinating of actions, the process of trying to make certain actions real, demands that they have to be agreed upon through conversation. Consequently, conversation is a key practice for strategists (Cooren, Benchkerki, Chaput, & Vásquez 2015, Samra-Frederics 2003). Due to the social nature of intentional organizing, ideas become abstracted, simplified, and materialized in the form of symbols (e.g., words) in order to be communicated (Czarniawska 2009). Czarniawska (2009) further emphasizes that from a process standpoint, communication can be described as translation (a concept borrowed from Michael Serres). She defines translation as a generalized operation of displacement or substitution with respect to an evolving object, such as knowledge, people, or things. This act transforms simultaneously both the translator and the translated. At the same time, the act of translation
reminds us how abstract ideas (the content of communication) are under constant change and illuminates the relationship between practice and abstract idea. Turning idea into practice, and, similarly, adopting a practice from some other place and time, requires an act of translation, which is at the same time symbolic and inherently material (Czarniawska 2009, Czarniawska & Sevón 2005). This suggests that the intentional strategy-making involved in change is tied to the dynamic translation of abstract ideas and practices.

Language and discourse play a key role in the symbolic form of translation. Language works at the intersection of abstraction and practice, as well as of generalizing and making conversation. The function of language is always social (Bergson 1946). For example, current organizational structures and processes are held in place by language, while changes to existing structures are negotiated through introducing new types of language (Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy 2011). Even though the notion of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness adequately points to the limited ability of our conceptual abstractions to describe processual reality, abstractions in the form of concepts, language, discourse, and narratives are nevertheless powerful.

The narratives, as well as discourse in general, are powerful because they alter how we act and think. Ezzamel and Willmott (2008: 192) explain that discourse, for example concerning strategy, gives social existence to abstracted objects (e.g., “opportunities,” “markets,” “competencies”), as well as subjects (e.g., “enactors of strategy”). Vaara et al. (2015), on the other hand, argue that narratives about change or stability can become agentic in organizational becoming by creating coherence among actors for either promoting or resisting change, as well as by altering an organization’s temporal trajectory.

The notion of the power of narratives leads us to acknowledge the creative and imaginative aspects of intentional strategy-making. Since the world is equivocal, ambiguous, and uncertain, there are endless possibilities for what might happen. Strategy work can therefore be seen as the unfolding of many possible stories (Vaara & Pedersen 2013). It also has to do with working with the tensions and paradoxes that evolve over time (Jarzabkowski, Lê & Van de Ven 2013, Smith 2014). Carlsen (2006) viewed strategy work as the dialogic imagination of practice, which, in addition to creativity, highlights the temporal nature of organizing (see also Hernes & Irgens 2013). Likewise, Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013) have highlighted that imagining the future and interpreting the past are crucial aspects of conversations about strategy-making.
Although the practice of imagining and discussing the many possibilities for the future at first seems to be an exercise that embraces the multiplicity and uncertainty of life, it can also be seen in some ways as a reductionist act. For example, Weick (1979) describes organizing as a communicative practice aimed at achieving some degree of certainty through reducing the number of possibilities. The act of stating possibilities is a key aspect in the making of meaningful, intentional choices (Hernes 2014a). All our conscious decisions thus require a sense of other possible ways of acting. The choice of pursuing one possibility requires an awareness of others, thus the presence of several possibilities from among which to choose. Any decision thus has to do with choosing this instead of that (ibid.). However, the process-relational view of the future leads us to highlight that any articulation of the many possibilities for acting is a constructive human act. Thus, the possibilities upon which decisions are made are social constructions. At its most extreme, the articulation of possibilities becomes the basis for making a choice either to act in a novel way or to keep things on track through repeating the same activities (Hernes & Irgens 2013). In such a setting, the choice to maintain continuity is based on acknowledging and assessing the possibility for change, while at the same time choosing to keep things as they are. Initiating intentional change works the other way around: it stems from a choice to change instead of keeping things as they are (ibid.).

However, decisions concerning collective actions are part of a complex process and do not lead to action in a straightforward way. For example, Denis, Dompierre, Langley, and Rouleau (2011) use the term “escalating indecision” to describe a heavy process of making, unmaking, and remaking strategic decisions that never really lead to concrete actions. The tendency to describe strategy-making and change as progressing through the phases of planning and implementation stems from the managerial challenge of trying to discursively, through relying on abstract concepts and categories, control everyday practices (ibid.). Also, Hernes et al. (2015) have showed in their field study of an intentional change process within an MNC how the momentum for change emerges more through the dynamics within the process itself than through the initial rationale for change or context. In their study, the momentum for planned change emerged through the buildup of collective experience and continued commitment.

Moreover, Simpson (2009), drawing on George Herbert Mead, argues that because the emergence and evolution of social actions take place within...
continuously changing social contexts, deliberate designs and plans have only a limited capacity to guide such social actions. Hernes (2008) further points out that organizing resembles experimentation more than rational planning, since it involves a multitude of simultaneous activities, choices, and adjustments rather than a series of single, isolated actions. Consequently, the view of strategy-making in change should be broadened beyond the activities related to rational decision-making. Therefore, the next subsection discusses the notion of the dwelling modes of human engagement in strategy emergence.

4.1.2 Unintentional strategy-making: the dwelling mode

From the dwelling perspective, strategy is *immanent* in actions and it unfolds through everyday practical coping actions. Thus, the dwelling mode refers to acting within immediate, emerging situations, in other words, simultaneous acting and experiencing. The notion of dwelling resonates with the process-relational worldview, which highlights that human embeddedness is in a continuous state of becoming reality (Chia & Holt 2006, 2009). It is grounded in describing the experience of living forward, which is characterized by routinized thinking and acting, experimenting, mistakes, readjustments, improvisation, and unforeseen consequences (Weick 2003).

By drawing on the notion of becoming, Chia and Holt highlight the importance of everyday practical coping through local adaptations and ingenuity in the emergence of strategy. Such an emphasis on everyday practices not only connects strategy to the actual doings of actors, whether intentional or not, but also to the ongoing present of organizational life. In this way, they disengage from the dominant future orientation related to theorizing about strategy-making and instead emphasize the non-linear, intensive unfolding of ongoing experience. Consequently, they conceptualize the human work of strategy-making as a fluxing, contextual, improvisational, and temporal process of practical coping, which only minimally draws on prior planning and intention (Chia & Holt 2006, 2009, see also Hernes et al. 2013, Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Tsoukas & Chia 2011).

To explain how there can be retrospective consistency in our actions without anyone intending for to be so, Chia and Holt refer to Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and logic of practice (see also Chia & MacKay 2007, Rasche & Chia 2009). Habitus refers to the durable system of dispositions shaping and organizing social practices, and it operates beyond the actors’ consciousness and control.
This habitus structures human behavior in the form of internalized and learned codes of behavior. The immanently strategic actions therefore are seen to reside in the latent, internalized tendencies of organizational actors, which have been acquired through socialization. This transcends the individual and social explanations for practice and strategic actions. Thus, either individuals or social structures should be seen as the deterministic agents in actions (Chia & Rasche 2015). Consequently, some moves that may otherwise be construed as strategies actually do not stem from explicit strategic intention at all. Such actions can be viewed as immanently strategic through the logic of practice. In other words, the retrospective consistency labeled as strategy can emerge through the immanent logic of practice, wherein the logic comes from the practice itself, not from any conscious logician (Bourdieu & Nice 1990, Chia & Holt 2009, Chia & MacKay 2007, Rasche & Chia 2009.)

However, based on my readings of Bergson and Whitehead, I argue that the power of habitus can actually be even more pervasive than how Chia and Holt describe it. It may not only refer to the habitual conduct of actions and practices based on an internalized modus operandi, but can also refer to our perceptions and thinking. In other words, it is not only our way of acting that can be habitual, but also the way we think in general. Therefore, I suggest that building can also be based on an internalized mode of thinking.

Whitehead (1929) has remarked that we habitually observe by the method of difference, and similarly Bergson (1946) has strongly pointed out that our intelligence generates our thoughts through fixed categories. Generalizing can be seen as a deeply rooted habit of ours, thus it is activity relevant for both building and dwelling. Bergson (1988, 1910) pointed out that even animals generalize in their engagement with daily activities, such as finding food and water, which in many ways resembles the dwelling mode. In addition to habitual generalizing, throughout this entire dissertation I have pointed out the latent assumptions behind our habitual thinking about organizations and change. Likewise, Calori (2002) has pointed out that our thoughts and acts can be seen as manifestations of our ontological beliefs and assumptions. These assumptions are expressed or embodied in all our actions and thoughts (ibid.).

In his empirical study, Segal (2010) reflected on the autobiography of Mort Meyerson, at the time CEO of Ross Perot Systems, who faced an existential crisis concerning his leadership style. He ended up questioning his entire way of being as a leader after becoming more self-reflective about the latent, unquestioned meaning of leadership. Thus, habit concerns an interconnected way of both
thinking and acting, and the breakdowns we might face within our habitual dwelling can refer both to our habit of acting and our habit of thinking. In a strange sense then, the building mode can involve both consciously reflecting about the way we act and about the way we think.

Additionally, the conceptual division between building and dwelling is not clear cut; both can also take place simultaneously. Hernes and Irgens (2013) have pointed out that managers many times act routinely while at the same time mulling over other possibilities. However, I argue that by linking building closely to conceptual and linguistic activity, and dwelling to practices and experience, we can obtain a better sense of the relation between building and dwelling. For example, Segal (2010) points out that we might suddenly have the feeling that something is wrong, even though we cannot at that precise moment name the exact problem that is disturbing us. By borrowing a concept form Eugene Gendlin, Segal calls this unnamed feeling a “felt sense.” This felt sense is closely related to direct experience, hence dwelling. In such a case, the role of conscious thinking, that is, building, is what gives a name to this felt sense.

4.2 Towards an unowned view of strategic change

Several organizational researchers, following process philosophy, have contributed to renewing our understanding of change in organizational research (e.g., see Chia 1999, 2014, Hernes et al. 2015, Tsoukas & Chia 2002, Langley & Tsoukas 2010; Nayak & Chia 2011). Highlighting change as an ongoing condition of the world rather than as a temporary, transitory phase in organizations broadens our view of strategic change beyond that of intentional human interventions (Chia 1999, Tsoukas & Chia 2002). In this section, I discuss strategic change by drawing on these key writings as a means of addressing change in general and strategic change in particular through the lens of a strong processuality approach (e.g., Chia 2014, Langley & Tsoukas 2017, MacKay & Chia 2013). In particular, I identify three interrelated viewpoints on change: 1) change as a condition of reality; 2) change as human perception; and 3) change as intentional action. I have already elaborated on the first viewpoint in chapter 3. In the following two subsections, I will discuss the latter two aspects of change in light of the first viewpoint. Finally, I will pave the way for theorizing about strategic change as an unowned process by integrating all three viewpoints.
4.2.1 Strategic change as human perception

Although in section 3.3 I argued that human perceptions of change and stability provide us with only a limited understanding of strategic change, I highlight that these perceptions should not be ignored. Therefore the holistic appreciation of change would require us to look even closer at perceived change and stability and to try to understand how these perceptions relate to strategic change (Hernes 2008; Norbäck et al. 2014).

Chia (2014: 21) emphasizes that change often takes place so silently, relentlessly, and almost inexorably that we are not consciously aware of it. Similarly, Bergson (1946) described immobility (as opposed to mobility and change) as merely the appearance of something, similar to the illusion of two trains moving at the same speed in the same direction. Likewise, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) have described the illusion of stability through the metaphor of a tightrope walker who maintains the appearance of stability by continuously correcting her/his position. This illustrates how an ostensible sense of stability presupposes change.

Van de Ven and Poole (2005) point out that change and stability can be explained in the same terms since they both describe human perceptions that emerge from how organizational processes are experienced. Thus, both perceptions stem from the retrospective abstraction of human experience. The human perception of change derives its meaning from noticing difference and experiencing a sense of disruption or interruption (Hernes 2014a). Similarly, abstracting recurring patterns of activity, repetition and continuity, can provide a sense of stability over some time (Hernes 2010, 2014, Muckelbauer 2008). A sense of stability thus emerges when no difference is noticed during some period of time, and this seeming stability, for Bergson (1946), is merely due to the temporary ordering of mobilities.

Empirically, Wiebe (2010) has elaborated on the vagueness of human judgments regarding change and stability by studying managers’ sense making during the process of implementing change. Wiebe found that the managers provided very different accounts of how they experienced the “same” change process: the accounts ranged from “there is no change” to “there is massive change.” These perceptions were based on temporal work that sought to configure the relationship between the past, present and future and evaluate their degree of “sameness” or “difference.” This further produced a sense of continuity (no change/stability) for some people and a sense of discontinuity (change) for others.
In sum, perceptions of change and stability are based on temporal human judgments of difference (ibid.).

Wiebe’s findings support my argument that it is reasonable to separate an ontological view of change from perceived change or stability. Even though the vagueness of human judgment regarding change and stability is potentially an important aspect of strategic change, I highlight that looking just at perceived change provides us with only a limited understanding of the dynamics of strategic change. In the next subsection, I will discuss strategic change as intentional action.

### 4.2.2 Strategic change as intentional action

In addition to approaching change as human perception, it can also be approached as intentional human actions. The actions referred to here entail an immanent intention to initiate change, and therefore such actions resonate with the building mode of strategy-making described in subsection 4.1.1. Whereas human perceptions of change emerge from a retrospective viewpoint, the human actions that produce intentional change are usually treated as being future oriented (Hendry & Seidl 2003). The conventional understanding of strategic change therefore stems from explaining intentional, pre-planned, and carefully specified change actions that aim to replace certain old ways of operating with new ways of operating (Falconer 2002). The other for these change actions is thus repetition, namely human acts that promote continuity (Hernes & Irgens 2013), or “stabilizing movements” (Norbäck et al. 2014: 450).

However, even intentional human actions contain both conscious and unconscious aspects. For example, Chia (2003) has pointed out that processual tensions emerging from human actions can be described as an immanent tendency towards repetition and also a simultaneous drive towards novelty. Similarly, Hernes and Irgens (2013) suggest that problems for human decision-making particularly emerge due to the tendency to favor the old and familiar over the novel and, hence, uncertain, which further leads to repetition (see also Ahuja & Lampert 2001). Consequently, intentional change actions and repetition are both key means of understanding the human activities involved in strategic change.

However, the key implication of adopting the process view on change is that strategic change cannot be explained by focusing on intentional human actions alone. One alternative approach to change has been to emphasize environmental forces as powerful determinants of change rather than merely adhering to a
human-centric approach; from this standpoint, the human influence on organizational change appears quite limited (e.g., see Aldrich et al. 2008, Levinthal 1991). However, by following process-relational thinking, MacKay and Chia (2013) suggest a third, unowned view of strategic change. The unowned view deviates from both the human-centric and the environmental selection explanations for change, which they refer to as “owned” processes, by building on the argument that neither organizational actors nor the environment produce forces that control strategic change (MacKay & Chia 2013: 208). Consequently, the emergence of strategic change process is unowned by its very nature (ibid., see also Chia 2014). In the next subsection, I will discuss the unowned view of strategic change.

### 4.2.3 Strategic change as unowned process

In their seminal study of a real-time strategic change within an automotive company, done over the course of five years, MacKay and Chia (2013) showed that when intentional managerial actions interact with chance environmental circumstances, change becomes unpredictable. Within the process of strategic change, intentional actions can have unintended, unexpected consequences, both positive and negative. In their study, they illustrated how unforeseen events, that is to say, “black swans,” had dramatic effects on strategic change. Their study also shows that even intentional choices that at the time seemed correct ultimately produced undesirable events later on. From this conclusion, it follows that not even intentional managerial actions can be described in simplistic terms. Based on their empirical findings, they further argue that neither perceived successes nor failures can be attributed to leaders or particular environments alone. Instead, strategic change is significantly characterized by chance, happenstance, and luck. This further means that strategic change emerges through complex interactions between choice, chance, and environmental circumstances. Accordingly, based on their findings, they describe strategic change as an unowned process, wherein the dynamics of change are defined through process complexes consisting of several powerful events (MacKay & Chia 2013).

MacKay and Chia (2013) focus in particular on two notions that I think are relevant for understanding strategic change. The first notion is that the meaning of actions and events change in time, so that, for example, the success or failure of a particular action is evaluated in light of ever-changing current circumstances. Thus, a good choice can later be re-evaluated as having been a bad choice, or vice
versa. The second notion is that the ways in which an action affects the future cannot be known ex-ante (and not necessarily even ex-post). Therefore, actions always take place in a state of uncertainty and have the potential for multiple unexpected outcomes. Thus, the possibility that actions might produce outcomes other than those that had been intended or expected is always present in strategic change actions. Consequently, I argue that their study shows that the passing of time matters in strategic change.

MacKay and Chia’s unowned view of strategic change also presents the role of managers and decision-makers in the process in a new way. Since managers are not in control of how processes unfold, they should no longer be perceived as the dominant heroic agents of strategic change. The same point is also made by Falconer (2002), who raised a serious concern about our prevailing habit of seeing change as something to be controlled and managed. Instead, the work of decision-making is continuously characterized by uncertainty with respect to the consequences of our decisions and actions as well as the overall unfolding of events. At any time, a black swan, an event that was not seen in advance, can turn everything upside down, no matter how well the strategic actions were planned beforehand (MacKay & Chia 2013). MacKay and Chia call for a greater appreciation of these black swans in our understanding of strategic change. Similarly, Chia (1999) has highlighted that all surprises are a natural characteristic of experiencing change, and therefore, when appreciating change on its own terms, the emergence of a surprise should not in and of itself be a surprise.

By building on the unowned view of change in his more recent paper, Chia (2014) proposes quite radically and distinctively that instead of trying to engineer and control change, managers should allow change happen naturally on its own terms by “relaxing” control over established organizational order. In practice, this would mean reading carefully and skillfully the natural course of change and emerging momentums and then silently removing established routines, structures, and regulations to allow for more spontaneous, novel, and timely responses to emerging situations. Such a silent transformation goes against grand and pronounced change initiatives, which means that the essence of managing strategic change becomes the ability to let change happen (ibid.). His suggestion stems from a radical openness to the various ways in which organizational actors can engage with change when change is no longer approached merely as an intentional action.

The unowned view of strategic change does not ignore the influence of owned processes, namely human actions and environmental forces, but it
questions their privileged agency in attempting to theoretically explain the unfolding of processes. Therefore, MacKay and Chia’s (2013) unowned view of processes paves the way for a less individualistic and less structurally determined view of strategic change by giving primacy to processes. Similar to MacKay and Chia, Falconer (2002) highlights that change occurs regardless of human interventions, and therefore the emergence of change should not be explained through human agency alone. According to his view, change can be better understood through an approach where change is also seen to respond to human actions, thus making processes nonlinear and unpredictable. From this point of view, intentional managerial actions always have a result, but these results are unpredictable precisely because processes unfold through the interplay of human agency and change (ibid.). Consequently, rather than viewing change as an accomplished intentional event, it should be seen as ongoing enactments (Tsoukas & Chia 2011).

Accordingly, I propose that both strategy-making and change should be seen as immanent in the concept of strategic change. Thus, in this dissertation I define strategic change as *strategy-making in change*, where *strategy-making* refers to the intentional and unintentional enactment of human agency in organizational processes (see subsection 3.5.1) and *change* refers to the fluxing nature of processual reality (see section 3.3). This definition of strategic change entails both an intentional building mode as well as a dwelling mode for strategy emergence (Chia & Holt 2009), while at the same time being sensitive to change as a condition of reality, in other words as an unowned process (MacKay & Chia 2013). Consequently, the definition “strategy-making in change” incorporates both human actions promoting continuity and novelty, while highlighting the limitations of human agency in the change process. In addition, all intentional change actions are treated as only one aspect of the rhizomic (Chia 1999), tangled (Hernes 2008), and nonlinear (Falconer 2002) processes of incessant change. Moreover, as discussed in subsection 4.1.2, they are just one aspect explaining the role of human agency in strategic change, as strategic actions can also emerge without ex-ante intentions (Chia & Holt 2006, 2009). I argue that this definition of strategic change enables us to focus on the dynamics inherent in trying to organize activities within an ever-changing world. After explaining the philosophical and theoretical grounding of this study, in the next section I will summarize such a grounding by presenting the conceptual framework of the study.
4.3 Conceptual framework of the study

In this section, I will at first present a summary of the philosophical and theoretical grounding of the research and then present the more specific conceptual framework adopted in this study.

4.3.1 Summary of the philosophical and theoretical grounding

In this subsection, I draw together philosophical and theoretical insights from chapters 3 and 4 in order to generate an overview of how strategic change can be theoretically viewed and empirically examined as an unowned temporal process.

In chapter 3, I presented the philosophical grounding of the study, which stems from following a process-relational worldview in general and Bergson’s and Whitehead’s writings in particular. In the chapter, I have elaborated on the idea that viewing processual reality as being under a constant state of becoming leads us to view all substances and entities as epiphenomena, namely as processes with a perceivable pattern. Furthermore, I argued that from an ontological perspective stability then becomes a false opposite of change. In the chapter, I have also highlighted that a process-relational view builds upon the notion that organizations are under a constant state of becoming. I have further highlighted that since change is seen as a fundamental characteristic of processes, it is inherently present in organizational becoming regardless of any human intentions for instituting changes. I also discussed a relational view of agency according to which agency is not an enduring property of individuals, but is instead emerge through the human and non-human acts of relating.

Finally, I have discussed the process-relational view of time, which highlights the indivisibility and nonlinearity of time as well as its inseparability from phenomena. In addition, by adopting the process-relational notion of time, it follows that the past and future are seen as being immanent in a continuously emerging present. By deviating from both objective and subjective views of time, which can be found in conventional organization studies, I have followed Hernes’s (2014a) suggestion that the passing of time can be viewed as having agency in processes such as strategic change. With the notion of agentic time, I have referred to the idea that agency emerges in time from within relational events. Consequently, I have argued that giving agency to time enables us to better understand strategic change as in-time process that entails both continuity and novelty. Through this means, human actions can be seen as unfolding in time,
hence as being subordinate to the temporal nature of reality. As a consequence, I have further argued that organizational processes in general and strategic change in particular cannot be fully understood without addressing their temporal nature.

In chapter 4, I have discussed the unowned view of strategic change. At first, I discussed the building and dwelling modes of human engagement in strategy emergence, which further leads us to acknowledge that both intentional and unintentional actions are potentially strategic. The notion of building and dwelling modes of engagement also leads us to acknowledge that the relation between thinking and acting is a key issue for understanding strategic change. In particular, I have pointed out our tendency to make immobile, generalized abstractions based on fluxing experiences and the potential challenges of engaging with such actions. Another notion worth repeating here relates to the power of habitual human engagement in activities. Thereafter, I have elaborated on strategic change by identifying three interrelated viewpoints regarding change, namely change as human perception, change as intentional action, and change as unowned process. I highlighted that although our perceptions of change and intentional change actions are relevant for understanding strategic change, the process should not be reduced to these issues alone. Consequently, I presented the unowned view of strategic change processes, according to which human agency is merely one aspect explaining the process. Accordingly, I have argued that strategic change should be seen as “strategy-making in change,” where the change itself is an unowned process and human agency is thus situated and conditioned by the agency of events emerging in time.

4.3.2 Agentic time and unowned strategic change

In this final subsection, I present the conceptual framework adopted in this study. I suggest that while MacKay and Chia’s (2013) empirical study of strategic change adequately illustrate the unowned nature of processes, their view could be further clarified by elaborating more explicitly on the temporal nature of unowned agency. Consequently, I suggest that the unowned view of strategic change could be further elaborated on by adopting the agentic view of time described in subsection 3.6.3. With this proposition, I follow Langley et al. (2013) and Tsoukas (2016), who argue that acknowledging the role of time in change processes is essential.

In particular, I suggest that the agentic view of time makes it possible for us to discuss the relational nature of strategic change events and, in this way, better
appreciate the complexity and uncertainty of the process during empirical analysis (see Tsoukas 2016). Furthermore, highlighting the emergence of processes in time (Hernes 2014a, Hernes et al. 2013) leads us to pay attention to the human experience of always living in the (becoming) present. Opening up the past and future to continuous definition and redefinition inside the fluidity of present leads us to a more specific understanding of the fluxing nature of strategic change.

In addition, the unowned view of strategic change would benefit from elaborating on the nature of human strategy-making within unowned strategic change processes. Consequently, I also suggest that the notion of agentic time enables us to elaborate on the role of human agency in unowned strategic change processes. More specifically, adopting the notion of agentic time makes it possible for us to discuss the temporal nature of strategy-making in change without treating temporality as a product of human agency. In particular, through adopting a relational view of events, the notion of unowned strategic change can be connected to the notion of building and dwelling modes of human engagement in strategy emergence as well as to the notion of objective and subjective constructions of temporality. The building mode of human engagement, where humans are intellectually detached from their environment, resonates with both the objective and subjective views of time. The dwelling mode of human engagement, on the other hand, can clearly be integrated with the view of agentic time, as the notion of dwelling mode of engagement prioritizes indivisible human experience over detached observation and disengages itself from an individualistic view of human agency. However, adopting the notion of agentic time does not mean that I am suggesting that time should be treated as a deterministic force or that human agents should be viewed as being incapable of nontrivial actions (Tsoukas 2016). In addition, I highlight that the view of time as agentic should be viewed as adding to rather than deviating from the prevailing understanding of the temporal nature of strategic change (Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Vesa & Franck 2013).

Accordingly, the key concepts that are relevant for this study are agentic time, relational events, strategic change as an unowned process, and building and dwelling modes of human engagement. Fig. 4 illustrates this conceptual framework.
Fig. 4. The conceptual framework of the study.

The two arrows in figure 4 illustrate the key aspects relevant for further empirical examination with respect to strategic change as an unowned process. The first aspect is related to the adoption of an agentic view of time (the vertical arrow). More specifically, there is a need to empirically elaborate on how the agentic view of time manifests itself in strategic change. By placing the realm of human agency within a circle marked by a dashed line, the figure illustrates that the realm of human agency should be seen as being indivisible from processual reality and thus subordinate to the agency of relational events.

In addition, due to the relatively small amount of empirical research still being conducted from the standpoint of the process-relational view on strategy, the connection between the building and dwelling modes of human engagement could be elaborated upon through empirical data (the horizontal arrow). The solid line around the building mode illustrates the assumed detachment of intentional strategy-making from lived experience. In particular, the temporal relation between dwelling and building could be clarified in empirical analysis. With this argument, I follow Hernes’s (2014) suggestion that we should focus more on how abstractions are formed from lived experience and how these abstractions, in turn,
influence lived experiences. Accordingly, the potential roles of objective and subjective time in relation to durational experience will also be empirically examined.

Finally, for the purposes of empirical analysis I highlight the difference between the metaphysical and analytical notions of events. In explaining the metaphysical underpinnings of the notion of events, I refer to Whitehead’s (1925: 72) concept of an event (a concept he uses to describe the temporal becoming of reality in conjunction with the term “prehension”). Due to the relationality of Whitehead’s conceptualization of events and their inherent connection to the indivisible experience of becoming, I acknowledge that Whitehead’s conceptualization is problematic for abstract analysis (recall also the Fallacy of Misplaced concreteness). Consequently, the second notion of events refers to the necessary analytical abstraction of events for the purposes of empirically examining a phenomenon (e.g., the naming of specific organizational events; see also Whitehead 1925). By identifying and analyzing specific events in the following empirical chapters, I will naturally be referring to the latter notion of events. However, I will construct an abstraction of events while acknowledging the relational nature of these events (internal and temporal relationality) and, in this way, try to compromise this relationality as little as possible during analysis.
5 Methodology

5.1 Ontological and epistemological clarifications

In Chapter 3, I already discussed the main ontological and epistemological issues that are related to the grounding of this research. However, several relevant issues still need to be clarified. This chapter focuses on addressing them.

First, departing from the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy has implications with respect to how scientific representations are viewed. Weiskopf and Willmot (1999) argue that instead of treating representations as more or less successful or accurate efforts to mirror reality in linguistic terms, they should be treated as endeavors to re-present and fit the fluid processes into the order of thought. Considering abstractions as modes of thinking leads us to focus on the ways in which these abstractions are created. From this, it follows that the emphasis in theorizing about organizational phenomena moves from creating explanations for how we think about organizations to assessing the organization of thought, in other words, to a critical revision of the practices of abstraction (Bergson 1946, Chia 1995, 1996). This is a revised form of rationalism, which focuses on the logic of thinking in the practices of theorizing, but does not assume that this rationalism enables us to control reality (Chia & Rasche 2015).

From the standpoint of process-relational onto-epistemology, the scientific abstractions that usually are evaluated based on their ability to represent reality are instead considered as performative phenomena (Chia & Rasche 2015). Thus, abstractions are entangled in the process of producing and being reproduced by material phenomena. Accordingly, the focus moves from questioning the correspondence between words and things to casually explaining how discursive practices and material phenomena are related (Barad 2007).

Departing from the aim to represent reality via theory also has implications for what results are expected from empirical research. For example, Shotter and Tsoukas (2011: 312) suggest using a reflective mode of theorizing according to which the aim of the research is to enable practitioners to conceptually rearticulate both the latent assumptions of their habitual thinking and their ways of engaging in everyday situations. This view of theorizing further seeks to preserve the complexity and particularity of the examined phenomena (Tsoukas 2016). The attention is drawn to the aspects of interactions that are not typically noticed. The key point of focus of reflective theorizing is on the practitioner’s
viewpoint, namely how he/she experiences unique situations and makes decisions while processes are still ongoing and with limited resources. Consequently, this point of view also entails recognizing the role of intuition and “gut feelings” in decision-making. (Shotter & Tsoukas 2011.)

Chia’s (1996) suggestion to focus on explaining the organization of thought means that language is treated as a mode for expressing thoughts rather than as a representation of reality. However, since abstractions are often communicated in linguistic terms, our language, with its static codes and categories, poses a challenge for theorizing about fluid phenomena (Weiskopf & Willmot 1999). The subject-verb-object structure of language is not well suited to describing process-relational reality (Mesle 2008). In addition, the tendency to create general knowledge by conceptually articulating and classifying fixed orders has led researchers to assign ontological status only to things that can be conceptually fixed (Bergson 1946; see also Chia & Holt 2009). When adopting the process-relational worldview, this tendency to generalize can be depicted as potentially problematic for theorizing. However, Griffin (1993) points out that Whitehead treated language as a capacity to create propositions rather than verbal statements. This means that linguistic propositions can be approached as ways to evoke modes of apprehending material reality rather than express accurate statements regarding that particular reality (ibid.). Accordingly, the key aims when theorizing about strategic change in this dissertation are to maintain a fluid way of thinking about the phenomena while describing the process through language.

In conjunction with revising the meaning of scientific abstractions and theorizing, the process-relational worldview also has implications for the methods of carrying out empirical research. The next section focuses on describing the methods used in this study.

5.2 Methods of research

In general, the process and practice views to strategy research are characterized by an interest in innovative research methodology (Johnson, Balogun & Beech 2010, Langley et al. 2013). For example, Balogun, Huff and Johnson (2003) suggest that developing strategy research requires reconsidering the taken-for-granted assumptions concerning the ways in which research is conducted and with respect to the organizational participants. Already by adopting the process-relational onto-epistemology, it follows that the customary research methods are
not fully applicable as they are used and described in conventional entity-based research. The onto-epistemological grounding has implications in terms of both how the data is generated and how it is analyzed. Consequently, the concepts used in this section to describe the empirical research should be understood by keeping in mind the onto-epistemological approach of the study.

I generated the data for this research by participating with one research colleague in open-ended strategy-making discussions together with three managers in a small Finnish software-intensive company. The data consists of recorded talk-in-interaction (Samra-Fredericks 2003) during the course of two years. The participants in the meetings were three managers from the company (CEO/Co-owner, COO/Partner, and Sales Manager) as well as two researchers. Thus, the meetings were set up for the purposes of research collaboration. The company, “Visual,” will be introduced later in section 5.3 and a description of the meetings in sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2.

The empirical research in this dissertation can be described as belonging to the group methods of organizational analysis (Steyaert & Bouwen 2004). Although the research setting is relatively unique, it resonates to some extent with participant observation (Alvesson & Deetz 2000, see also Laine & Vaara 2007) and qualitative action research (Reason & Bradbury 2008), which Cunliffe (2015) suggests are both methods belonging to the family of ethnographic organizational research methodology. However, the research method should be understood in light of the adopted onto-epistemological grounding.

I argue that the real-time, participatory research carried out with a small group of managers is suitable for the aims of this study. Van de Ven (1992) highlights that especially in research on strategic change, a real-time study is required in order to examine and understand how and why changes come about. He further argues that by observing change processes from the perspective of managers, it is possible to understand the dynamics confronting managers during strategic change processes (ibid.). Hernes (2014) points out that by adopting the in-time view of temporality, it follows that understanding how actors cope in the ongoing present is of particular importance. Consequently, he suggests that researchers find ways to engage in experiencing lived organizational temporality. Likewise, Langley (2009), Samra-Fredericks (2003), and Weick (2003) all highlight the importance of theorizing about lived experience.

Langley (2007, 2009) further highlights that process research calls for qualitative, in-depth data gathered, for example, through participation, while Cunliffe (2015) argues that participatory research is well suited to the aim of
explaining the emergent and fluid nature of strategy-making. Similarly, Vesa and Vaara (2014) suggest that participation offers a way to gain insider insight into everyday organizational life, which is needed in research on strategy processes and practices. Adopting the process-relational viewpoint means that the researcher exists within the activity being researched, not as an independent observer outside the phenomena (Cooper 2005). Accordingly, process-relational research makes it possible to understand phenomena from within (Shotter 2006).

I further argue that engaging in discussions with managers provides us with valuable insights into the experience of strategic change as a temporal process. Samra-Fredericks (2003) highlights that talking is the key way for strategists to negotiate and construct meanings, express insights, and articulate their interpretations of the environment. Similarly, Shotter (2006) states that understanding phenomena from within emerges through engaging in dialogically structured relations with other individuals. Since organizational phenomena are social in nature, working with a group of managers is also a natural choice (Steyaert & Bouwen 2004).

By describing our meetings as an open-ended strategy-making, I mean mainly to emphasize two issues. First, our meetings did not directly contribute to the creation of a formal strategy for the company, but could be described as encounters in order to reach a collective understanding of what is going on in the company. Thus, the meetings entailed strategy-making in the form of informal strategizing in an ongoing situation. The motivation for the managers to participate in the meetings was twofold: first, they were trying to broaden their understanding of what kinds of options they have when taking organizational actions, and second, they wanted to reflect on their experiences in an ongoing basis. However, I highlight that the role of the researchers was not to provide ready-made options or solutions, but instead to promote versatile discussions. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that our participation in the discussions was active, and thus, it can be seen also as a limitation of the study. In practice, we maintained discussion by asking questions as well as by framing the discussions in several of the meetings with the aim of approaching the discussed topics from multiple angles. In this way, the research setting can be described as an “engaged relationship” (Cunliffe 2015: 434) between two researchers and three managers. Accordingly, what distinguishes this study from conventional forms of participant observation has to do with the fact that I did not attend any of the formal strategy-making meetings already taking place in the organization, that is to say, any naturally occurring events (Jorgensen 1989). Instead, we collectively established
the meetings that generated data, although the meetings touched upon the world of everyday life as continuously experienced by the three managers (ibid.).

The second notion concerning the open-ended nature of the strategy-making meetings is related to the dynamics of organizational actions and reflections. In the meetings, we did not plan and subsequently evaluate particular actions or interventions and their success, as conventional forms of action research would suggest. Thus, there was no direct causal link between a problem and solution (Wicks & Reason 2009) mediated via our meetings. Instead, the action-reflection relation (Reason & Bradbury 2008) was open ended, resembling the natural relation of everyday practices and conscious reflection. Consequently, in this study the relation between organizational actions and reflection resonate with the real-life dynamics of the dwelling and building mode of engagement (Chia & Holt 2006). Consequently, during the meetings researchers experienced the rhizomic becoming of problems, ideas, actions, and events in time. In this respect, the study we initiated resembles an exploratory intra-action with the world, as we did not focus on solving a single, pre-defined problem (Lorino Tricards & Clot 2011).

Both researchers who participated in the meetings had a professional background in the software business. The other researcher had more than eight years of experience in the software business. As he shared this experience in our meetings, his role can be described as that of an advisory facilitator. In addition, I myself have more than three years of experience working in a software-intensive company. My involvement in the meetings was much more passive, and therefore, it resonates more closely with the notion of participant observer (Jorgensen 1989).

However, the research setting also had its challenges. As in all research concerning other people’s experiences and perceptions, the challenge is in how to get them to genuinely talk about the issues relevant to the research topic (Alvesson 2011). The danger is that people might follow social scripts for how to talk to researchers in order to create a certain professional impression (ibid.). Langley et al. (2013) suggest that a researcher’s own expertise in how to relate with the people involved in the study may help engage participants to share their perceptions and knowledge relevant to the study. In other words, being able to communicate within a certain professional domain can be helpful in finding out what is going on in the research setting (Langley et al. 2013). This highlights the importance of relating with the participants in a way that transcends the traditional roles of researcher and subject, as well as information sharer and receiver (Helin 2013).
I consider our personal backgrounds a major advantage in getting access to the company. I feel that engaging in conversations with the managers was quite easy for us. Due to our background, we were both familiar with the practices, details, and concepts typical of a software-intensive business. Therefore, I personally felt that because of my background I was able to relate well to the experiences, challenges, and activities the managers described. By having a general understanding of the real practices to which the abstract concepts used in our discussions referred to, we were able to contribute to the discussion at a much more detailed level. This belief is linked to Deleuze’s (1990) notion that understanding a verb requires that one has done it. Accordingly, I argue that our past experience is a key issue that enabled us to focus more in depth on practical details concerning the business and consequently obtain rich data. Thus, it enabled us to overcome the challenge of how to get the managers to openly and honestly discuss issues with us. However, our past experiences with the software business can also be seen as a limitation. In other words, even though my past experiences made it easier for me to understand the managers’ challenges, at the same time this familiarity might have limited my ability to question some of the taken-for-granted ways of thinking and acting.

5.2.1 My narrative of the data generation process

We met with the managers of the company in a joint, quarterly meeting for a national research program called Cloud software. The research program promotes openness among participants as well as research that takes place in real-life situations. We had been working in the research program already for six months, and during that time we had had discussions with several managers involved with software-intensive business. Therefore, because we were able to pass on experiences and useful practices from other similar companies, the managers became more interested in talking with us. I think that another key issue was our personal experiences from working in software-intensive companies in the past. When we began the meetings, we did not fix a set number of meetings that we would have. However, we were all satisfied with the discussions, and therefore we continued to hold meetings one by one over the course of two years. The managers were motivated to continue the discussions.
CEO: “This has been very much about structuring and explaining things to myself. When you open the case to the others, you at the same time think it through yourself.” (20.12.2012)

Chia and Rasche (2015: 2) define purposeful action in strategy-making as a “deliberately designed and planned form of intervention.” This is what I thought we were doing when we started the meetings with the managers. The purpose of the meetings was clear: to plan a type of business model change that would take place through adopting cloud technologies as part of the company’s software solution. We had pre-designed a stepwise process for the meetings, wherein the business model change was to be planned. Hence, the initial setting was following the conventional action research methodology.

Despite outlining a clear process for carrying out the activities in the meetings, it soon became quite evident that integrating cloud technologies with their solution and business model was only a small aspect of what the managers currently had on their minds related to their business activities. Furthermore, as simple as cloud technology may seem to those expert in the field, when discussing it from the point of view of business activities, it becomes rhizomatically connected to the complexities of organizational life. Therefore, the initial “plan, implement, evaluate, refine” process of changing the business model by utilizing cloud technologies was not operationalized in our meetings. Based on discussions with the managers, I argue that the key reason for this was that the managers’ lived present was much too complex and fluxing for such a stepwise process.

At one early meeting, the managers explicitly expressed their wish for us to discuss issues more relevant to their current challenges concerning internationalization and growth, and thus, to disengage from our pre-designed planning process with respect to the business model change. Thereafter, our discussions became more versatile: we started to discuss whatever was topical for the managers at the time the meeting took place. Consequently, the data turned out to be heterogeneous and closely linked to the everyday practices and events taking place in the company. Due to this, the data generation method actually resonates also with participant observation. I implicitly began to realize that the change that I felt was taking place in the company could not be described as the change of something specific, such as a business model. Neither was it something concrete and simple that could be planned during our meetings and subsequently implemented by the managers.
As a young researcher, I was a bit nervous when it quite soon became apparent that the initial expectations I had had about how the meetings should unfold did not materialize. Nevertheless, I felt that the genuine conversations that we had with the managers served as valuable data, although I was no longer sure what my particular research topic was going to be. Consequently, I mostly asked questions and commented occasionally during the discussions without a specific research agenda in mind, in a way that resonates with Helin’s (2013) description of dialogic listening. This can be seen as a strength because I was not driven by any assumptions arising from a particular research agenda. However, it also entails potential problems because my assumptions, which influenced my involvement, stemmed from my familiarity with the nature of the business. Thus, since I had worked in a software company previously, I joined the meetings as a kind of “curious practitioner.” Thus, I feel that my personal comments and questions stemmed more from my past experiences from working in the software business than from my readings of scientific literature.

We started the meetings at the beginning of my dissertation work. Initially, I was supposed to study business model change. At that time, I had read only a limited amount of the existing theoretical literature and had never even heard of process philosophy. In conjunction with the early shift in the nature of our meetings, I also realized that I could not meaningfully analyze our discussions through the business model concept. Due to the heterogeneous nature of our discussions, I felt that I would have to leave aside many important aspects of the discussions if I were to tie the research to the couple of elements discussed in the business model literature. Most importantly, I felt that I would lose all the complexity and dynamics that I saw in the data. During the first year of our meetings, I was ill at ease with the business model and change literature that I had been reading, but I could not specifically articulate what was bothering me in the articles that I read. Due to this sense of unease, I expanded by readings to include strategy literature, but still could not get rid of the feeling that what I was reading did not yet resonate with what I had experienced in our meetings.

However, one day, after a year of engaging in the data generation process, I found Tsoukas & Chia’s (2002) and Chia’s (1999) articles on organizational becoming and realized immediately that they resonated well with the data I had acquired. I started reading organization and management literature that builds on process philosophy and thus reoriented the focus of my dissertation. This background is important for understanding the relationship between my earlier participation in the data generation process and my later analysis of it. During the
former step, I share the assumptions from which I depart in the analysis. As a result of this background, I have ended up being critical also of my own thinking during the data generation process. In addition, my reading of the process literature also changed my understandings of the past experiences derived from participating in the meetings, and in this way, the research process was mutually constituted by the events of reading the literature and participating in the meetings.

The data consists of 16 recorded meetings that took place between August 2011 and June 2013 (see subsection 5.2.2). During some of these meetings, we used pre-designed workshop frameworks to facilitate discussions and to approach the topics from various viewpoints. Some of these frameworks were designed by the other researcher and myself, while others were adopted from the business development literature (e.g. the business model canvas proposed by Osterwalder & Pigneur 2010). However, after having utilized three workshop frameworks in the meetings, the focus of our meetings shifted from the original plan described above; thereafter, we chose frameworks based on how the conversations unfolded and used them only occasionally. Instead, we engaged more in open-ended discussions with the managers. Consequently, as the structure of the meetings varied, some of them resembled workshops, some open-ended conversations, and some even group interviews. Usually, one meeting contained all of these features. Out of the 16 meetings, nine were open discussions; in seven of the meetings, we also used frameworks to structure the discussion.

We started each of the meetings by discussing what was going on in the company at the time. The duration of this kind of discussion ranged from 30 minutes to lasting for the entire meeting (2–3 hours). Through these types of discussions, we became familiar with the everyday unfolding of events. The managers told us what they were, in practice, engaged in at that particular moment. Thus, we talked about events, which were mostly related to specific customer relations, to competition, to software development, and to the way in which activities were organized. Moreover, the “burning issues” at the time defined mostly what we discussed more specifically during the meetings. Therefore, I feel that these recent events also had agency in terms of defining the more specific topics that we discussed in our meetings. I think that by letting the managers define the specific topics we discussed, we were able to overcome problems that might have emerged from too much active participation in the data generation process. In these types of discussions we talked about the current challenges and uncertain issues that required further thinking by the managers.
The broadly labeled topics of discussion are listed in table 1 in the following subsection. Since we touched upon several topics during any one particular meeting, and since the discussed topics also varied between different meetings, the data is heterogeneous.

However, since the discussed topics were all related to the managers’ everyday work, I argue that the heterogeneity and inherent complexity of the topics covered in the data is one of its key strengths. Thus, as much as it presents a challenge with respect to analyzing and describing the results, the data enables us to touch upon the uncertainty and complexity that the managers face when dealing with issues of strategic change. A further strength of the data is that the managers were not telling an existing story retrospectively, as in conventional interviews, but discussing with us what is going on now and trying to figure out what to do next. Thus, the data not only enables us to analyze how managers talk strategically (see Cooren et al. 2015), but also how they think strategically. Consequently, the nature of our discussions can be described as “thinking aloud.” In this way, the data is retrospective only in the way the past is naturally active in the present.

5.2.2 The study data

I divide the data into primary and secondary data. All of the meetings in the primary data were recorded and transcribed. Additional data consists of later follow-up meetings, which have not been transcribed, as well as one short interview. The general contents of the meetings is described in the “Discussed topics” column. The abbreviation (FU, i.e. “framework used”) indicates a meeting where we used a framework to structure the discussion; following the abbreviation, the framework is described.

Table 1. The data of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of the meeting</th>
<th>Duration (mins)</th>
<th>Discussed topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Primary data: 16 meetings

29.08.2011 2h 37min The managers introduce the company, general discussion about current challenges.

20.09.2011 3h 48min Talking about the product and customer relations, managers also bring up challenges and new ideas. FU (listing customer needs, Visual’s solution for them,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of the meeting</th>
<th>Duration (mins)</th>
<th>Discussed topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.10.2011</td>
<td>3h 14min</td>
<td>Imagining the changes taking place in the future. FU (future scenario methods).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.11.2011</td>
<td>3h 9min</td>
<td>Creating future scenarios, FU (future scenario methods).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.12.2011</td>
<td>2h 16min</td>
<td>Trying to figure out the implications of cloud technologies for the current business model. FU (the business model canvas).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.01.2012</td>
<td>2h 47min</td>
<td>General discussion at first about the contemporary challenges, then talking about two specific customer cases in terms of those challenges, and finally trying to figure out new, cloud-based pricing model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.03.2012</td>
<td>2h 16min</td>
<td>General discussion at first, then working on a new pricing model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.04.2012</td>
<td>2h 44min</td>
<td>General discussion at first, then working on new pricing model, during which time discussion has to do with a couple of new business ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.06.2012</td>
<td>1h 53min</td>
<td>General discussion at first, then working on a new pricing model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.08.2012</td>
<td>2h 29min</td>
<td>General discussion about what's going on in the business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.10.2012</td>
<td>2h 26min</td>
<td>General discussion about what's going on in the business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.12.2012</td>
<td>2h 34min</td>
<td>General discussion about what's going on in the business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.02.2013</td>
<td>3h 19min</td>
<td>Strategizing related to new product concept. FU (the simple rules for strategy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.04.2013</td>
<td>2h 14min</td>
<td>Strategizing related to new product concept. FU (the simple rules for strategy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.05.2013</td>
<td>2h 55min</td>
<td>General discussion about what's going on in the business (the facilitator-researcher not present, another doctoral student attended).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.06.2013</td>
<td>1h 38min</td>
<td>General discussion at first, then strategizing related to new product concept. FU (internally developed business modeling framework). (Another doctoral student also attended.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2011-2013 - Personal notes from the meetings.

Secondary data:

- Meeting, own notes used only so as to inform others what has happened after the last meeting.
- Meeting, own notes used only so as to inform others what has happened after the last meeting.
- Interview with the Sales Manager about customer relations.
- Informal discussion with the Sales Manager, update of what has happened since the last meeting. Not recorded, but I took notes.

2011-2013 - Material produced in the meetings together with the managers (PowerPoint slides).

Data hours: 43.8 Primary and secondary data together.
In the empirical part, I will be using the following abbreviations for the discussion parties:
CEO: The company’s CEO/Co-owner
COO: The company’s Chief Operating Officer/Partner
SM: The company’s Sales Manager
R1: Researcher 1 – facilitator of the meetings
R2: Researcher 2 – participant observer in the meetings (author of this thesis)

5.2.3 Abstracting from the data

“We come close to grasping complexity when we restore the past to its own present and make distinctions that overcome dualisms, preserving as much as possible relationality, temporality, situatedness, and interpretive open-endedness.” (Tsoukas 2016: 1)

In this subsection, I address issues relevant for understanding how I have formed the abstractions from the data generated through participation in strategy-making in the company. In data analysis, the grounding assumptions concerning the phenomena the researcher is trying to explain are important (Weiskopf & Willmot 1999). As Whitehead has argued (1933), knowledge always entails implicit presuppositions and is accompanied by emotion and purpose. I have tried to be explicit with the presuppositions of this study, namely those concerning reality as becoming and subsequently time as agentic. These are issues that I maintain as stable in this study (Weiskopf & Willmot 1999), and the abstractions I make are grounded in them. However, echoing Ezzamel and Willmot (2008), I also acknowledge that it is not possible to provide an accurate representation of how the abstractions presented here are constructed. Nevertheless, I try to be attentive to my own “apparatus” of interpretation (Barad 2007) as much as I can.

Halinen et al. (2012) emphasize that analysis in the process-relational research, when using data from participant observation or action research, is experiential by nature, as the researcher is directly involved with the ongoing phenomena he/she studies. With the onto-epistemological and conceptual disposition of my study, the aim of empirical analysis moved away from trying to find something radically hidden from the data (Shotter 2006). Instead, the analysis can be characterized by a reorientation of attention, which can lead me to notice things not remarked upon earlier (ibid.).
Overall, this research process can be described as abductive research (Cunliffe 2015; Dubois & Gadde 2002), which means that my onto-epistemological and theoretical assumptions, together with the empirical experiences from data generation meetings, have influenced the data analysis process. In other words, the philosophical and theoretical grounding as well as the empirical data have all influenced the data analysis process. From an epistemological perspective, the adopted relational approach also entails that I do not assume to stand outside the phenomena of study, but rather inherently constitute it. Nor I claim that the abstractions I make are constructions of my mind without the “real” experience resulting from the data generation process having any impact on them.

The onto-epistemological assumptions and the conceptualization of agentic time have further implications in terms of how I define the relation between the data I have and the phenomena I study. This implication relates to the issue of what, analytically, are seen as strategic change events and how they can be analyzed based on the data from the strategy-making meetings. I highlight that the strategy-making meetings I participated in should not be treated as constituting the strategic change process in its entirety. However, the meetings were not external to the indivisible change unfolding through everyday entanglements; instead, they should be seen as having occurred in relation to them. Thus, I argue that the agency of other events was immanent also in our meetings through the relational nature of events (see also Hernes 2014a: 179). Hence, the phenomena that I analyzed extends beyond the meetings themselves. From highlighting the agentic nature of events, it follows also that although our meetings took place only every six to ten weeks, they enabled us, with some limitations, to analyze strategic change as it was emerging at the time. I further point out that the relation between our meetings and the everyday practices that the managers are engaged in is internal and material-discursive. In this respect, I draw on Barad’s (2007) notion that discursive practices not only develop at the level of abstraction, but also by belonging to the material world. Consequently, our meetings can be seen as internal events with respect to the temporal emergence of the material-discursive strategic change process, thus intra-actions within the becoming phenomena. Management’s intra-action with the phenomena takes place all the time, which makes managerial agency primary in relation to the agency of us researchers, as our agency was limited to the meetings.

After experiencing the meetings myself, I naturally have my own memories of them that have influenced the data analysis process. I have intentionally and
unintentionally analyzed the data ever since the meetings began. Already during
the first few meetings, certain instances, namely managers’ descriptions of events
and sharing with us their thoughts, felt especially important, and therefore I made
notes about them. These instances were taken into particular consideration during
the data analysis process.

During the data transcription process, I listened to all the recorded meetings
at once. After the data transcription phase, I carried out a structured data analysis.
At the beginning of this analysis, I utilized the NVivo data analysis program to
thematically group the texts. This was necessary due to the large amount of data
(over 800 pages). Formally, I did three rounds of grouping, at the end of 2014, in
the spring of 2015, and in the fall of 2015. I conducted the first round of grouping
through inductive, bottom-up coding resonating with a grounded theory approach,
which in practice means that I constructed the thematic groups during the coding
process by going through the transcribed recordings sentence by sentence
(Langley 2009). During this phase, I left out only those parts of the discussions
not directly related to Visual (e.g., certain issues and small talk related to the
research project), basic information that had already been shared in previous
meetings, and the majority of discussions about technical details related to the
software solution. Mostly, I grouped longer excerpts according to a certain theme.
In addition, I also grouped some excerpts into several themes, as they illustrated
simultaneously many aspects important for the understanding of strategic change.

With the following two rounds of groupings, I made sure that the
development of my own theoretical and philosophical understanding related to the
phenomena was properly accounted for in the data analysis process. Hence, I
focused on temporality and events in the thematic grouping. Consequently, I
gained new insights and noticed previously disregarded issues during these two
rounds of thematic grouping. In addition, the retrospective analysis also caused
me to notice certain issues in our discussions that seemed unimportant at the time
the meeting took place, but that in light of later understanding became interesting.
Thus, similarly with Kaplan and Orlikowski’s (2013) analysis of temporality, my
analysis involved ongoing reflections on the data and theoretical work. Overall, I
also focused more in my analysis on the freely unfolding discussions in our
meetings and less on the parts of the discussions where we utilized frameworks to
guide the talking points. The reason for this was that I noticed that the freely
unfolding discussions provided us with more relevant data for examining the
chosen research topic.
The created themes were as follows: customer relations, decision-making and boundary setting, identifying and solving problems, future constructions, stories of events, Visual’s activities and actions, temporal dynamics, strategy, socio-materiality, novelty, practical logic, rational reasoning, software solution, and finally, strategic ideas, with sub-themes for each idea.

During the second phase of the analysis, I used the adopted-in-time view as a lens to analyze the data. The analysis was grounded in paying special attention to relational events (Hernes 2014a). This events-based analysis resonates with, for example, MacKay and Chia’s (2013) analysis of strategic change and Hussenot and Missonier’s (2016) analysis of project meetings. At first, I mapped the key events, challenges, and intentions that we discussed during the meetings. A summary of these be found in section 6.1. After this step, the adopted “in-time” lens led me to focus the analysis on three interrelated issues. First, the analysis focuses attention on specific events, while second, it focuses attention on the relations between different events, and third, it focuses attention on the relations between events and managerial strategy-making. The analysis is especially challenging because the adopted conceptualization of agentic time refers to the temporal nature of ongoing phenomena, not to a force existing separately from any particular phenomena.

In practice, I focused on these three issues during the analysis in the following way. First, I tried to trace the unfolding of events in time. While grounded in a relational view of events, this did not in actuality mean a chronological sequencing of events. Instead, I focused on analyzing two issues: first, the internal relationality of events, and second, the temporal relationality of events (recall section 3.6.3 for an elaboration of these notions). With respect to the internal relationality of events, I identified the participants in the events as well as the practices and/or actions constituting the events. Thus, I wanted to understand how the particular events emerged. With respect to the temporal relationality of events, I focused on identifying the relations between a particular event and other events belonging to its past and, when possible, also to later events. This entailed also focusing on finding references to the same events in different meetings. Thus, the approach enabled me to, for example, find excerpts where past events were looked at from the point of view of the present situation. In particular, the purpose was to identify how and why the notions of past and future shifted between meetings.

The second issue that I focused on during the analysis was trying to find instances in the transcriptions where the events clearly can be seen as influencing
managerial strategy-making. On the one hand, this influence refers to the emergence of novelty through events, while on the other hand, it refers to the perceptible reorientation of managerial thinking and acting. The purpose of this analysis was to identify the influence of time, and thus to understand how the agency of time perceptibly manifests itself in strategic change. This further led me to pay special attention to the nature of the events that seemed to have a perceptible influence on managerial strategy-making. Due to the fact that the data primarily consists of discussions, this part of the analysis was the most important with respect to the overall findings of this study. At the same time, it was the most challenging phase in terms of maintaining consistency between the adopted view of agency and data analysis. Thus, I approached the agency of events from the viewpoint of human agents, which entails the risk of downplaying either one of the sides in the mutually constitutive relation between events and human agents.

Based on our meetings during the course of two years, I already knew before formal coding how many events were related to strategic change, although we had only discussed a small fraction of the events taking place. Since so many events took place simultaneously in different geographical locations and through different relations, I refrained from trying to present strategic change as a complete process with all relevant events fully mapped out and described. Instead, I chose a few events from among the many events for closer analysis (as discussed in the previous paragraphs). This choice was based on the perceived significance of the events as well as on their relevance for an analysis of temporality in particular. In the next section, I briefly introduce the studied company.

5.3 Introduction of the examined company and the research setting

The empirical data for this study was gathered from a Finnish software company called Visual (an acronym), officially established as a legal entity in 2006. The company has three owners who also run the company. The company was established as a spin-off from a larger company, in which all the owners worked for almost a decade and developed the technology that is now the backbone of Visual’s software solution. Thus, the relevant past exceeds the official existence of the organization.

Since its establishment, Visual has offered its software solution to organizations manufacturing or selling furniture. The solution enables them to visualize physical products, and Visual’s customers use it as a part of their sales
process. In addition, the solution can be used online by the customer’s customers, namely consumers. This creates some complexity in Visual’s customer relations and practices. At the beginning of our meetings, Visual did not face notable competition from similar technical solutions worldwide. Key competing solutions were using other, older technology.

When our meetings began in August 2011, the company employed 25 persons. Geographically, Visual operated in Europe, however the majority of its customer relations still took place in Finland. In Finland, the managers identified Visual as a clear market leader. Even though furniture manufacturing and selling contain a number of routinized practices, the managers highlighted that the industry practices were changing due, for example, to the Internet and related online sales and marketing. The need for furniture is quite stable given the reality of a continuously changing world, but in other ways the practices related to furniture are always evolving.

Visual is a small company that does not rely strongly on formal strategy. Instead of being tied to a formal strategy that is created and subsequently implemented annually, the operations evolve through continuous, more informal practices of strategy-making. Thus, strategy-making mainly consisted of everyday practical coping by managers (Chia & Holt, 2006) and involved both improvisation and experimenting. I find that Visual is an especially relevant and interesting organization for my study because all the managers within the company are also involved in practical work on a daily basis. Therefore, there is no clear distinction between the management and other employees in terms of what they do. Hence, although this study is limited to the viewpoints of three managers, it does not provide such a restricted viewpoint on strategic change as in companies where professional top management are solely engaged in managerial tasks.

Strategic change at Visual cannot be described as one large change initiative. In line with the theoretical discussion provided in the previous sections, the experience of strategic change that comprises the data of this dissertation is about strategy-making in change. However, the beginning of the data gathering process coincided with a situation at Visual where the managers faced a number of unanswered questions and had the explicit aim of moving into unknown areas of business.

CEO: “We have at the moment choices to be made. Until now, it has been so straightforward because we have had a very strict focus, but now we are in
some kind of turning point where we wonder how we could take the next step forward with our business.” (29.8.2011)

The above quote describes well the overall situation at the beginning of our meetings in August 2011. Visual’s strategic focus was on growth, especially through internationalization. However, how to grow and internationalize was not that clear. In Finland, there were not many companies left to sell the solution based on Visual’s defined customer type. According to the Visual’s managers, the most natural path to grow was to try to expand the business globally within their established customer focus, and they in fact saw a huge potential for the company in the global market. The competition that Visual was facing was not yet so intense, and the managers saw that Visual thus had to internationalize rather quickly before the competitors would catch up to the slight first-mover advantage that Visual seemed to be enjoying due to its sophisticated technological solution. Moreover, after the strict focus on clearly defined types of customers in its early years, Visual indicated that it was open to also seeking customers outside the defined customer focus.

However, the best way to achieve global growth in practice was not clear to Visual’s management at that time. The questions and problems they described were quite practical in nature, such as: Do we sell directly to the customers, or build a sales channel? Our current pricing model does not scale up to the types of large customer companies that we would like to pursue in the global market, so what would be the most suitable way to price the solution? How do we identify and solve bottlenecks that hinder our ability to grow? Accordingly, stemming from simple strategic aims (i.e., growth and internationalization), a complex web of interconnected challenges to solve and decisions to be made seemed to exist. In the next chapter, I will describe the empirical findings.
6 Empirical findings

In this chapter, I present the empirical analysis based on the generated data. The chapter is further divided into five sub-chapters. Section 6.1 gives an overview of the events, challenges, and intentions that we discussed in our meetings. Thereafter, in section 6.2 I analyze how the agency of time manifests itself in strategic change. This section is perhaps the most focused of all the sections in this chapter, as it elaborates upon the particular characteristics of strategic change as an in-time process. The manifestations are immanent also in later sections when focusing on broader aspects of strategic change. In section 6.3, I focus on the explicit role of temporality in strategic change by analyzing different temporal orientations inherent in the processes. The purpose of this section is to broaden the perspective on temporality beyond the in-time view by also taking into consideration the abstract construction of temporality. These two sections, namely 6.2 and 6.3, focus on the relation between time and human agency and together enable us to better understand the temporal dynamics of strategic change. In section 6.4, I continue the analysis by elaborating further upon the strategic change events. The purpose of this section is to shed light on the characteristics of the strategic change events emerging in the studied company. Elaborating on the nature of events is important, especially for the in-time analysis of strategic change, since the events are viewed as agentic. Thereafter, in section 6.5 I focus on the managerial strategy-making involved in change. The purpose of this section is to elaborate on the relation between the lived events and building mode of strategy-making in change. In this way, section 6.5 continues the analysis from section 6.3 concerning the relation between lived experiences and abstractions (i.e., the realm of human agency), but it takes a broader perspective on such a relation compared to that provided in section 6.3, which focuses more on temporality. Finally, in section 6.6 I briefly present an epilogue to Visual’s strategic change process. Sections 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5 present the key findings of this study from four interrelated viewpoints, namely temporality (sections 6.2 and 6.3), agentic events (6.2 and 6.4), the relationship between lived experiences and abstractions (sections 6.3 and 6.5), and the emergence of strategic change (sections 6.4 and 6.5). As the analysis presented in the sections is at times overlapping, the relationship between the different sections is clarified in the following figure.
6.1 Overview of the discussed events, challenges, and intentions

Based on the discussions in our meetings, what I came to see as relevant events for understanding the dynamics of strategic change processes are not only restricted to a few striking events forming a linear chain of strategic change. Instead, the continuous emergence of a multitude of seemingly insignificant events, often related to everyday practices, is an equally important aspect of strategic change as it emerges in time. Therefore, this section provides a brief summary of the events, challenges, and intentions of strategic change in order to provide scholars with an overall view of what we discussed during the two years of meetings. In general, our focus in the meetings was on challenges that managers had encountered in practice, and therefore, we discussed a variety of events that in some way had stimulated managerial thinking. The following table summarizes the latest events as well as the challenges raised by the managers during each of our meetings.
Table 2. Overview of the latest news, events, and challenges in our meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Latest events</th>
<th>Challenges and intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29.08.2011</td>
<td>Operating now in Europe, mainly Finland. (Resellers in Italy, Sweden, Poland, and Turkey). Approximately 50 customers. Seeking new global growth, for example in Japan and the U.S. New module “AR” introduced to the software solution. 25 employees.</td>
<td>Current business model is not suitable for large, global customers. Technical risks may be involved in sudden growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.09.2011</td>
<td>Pressure emerged to offer a solution to interior designers.</td>
<td>Technical and practical scalability in large customers is a challenge. Another challenge is that Visual has no concept for interior designers. Intent to grow through resellers by offering them only platform and letting them produce the content. However, tools for easy content production missing. Focus on furniture industry, but intention to also explore other industries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.10.2011</td>
<td>New feature almost ready for visualizing public space products. Copycats are emerging in the market.</td>
<td>The solution does not meet the needs of interior designers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.11.2011</td>
<td>First reseller in Japan. Also, first small customer contract there now close to being signed. Conversations in both Finland and Sweden with web retailers. Copycats are emerging in the market.</td>
<td>Content production is at a bottleneck for growth. Intention to grow quickly before copycats take the market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.12.2011</td>
<td>The Swedish web retailer did not lead to a contract.</td>
<td>Challenges in growth: workload in production and inability to support the resellers enough. Intention to grow through reseller channel. The current server solution is not suitable for volatile usage volumes. Azure identified as the suitable cloud solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.01.2012</td>
<td>Ongoing conversations with a large U.S. retailer and a Scandinavian-based global manufacturer.</td>
<td>Delivery process scalability, geographical spread, pricing model scalability are the current key challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.03.2012</td>
<td>Exhibitions participated in recently, latest in Turkey, and more coming in the spring. Managers have worked on the new pricing model. New case in Australia has emerged.</td>
<td>Pricing scalability is a challenge. Willingness to completely outsource the content production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.04.2012</td>
<td>New pricing experimented with new customer in Europe. IPad applications for certain customers under development.</td>
<td>Resellers are seen as the main way to grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Challenges and Intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.06.2012</td>
<td>Ongoing negotiations with the Australian partner. Turkey is not progressing.</td>
<td>Pricing challenge: versatility of customers. What to do with Turkey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.08.2012</td>
<td>New Sales Manager is hired in the U.S. Negotiations with potential customer outside the furniture business. Proof-of-concept for Azure Cloud ready. CRM solution taken into use with new sales process that has been constructed.</td>
<td>Outsourcing is a topical question: What could be outsourced? The managers are trying to reconstruct the offering as four individual elements. Key challenge is that selling through the resellers does not work as desired. Overall, managing sales is challenging. Volume peaks are seen as a risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.10.2012</td>
<td>Contract with a customer outside the furniture business signed. Ongoing contract negotiations with a first large case in Japan and a first case in the U.S. First solution to retail shop designing released. CFO hired. Trial phase with the Australian partner will be started soon. Contract with it signed, and it has huge potential. Two partners found for outsourcing certain areas of production. 31 employees.</td>
<td>In Finland, growth is seen to emerge from other than furniture business. Challenges include the Swedish market. Handling the growing number of sellers globally. Content production in large cases (e.g., the Australian case), getting the outsourcing to work. How to construct licenses for the new cases?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.02.2013</td>
<td>Investor pitching in January. First contract with U.S. customer signed. Large expectations for U.S. this year. New idea to package AR into own offering. A seller laid off in country X.</td>
<td>Competition in AR applications becoming intense. Nothing to offer to interior designers. Key question is that what might be the proper distribution channel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.04.2013</td>
<td>Ongoing contract negotiations in Turkey with couple of companies. Also active negotiations in the USA with big companies. Australian trials ended and negotiations for the actual deal started. Two people hired in 2013.</td>
<td>Japan is not progressing as desired. The Japanese reseller has problems in delivering the already sold solution and does not actively sell new cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.05.2013</td>
<td>A new concept for interior designers is now under work. Contract in the long-</td>
<td>Growth in the number of employees has brought challenges for organizational practices. Need to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
negotiated case in the USA almost ready. Meanwhile, second contract in the USA signed. Discussions with investors ongoing. Commercial contract negotiations with the Australian company continue. Customer requires better support and now global 24/7 support service is under planning and should be ready by August 2013. Now two discussions in Australia directly with end customers. Ongoing discussions with Japanese company similar to the Australian company. Over 80 customers now. Outsourcing through three subcontractors.

define more clearly how certain activities are being carried out. Evaluating the costs of customer projects is challenging. Another challenge is how to handle customer communication during delivery. Intention to create an admin tool for the software solution.

The table above demonstrates the versatility of the events and identified challenges that we discussed during our meetings. The challenges pointed out by the managers were quite practical and related mainly to selling, developing, and delivering the solution. As a result, new challenges emerged, others became irrelevant or were solved, and unresolved challenges evolved. Moreover, the urgency of the challenges was under constant flux based on new events that the managers encountered. The events that we discussed had to do with both mundane work and large upheavals. Based on the data as a whole, a notable issue related to the events is that there has been multiplicity of events going on all the time. Therefore, it is not reasonable to identify specific major strategic change events and treat all the mundane events as insignificant for the process. Instead, the data suggests that strategic change emerges in time as a relational, multi-event process.

The data I have analyzed is characterized by a two-fold temporal orientation. First, all the novel events are discussed retrospectively. This is natural since none of the novel events could be anticipated ex ante. Second, the challenges and intentions deal with the tripartite understanding of temporality (past, present, future). However, what is particularly interesting is that the managerial intentions are mostly grounded in present challenges, not in detached, strategic future goals.
Based on Table 2, managerial strategy-making in change seems a quite rational activity characterized by problem setting and solving as well as intentional actions. However, by analyzing more closely the temporal nature of the relation between managerial intentions, actions, and events in strategic change in the following sections, I show how the rational intentions and actions emerged from within unowned processes. In the next section, I focus on identifying how agentic time manifests itself in strategic change processes.

6.2 Manifestations of agentic time

In this section, I analyze how agentic time, namely the agency of relational events, manifests itself in strategic change. I particularly define and describe five perceptible manifestations that help us understand in practice how temporality is inherent in the dynamics of organizational life in general and strategic change in particular. This section contributes to an understanding of temporality and the agentic nature of strategic change events (see Fig. 5).

The emergence of unforeseen events, in other words, “black swans,” is the first and perhaps the clearest manifestation of agentic time in strategic change. During our discussions, unforeseen events emerged continuously and they particularly illustrate the unpredictable and nondeterministic nature of strategic change. In particular, they show how the novelty of strategic change cannot be anticipated based on past experiences. One “black swan” event in particular had notable causal power in defining Visual’s subsequent activities, and I will next describe that in more detail.

In 2012, Visual’s sales department received an email from representatives of a large Australian company, “Alpha”, stating that they were interested in offering Visual’s solution to their company’s own customers as part of a new service platform. The Alpha’s team that contacted Visual’s sales had already carefully planned their new service platform. They thought that Visual’s solution matched what they were looking for in a platform. Engaging in discussions with the people representing Alpha led to Visual forming a business relation that the managers perceived as radically different than their past relations. The managers defined the new relation as a new type of sales channel, although they referred to the company as “customer.” Before being contacted by Alpha, Visual’s managers had not even considered the possibility of forming such a business relation.
SM: “This is very interesting. I couldn’t understand X [the same type of company as the Australian company] here in Finland wanting to be our customer. I could not understand it at all.” (16.10.2012)

How did the representatives of Alpha find Visual, a small Finnish company operating in a specific industry? They found Visual through Internet searches. Even though Alpha’s representatives were intentionally searching for a partner on the Internet, the initial formation of the business relation was also based on the coincidence of the partner happening to find Visual during the search process. In this way, even the intentions of Alpha’s representatives cannot be seen to fully explain the emergence of the black swan event. Instead, in the surprising contact event, the Alpha’s intentions became entangled with the coincidence of finding Visual’s solution online. This illustrates how human actors evoke their agency through participating in generating events, while the events themselves are unowned and relational in nature, thus characterized also by chance.

In addition to being engaged in a very different type of business than the partner company that Visual had traditionally been doing business with or been actively looking to do business with in the future, the case was also financially lucrative. The revenue potential calculated by Alpha was significant, and therefore the proposed business deal peaked Visual’s interest. The relation proceeded with a trial phase, where three “end customers,” namely Alpha’s customers, tested the solution. After the initial contact with Alpha, Visual was contacted by a similar company in Japan as well.

CEO: “And now about replicating this. When we got these two contacts [referring to the Australian and Japanese companies], finally bells started to ring in our heads. Everyone are looking now for additional services.”

R1: “They are trying to differentiate. You have a huge opportunity here.”

CEO: “The situation right now is unbelievable. I would say that after a long time, there’s finally a kind of new ‘vibe’ here, and I feel that there seems to be a new scenario of sorts in all this.” (16.10.2012)

A few discussions were also initiated with some Asian companies operating in the same industry as Alpha and Japanese partner candidates, which eventually led Visual to notice a possibility for replicating the concept in other geographical locations besides Australia. This imagined possibility for replicating the new partner logic with other similar partners caused the present situation to look even more
promising for the managers. While the “trial phase” was being enacted with Alpha, Visual already indicated that the new sales channel represented the two greatest business potentialities for the company at the time. These two potentialities were identified and communicated in discussions with potential external investors.

The story of the Australian case illustrates the agentic role of unforeseen events in strategic change. The perceived novelty that became defined in the example presented above as a new partner type in a new geographical market area emerged through an unforeseen event. This event had a clear causal power in the emergence of strategic change in general and novel strategic intentions in particular. Thus, the unforeseen event also illustrates how events have agency with respect to the emergence of human intentions. In particular, a major “black swan” event seems powerful in relation to human intentions. However, in this analysis I deviate from viewing black swan events merely as events with major effects, and instead I highlight that these unforeseen events can also be mundane.

Besides that Alpha’s contact illustrates the power of unforeseen events in strategic change, the case also illustrates how the meaning of the past events change in relation to the becoming present as new events relate to them. The initial reference from the Alpha’s contact person can be defined as the unforeseen back swan event. But once the surprise reference had occurred, it was not immediately clear what it would mean in practice. The subsequent events, namely the conversations between the people working for Visual and Alpha, as well as the trials with the end customers, continuously (re)defined the meaning of the black swan event. Consequently, the relations between events operated together to form ‘the Alpha case’ for the Visual managers. Although this relation between events was initiated by the black swan event, the strategic significance of the black swan emerged only in relation to later events. Thus, the meaning of past events continuously becomes in time in relation with other events. The *becoming meaning of events* is therefore the second manifestation of agentic time. The key notion related to this manifestation is that although human agents construct these meanings for events, the events are defined in the fluidity of the present and are thus situated in the present. In this way, the emergence of events can be seen as influencing meanings.

When we first heard about the Alpha’s contact person before the summer of 2012, the managers did not discuss it at length. But in meeting after meeting they subsequently started to talk about it more, and in October 2012, more than half a year after the initial contact, they were highly enthusiastic about it, like the
excerpt I earlier presented indicates. At that time, the managers had already noticed the possibility for replicating the new business logic globally, and this affected their perception of the Alpha case as well. In this way, new events that were not directly related to the Alpha’s contact person also became agentic in terms of perceptibly influencing the meaning of that particular “case.” Conversations with many companies became connected to one “global case” for new potential business areas. Besides showing the changing meaning of past events, the example also illustrates how the Alpha case was really not an isolated chain of events, but became related to other events not explicitly involving Alpha. The Alpha example also illustrates that the future hopes and expectations were under a constant state of becoming through actual events, and that these expectations in turn affected the meaning of these events for the managers. In sum, the becoming meaning of events can be viewed as a material-discursive process.

The third manifestation of agentic time can be described as the immediacy and irreversibility of an emerging situation. By an emerging situation, I am referring to the uniqueness of a lived present in terms of its becoming. The immediacy and irreversibility of the situation describe the temporally indivisible human experience of a particular emerging situation, in other words, the nature of intra-acting from within the becoming present. The emerging situation can thus create the necessity for immediate actions within its indivisible becoming. In the excerpt presented below, the CEO describes an event, namely a meeting with the representatives of a potential customer, wherein the CEO had to make an immediate suggestion with respect to pricing because he wanted to change the prevailing pricing model. The standard formula used for counting the price of the software solution was not suitable for this global, larger than usual case, as the total price would have been too low.

CEO: “This kicked off a month ago, and we expect a decision already this month. Thus, our discussions are progressing really fast. And last week, I was there and … we tested what we talked about the last time. We did not get far, but anyway, we managed to open this up. […] We had to do so there at the meeting, we had to make up immediately those regions [for pricing]. […] this part was really hard-going, luckily we had worked on this. [before]. […] Of course, it would have been easier if we had considered this even further. So we would have had even more leverage at the meeting. I had to come up with the regions immediately. And then finalize it right there. That these are the
In the excerpt above, the agency of time manifest as the CEO could not postpone the pricing proposition into a more convenient future setting in order to have time to consider the options carefully. Instead, within the emerging situation, the response had to be immediate. During the emerging situation, the CEO also recognized the irreversibility and causal power of the pricing proposition for subsequent events in the customer relation. Hence, this illustrates how managerial agency was evoked as improvised acts from within the emerging situation as the CEO participated in generating the event. Furthermore, since such immediate acts as the pricing proposition have causal power in terms of evoking further immediate responses from other participants in the meeting in return, the entire becoming of the meeting through the acts of several individuals can be seen as being unowned in nature. The actual negotiation event, in other words, the relation between the negotiating parties, produced the realized pricing for the case. The buyer in the negotiation did not approve entirely of the CEO’s proposition for pricing, and therefore the realized pricing was not completely defined by the CEO. Thus, the meeting event per se was unowned in nature.

Although the “meeting-in-becoming” in the example above required an immediate, improvised engagement, our past discussions with the managers and the managers’ own pricing model work were clearly immanent events in the pricing proposition. In this way, it is impossible to define the extent to which the pricing proposition was an immediate improvisation and the extent to which it was the result of past planning. These two issues, namely improvisation in the present and events of planning in the past, became intertwined in the meeting event that the CEO describes. This illustrates how even immediate decisions, despite their novelty, are influenced by past events. Consequently, the immanent past in the present is the fourth perceptible manifestation of agentic time. In this manifestation, the agency of time becomes explicit in instances where past events have identifiable causality in relation to later events. However, I highlight that this causality is unowned by nature. This means that it is possible to recognize causality in the relations between events, but at the same time the present effects cannot be reduced to or explained by a single cause.

So far, I have presented a couple of striking events as examples when analyzing how agentic time manifests itself in strategic change. However, the majority of the emerging events that we talked about were related to mundane

regions. Without having time to think whether Asia really is one. .”
(17.4.2012)
practical work. They were related, for example, to the regeneration of relations with representatives from existing or potential customer companies as well as to the intentional development of the software solution. Having less than thirty people engaged in multiple processes means that everyone is busy. This is due to the conditionality of time, which I identify as the fifth perceptible manifestation of agentic time.

CEO: “Then, if we consider today’s situation, what partly slows down our growth is that we cannot support our channels, especially during the early phases, at a level that we should. [...] because we don’t have enough time. We do not have enough hands ... or feet actually to run along with them to help getting it running.” (15.12.2011)

The above excerpt illustrates how ongoing organizational processes are framed by temporal reality. In particular, temporality creates the conditions for an individual’s actions, as each individual can only have one experience at a time and thus intra-act in only one emerging situation at a time. Human experience as conditioned by temporality is simultaneously novel and continues from the previous moment. The temporal conditions of the lived present create challenges for organizing activities and for actualizing strategic intentions, since the managers would like to do more than is possible. The temporal conditions create special dynamics for strategic change, which will be discussed in the next two sections in a more detailed manner and through more examples from the data.

In this section, I have identified and provided practical examples of five ways in which agentic time perceptibly manifests itself in strategic change. These manifestations pinpoint different aspects of agentic time that are analytically relevant and useful for an understanding of strategic change. Consequently, the manifestations are inherently inseparable from each other. The manifestations are summarized below in Table 3.

Table 3. Perceptible manifestations of agentic time in strategic change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manifestation of agentic time</th>
<th>Explanation and implication for strategic change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Unforeseen events</td>
<td>Continuously emerging unforeseen events introduce radical novelty for strategic change and disrupt repetition. This manifestation pinpoints the unpredictable, nonlinear nature of strategic change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Becoming meaning of events</td>
<td>The emergence of new events changes the meaning of past events. Thus, the meaning of events is defined in the fluid present and emerges through the relationships between events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifestation of agentic time</td>
<td>Explanation and implication for strategic change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132 Manifestation of agentic time</td>
<td>Hence, new events have agency in (re)defining past events. This manifestation pinpoints the temporally situated nature of the meanings of events and constructed cause-effect relations. Furthermore, it pinpoints how influential events cannot necessarily be recognized when they happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Immediacy and irreversibility of an emerging situation</td>
<td>Participating in an emerging situation produces managerial actions from within the situation. In this way, strategic change actions can also be immediate responses to unowned present situations that have irreversible, unknown causal power in relation to future events. This analytically blurs the boundary between planned actions and practical coping. This manifestation shows how human agency in the lived present is evoked from within unowned events and is thus tied to them. This lived present is characterized by its temporal unfolding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Immanent past in present</td>
<td>Past events have unowned causal power in relation to the becoming of new events. This manifestation pinpoints how new strategic change events emerge from the immanent past. Fragments of this immanence can be perceived in the lived present, even though the present cannot be reduced to any single past event as its cause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conditionality of time</td>
<td>The temporal nature of reality defines the conditions of human lives and, in this way, limits human agency in strategic change to one intra-action at a time. This manifestation pinpoints how human agency is framed by the temporal nature of reality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These five manifestations are all related to a further implication related to strategic change that was already mentioned in this section, namely that managers’ intentions emerge from within relational events and are therefore under a state of continuous becoming. Consequently, the intentions cannot be viewed as a result of detached rational building or as preceding strategic change events. This issue will be elaborated on further later in subsection 6.5.1.

### 6.3 Varying temporalities inherent in strategic change

In this section, I analyze the varying temporalities inherent in strategic change. The section focuses on the dynamic relation between trying to manage organizational activities over time while still living in time. Accordingly, the focus of analysis shifts now from the perceptible agency of events discussed in the previous section to the relation between human agency and events. Thus, this
section contributes to our understanding of temporality and the relationship between lived experiences and abstractions (see Fig. 5).

### 6.3.1 Organized continuities

While being engaged in the discussions with the managers, one of my early notions was that a major part of the managers’ talk reflected a sense of continuity over time. In our discussions, the managers expressed this sense of temporal continuity in two ways. The first way was related to routines and repeated activities, and the assumption of continuity was embedded in and expressed through linguistic expressions such as “we are doing,” “we offer,” “we are selling.” The second way of expressing a sense of temporal continuity can be described as “development mode” talks. Thus, the managers talked about their organizational practices and actions as a sequential, logical, and cumulative process that continues over time. In this process, some actions belong to the past, some to the present, and some to the future. In these development mode talks, the managers were mixing the past, present, and future tenses, sometimes even in the same sentence. For them, past actions had cumulatively formed a platform enabling present actions, which in turn were seen to enable future actions. In that setting, future actions could be described as a list of actions not yet taken.

CEO: “This is what we have done. We have put two virtual servers. These can be called something like Visual USA and Visual Singapore. It is on Azure, so artificially we are now on Azure. We are waiting to get the licenses running with the customer and then we’ll establish a new development project with them, where the system is put on the cloud. And then, when we have a paying customer, we’ll do the work and by that time we will already have investigated the technical issues and solved the problems.” (20.12.2012)

The sense of temporal continuity builds on the objective view of time by assuming a linear continuity over time. In addition, it builds on subjective time in the sense that it organizes activities into the past, the present, and the future. In talks grounded in temporal continuity, time does not seem to have a role in strategy-making other than providing a temporal extension of the present to support repetition and the cumulative, sequenced development of actions. In this study, I define this ongoing organizing of actions over time as the construction of “organized continuities.” This practice gives linear, objective time a role as an artifact used in the intentional organizing of human actions.
The previous excerpt illustrates how an organized continuity was constructed for implementing cloud technology for the software solution. The cloud implementation is thus described as a series of steps, in which the first one has already been carried out and the other steps will be carried out in the near future. Another example of organized continuity for Visual is the international growth reflected upon in the following excerpt:

COO: “And we just discussed with the CEO that we should start thinking that we do not proceed country by country in an old fashioned way, but we proceed one segment at a time, because our customers are global. Certain things follow country borders, but still we proceed globally.” (22.2.2013)

This excerpt illustrates how the managers think in terms of proceeding on a step-by-step basis. Thus, the internationalization process is thought about in terms of viewing different segments as cumulating steps. In addition, individual customer relations themselves are enacted through organized continuity, a sequential order of contract negotiations, implementing a software solution, and using it. Similarly, Visual’s software solution is developed by organizing and sequencing the development activities into a roadmap that maintains the priority and order of future development activities. The solution itself is divided into features that can be added to the solution and then modified later. The new features are weighted against each other when defining the order of their development.

From the perspective of temporality, the nature of the organized continuities is twofold. On the one hand, the organized continuity enacted in the present might be based on a real, immanent past. In other words, it is supported by already accomplished actions and experienced continuity. This real past creates a firm ground for constructing continuity also for the future. In this way, the constructed, organized continuities are simultaneously based on real past events and an imagined future. Since the constructed, organized continuities for the future are merely expectations, they might become problematic during the continuous emergence of new events in the evolving present. This issue is elaborated on more in the next section.

The construction of organized continuities can be seen as practical coping with the conditionality of temporality. For each individual, the actual becoming present allows for only a limited number of ongoing activities. For example, international growth is limited by the amount of sales relations that Visual’s salespeople can participate in, and the development of the software solution is limited by the coders’ ability to write code. Due to these temporal conditions, the
spreading of more complex acts into several cumulative sub-activities is necessary for making plans and operationalizing the plans. Moreover, repeating similar practices in multiple situations can be an efficient way of operating. However, this enactment of an over-time temporality introduces also challenges, which will be elaborated on in the next section.

6.3.2 Temporality paradox

In this section, I define and describe a temporality paradox that emerges as the managers live with two temporalities, namely with the constructed linear over time and the lived present becoming in time. Related to this paradox, I identify two interrelated characteristics of human temporality in strategic change: first, the creation of organized continuities described in the previous section, and second, the continuous emergence of novel, often unforeseen, events that create tensions between over-time and in-time temporalities. In addition, I argue that this tension produces intentional change actions.

The practice of constructing organized continuities is interesting from the ‘in-time’ standpoint. By constructing organized continuities, managers rely on the idea of extended time even though the immediate present is not extensive. Linear objective time seems to be useful for the creation of repeated, efficient practices or cumulative, complex organizational acts, but relying on extensive time creates some contradictions for managerial work. The experienced in-time temporality is not linear like the constructed over-time temporality, which forms the background of organized continuities. Instead, the managers faced continuously novel events that became problematic in relation to the organized continuities. Many times the events were also surprising in nature.

The key challenge that emerged as a result of relying on organized continuities is that enacting the continuities at times becomes contradictory with respect to the need to respond to the immediate situation at hand. Thus, although organized continuities provide us with efficient and consistent way to organize activities, they at the same time narrow the managers’ scope for action. They are commitments in the present that are extended into an imagined future. In this way, the present commitments enacted through organized continuities hold causal power with respect to the future that might become problematic. Accordingly, relying on organized continuities creates a paradoxical situation that I define as the temporality paradox. The temporality paradox emerges as the conditions of the lived present cause managers to establish and commit to over-time organized
continuities, but at the same time being constrained by the continuities makes it challenging to relate to continuously emerging new events in time.

CEO: “There is that picture in one book. I don't even remember its name, but there is the picture where the American Indians attack the fort. And in the fort they have barrel-loaded guns. And the salesman comes there with a machine gun and says: “hey, look what I have.” And they just say to him that “sorry, we are too busy right now.” This is what this is all about.” (16.10.2012)

One practical illustration of the temporality paradox is related to conversations with representatives of potential new customers. The example below shows how relating with a potential new customer became problematic due to being constrained by organized continuities. The novel events within the relation made it problematic to enact organized continuities, and this tension further initiated the need for making changes.

CEO: “In this customer case, we have three problems. There is a geographical problem, because we have had our servers so far in Finland. And then there is a problem related to content production. And there is a scalability problem in our pricing model. This is a burning issue that needs resolving now.” (27.1.2012)

The above example particularly illustrates how acting in accordance with organized continuities contradicted the need to respond to unforeseen emerging events. The managers seem to juxtapose the continuities with the new events so that the new events either disrupt or enable some of these continuities. The contradictions between organized continuities and novel events create resistance to the organized continuities because commitments to organized continuities constrain the managers and restrict their ability to maneuver. This resistance is powerful in the sense of producing intentional actions. Thus, the becoming present with its novel events, has the power to affect managers’ objects of attention and, in this way, the enactment of organized continuities. However, the disruptions caused by novel events with respect to the enactment of the organized continuities are not merely negative, as was already illustrated in subsection 6.2 through the example of the Australian case.

Another example related to the temporality paradox has to do with software development.
CEO: “So lately, the AR-based applications have been popping up in the App Store like mushrooms in the rain. [...] This is what has been happening among the competition now. And, maybe, we haven’t been that agile in this issue, because our effort has been put into [tackling] issues other than AR this year. And now, we have added to the roadmap something called markerless AR.” (20.02.2013)

Due to the conditions of temporality, Visual’s personnel can engage only in a limited number of activities, in which the priority of different intentional activities is continuously being weighed. Like the above quote illustrates, the roadmap manifests the priority of intentional actions whenever they involve making modifications to the software. Thus, the roadmap can be seen as an organized continuity in the continuous, cumulative development of a software solution. This roadmap is constantly being modified based on evolving events. However, in the above example it took a while before the emergence of new competition was addressed intentionally, as other development activities had to be prioritized on the roadmap over immediate reaction to the emerging competition. In this way, the organized continuity, namely the over-time organizing of the software development activities, affected the managers’ reactions to the increasing competition in time. Hence, organized continuities are in an inseparable relation with the unowned emergence of novel events, and thus, neither of them completely determines intentional actions. Consequently, the above example brings out the continuous tension between the abstract over-time and experienced in-time temporalities and illustrate how the managers operate within these two temporalities.

At a more general level, the temporality paradox brings out the dynamics of the material-discursive practices and, in this way, shows how the abstractions and actual events are inherently related within strategic change. The abstract continuities have to fit into the material world in order to be realized. At the same time, they are enacted and modified in time both in and through emerging events. Consequently, translating abstractions into actualities can create temporal tensions. This dynamic relation between abstractions and actual events seem to characterize strategic change.

Another example illustrating the challenges in enacting organized continuities in a fluxing situation is related to the dynamics of feature requests from potential customers and the product roadmap. The managers talked about “deal closers,”
namely new features that are requested by potential customers when negotiating a contract with Visual.

CEO: "At some point, this was uncontrollable. All the time, we got comments like, 'otherwise fine, but we should get this.'"

SM: "Those kinds of deal closers."

CEO: "... exactly, little features. But I think we have gotten rid of that trend. And on the other hand, we have developed our platform in a way that we can more easily customize the solution. So that we can develop the feature past the everyday product development and it won't stop everything else and compromise our product. Instead, our production can tailor it to the specific customer. Later, we can then consider whether others need it too, and then add it to our roadmap." (28.11.2011)

The request for deal closers can be viewed as new events that disturb organized continuities. In this case, the challenge emerging from the temporality paradox could be, at least to some extent, solved by handling the new request in parallel with enacting the organized continuity of software development. In this way, the software development activities were no longer completely fixed in advance as a single organized continuity, but also allowed more easily for immediate reactions to sudden customer requests.

The above example also brings out another challenge related to organized continuities, namely that they are often embedded in relations with third parties. The next excerpt illustrates this aspect as well.

CEO: [CEO's phone rings] "Speak of the devil, it's that customer. Because we have agreed that they will call us when they are ready continue. I'm not sure, but they might even call because of that. If that's the case, we will have pretty severe resource problems if the case now kicks off. We already had two and a half persons tied full-time to this case last spring. So we don't have anyone to put into this."

SM: "The other new project started pretty conveniently around the same time that the other project was finishing up. But if there comes now an announcement in the phone that... [laughing]"

R2: "New over-time work for the guys."

CEO: "Yes, and we are operating already at our limits." (16.10.2012)
The above excerpt is another illustration of how organized continuities become problematic due to new events. It particularly enables us to see how challenges emerge when all the people are already committed to working with specific overtime continuities. In this way, the new event, in this case the request to begin a new project with a customer, makes the practice of pre-organizing continuities for the future problematic. What is particularly interesting in this example is that even addressing the novel event, namely the customer’s product development request, was already seen as a new organized continuity extending into the future. However, due especially to the relational nature of organizational activities, the managers’ ability to control the timing related to the enactment of organized continuities is limited and thus causes further uncertainty.

The final example below further illustrates the challenges emerging from being tied up with over-time commitments while living in an uncertain, changing present.

CEO: “There we have next year’s budget, which contains no recruitments. None. And then this morning, we had a project meeting with our customer [laughing], and they would have this much work for us! And I just had to call our CFO (chief financial officer) to start counting. That if we recruit, what does it mean for the budget? How much work has to be certain based on the amount the customer says so that we can recruit someone? And then, I’ll call the customer and ask if they can commit? So, if we get a commitment that this work will materialize and get a schedule for the work, even a framework, then we will start recruiting.” (20.12.2012)

Relying on organized continuities also seems understandable when considering that all the employment contracts usually are over-time commitments extending into the future. Consequently, it makes sense to ensure as far into the future as possible that the employment costs and overall income are in balance, although it is challenging given the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of organizational reality.

In these first two sections, I have presented the two main findings related to the temporal nature of strategic change. In particular, I have illustrated how events have agency in relation to strategic change by describing the manifestations of agentic time, and I have defined the challenge of strategy-making in continuous change by invoking the notion of the temporality paradox. In what follows, I will further illustrate these findings while at the same time focusing more on analyzing the nature of strategic change events as well as the
relation between managerial strategy-making and events. First, I will discuss the events related to strategic change.

### 6.4 Strategic change as relational events

In this section, I elaborate on the temporal dynamics of relational strategic change events. In particular, I focus on analyzing the nature of events in general and the nature of human and non-human participation in these events in particular. Accordingly, this section contributes particularly to an understanding of the nature of strategic change events, and in a more general sense, also to an understanding of the emergence of strategic change (see Fig. 5).

The events I analyze in this section are related to everyday practices, and therefore they can be described as mundane. Nevertheless, they all have had strategic importance for Visual when I look at them from the retrospective viewpoint. Thus, the events can be directly linked to the main strategic aim to grow fast internationally. In addition, they make it possible to analyze strategic change as a lived experience in contrast to analyzing change only through a couple of the most striking events. Accordingly, I argue that these mundane events provide us with relevant insights into strategic change processes. In the first subsection, I describe how the in-time emergence of events had an impact on the strategic expansion of customer relations.

#### 6.4.1 Customer and partner relations as temporal events

In this subsection, I analyze the customer and partner relations as temporal events. In particular, the subsection further elaborates on the relation between simple, structured processes and complex events in strategic change.

A majority of the events that the managers discussed with us in the meetings in some way had to do with customer relations, and therefore I argue that an analysis of these events is particularly relevant for understanding how strategic change emerges in time. The relations with customers and partners were particularly important for the strategic aim of growing internationally. The centrality of customer relations is also highlighted in the data, as the word *customer* was the most frequently used noun in the data. In the 16 meetings, it was used 634 times. When we began our meetings, Visual had approximately 50 customers established through a legal contract, and after two more years they had more than 80 customers.
The legal contracting process provides some structure for the relations with potential partners and customers. The act of signing a contract between two legal entities, namely Visual and another company, forms a practical and discursive cut that constructs two temporal “phases”: before and after a contract negotiation. Thus, before signing the contract, a relation is generated between the contract negotiating parties, whereas after signing the contract the relation is renewed through the practices of using the software solution. Visual’s sales personnel are involved in both of these phases, with different employees responsible for specific practices. However, within the customer organizations the buyers and the users of the software solution are different individuals. Therefore, Visual’s relation with one legal entity, namely the customer, is in practice comprised of two interconnected relations: one generated through the events of contract negotiating and the other generated through the customer’s practices when using the software solution. Although Visual’s sales personnel are often in contact with the solution users, the main relation is regenerated through intra-action between the software solution and its users. I will come back to this notion later.

Although the contract negotiation phase is in many ways structured by the legal procedures of contracting, it is not a straightforward, predictable, and pre-defined process. The example cited below is related to contract negotiations with a large U.S. company. Signing the new contract would have significant value for Visual, as the top management was simultaneously holding discussions with potential investors. The growth potential presented by the management in those discussions was primarily based on expected growth in the U.S. market, and therefore, a large new deal there would prove that their expectations were valid. In this way, the case was not merely about one new contract from among more than eighty existing customer contracts, but had explicit strategic significance for Visual’s management during the contract negotiations.

CEO: “In the U.S., we are having active discussions with the big case now. The discussions have been active this whole year. There is not a single week [that goes by] without us discussing the deal at least one night a week, usually two or three nights a week though. And at times it has been quieter, but now we have an intensive phase going on there, where we are fixing the final details of the contract. I mean the final words and expressions. It is a big case for us. And in the negotiations, we are in the very final stages. However, we have been in the very final stages already for a couple of months, so I cannot really tell anymore how soon the contract will be ready.” (10.4.2013)
The previous quote illustrates how the abstract construction of contract negotiation phases is in practice ambiguous. The “final stages” in the negotiations had already lasted in reality for much longer than what the CEO had initially estimated. Negotiations have their own unique internal dynamics, which are characterized by the tendency to collectively work at achieving an agreement despite a number of disagreements. Therefore, despite the legal structure that frames the practices of, and thus, creates some the patterning with respect to contract negotiations, the actual becoming of the process is hard to predict. Each negotiation is unique and involves its own particular dynamics during both the negotiating of the agreement and the drafting of the legal contract. In addition to surprises in terms of the length of the negotiations, other kinds of surprises emerged during the contract negotiations as well, as illustrated by the following excerpt from March 2013.

CEO: “Two weeks ago, as the contract was going higher and higher in the hierarchy, they got caught up in one term, 'software,' that they don’t understand in the contract, which was originally 'configuration and activation' in our terms. And we have now spent two weeks discussing this issue only. It has been so long since we discussed these issues that they have already forgotten about them. They originally wanted to change the term themselves. And now they cannot explain it to the top management in their company. It is the procurement director, with whom we are discussing [the changes] and he can sign some of the papers. But the size of the deal has gotten so big that the CEO has to sign the others. And now it has stopped with their CIO [Chief Information Officer] because of the term 'software,' [a person] who was just supposed to say OK to the contract.” (6.3.2013)

The above excerpt illustrates how negotiations that formally take place between two legal entities actually take place as a result of many individuals evoking agency during the process. This makes the actual process complex and unpredictable, although it seems straightforward at an abstract level. The example cited below is from our meeting one month later.

R1: “Have you had any news from the U.S. company?”

CEO: “Yes, last Friday we got the latest twist to that story. How should I put it...? Well, I read it this way: the Request for Quotations was put back on the table.”
R2: “RFQ?”

CEO: “RFQ, yes [laughing]. All the texts in the contract, everything was agreed on, and now the RFQ is back on the table. Because they had considered that ... initially their starting point was the business-to-business aspect, so we would provide the retailer solution. And now, they have concluded that no, actually it is more crucial to do the business-to-consumer side first. So they have turned everything around.”

R2: “So, is it the parent company that wants this?”

CEO: “No, this happened because our contract negotiations prolonged with the parent company. And meanwhile, the subsidiary that will be using the solution has done a survey and ended up concluding that the RFQ that they originally sent was done with the wrong scope.” (3.6.2013)

The above excerpt brings out yet another unexpected event in the contract negotiations. It also has interesting temporal dynamics, since events that happened in parallel with the contract negotiations at the subsidiary ended up prolonging the negotiations between Visual and the parent company even more. The subsidiary’s demand for a new RFQ was made just before the contract was to be signed, and this event held causal power in the process of contract negotiations. This example also illustrates the tension between the abstract over-time and the experienced in-time temporalities in strategic change. The managers maintained clear future expectations for the linear unfolding of the contract negotiation phase. However, the real becoming of events did not meet this assumed linearity and, thus, caused disappointment among the managers when their expectations and reality did not meet.

In this subsection, I have illustrated through an example of contract negotiations with a U.S. customer how an artificially pre-structured relation has, in reality, its own unique, internal dynamics. In particular, the dynamics stem from the enactment of an abstract structure of the negotiation process from within the uncontrollable emergence of the actual process. This makes each relation novel and unpredictable despite a similar structure being enforced by the legal contracting department. In the following subsection, I will elaborate more on the nature of strategic change events and subsequently build an argument that all relations and organizational events should be seen as relevant for understanding strategic change from the in-time perspective.
6.4.2 Participants in strategic change events

In this subsection, I analyze human participation in strategic change events by focusing on mundane organizational events. All of the people working for Visual either directly (employees) or indirectly (working for partners/resellers/subcontractors) evoke their agency in strategic change through their participation in events. The top management does not have control over the actions of individuals, especially since many of them work all around the world and the management is not frequently in contact with them. Therefore, the emergence of strategic change is not a single chronological chain of manager-controlled events. Instead, strategic change emerges through everyday practices and multiple relational events occurring all over the world and involving many individuals.

One example of managers’ limited control over events is related to what happened with the Japanese reseller “AB.” When the below discussion took place, “AB” was the only reseller in Japan and, therefore, strategically important.

CEO: “It has been really difficult. So ‘AB,’ which consists of two guys and a little bit of outsourcing, sold a big case for them. And then they became absorbed in working on it. And now, they cannot close it. I don’t know the details, so I don’t know what the problem is in closing it. And then selling the next case is completely on hold.”

R1: “They are now in delivery mode.”

CEO: “And the ‘COO’ wondered already when they sold the case whether this is going to happen. And I said to him that it could not possibly happen, they are smart guys. And the other is not even a technical person, he could have kept on selling while the other guy focused on delivering it. But we have been in the same trouble ourselves. So, I guess some kind of learning curve is needed, and apparently this cannot even be taught. Or, maybe I should have taken more seriously the COO’s comment and continuously stressed in our weekly meetings that [you must] sell, sell, sell. But it is easy to say [this] afterwards.” (10.4.2013)

The above excerpt illustrates how selling a solution through partners is an uncertain and uncontrollable rhizome of practices. The managers find it impossible to effectively advise the partners on what to do or to teach them the best practices. In addition to events being uncontrollable, the top management
does not have knowledge of everything that is happening. Therefore, intentional strategy building is based on the managers’ personal experiences as well as on only a limited understanding of the other organizational events taking place.

CEO: “Now, when we have salespeople in Singapore, Denmark, Sweden, and U.S. plus three of us. And if someone would have asked me at the beginning of this year, how many sales cases do you have?, I would have answered, ‘I have heard about this case and then I heard something, maybe it was that kind of case.’” (20.12.2012)

The managers do not have a real-time understanding of all the activities being carried out by the employees, and hence, of the events they are participating in. Therefore, each individual evokes her/his own unique agency, even though the offered software solution as well as some of the structured practices and company policies are similar for everyone. Consequently, the managers do not directly evoke agency in the majority of mundane events that produce strategic change.

I have already mentioned the rational work we did in our meetings in efforts to create a new formula for counting the price of the solution. However, this rational work did not lead to new pricing for the U.S. market, which Visual entered during the course of our meetings. Instead, the pricing for the U.S. market changed because of other events. One particular event that ended up having causal power for defining the sales practices in general and the pricing practices in particular in the U.S. was the hiring of a new Sales Manager there.

CEO: “So in July we hired a local guy in the U.S.”
R2: “Where did you find him?”
SM: “He used to work for one of our competitors.”
CEO: “Well, who found whom...” (10.8.2012)

Since the new person responsible for U.S. sales (later referred to as the “U.S. Sales Manager”) had been working for a competitor, he was familiar with many of the practices relevant also to his work at Visual. Furthermore, he had the relevant contacts for potential buyers in the U.S. Thus, the past experiences and relations of the U.S. Sales Manager were immanent also in his practices after he started to work for Visual. The pricing logic of the software solution in the U.S. is a concrete example of how his personal past was immanent in the events of him selling Visual’s solution.
CEO: [asks from the COO] “I don’t know how much you have gone through with the ‘U.S. Sales Manager’ how he prices our solution. He does it quite differently.”

COO: “It is value based. He looks at the solvency of the customer and then the value and scale of our solution. [...]”

R2: “So he negotiates the price himself?”

CEO: “Yes, he takes soundings about the case and ... he gathers the relevant data, tries [it] out ... and then just puts some price tag on it.”

COO: “And the fact is that it is completely based on what he has seen regarding how it has been done before, that he has seen how large a monthly fee they were are able to pay.” (22.2.2013)

The pricing in the U.S. is a good example of how novelty in strategic change can emerge without top management intervening or being at all involved. What is particularly interesting in this case is that even the CEO does not have detailed knowledge about the logic that the U.S. Sales Manager uses for pricing. Consequently, the novelty in operating in the U.S. was not only related to it being a new geographical location for Visual, but also because novel practices emerged through the actions of the new U.S. Sales Manager. Another interesting issue is that the top management allowed the U.S. Sales Manager to arrange the pricing on his own. The top management not trying to determine or control the U.S. Sales Manager’s activities can be perceived as intentional managerial decision immanent in the emergence of new pricing. This is yet another example of how the boundary between intentional and unintentional actions is actually blurred in the becoming of strategic change events.

In addition to the U.S. Sales Manager, the new Sales Manager based in Singapore also operated based on his past experiences and personal relations:

CEO: “I don’t know how accidental this is, but our Singapore guy has his background from working in ‘CD,’ and there he had already been dealing with companies like the ‘Australian partner’ and ‘Japanese partner.’ So, basically he is already inside, he has the contacts from his previous job.” (16.10.2012)

In the next subsection, I illustrate how events in the reproduction of customer relations are linked to the practical logic of the software solution. In other words, the relations with existing customers, namely with people working in the
companies using Visual’s software solution, are regenerated through events where the participating agent on Visual’s side is the software solution itself.

6.4.3 Software solution’s participation in strategic change events

In this subsection, I elaborate on how Visual’s software solution evokes agency in strategic change events by participating in the practices taking place within customer organizations. I argue that a discussion of the participation of the software solution in organizational events will enable us to better understand the unowned emergence of strategic change processes in general and their multi-event nature in particular.

The software solution is used in the customer organizations’ sales practices. The solution is used either by the sales personnel within the customer companies or by the customer’s customers, namely consumers. Visual’s solution visualizes products, and it is used, for example, when selling or buying products not physically present. As explained previously, the people who buy and the people who use the solution within customer organizations are different. The Sales Manager told us that when maintaining customer relations, he communicates mostly with the top management, for example with CEOs, chain managers, and marketing managers. In addition to this, other people may also be involved during the technical implementation of the software solution.

However, none of these individuals are actually involved in the daily practices for which the software solution is used. Instead, the software solution, the customer’s salespeople, and the consumers participate in the majority of everyday events related to customer relations. Consequently, the majority of events through which customer relations are regenerated take place with the software solution being Visual’s participant. Thus, the relations with customers are regenerated mainly through intra-actions between customers and the software solution. This process represents a challenge for intentional strategy-making, as within most events regenerating the customer relations, the Visual’s participant-agent is blind, deaf, and mute. Thus, it participates in the customer’s practices and events but does not experience them. In this way, the key events in the process of regenerating customer relations take place without experience emerging from these to intentional strategy-making. The solution does provide some statistics based how the solution is used, but nothing specific that could be explicitly utilized in strategy-making. The people involved in sales also regularly hold discussions with some of the people using Visual’s software solution, but such
feedback is not communicated immediately from the events in which the solution is used. Moreover, this feedback is limited. Therefore, an understanding of a particular customer’s practices and possible problems only comes about as a result of occasional discussions about how the software solution is being used.

When participating in a customer’s practices, the software solution performs the activities coded for it and develops only through intentional human involvement. Consequently, strategic decisions regarding how to develop the solution take place without knowledge about the events where the solution is the participant.

The way the software solution intra-acts in customer relations is even more complicated in cases where a customer’s customers, that is to say, consumers, use the solution. In that case, the software solution also participates in the customer’s sales practices, again in a blind and deaf manner. This is also perceived as a challenge for Visual because the software solution’s participation in the event can go unnoticed.

COO: “For example, [consider] the ‘EF’ case that we measured for a couple of months. And it was around 400–600 daily visitors to view our solution, at best 800 and at worst 200. So we had the same number of visitors as their main retail store. [...] The challenge is that we can see that 650 people a day uses this solution for 18 minutes and the customer does not know about this. It saves them 650 times multiplied by 350 days a year multiplied by 18 minutes. There is around 80 million’[minute’s] worth of work transferred to people’s homes from the store.” (27.1.2012)

Since no one at Visual consciously experiences the regeneration of customer relations in real time, it is impossible for managers to see how the relation is regenerated in time. Therefore, the nature of how customer relations are regenerated has implications for strategic change. The change emerging through the events within customer relations remains unknown until new information is explicitly passed to someone at Visual. At the same time, the change in customer relations can be intentionally influenced only through the development of features for the software solution. Since new versions of the software are upgraded for particular customers only rarely, the possibilities to influence the performance of the software solution are not immediate.

Likewise, many new customer relations emerged through the potential customers contacting Visual’s salespeople. They had thus been interested in Visual’s software solution, and in this way the software solution evoked agency in
strategic change events. For example, the large Australian partner Alpha had found and evaluated a Finnish language version of Visual’s software solution online before contacting Visual’s sales department. Even though for Visual’s managers the black swan event in the Australian case was the Alpha’s representatives contacting them, the Alpha’s representatives evaluating the software solution was already an immanent past event in the process. Had the Australian partner not been satisfied with the performance of the software solution, it would not have contacted Visual. Consequently, the software solution participated in generating a successful evaluation event, which further led to the Australian company contacting Visual’s salespeople. Accordingly, the software solution’s participation in generating strategic change events is meaningful for an understanding of the unowned nature of strategic change processes.

In sum, in section 6.4 I have broadened the perspective into what can be perceived as the relevant experiences and events involved in strategic change. By illustrating how individuals evoke agency in events in their own way, and how strategic change emerges through mundane events and through the multiple participants (human and non-human), I have pointed out the multi-event nature of strategic change processes. I have also particularly illustrated how everyday events are beyond the control of top managers, since managers do not have a complete, real-time understanding of everything that is happening. These uncontrollable dynamics related to the becoming of events create uncertainty for strategic change and obvious challenges for managerial strategy-making. After elaborating on the nature of strategic change events, I will next analyze managerial strategy-making in change.

6.5 Managerial strategy-making in change

When we began our meetings, the key strategic goal, namely to achieve global growth, was stated explicitly to us. However, such a goal is very general and open in practical terms. Thus, the existence of such a goal does not by itself explain how and why specific actions are taken, as almost any action can have a meaning that is in line with this strategic goal. Therefore, describing strategic change processes is terms of managers creating and implementing a new global growth strategy does not really resonate with what I experienced as actually occurring. In the previous sections, I already illustrated the unowned and hence surprising nature of strategic change as well as the emergence of strategic change through multiple mundane events. This section further elaborates on the practices of
rational managerial strategy-making, which is an equally important aspect of strategic change. Accordingly, this section particularly contributes to an understanding of the relationship between lived experiences and abstractions as well as to the emergence of strategic change more generally (see Fig. 5).

Approaching relational events as agentic and strategy-making as a practice that takes place within the fluidity of the present highlights the importance of everyday experiences. Through their individual experiences of events, managers continuously create an understanding of what is going on. Therefore, considering what the managers experience and do not experience is a relevant aspect for an understanding of strategic change in general and managerial strategy-making in particular. First of all, all three managers were involved in practical work, so their experiences were not merely related to the formal management of the company. All three manager-participants in our meetings were involved in sales and, in addition, were closely working with R&D personnel. Being a small manager-owned company, all of the organizing practices and people involved in such practices were quite closely connected. Thus, the managers’ experiences emerged from quite versatile events, for the most part through mundane practices and practicing. Therefore, our discussions were also for the most part practical. The term in practice was used 250 times in our meetings.

6.5.1 Managerial intentionality and strategic-change events: example of the strategic expansion of customer relations

In this subsection, I analyze the temporal relation between managerial intentions and events by analyzing the emergence and expansion of customer relations. The categories of “customers” and “non-customers” defined the types of clients that Visual sellers actively contacted. In this way, identifying whom the potential customers are seemed like a clear, rational, strategic decision. However, the boundary between customers and non-customers actually evolved through both intentional strategy-making and through the in-time emergence of unplanned events. Therefore, customers and non-customers can be seen as material-discursive constructions becoming in time.

When we began our meetings, the Visual managers expressed their willingness to explore the constructed and practically enacted boundary between customers and non-customers. However, during our meetings the novel customer relations that fell outside the constructed category of customers actually emerged mostly unintentionally. In those cases, the buyer or a third party initiated the
relations. They were looking for a software solution that matched Visual’s solution. The unintended broadening of the customer category beyond the furniture industry happened mostly in Finland, but also the Australian partner serves as an example of such unexpected contacts. The following examples show how the unintentional emergence of new customer and partner relations broadened managers’ understanding of Visual’s customers.

SM: “And then, in Finland we have now a first solution to design retail shops.”

R2: “We have now talked for almost a year about these potential new industries. How did you end up now particularly with these two [referring to house design and retail shop design]?

CEO: “It is such a ... [laughing]”

R2: “Was it an accident or?”

CEO: “Yes, it was accidental [laughing]. Actually, it is because we are so well known in the Finnish market. Thus, everyone starts to know us because we are so visible in the furniture industry. And these other parties start to think when they run into our solution. So, the new industries have emerged through this.” (16.10.2012)

Here is another example of a new customer in Finland:

SM: “Except that in Finland we have unintentionally gotten in the way of new partners. Because some larger software firms have started to sell our expertise as a part of their offerings.”

CEO: “‘GH’ and ...”

SM: “And a few others also.”

CEO: “So, with ‘GH’ we have a joint history through a shared customer, ‘IJ.’ We have developed the IJ’s sales system together with GH. And they know us from there. And ‘GH’ brought this new customer to our table.” (20.12.2012)

In this case, the past relationship with “GH” had a perceptible causality, hence agency, in the emergence of events leading up to the new customer deal. The new customer was outside the discursively constructed and practically enforced category of customers. Moreover, the new customer relation emerged
unintentionally for Visual’s managers, in other words, as a result of an unforeseen event.

CEO: “[…] because, genuinely, we had no idea that we could even discuss something like this.” (20.12.2012)

The unplanned emergence of new customer relations outside the constructed customer category did not at first lead Visual to actively pursue customers beyond its traditional focus. However, after the emergence of some new relations, such as in the examples above, Visual’s managers became more active in pursuing more versatile types of potential customers. Thus, unintended past events clearly have agency in the emergence of managers’ intentionality for pursuing new types of customers.

Another aspect to consider when categorizing customer relations was their geographical location. One of the key strategic decisions concerning the global growth of Visual had to do with which countries to focus the sales efforts on. However, even this seemingly rational strategic decision was entangled with unplanned events. For example, Visual’s entry into the Japanese market was simultaneously a rational decision and a matter of coincidence. One of the former workers on Visual’s software development team moved to Japan and worked from there for Visual. This worker approached Visual’s management with the idea that he could become a reseller in Japan together with a Japanese colleague who had useful contacts with Japanese firms that fit into Visual’s constructed category of “customers.”

CEO: “And we considered this for a while and thought that it fit with our strategy. That we now try to conquer the market as widely as possible before our competitors catch up. […]. But you asked, why Japan of all countries? It is because we have in a way a foothold there. We have a guy that is inside the culture, but with whom we can nevertheless communicate in Finnish.” (28.11.2011)

The above excerpt illustrates how the past act of hiring a particular person and the chance event of him moving to Japan are immanent in Visual managers’ strategic decision to enter into the Japanese market. Thus, these earlier events, which seemed strategically insignificant when they happened, later were actually pivotal in a major strategic decision.

In this subsection, I have illustrated how entering into a new industrial sector or geographical market, in other words, actions that retrospectively can be viewed
as strategic, emerge through the entanglement of managerial intentions and unplanned events. That is to say, strategic intentions and decisions emerge \textit{from within} continuously becoming events, and consequently, they are not always a result of detached strategic planning. In particular, the examples presented in this chapter illustrate how a definition of just who Visual’s customers are is under a constant state of becoming through the events of relating with buyers and users of the solution. Thus, the unowned becoming and perishing of certain relations have agency in relation to intentional activities. The examples also illustrate the role of coincidence in the becoming of new customer relations and show how influential events cannot necessarily be recognized when they first occur, since their meaning becomes in time in relation to later events.

The purpose of this subsection has not been to argue that most customer relations are initiated unintentionally, as the data also contains examples of Visual intentionally pursuing customers, which results in contracts. Instead, the purpose has been to show that relations also emerge unintentionally, and in the many events that we discussed, the unintentional and intentional became intertwined due to the agency of unowned events. Thus, the relation between intentions and events is indivisible and should not be abstracted as being causal.

\section*{6.5.2 Broadening the view of strategy-making: ideas under a constant state of becoming}

In this subsection, I present stories of two strategic ideas that we discussed during our meetings. The reason I chose to analyze these stories more closely is that, based on our discussions, different strategic ideas played a major role in the managers’ everyday strategy-making. Following the becoming of these ideas in time has stimulated many questions and thoughts that have further led me to question the view of managerial strategy-making as characterized by detached, rational decision-making and simple causal connections.

The notion of a strategic idea as such does not fit a fixed, clearly circumscribed definition. In this dissertation, it refers to a loose, abstract articulation of potential novelty in organizational activities. In this subsection, I show how the identities of the abstract ideas under a state of becoming are loose, blurred, and relational in nature, such that the articulation of an idea is never stable or complete. I argue that the stories of strategic ideas especially elucidate those creative and imaginative aspects of human strategy-making where an explicit focus on planning and executing intentional strategic actions is not
immanent in managers’ thinking. Thus, the notion of strategic ideas relates to the practice of playing with imaginative possibilities. In other words, strategic ideas under a state of becoming do not necessarily entail any managerial intentionality for their actualization. In addition to broadening the view of managerial strategy-making beyond the rational planning of actions, the stories illustrate the fluxing, internal relation of managerial thinking, organizational practices, and events. Accordingly, in this subsection I pave the way towards complexifying the notion of theoretically relevant events for understanding managerial decision-making in strategic change and opening up the situated and shifting nature of living forward in a temporal world.

The “BI” idea

The first story is about an idea called Business Intelligence (later referred to as BI). The managers mentioned BI already during our first meeting:

**COO:** “There’s a term, Business Intelligence, which is going alongside with us, but we haven’t really priced it yet. We haven’t pushed it anywhere; we have talked about it a bit. What we have been thinking is, what it would mean in our business model.” (29.8.2011)

“Going alongside with us” indicates that the idea has been considered already for some time. In September 2011, the COO explained that technically their software solution enabled the company to start collecting data from the activities performed as a result of their software solution. The basic logic of BI is clear: to gather data about the software solution’s activities, then to process the data so that the solution’s users can easily utilize it, and finally to sell this data in some way to the customers. We discussed the BI idea in almost all the meetings during the first nine months. Even though the basic logic of the BI idea was simple, the idea as a whole was not clear:

**CEO:** “The only problem is that we don’t know what BI is, what kind of information the customers need. We know what kind of information we can gather, but what is its value? Where in that data can the value be found?” (28.11.2011)

**CEO:** “We have implemented some customer requests, but I would not call it intelligence yet. This is still on such thin ice ... this whole issue of what the intelligence is.” (15.12.2011)
CEO: “This BI has been, already two years ago...”

R2: “Have you introduced this to your customers?”

CEO: “No, we haven’t dared because this has not been clear to us. This just now starts to ... get a form. We have known that it is data to be gathered. What then?, has been the problem. This slowly starts to take shape and it comes together when we ask the right questions, like ‘Hey, could we gather this kind of data?’ This BI is an oddity to us. It’s hard to get a grasp of it.” (17.4.2012)

The managers were clearly striving to be able to articulate the idea fully in order to transform it into a practical plan that could be realized. This process was considered in terms of organizing actions into sequenced activities, namely organized continuities. Despite the vagueness of the idea, during the first months of our meetings the BI was stated as one of the key potential ideas that could help actualize the strategic goal of growing the business.

CEO: “This is ... we see that, let’s say without further chewing on it, [that] it’s just a kind of idea and template we have and ... we see it as the biggest producer of our growth. We are in this at a very early stage, but it’s promising in terms of our thinking.” (28.11.2011)

Concurrent with the efforts to clarify the BI idea at an abstract level, the managers connected it to feature requests for the software solution that had already been received from some customers. Connecting the idea to actual events with customers blurs the boundary between the abstract and actual dimensions of the idea.

CEO: “And some elements of this BI come from our customers, as needs. But they are not this far with it yet.” (13.10.2011)

During our meetings, some features that were linked to the BI idea were actually developed for the solution:

CEO: “So, we have now developed a data-gathering functionality with one of our customers, which now gathers the data. But it is closer to analytics than to BI. It is the preliminary stage. But we could now suggest that, hey, let’s start thinking about this. What could be the first element in this?”
SM: “I think it would be easiest to do it as a customer driven process, not to think these [things] through by ourselves. Just like we already got these suggestions from that customer.” (17.4.2012)

The past events, namely customer requests for new features, as well as already developed features of the software solution, show that the idea in becoming is not merely a result of abstract managerial thinking and, thus, completely detached from practice. What seems to mediate the link between abstract thinking and real practices for the managers are the features of the software solution. Implementing the customers’ feature requests serves as a way to connect the abstract idea to real events. Thus, these actual, implemented features belong to the immanent past of the abstract idea by forming the “preliminary stage” of its actualization. In addition, the intention of involving customers in further developing the BI idea indicates that its actualization is not meant to be planned as a detached building mode process.

During the first nine months, I was personally convinced about the potentiality of the BI idea and estimated that the managers were gradually going to introduce the idea to the company’s customers and build BI features for the software solution. Therefore, I was somewhat surprised that after the first nine months, I did not hear anything more about BI for a long time. Why have they not proceeded further with actualizing the BI idea? In December 2012, I asked about the status of BI and received the following answer.

CEO: “BI has not ... progressed in the form we thought back then. Some have wanted to gather so-called BI data, but it is still ... trivial data in our opinion. Nothing in depth. [...] But we haven’t received any profound request, so that we really would have started developing this [idea], because that is such basic data [that] they want.” (20.12.2012)

The above excerpt illustrates how the pressure from customers is important in generating managerial intentions to actualize the strategic idea. In this case, it was a lack of pressure from customers that became the reason for the company not putting an effort into developing and actualizing the BI idea. Thus, since there was no such pressure, other activities were prioritized over the development of the BI idea. Hence, there were no agentic events that would have motivated the managers to actualize the idea. In addition, the vagueness of the practical meaning of the BI idea can be seen as one reason for why the idea was not actualized beyond the initial few features that were developed.
By analyzing the BI idea, I have particularly shown how the strategic meaning and significance of an idea changes in time as a nonlinear process. The managers’ thoughts and intentions were thus constantly fluxing through their relation to continuously emerging novel events. Finally, with this story I have shown how even a clearly named abstract idea is never static or complete.

*The “AR” idea*

The second story is about an idea called Augmented Reality (later referred to as AR). With this story, I begin by discussing our last couple of meetings in spring 2013. At those meetings, we discussed AR as an individual solution to be provided to smaller local manufacturers and interior designers. Based on the situation in our last meetings, I have practiced retrospective judgment in selecting quotes from earlier meetings that are significant for the becoming of the AR idea. Even though this retrospective selection was made on the basis of a known situation in 2013, the quotes from the earlier meetings illustrate how the idea had an immanent past even though the “outcome” in 2013 had not been the clear goal for the managers during the course of our discussions.

In August 2011, AR represented a new product element in Visual’s modular software solution consisting of four elements. Therefore, for Visual’s managers the meaning of augmented reality has been firmly linked to improving their existing software solution. In that meeting, we talked about their customers and they seemed to have a clear view that interior designers are not their target customers.

*COO: “But we haven’t focused at all on the designers, because that is not our market.” (29.08.2011)*

One month later, in September 2011, the managers became more interested in interior designers. Visual’s current software solution cannot be reasonably offered to them, and the managers recognized this as an emerging problem. However, when considering the whole discussion during the course of that particular meeting, interior designers still constituted a minor issue. The interest in interior designers seemed to be emerging due to discussions with them at exhibitions rather than through any rational principles of strategy-making, such as market positioning. Furthermore, the managers had already been considering some of the practicalities and technical aspects related to offering a solution to interior
designers. In this way, the idea is closely linked to the practical logic of the software solution.

After another month, in October 2011, managers still explicitly stated that designers represented a challenge. Thereafter, we met over the course of a year without anything interesting related to AR or interior designers being specifically addressed. However, in December 2012 the managers mentioned an event that had considerably influenced their thinking and actions (the same event as was already mentioned in subsection 6.3.2):

CEO: “So lately, the AR-based applications have been popping up in App Store like mushrooms in the rain. And it has been shaking up the market a bit. Now we have the AR and it is strictly focused on this specific purpose. But these apps are shaking this up. The customer ... just sees this AR and thinks, ‘This is awesome. You don’t have anything like this, why?’ […] This is what has been happening with the competition now. And, maybe we haven’t been that agile in this issue, because our effort has been put into issues other than AR this year. And now, we have put it on the roadmap, something called markerless AR.” (20.02.2013)

The perceived emergence of competing applications in the App Store can be depicted as an unexpected nexus of events that have agency in generating a novel response among the managers. Thus, I find that the impulse to develop the AR module aspect of the solution emerged in conjunction with increasing competition in the App Store, which created managerial resistance towards the present way of operating. The managers’ response to the new situation was realized in the form of a product development decision.

In February 2013, we discussed the AR idea in more depth. The meaning of AR development had perceptibly changed since the previous meeting. Whereas in December, AR development had been closely linked to developing the existing software solution, in February novel thoughts were emerging.

COO: “What we are looking at is this AR as its own ... out-of-the-box type of solution. We can bring this AR on its own into the volume deliveries. [...] What we are really at the moment building is [a means for] separating these two [AR and the entire platform consisting of all four elements] also as own products for sales and marketing. [...] It is really challenging to get our partners to sell our platform, to get them to know how to [do it]. We have been wondering about this already for two years. And then the other reason,
because we see in practice that competition is increasing through these small apps. And this is one of our answers that, hey, we can do this too.” (22.2.2013)

The COO’s comments from our discussions illustrate how the “new” idea to separate the AR module into its own solution is linked to challenges already identified in the past. For example, the challenge of supporting the reseller partners had been discussed for years. Moreover, the managers argued that in some countries the initial investment for purchasing Visual’s platform solution had been too high for potential customers. They consider the AR idea a novel way to solve this already identified challenge.

The markerless AR feature, which was added to the product roadmap in December 2012, was already introduced to customers in February 2013. In this way, an abstract idea also became linked to an actualized product development action. In addition, during the same meeting the AR idea became linked to the persistent challenge of not having anything to offer interior designers.

COO: “This also enables us to serve the designers as well ... this comes through the ways of pricing and delivering.” (22.2.2013)

The becoming of an idea is also characterized by managers linking past thoughts, discussions, and other ideas to their novel articulation of the idea. Consequently, it is not possible to define when and where the idea emerged since the entire past is immanent in the idea.

In April 2013, the COO and Sales Manager had already been pondering how to price the new AR solution. However, in many ways the articulation of the idea is still vague and full of suggestions and different, alternative types of practical logic.

CEO: “When I start considering this, I get thoughts from many directions. And these really are not structured, and we have not considered them that far. [...] And we have with this idea [about] a flavorful situation now, but we have quite a lot of challenges. Because at the end of June, we are attending the ‘Beta’ exhibition. And last year, there were around 20–25000 visitors and most of them were interior designers. [...] But the problem with this is that this thought is not concretized or structured at all; we have just thrown ideas in the air and ... the challenge is that we should be ready by June, both technically and in terms of the business model and ... I don’t think it is possible.” (10.4.2013)
The above excerpts illustrate the challenges of seeing an abstract idea come to fruition. During the spring of 2013, we spent a considerable amount of time discussing the AR idea with the aim to clarify its strategic meaning and practical logic. However, our discussions still remained at a general and abstract level concerning the AR concept. We only briefly touched upon the practical actions that supposedly would have to be carried out in order to be able to realize the idea and promote it for interior designers in the upcoming exhibition. Thus, the practical details remained vague, which was an obvious barrier for the managers to start working on actualizing the idea. The managers clearly wanted to create a solid, practically sound logic from the vague web of thoughts concerning the idea, but it was challenging. This suggests that translating an abstract idea into practice requires, first of all, a detailed enough articulation of the idea in practical terms.

In January 2016, I visited the company’s web pages and found that Visual is now promoting a unique solution for interior designers. When we discussed this with the Sales Manager in January 2016, he however admitted that they were not really actively selling the solution to these types of customers. Earlier, they had constructed a practical logic for the AR concept for the U.S. market and piloted it there. However, the concept did not generate enough interest and was therefore put on hold. Through the AR pilot, Visual received many requests for further development before the concept could become lucrative. Consequently, the AR concept had only been realized to a minimal extent by early 2016.

With this story, I have illustrated the continuous becoming related to strategic ideas, while highlighting that ideas do not have a stable identity that would allow to analytically construct an enduring definition for them. Accordingly, specifying whether the AR solution as a tool for interior designers (discussed in May 2013) is a completely new idea or inherently related to earlier articulations of the AR idea is not a straightforward process. Further questions with indefinite answers from the process perspective have to do with, for example, when the AR idea actually emerged. Or, is AR one idea with many aspects or actually several ideas? The idea of offering something to interior designers was mentioned already at the beginning of our meetings, and AR as a module in the software solution was introduced to customers already in 2011. Nevertheless, when the AR solutions started to emerge in the App Store, the idea clearly had been transformed. Consequently, strategic ideas could be described as webs of loosely articulated thoughts under a state of continuous becoming in time, thoughts which are stabilized through grounding them in a fixed concept, such as AR.
The abstract ideas I chose for closer analysis in this section were the two clearest and most thoroughly discussed ideas. Neither of them was really translated into practice apart from a few details. I found two reasons for this: first, the inability to articulate them in detail, and second, a lack of impetus from real events that would create pressure for realizing the ideas. Thus, the analysis shows that the passing of time produces novel events and experiences that feed the managers’ creative thoughts, and consequently, events have agency with respect to realizing (or not realizing) the managers’ strategic ideas. Therefore, strategic ideas do not come about merely through rational thinking in isolation from the becoming reality. From this it follows that it is not possible to know what ideas and thoughts in the present are going to be retrospectively seen as important and become actualized in some way.

This section further broadens our view on the role of relevant events in understanding strategic change, as strategic decisions contain an immanent past of continuously playing with several imaginative ideas both individually and collectively. It is possible to retrospectively detect a past for a becoming idea without there really having been any initial prospective vision of the idea prior its explicit articulation and partial realization. Thus, even conscious managerial strategy-making does not always entail an explicit future goal to progress towards. The immanent past of strategic ideas consists of past thoughts, conversations, and other experienced events.

Finally, the analysis of strategic ideas under a constant state of becoming clarifies the relation between abstractions and events. In particular, the analysis shows how managers’ engagement in strategy-making is not merely polarized into the intentional rational planning of actions or practical engagement with daily events. Instead, the becoming ideas illustrate the multifaceted and creative nature of managerial thinking in strategic change with respect to their material-discursive engagements. The notion of strategic ideas also broadens the view of intentional strategy-making by showing that mulling over many possibilities and ideas is just as important as the rational planning of the realization of actions. However, in the next subsection I will focus on analyzing this other aspect, namely the rational strategy-making in change.

6.5.3 Strategy-making as rational building

In this subsection, I focus on the rational strategy-making that we engaged in during our meetings in order to shed light on the temporal nature of strategic
change. Rational strategy-making resonates with the building mode of engagement discussed from a theoretical standpoint in subsection 4.1.1.

**Uncertainty in rational strategy-making**

As already discussed in subsection 6.3.1, the practices of rational managerial building rely on organized continuities to cope with the temporal conditions of reality. Living with continuous change and with an unknown future made the rational building that we engaged in during our meetings a practice characterized by uncertainty. For example, in our first meeting the CEO admitted that even though they had in the past a very strict focus, the ambitious growth targets were shaking up that focus. Slightly slower growth at the beginning of the year compared to estimations had weakened their confidence in a constructed focus, thus leading managers to explore alternative business possibilities outside the main point of focus.

Based on the data, the impossibility to predict cause-effect relationships was one of the key dilemmas in rational strategy-making. Having the courage to try new, pre-planned actions seemed to require that the managers felt, at least to some extent, confident about the direct effects of the novel actions being taken. Therefore, they perceived intentionally replacing an old practice with a new practice, one that is based on an abstract, pre-built rational logic, as a highly uncertain act, as the comment below shows.

**CEO:** “But I recognize in myself that everything that I have sold lately has been with the old pricing model. Just to have the courage to take the new pricing into use, I admit that I really have not had it.” (10.8.2012)

Their uncertainty about introducing novel activities was also related to the inherent difficulty of trying to carry out complex new activities based on a pre-planned abstract logic.

**CEO:** “We are having our first iPad deliveries now. And it has not been easy [laughing]. Well, it is just a fact when we are doing something new ... that when we are finally about to roll it through, all the new things that we haven’t even considered come up.” (17.4.2012)

The above excerpt illustrates how a rationally created plan is never complete, but only a reduced, symbolic form of the actual practices. Thus, implementing
pre-planned activities brings with it surprises. This can be defined as the challenge of translating an abstract logic into a real practice.

*Coping with uncertainty by experimenting*

One way for managers to address the challenge of the ambiguous cause-effect relationships was to conduct small experiments. One formally strategic experiment took place in Scandinavia regarding two potential customer relations. The experiment was planned and later analyzed together with the company’s board members. The experiment was related to new contract terms, for example concerning pricing. These new contract terms were offered to two companies labeled as retailers, and the experimental contract period was one year. The managers wanted to see whether the new contract terms would make it easier to also sell the solution to the retailers’ suppliers, namely to manufacturers. The analyzed results of the experiment were clear: one of the experimental relations did not lead to the desired outcome, whereas the other led exactly to the desired outcome. In the successful case, after one year Visual had signed contracts with two new manufacturers, expanded its existing deals with the two manufacturers, and was negotiating with a third new manufacturer that had been using a competitor’s solutions. The other case did not lead to any positive business results.

SM: “I think the reason why ‘KL’ did not succeed in this ... The ‘MN’ [the successful experiment] is a big chain, having 60 stores, but ‘KL’ is small, only one or two stores.”

CEO: “Exactly. So ‘KL’ was a wrong choice from us. Too small and [offering] no leverage with the manufacturers.” (20.12.2012)

The experiment with the two customer relations generated clear events to analyze. However, the challenge in these experiments lies in the generalizations constructed from them. The rational outcome of the analysis is that the new contracting terms work with large, but not with small, retailers. However, categorizing customers into two types makes for extreme generalizations regarding Visual’s customer relations, especially if the generalizations are combined with retrospective constructions of cause-effect relationships based on only two existing relations.
The challenges in generalizing and categorizing

The problematic nature of generalizing about relations is not only related to the experiments. Instead, as already shown when describing the temporality paradox, it is related to rational building in general, which centers on creating a fixed way of performing practices. Accordingly, three often-repeated expressions that the managers used during our discussions were “this works,” “this does not work,” and “does this work?”

CEO: “We should be able to develop a model that works with both large and small companies.”

COO: “It works quite well in the Nordic countries, but it does not work any longer in Germany or in the U.S. The ten largest companies have billions of turnovers. They have completely different kinds of decision criteria.” (29.8.2011)

CEO: “In the U.S. we now have in our pipeline much larger firms compared to the cases we sell to in Europe. So, if we sold cases this size in Europe as well, it would already change our way of operating here.” (10.4.2013)

As the above quotes illustrates, the division into large and small companies is an important way of categorizing Visual’s customers. The challenge with such categorizations became evident when the managers noticed that the potential new customers the salespeople contacted abroad did not fit into the existing discursive category of “customers” and the related routinized logic of practice. Even the large companies can be very different from each other, as the quote below illustrates.

COO: “Even ‘OP’ is different, as they have direct operations in different countries globally. They have 400 sales points all over. So, whereas this ‘OP’ is multi-country, ‘QR’ is a local company.” (27.1.2012)

The challenge in having versatile customer relations is evident when trying to rationally create a fixed logic that is suitable for everyone, in other words, one that “works” for all customer and partner relations. From the temporal perspective, the fixed way of conducting practices resonates with the notion of organized continuities. Just as each customer relation is unique, and thus emerges and is regenerated via unique events, so too the fixed organized continuities that have “worked” in one relation will not necessarily “work” in another relation. By
looking at customer relations as events, we arrive again at the temporality paradox, in other words, at the challenge of trying to relate unique events to a fixed, temporally extensive logic. This time, however, the challenge I point out is related to the generalizations, such as customer categories, underlying the constructed fixed logics.

The challenge in having just one generic logic for dealing with customers was evident also to the managers, and they tried to construct a new process logic for sales practices. This logic was based on formulating three categories for potential customers instead of just one, as had been done previously. These categories were bulk customers, basic delivery, and special cases (later, the names were changed to volume business, modular and integrated, and industrial and specially tailored). For each category then, a different fixed logic of practices would apply during sales. Consequently, Visual would invoke three types of logic for intentionally generating customer relations compared to the previous one type of logic. The purpose was to avoid the risky, unprofitable deals that had occurred in the past due to treating non-typical customer relations as no different than other relations in terms of contract terms and pricing.

CEO: “So, what is Bulk for us? Well, yesterday’s case, where ‘JK’ ordered new visualized content for its solution. It was clearly routine work for us. Just [customer’s product] measures in and [then] into production, our production pushes it out, and that’s it. Nothing special. And what I would add to the basic delivery category is the case ‘LM,’ which we did during this past fall. So the visualized content resembled bulk, but there are altogether 50 pieces, so it is not something you just throw to our people in production and they would just do it. And then there are the special cases that cannot go past me or the ‘COO.’ So at this stage, our salespeople should recognize which category the case belongs to. And we create the criteria to categorize cases. Because today, without these categories, some really challenging case might be perceived as routine and then, around a week before delivery, we would suddenly realize that we cannot possibly do it this easily. If we had caught the case earlier, it would have received completely different treatment throughout the process.” (20.12.2012)

The intentional changes to organizational practices that aim at creating more systematic and structured practices among employees resulted from the managers’ resistance to the present state of affairs. In this way, the intentional
“improvements” are closely linked to present practices. It is thus not meaningful to treat the intentional reforms as future-oriented actions.

Categorizing the customers and reconstructing the formal sales process took place in conjunction with adopting a CRM (customer relationship management) solution. Therefore, the newly constructed logic of practice for sales is also based on the logic introduced via the CRM solution. In addition to continuing to categorize the sales cases into three types, the company also conceived of the different “sales phases” as a part of the “sales process.” The idea is that identifying the category of the case would evoke different practices. Hence, CRM acts as a knot attempting to relate the actual practices to their abstract rationalizations. Through this means, the CRM solution affects and changes both of them.

The previous example shows how managers tried to deal with the challenges of generalizing by redefining the practices of generalizing and, thus, the challenges of fixed practical logic by constructing a new fixed logic. Hence, rational strategy-making centers around redefining organized continuities, while at the same time these continuities remain in unavoidable paradoxical tension in relation to unique events.

**Constructed control over the organizational practices**

When the salespeople begin to divide their practical relations with identified potential buyers into abstract types and stages in the CRM solution, the abstract information added to the CRM concerning all existing relations is available for everyone all the time. Using the CRM solution therefore seems like an attempt to increase managers’ control of and ability to predict organizational practices as well as to maintain fixed practices all over the world. In previous sections, I provided an example from pricing in the U.S. that showed how managers have not even tried to control the ways in which employees work. Instead, they have allowed the people involved to make improvisations with respect to operations. However, as the company grew in terms of the number of employees, customers, partners, and geographical spread of operations, the managers found it challenging to allow such freedom of operations for the employees.

**CEO:** “It is a fact that the larger the organization, the tighter the focus must be. Now, 30 employees is a kind of limit. We have so many kinds of persons here now that we just have to have some rules for how certain things are
done, which we cannot depart from. And of course, since we have for so long been operating in a manner where everyone can freely work, brainstorm, and do things in their own way, I find it very difficult to figure out how to establish these policies.” (6.5.2013)

The above excerpt illustrates the difficulty in trying to handle a growing organization and find a balance in terms of just how much to try to control organizational practices through establishing fixed logics. Thus, it seems that the role of organized continuities was growing at Visual, even though the managers themselves were, in my opinion, able to avoid quite well being overly constrained by a habitual conduct of practices. Accordingly, when considering all the data that I have analyzed, it seems that the intentional actions stem more from direct engagement in events than from a detached, abstract building process. Thus, despite a certain level of uncertainty, the managers have nevertheless had the courage to also take advantage of surprising events and engage in novel practices without maintaining rational ex ante planning and control over the events. In this way, strategic change in terms of retrospectively perceivable novelty has emerged through the internal relation between rational planning and unowned processual dynamics within the multi-event business context.

CEO: “So, three new markets last year. For us. I had a bit deeper conversation about this with a few people and they wondered how a company this small ends up opening simultaneously Asian, Australian, and U.S. markets? And I think that it is just our way of not being afraid of anything, but just going for it.” (22.3.2013)

6.5.4 Past, present, and future in strategy-making

In this subsection, I further clarify the role of temporality, namely the past, present, and future in strategy-making. More specifically, I focus on the roles of the past and future in the present.

Role of the past in the present

In the earlier sections, I provided multiple examples of how the past is immanent in present events. In addition to this, the past also plays an explicit role in rational strategy-making.
CEO: “This is due to our history, that we have for so long, already for 15 years, been doing this. So, already about ten years before we started this company, we were doing this same thing. And from this history stems our firm understanding that we cannot tie our solution to visualization technology. So that when, not if but when, the old technology is replaced with new technology, we can replace it in our solution.” (10.4.2013)

The above excerpt shows how the relevant past in present strategy-making exceeds the official existence of Visual as a legal entity. The past experiences of the owner-managers had, already from the time before establishing Visual, affected how they have intentionally designed the technical architecture of the software solution. The key experience related to this experience has to do with suddenly being forced to change the visualization technology in the past, which they told us caused them a great deal of additional trouble.

Likewise, the people working for Visual have their own experiences and immanent past, which affect their actions. In an earlier section, I illustrated how the past of the Sales Manager in the U.S. was immanent in his sales activities in general and in his way of pricing the solution in particular. Here, I present another example of the immanent past of individual persons as having agency in strategic change.

CEO: “I don’t know how accidental this is, but our Singapore guy has his background in working for ‘ST,’ and there he has already been dealing with the companies similar to our ‘Australian partner’ and ‘Japanese partner.’ So basically, he is already inside, he has the contacts from his previous job.” (16.10.2012)

The above quote illustrates how the salesperson in Singapore had been utilizing his personal contacts formed in the past when selling Visual’s software solution in the present. This shows how agentic past events in strategic change actually can also be the past experiences of all individuals working for Visual. Consequently, it is not meaningful to refer to Visual’s past as any kind of whole, consistent past. Visual is not an entity experiencing events. The relevant past for the current activities at Visual is immanent in, for example, repeated practices, business relations, the software solution’s source code, and various individual’s activities.
Role of the future in the present

To elaborate on the role of the (constructed) future in managerial strategy-making, I describe my experiences from our two scenario-development meetings, namely the third and fourth meetings. In these two meetings, we constructed four future scenarios that, in my opinion, contained interesting and creative visions of what might happen in the future in their relevant business environment and portrayed relevant paths leading to possible strategic actions in the future. I personally felt that they were valid scenarios and that we as a group succeeded quite well in their construction. However, when we started to consider the implications of these scenarios for Visual’s business in more practical terms, namely by constructing possible business models for the future, the COO expressed that they actually had more relevant issues to solve in their present business.

COO: “But now we need to understand what are the key business issues supporting this [decision]. Because this is a pressing issue. After that, we might for sure have these long-term plans. But if we don’t get this basic business running, it will be pretty difficult to build these different paths... We are now jumping into mega-sized customer [relations] in the Asian and the U.S. market. And we are geographically scaling ourselves to deal with an enormous number of customers. And this means that we cannot possibly jump into the situation in the second or third scenario slide [points to PowerPoint slideshow], because we are now building a completely new business and we have to solve this first. We are talking now with ‘QR’ in the U.S. market with 15,000 sales points. Our current business model does not work in this case.”

CEO: “It is good that we have opened this up, but actually our problems are now right here.” (27.1.2012)

This sudden turn in our discussions is interesting from the point of view of temporality, especially for understanding the role of the constructed future in the present strategy-making. The managers were not comfortable with constructing the future as a separate state and then figuring out how to move towards the future vision. Instead, the focus of the managers’ intentions was on the present from which the future emerged. The difference has to do with the temporal orientation. Whereas the former orientation relates to moving towards an imagined future (i.e., with the present and future as separate), the latter relates to moving from the actual present into the future (i.e., with the present defining the conditions for the future). That the managers’ thinking resembles the latter orientation shows how
present circumstances are influential in terms of defining the scope of intentional strategic change actions for the future. Thus, the future is used as an extensive dimension of the present (recall organized continuities). Thus, a key notion here is that organized continuities stem from and are regenerated in the becoming present. Our discussions as a whole indicate that the managers’ focus has been predominantly on solving present challenges. Consequently, intentional change actions were realized more through managerial resistance to the present than through pursuing detached future goals.

Next, I will describe a more ambiguous example that at first might seem to illustrate purely future-oriented rational actions. In the fall of 2012, Visual’s management carried out many intentional development actions. They hired a new CTO and renewed their accounting practices, they began to use a new CRM solution, they modified their sales process (as elaborated upon earlier), they initiated content production outsourcing, and they implemented a cloud infrastructure for their solution.

CEO: “We have taken huge actions this fall! And I think that this is why I feel that I don’t have time to do everything that I should. We have changed our accounting company and renewed everything. And these other changes related to our infra, sales and production, I mean all of these aim to make us just about ready for what we have ahead of us in the next few years. And this has been a pain, to make everything ready, I mean huge preparations, but I just felt that this is the last moment to get these things in order. Of course, not everything is in order; you can never think all things through.” (20.12.2012)

Based on the above comment, these intentional actions seem like purely future-oriented actions. The managers prepare for what they estimate as being the future within the scope of the next couple of years. The future that the CEO is referring to in his comments is one of rapid global growth and an increase in the size of the sales cases, which supposedly will carry with it challenges for Visual. However, all the intentional changes made during the fall of 2012 had to do with solving challenges that we had already been discussing in our earlier meetings as current challenges. For example, challenges related to infrastructure, sales, and production had already been identified earlier and were thus not merely challenges assumed to emerge in the future as a result of continuing global growth and an increase in the size of its customers. Therefore, the intentional changes made in the three above-mentioned areas did not emerge merely as the managers’ rational response to purely hypothetical future challenges. Instead, the
constructed future challenges were firmly grounded in experiences from the near past and present circumstances. This further means that the intentional actions taken by the managers cannot be viewed as purely proactive. Consequently, the imagined future can be viewed as being inherently related to the anticipated continuation and escalation of processes already being experienced. The quote below further illustrates how, for example, how the sales activities are handled has already been perceived as a problem for some time.

CEO: “So last summer me and the ‘COO’ wondered that what an earth we going to do? It is easy when the ‘SM’ is physically next to us and we can discuss with him every day what’s going on in sales. But global sales, they are just so much more difficult to handle.” (16.10.2012)

The above quote shows how using the CRM and creating a new sales process are not purely anticipatory actions; rather, they solve already recognized problems in the present. Consequently, even in rational actions the constructed future emerges out of present circumstances.

The above-described actions look like carefully planned, rational, strategic moves. However, at the end of our meeting in December 2012, the CEO commented on these actions in more detail:

CEO: “At least for me, this structured that; after opening this case to you, I understand much better what has happened this fall [laughing]. [...] Retrospectively, it looks like this has been really consistent, but that’s not true really.” (20.12.2012)

When discussing past actions with us in one of the meetings, the strategic meaning of the actions became clearer. Our meeting thus created retrospective consistency for the actions, which the CEO admitted was not originally present when the actions were being taken. Consequently, the ostensible rationality and consistency of the activities increased retrospectively. This retrospectively clarified strategic meaning of the actions extends also temporally into the imagined future.

In this section, I have examined strategic change from the standpoint of rational managerial building. Through this I have clarified the relation between human abstractions and events in strategic change. These findings, as well as the findings presented in earlier sections, will be summarized and discussed further in chapter 7. However, before that I will present a short epilogue for Visual’s story based on a meeting with the Sales Manager in January 2016. With this epilogue, I
want to further show how strategic change cannot be depicted as a linear, cumulative process of managerial planning and implementation.

6.6 Epilogue to Visual's story

I met the Sales Manager over coffee at the beginning of 2016 to discuss yet again what was going on in the company. Despite the large effort put into the U.S. market, which had generated good initial sales results already during our meetings, in 2016 the Sales Manager told me that the market had been much quieter of late. Furthermore, the Singapore sales office had been closed and the partnership with the large Australian company had ended due to internal restructuring of the Australian partner company, which terminated development of the new concept. Visual had hired a new Sales Manager in Germany and he had already brought about some new contracts.

The positive news was that the Japanese market was now more active. They had a large new partner and many ongoing sales cases. They had initiated special pricing in Japan that scaled up to the big companies as well. The good situation in Japan in 2016 is worth considering in relation to how the sales activities in Japan had been started through the actions of one of the company’s former employees. The situation in Japan in 2016 could clearly not be described as an outcome of a linear chain of controlled, intentional strategic actions. However, what was interesting for me to hear during our meeting was that, actually, the Finnish market had produced the most considerable growth in 2015. This news is especially interesting when keeping in mind that when we began our meetings in 2011, one of the reasons to internationalize was that the Finnish market did not enable sufficient growth anymore.

Another interesting piece of news was that considerable growth had taken place outside the furniture industry, which had been defined as the target industry in our early meetings. Some of the new application areas for the software solution were quite surprising to me. The new sales deals that were not within the furniture industry had emerged, to some extent, through intentional sales activities, but most importantly through surprise contacts from companies looking for a solution just like the one Visual was offering. Now, Visual was serving these new types of customers also outside of Finland.

In conclusion, many notable, perceptible changes had clearly happened between 2011 and 2016. In particular, I see a notable difference between the managers’ intentions at the beginning of 2011 and what actually had happened,
even though the strategic aims to internationalize and grow had been realized. The comparison resonate with the study findings, according to which the managers’ strategic intentions are under a constant state of becoming based on events emerging in time.
7 Findings and discussion

In this chapter, I first summarize the main findings of the study. After that, I discuss these findings in relation to current theoretical understandings of strategic change processes.

7.1 Research findings

The empirical analysis was based on an in-time view of temporality that gives agency to the passing of time. According to this view, agency can be found in relational events, and therefore, individuals exert agency through participating in the becoming of events. Based on this in-time analysis of strategic change, this study posits four key findings. These findings are summarized in the following table.

Table 4. Key findings of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Manifestations of agentic time</td>
<td>Five manifestations identified: 1) unforeseen events, 2) the becoming meaning of events, 3) the immediacy and irreversibility of an emerging situation, 4) the immanent past in the present, and 5) the conditionality of time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Temporality paradox</td>
<td>The paradox highlights the relation between constructed (i.e. objective and subjective time) and lived temporality (i.e. agentic time) in strategic change. It problematizes the acts of fixing activities for the future while living in the fluxing, ongoing present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Multi-event nature of strategic change</td>
<td>Strategic change emerges in time through multiple mundane events in complex, fluxing relation with each other. In this way, their meaning and consequences are never set and known. In addition, events emerge in relation to customers, partners, and other actors (human and nonhuman).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Elaboration of managerial strategy-making in change</td>
<td>The key finding is that managerial intentionality is under a continuous state of becoming from within unowned relational events. Managerial strategy-making in change can be described as a temporal, complex, uncontrollable, and often conflicting relation between rational abstractions and actual events. In addition to the rational planning of actions, it involves creatively playing with novel ideas.</td>
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The first finding relates to an analysis of how the agency of time manifests itself in strategic change. Thus, the focus of analysis leading to this finding was the relational events, which were approached through the in-time lens. In this study, I identified five interconnected, perceptible manifestations, namely (1) unforeseen events, (2) the becoming meaning of events, (3) the immediacy and irreversibility of an emerging situation, (4) the immanent past in the present, and (5) the conditionality of time. These manifestations clarify the temporal, fluid nature of the strategic change processes emerging in the continuing present.

The second finding is the identified temporality paradox, which describes the challenges related to organizing activities over time in the continuing present. Thus, the focus of analysis leading to this finding was on the relation between the experienced events and managerial strategy-making, which was explicitly looked at from the perspective of temporality. The temporality paradox emerges as activities are organized into temporal continuities that rely on a linear, over-time conceptualization of time. Being committed to these organized continuities then makes it challenging to engage with continuously emerging novel events. Thus, the paradox is that managerial coping with temporal reality occurs through the linear sequencing of events over time, but at the same time this activity makes it more difficult to cope with a novelty emerging in time. Thus, although both the over-time and in-time conceptualizations of temporality are individually coherent, their juxtaposition (Smith & Lewis 2011) reveals an inherent contradiction. Since the construction of organized continuities is necessary in order to accomplish any complex acts, the temporality paradox is an unavoidable characteristic of strategic change. These first two findings explicitly concerning the temporal nature of organizational activities form the ground for the latter two findings, which further elaborate upon strategic change as a temporal phenomenon.

The third finding concerns the multi-event nature of strategic change processes. The focus of analysis leading into this finding was on elaborating the nature of strategic change events. By focusing on events in the analysis, I was able to take a broader view of temporality that extended beyond the notions of past and future in the present. Based on the data analysis, the strategic change process at Visual was characterized by unexpected turns as well as tangled events, where seemingly separate streams of events were interrelated, where mundane details were important, and where no complete linear story could be found. Thus, strategic change did not emerge in time as a single chain of events, but could rather be abstracted as multiple simultaneous patterns of events with an unowned relation to one another. Fig. 6 below illustrates my perception of strategic change
as a multi-event process (please note that due to the challenges of presenting movement via stable pictures, the picture presents an over-time, not an in-time viewpoint).

Fig. 6. Fluxing, multi-event nature of the strategic change process.

The picture above illustrates the complex, multi-event nature of the strategic change process at an abstract level. A great deal is going on in the becoming present through multiple events emerging around the world. In other words, the strategic change process can be described as a rhizome of becoming, relational events that despite creating perceptible patterns also become entangled with each other in unexpected ways. In this process, seemingly unimportant events, such as one employee moving to Japan, can also be relevant since, through unowned causality, their effect emerges in time. Thus, influential events cannot be necessarily recognized when they happen, as their full agency actualizes only in relation to later events. I also found out that the significance of unexpected events is not only limited to a couple of really powerful events; mundane, seemingly insignificant practices are also continuously subject to unexpected events. Furthermore, the analysis of customer relations enabled me to show how events that emerge through intra-actions between several human and non-human agencies cannot be predicted or controlled by managers, only influenced. Finally, the software solution also intra-acted with strategic change events especially by participating in the emergence and regeneration of customer relations. This
finding highlights the significance of non-human participation in strategic change processes and also clarifies the complex nature of intra-actions in events.

The fourth finding relates to an explicit elaboration of managerial strategy-making in change, in particular strategy-making as a lived, situated experience. The findings of the study show that in strategic change, managerial intentions are entangled in the unowned becoming of relational events. In this way, they are fluid in nature. Moreover, intentional acts are realized from within unowned processes, and therefore this realization is also non-linear. In other words, managerial agency is enacted from within unowned, agentic events. This blurs the difference between intended and unintended actions, and instead shows their inherent relation. In addition, the findings of the study also clarify the internal, material-discursive relation between rational abstractions and concrete events. For example, in the analysis I showed how the strategic construction of “customers” and “noncustomers” was influenced by unexpected events and, thus, could be described as becoming via material-discursive intra-actions.

As a part of the analysis of managerial building, I also analyzed how strategic ideas come about in time. I particularly found that strategic thinking does not necessarily entail any direct intent to take action. The analysis further showed that actual events also have agency in relation to the becoming of abstract ideas. Moreover, my analysis of the two ideas indicates that realizing strategic ideas requires an incentive from actual events as well as an ability to articulate the idea fully in practical terms. The perceived attractiveness of ideas change constantly in time in conjunction with the ideas themselves continuously being transformed. The practical articulation of the idea means having an ability to construct a logic for practices related to the idea as well as identify what needs to be done in the present in order to realize the idea. Neither of the two strategic ideas I analyzed was ever fully realized (situation in January 2016). When also considering all of the data as a whole, this indicates that novel actions in strategic change stem more from a response to actual events that as an outcome of managerial planning.

In general, I found that managerial strategy-making in change was not based on creating and implementing a constructed plan from a detached standpoint, but instead was closely tied to coping with the continuous emergence of novel challenges related to everyday practices. Consequently, even rational strategy-making is inherently immanent in the flux of organizational events rather than being detached from them. Due to the fluidity of the lived organizational reality, rational strategy-making was characterized by uncertainty about what to do and challenges related to vague cause-effect relationships. This uncertainty was dealt
with, for example, by experimenting. In addition, the uncertain nature of real-time strategy-making was complemented by a retrospectively produced rationality for past actions, which created ostensible consistency for strategic change. The data analysis also shows that the uniqueness of events, for example in the regeneration of customer relations, make the generalizations utilized in the building mode of strategy-making problematic. For example, having a similarly constructed logic for handling all customer relations turned out to be problematic when the salespeople approached large international organizations. Thus, unique customer relations could not be handled in a standardized way.

Another finding concerning rational strategy-making was that the managers’ thoughts, even concerning potential future actions, were tied to present circumstances. This finding suggests that strategy-making is not merely a future-oriented activity. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that intentional actions can be explained in terms of resistance towards the present situation, not so much in terms of a systematic realization of future goals. Even the constructed future goals are based on challenges in the present, which makes it reasonable to treat the constructed future as being inextricably linked with the continuously becoming present. Consequently, the role of the constructed future in the building mode of strategy-making can be viewed as a projected pattern of becoming in the fluid present. In sum, managerial strategy-making in change can be described as a temporal, complex, uncontrollable, and often conflicting relation between rational abstractions and actual events.

Finally, the findings of this study should be understood in light of the data that I have analyzed. Having data from discussions with managers that are closely involved in practical work has highlighted the entangled nature of abstract strategy-making and everyday practices. The same issue might have also increased the amount of discussion about specific customer relations in managerial strategy-making. The findings of this study clearly do not resonate with the traditional view of strategic change, which consider it to be the result of detached conceptual planning and the subsequent implementation of strategic change actions. More specifically, the causal relationship between planning and implementing strategic change was not perceptible in my data. The managers in my study clearly do not resemble the characteristic professional “top-down” strategists that build a strategic plan for the future. Instead, the actions of the top management at Visual, a small company that they themselves own, clearly have a strong practical orientation and grounding in the present. Consequently, the size of the company and the nature of the business should be taken into account when
considering the findings of this study. In the next section, I discuss these key findings in relation to theoretical issues.

### 7.2 Discussion of the findings

In this section, I discuss the findings of the study especially in relation to four interrelated topics relevant for this research, namely temporality, events, managerial strategy-making, and finally, the emergence of strategic change per se.

First, the findings of the study add to an understanding of *temporality* in organizational processes in general and in strategic change in particular. I highlight that the in-time approach adopted here for analyzing strategic change has been highly influential with respect to the findings of this study. In particular, Hernes’s (2014) suggestion to view the passing of time as agentic has led me to analyze how this type of agency manifests itself in strategic change. Consequently, I argue that this empirical study contributes to a better understanding of the notion of agentic events in the ongoing present.

In addition to the above-mentioned manifestations of agentic time, the temporality paradox that I identified will also provide scholars with a new understanding of the complex temporal dynamics of strategic change processes. In particular, the temporality paradox clarifies the relation between constructed and lived temporality during strategic change. I argue that the temporality paradox particularly complements the empirical findings presented by Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013) as well as Vesa and Franck (2013) concerning the role of the subjective construction of the past, present, and future in strategy-making. This study has especially shown how the constructed over-time temporality is in a paradoxical relation with the experienced in-time temporality.

My findings resonate with Kaplan and Orlikowski’s (2013) and Vesa and Franck’s (2013) notion that during strategy-making, managers seek temporal coherence for the constructed past, present and future. However, in contrast to these studies, I discovered that in the company that I examined, managerial strategy-making was less oriented towards future goals and instead inherently bound to the present situation. Even future constructions were based on the present situation. Thus, the intentional managerial actions emanated from the present rather than being oriented towards the future (comp. Garud & Van de Ven 2002). Elaborating on how intentional strategy-making is bound up with emerging present situation provides us with a novel view on the role of the future in strategy-making (comp. Hendry & Seidl 2003, Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013).
This view resonates also with Hussenot & Missonier’s (2016) recent findings based on their analysis of project meetings, according to which human agents construct their view of the future from the point of view of the particular present situation.

The temporality paradox also extends Reinecke & Ansari’s (2015) empirical findings regarding the contradictory temporal orientations that exist within organizations. Their study shows the contradiction between various constructed temporalities, whereas the temporality paradox identified in this study shows the contradiction between a constructed temporality and lived temporality. Although Reinecke and Ansari draw on the notion of process time (Chia 2002), they still study temporality in terms of varying human constructions that are used in organizing activities. Thus, by giving primacy to the agency of relational events, the findings presented in this study deviate from Reinecke and Ansari’s notion of agentic time, which they use to illustrate how human agency can be based on various temporal orientations. Thus, this study clarifies the ways in which time also works on us (Hernes 2014a).

Second, the findings presented in this study also add to our understanding of the nature and role of events in strategic change. In particular, the study shows how multiple unowned events continuously define the dynamics of strategic change. Through this finding, the study especially adds to Hussenot & Missonier’s (2016) study of the shifting meaning of events in the fluidity of the present. In particular, through my analysis I was able to show how the unowned emergence of a rhizome of events contributes to a becoming meaning of the past, the present, and the future. This highlights that a change in the meaning of events does not emerge from a single cause.

The findings presented in the study also show that the becoming and perishing of customer relations as well as other business relations form central events in strategic change. Therefore, these relations clearly need more attention within the strategy literature. The apparent lack of acknowledgement of the importance of customer relations and other business relations within strategy research is also visible in the literature review provided in this dissertation. Consequently, recognizing the importance of customer relations in strategic change can be considered one of the contributions of this study. I found the importance of customer relations for strategy mentioned in a study on industrial networks by Baraldi, Brennan, Harrison, Tunisini, and Zolkiewski (2007), who also wondered about the lack of attention given to practices related to customer relations in the studies on strategy. Certain forms of intra-organizational
networking, such as outsourcing and alliances, have been discussed in the resource-based view of the firm and dynamic-capabilities approaches as rational strategic moves (Clegg, Josserand, Mehra & Pitsis 2016). However, this study has advanced our understanding of relations as holding also agency over the strategists.

Third, the findings presented in this study add to our understanding of managerial strategy-making (i.e. the realm of human agency). In this research project, I have theoretically drawn on Chia and Holt’s (2006, 2009) view of strategy-making as everyday practical coping, as well as their twofold conceptualization of strategy emergence through building and dwelling modes of human engagement. The findings presented in the study are in full accordance with Chia and Holt’s view (2009, 159), which is to say that managerial strategy-making is not necessarily characterized by a detached, “birds-eye view” of planning and means for implementing the plans. Instead, even the intentional building of strategy can be viewed as a continuous activity close to everyday practices. This resonates with Chia’s (2014) suggestion that human engagement in the world emerges from within unowned change processes (see also MacKay & Chia 2013). I add to this view of strategy-making as building and dwelling through my findings that the even the detached building mode is inherently relational to both actual events and the logic of everyday practices. Accordingly, I argue that the supposed detachment of the building mode from everyday occurrences only refers to the difference between abstract generalizations and real experience, not to any particular individual’s ability to become consciously detached from his/her real experiences. Therefore, it is not necessary to make a clear distinction between them or to interpret the notion of building as a practice of representation completely detached from the lived present. In other words, rather than viewing strategy-making in change as an interplay between building and dwelling modes of activity, it can be viewed in terms of a close temporal relation between them. This relation emerges through the entanglement of abstractions and real experiences in strategic change.

The close relation between building and dwelling becomes especially evident when highlighting the indivisibility of temporal events. Thus, abstract building and everyday practices do not occur one after the other, where the one ends when the other begins, as pointed out also by Hernes and Irgens (2015). The boundary between building and dwelling becomes blurred when approaching thinking and acting as relational. I also illustrated this relation through the examples of becoming strategic ideas in my empirical analysis. These findings concerning the
internal relation between real events and discursive work resonate with Barad’s (2007) view of phenomena as material-discursive. In addition, they are in line with Maguire and Hardy’s (2013) study of chemical risk assessment, where they showed how the meaning of risky and safe are in a constant state of becoming through situated practices and discursive work. Finally, the empirical findings of this study also resonate with Chia and Holt’s argument regarding the importance of the seemingly small details of strategic situations for the emergence of strategy.

By problematizing the way in which intentions and emergence are viewed in opposition to one another (e.g., Mintzberg & Waters 1985), the findings presented in this study are also relevant for discussions of strategy emergence within strategy process research. Whereas the seminal paper by Mintzberg and Waters (1985) rightly questions the way a realized strategy (i.e., a retrospective pattern) is depicted as an outcome of managerial planning and the subsequent implementation of the plan, they nevertheless present intended and emergent strategies as opposite ends of a continuum. Consequently, by suggesting that a realized strategy could be placed in a certain position along the continuum between intended and emergent strategy, the strategic pattern is treated as static. This view treats intentionality as an enduring, ex ante force in relation to the events involved in strategy realization. However, by examining strategic change as an in-time process, I have challenged this view of intentionality by showing the shifting nature of intentionality. Thus, intentionality both affects and is affected by emerging events and is under a process of continuously becoming through this internal, mutually constitutive relation. Accordingly, I argue that by re-examining the notion of intention, this study adds to the Mintzbergian view of strategy emergence.

Fourth, the findings of this study add to an understanding of strategic change processes, both through the contributions already described above and in the following ways. As emphasized in the previous section, my study deviates from describing strategic change processes as chronological chains of events (e.g., Melin 1992; Van de Ven 1992), and instead highlights the multiplicity of simultaneous and entangled events that generate strategic change. By showing the multi-event, relational nature of strategic change processes, this study resonates with and elaborates on Chia’s (1999, 2014) rhizomic view of organizational becoming. The multi-event nature of strategic change processes has not yet been adequately addressed in the current literature, although Dawson (2014b) has described change as a process involving multiple stories rather than a
single story, and MacKay and Chia (2013) have linked key events to process complexes in their empirical analysis.

In particular, the findings of this study add to MacKay and Chia’s (2013) unowned view of strategic change, according to which the dynamics of change emerge through a series of decisions, chance events, and unintended consequences. My findings especially elaborate on the relation between managerial intentions and chance events as a part of mundane, everyday practical coping by showing how managerial decisions and intentions emerge in time from within relational events. Thus, as already emphasized in the previous paragraph, intentions should be seen as a fluid process. Accordingly, this study shows how events also have agency in relation to managerial intentions and decisions beyond the most powerful black swan events, which adds to MacKay and Chia’s findings concerning the role of unforeseen events in strategic change. In other words, this study highlights that mundane, seemingly insignificant events can also turn out to be crucial for strategic change due to the unowned causality of events. Thus, this study highlights that the events influencing strategic change cannot necessarily be noticed as they happen, which underscores the shifting meaning of events in the managers’ lived present.

Finally, by elaborating on the role of the software solution in strategic change in general and in the regeneration of customer relations in particular, this study shows how non-human actors also intra-act in strategic change. This finding extends our understanding of the socio-material nature of strategic change compared to studies that have focused on material arrangements solely within the realm of human strategizing (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Kaplan 2015, Kaplan 2011). In particular, the findings presented in this study highlight that non-human participation should not be treated as a minor issue subordinate to human practices.
8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I present the main conclusions of the study. After that, the chapter discusses the theoretical contributions of the study as well as the methodological and practical implications of the study. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

8.1 Conclusions of the study

The aim of this study has been to contribute to our understanding of strategic change processes. More specifically, the research has addressed the need to better understand the temporal nature of strategic change. Accordingly, the research question of the study has been as follows: *How does strategic change emerge in time?*

For its philosophical grounding, the research has drawn on the writings of process-oriented philosophers (e.g., Bergson 1910, Whitehead 1929). Consequently, the theoretical grounding is based on, from a philosophical standpoint, the process-oriented stream of organization studies (e.g., Helin *et al.* 2014; Hernes 2014a; Tsoukas & Chia 2002). Within this stream of research, the study has particularly focused on the writings addressing strategy (e.g., Chia & Holt 2006, MacKay & Chia 2013), which can also be viewed as the seminal works within the emerging field of post-processual strategy research. In addition, by highlighting temporality as a key issue for understanding strategic change processes, this dissertation has elaborated upon different conceptualizations of time and drawn upon studies contributing to our understanding of organizational processes and strategy-making as temporal processes (e.g., Hernes *et al.* 2013, Hernes 2014a, Kaplan & Orlikowski 2013, Vesa & Franck 2013). Consequently, the contribution of this study to our understanding of strategic change is especially linked to emerging theoretical discussions concerning the temporality of the organizational phenomena (Langley *et al.* 2013).

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that strategic change emerges through a rhizome of relational, agentic events in which human and non-human enactments of agency are embedded. From the perspective of temporality, human strategy-making in change is paradoxical in nature since it involves two co-existing, yet at times conflicting temporalities, namely the experienced becoming “in time” and the constructed “over time.” In addition, the findings suggest that managerial intentions are under a constant state of becoming with respect to
8.2 Theoretical implications

Through the findings, this study adds to the emerging field of post-processual strategy research, which has promoted an unowned view of strategic change processes (e.g., MacKay & Chia 2013, Chia 2014), and to strategy process and practice research more generally (e.g., Mintzberg & Waters 1985, Vaara & Whittington 2012). In addition, the findings are also relevant for process organization studies, which have highlighted the key role of temporality in an understanding of processes (e.g., Helin et al. 2014, Langley & Tsoukas 2017). In particular, this study contributes to an event-based view (Hernes 2014a, Hussenot & Missonier 2016) of strategic change processes. The findings presented in this study suggest the following interrelated theoretical implications with respect to the above-mentioned streams of research.

First, by defining the manifestations of agentic time and identifying the temporality paradox, this study enables us to better understand the temporal dynamics of strategic change. In particular, the findings of this study extend the meaning of temporality beyond the ways in which human actors interpret the past and the future or utilize linear time in their strategic planning and organizing practices. Thus, I show empirically how events have agency in relation to human agents, and how this agency creates conflicts for human actors precisely because the actors are engaged simultaneously in both the “in-time” and “over-time” temporalities. Consequently, I highlight that in process studies time should not be treated as a mere linear background to human practices or as an aspect of sensemaking in the form of temporal elements, although I agree that they are relevant viewpoints with respect to temporality. Instead, I argue that using the notion of agentic time enables us to examine processes in a way that avoids reducing processuality to outcomes generated solely by human agents. In particular, I argue that the findings of this study, especially the manifestations of
agentic time, enable us to better understand the relationally constituted nature of
temporal events and human agency. Based on the findings, I further argue that the
agentic role of events in creating the human experience of temporality is a key
issue that should be considered even in studies focusing explicitly on human
practices within processes. In addition, since the findings of the study question the
prevailing view of strategy-making in change as an intentional, future-oriented
planning and decision-making activity, I argue that the agency of past events in
present situations involving strategy-making should also be acknowledged when
theorizing on intentional strategy-making that explicitly focuses on the imagined
future.

The second finding with theoretical importance is related to the multi-event
nature of the processes. Since novel strategic change events emerge through
unowned processes, it is not possible to determine where, when, and how the
pivotal events affecting strategic change, which perceptibly introduce a sense of
novelty to practices, will emerge. This makes it unnecessary or even impossible to
draw a boundary between an organization and its environment (i.e., making a
division between internal and external changes) when theorizing about and
analyzing strategic change. Broadening the view of strategic change events also
highlights the centrality of customer and partner relations for strategic change,
which has not yet received enough attention in theorizations about strategic
change. Furthermore, due to the unowned causality and relational becoming of
events in time, the effects of any single event are vague and fluid. This has
implications for how any abstracted effect or consequence should be viewed; as
consequences engender further consequences, events do not have an enduring
meaning as such. Therefore, I highlight that identifying the effects or
consequences of actions can, at most, be a temporary analytical act situated within
a particular moment and within a particular viewpoint. Similarly, any perceptible
effect should not be reduced to a single cause. This should be acknowledged
when considering the theoretical perspectives that make causal connections or
that rely on the concept of consequence in their analysis.

The third theoretical implication based on the findings of this study is that it
is not feasible to make a clear analytical distinction between intended and
emergent strategy because intentionality becomes in time from within the
unowned becoming of events. This further highlights the situated nature of
rational strategy-making in change as opposed to it being a detached, temporally
located discursive activity. Furthermore, the impossibility of clearly
distinguishing the managerial intentions from the fluidity of events makes it
problematic to theorize about strategic change merely by focusing on the unfolding of intentional managerial change actions. In addition, the findings presented in this study suggest that intentionality should not be treated as ex ante with respect to strategic change events. Consequently, highlighting the fluid nature of intentionality shifts the focus from defining the degree of intentionality and/or the emergence of realized strategies (e.g., Mintzberg & Waters 1985) to understanding the way intentionality affects and is affected by the unowned (MacKay & Chia 2013) strategic change events. This adds to our understanding of how events and human agency can be viewed as mutually constitutive. Thus, this study sheds light on the inherent relationship between abstract thinking and actual events, in other words, it shows how the distanced building mode of strategy-making is carried out from within everyday practical coping (i.e., dwelling mode of strategy) (Chia & Holt 2006).

Finally, the findings of the study suggest a close connection between Barad’s (2007) performative view of agency as material-discursive intra-actions and the Hernes’s (2014a) processual view of temporal agency as emerging through relational events. Consequently, I suggest that the temporal approach to agency could complement the performative views of strategy-making practices by elaborating on their processual nature.

8.3 Methodological implications

The key implications of the participatory research setting adopted in this study are considered in this section. Overall, this research contributes to finding solutions for the methodological challenges of doing process-relational research (e.g., Langley et al. 2013). The real-time, participatory research setting has provided me with good access to examine managerial thinking and acting in relation to strategic change processes in general and to events in particular. It enabled me to perceive uncertainty and uncontrollability that managers are experiencing as a result of strategic change and to examine how the new events relate to managerial intentions. Moreover, the research setting enabled me to analyze managers’ real-time temporal orientation with respect to strategic change. The clear challenges for participating in strategy-making were related to the uncontrollability of the unfolding research as well as the need to create genuine discussions where managers would be willing to share their thoughts openly.

This study can in particular be considered an example of active participation with respect to the examined phenomena. The researcher’s role in this type of
research project can be described as falling midway between observing and influencing the phenomena under study. While maintaining an open agenda for action, the focus has been on conducting a holistic examination of actions and events without attempting to produce any particular action or outcome in a controlled manner. Consequently, this kind of relatively unique research setting enabled me to find a middle ground between observational ethnographic research and interventionist action research.

Another methodological implication of this study is related to the adoption of an agentic view of time. This choice has further led me to focus on events when conducting data analysis. Based on the experiences from this research project, I argue that adopting an agentic view of time enables researchers to adopt a novel approach for analyzing organizational activities, for example routines, repetitions, experimentations, intentional development processes, and creative practices in time. In particular, it provides scholars with the means for restoring the past into its own present, and in this way, shed light on the complex, fluid nature of strategic change (see Tsoukas 2016). Moreover, agentic time provides scholars with a way to incorporate the temporal dimension of agency into an analysis of strategic change, and subsequently, to examine the constraints and conditions that time creates for human agency. In particular, I argue that by analyzing relational events as agentic in strategic change, researchers will first be able to depart from individualistic assumptions regarding strategy-making (Chia & Holt 2009), and second, be able to elaborate on the temporal dynamics of strategic change processes (Hernes et al. 2013). Consequently, the focus of attention in strategic change should be on unowned relations instead of humans as subjects. From this standpoint, the empirical analysis part of this study contributes new ways for analyzing processual data.

However, the study also has its limitations, which are discussed in section 8.5. In the next section, I discuss the practical implication of the findings.

8.4 Practical implications

The performative view of knowledge and theory highlights the centrality of the performative effects of the research within its evaluation. Therefore, this study should be evaluated not only in terms of the level of correctness or incorrectness in the way strategic change processes have been described, but also through the performative effects that the findings potentially can have in practice (Ezzamel & Willmot 2008). Therefore, the managerial implications of the study, which form a
potentiality for performative effects, are a central outcome of this research. These effects will be elaborated on in this section.

The findings presented in the study give reason to reconsider the role of managers in strategic change from the practical viewpoint. The uncontrollable nature of strategic change events means that managers’ actions in the process are both enabled and constrained by the in-time becoming of events. Consequently, constant surprises are something to be expected in strategic change, as the causal link between managerial acts and the events stemming from these acts is not known in advance. This notion further highlights the imaginative nature of the constructed future as well as that uncertainty is a natural characteristic of managerial decision-making. Consequently, the findings of this study suggest that strategy-making should be grounded in an awareness that it is impossible to predict or control the future in the present. Accordingly, I suggest that the focus of intentional strategy-making should have do with being prepared to deal with unforeseen events and being sensitive to the meaning of mundane present events. In other words, intentional strategy-making should be seen as continuous, situated work that acknowledges a constant potentiality for surprises and the multi-event nature of change.

The temporality paradox identified in this study addresses the difficulty in operationalizing complex actions in a continuously changing situation. Although the paradox is unresolvable characteristic of strategy-making, dealing with it calls for agility and balancing between achieving continuity and being able to take advantage of novel situations. An awareness of the temporality paradox might help managers better evaluate the possible implications of committing themselves to specific organized continuities.

Finally, the active role of the software solution in strategic change is a finding that demands further consideration by managers. Perceiving the solution as a participant in the emergence of strategic change events will cause managers to pay closer attention to how the solution intra-acts with practices and events. This approach to the software solution also highlights the limited knowledge possessed by management regarding the events taking place. Moreover, the centrality of the customer and partner relations for strategic change also means that all of the people involved in regenerating the relations are potential strategic change agents. The implication of this finding is that strategic change is not something that takes place in a meeting room with the top management in full control of the situation. Likewise, strategic change should not be viewed as a company’s internal process, which is linked to the external world only when considered necessary for the
rational strategy-making. Consequently, since influential events cannot necessarily be noticed as they happen, the ways for individuals to deal with such mundane, seemingly insignificant events and their relations may well be crucial for strategic change.

8.5 Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

All processual research methods involve tradeoffs and limitations (Bizzi & Langley 2012). The limitations of the study are discussed in this section. The section concludes by making suggestions for future research.

Despite its advantages, the method for generating the data used in this study has also its limitations. The first limitation is that the data is discontinuous, in other words, it was generated through meetings that took place on average every 1–2 months. Therefore, I do not have real-time data from all strategic change events, as it would have required everyday participation in the organizational work of the company. This limits to some extent the in-time analysis of everyday events. However, as Hernes (2014a) emphasizes, organizational events gain their significance through being mirrored in other events. This means that the agency of events that occurred in between our meetings manifested themselves also in our discussions. In this way, the frequent discussions also provided me with valuable data for the in-time analysis. In addition, through the chosen method of data generation I was able to follow strategic change processes during the course of two years, which would not have been possible through continuous fieldwork when considering the time limitations related to the doctoral research process. Also, I was allowed to record all of the discussions, which makes the analysis more accurate in terms of the exact words used by the managers as opposed to only making notes from conversations while being in the field. Nevertheless, I strongly emphasize that ethnographic studies focusing on everyday happenings within an organization would complement well the findings of this study.

The second limitation is related to the nature of the meetings I participated in, as they were specifically organized for research collaboration. In other words, the meetings were not part of the managers’ usual practices. Furthermore, I acknowledge the limitations related to the active involvement of us two researchers in the meetings. These issues should be taken into consideration when comparing the findings of this study with other studies that have particularly focused on formal strategy-making meetings that take place naturally within organizations.
The third limitation of the study is related to the content and focus of the research, which always excludes some important issues. These exclusions can be used to encourage further research on the aspects of strategy-making not addressed in this study. One issue to be considered is the focus of the study on managerial strategy-making, which inevitably excludes non-managerial viewpoints on strategic change. This has also limited the analysis of practical dwelling in this study and allowed me to examine dwelling only through its visible effects in the managers’ talks. This is a clear limitation of the empirical results presented in this study. However, since the managers were also involved in practical work, the difference between managers and non-managers in the examined company is not as significant as in larger companies where the top management is not actively involved in mundane daily practices. Nevertheless, further research focusing on non-managerial viewpoints in strategic change could complement the findings of this study quite nicely.

Also, the event-based analysis conducted in this study had its challenges. The process-relational view of events highlights the indivisibility of certain events from other events (e.g., Whitehead 1929), which means that identifying and naming particular events in order to analyze strategic change always compromises the said indivisibility and fluxing nature of past events. However, despite focusing on particular strategic change events in my analysis, I have tried to be explicit about their relational nature.

I also acknowledge the limitations related to my interpretation of the findings, which stem from the nature of the examined organization. In addition, I hope that the findings of this study will not be interpreted in such a way that this study is seen as undermining human agency in general or managerial agency in particular. Thus, I am aware of the risks of misinterpretation that might emerge from the particular emphasis that I have given to the notion of agentic events.

With respect to future research, I encourage studies that address the role of power in the temporal strategic change process. This is clearly an issue that needs to be further studied to better understand the dynamics of strategic change. Likewise, the roles of customer relations and non-human agency in strategic change processes are topics that would benefit from further examination.

Finally, I suggest that this “in-time” analysis could be treated as complementing more conventional approaches to studying processes. I hope that this dissertation has provided inspiration to approach processuality from a slightly different viewpoint and has perhaps evoked interest in challenging one’s often taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin our thoughts and actions. The
A process-relational approach has definitely led me to challenge my own thinking, and this process definitely will continue in the future in an unowned way.
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