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Eternal today – The temporality paradox in strategy-making

Abstract

In this chapter we focus on temporality in managerial strategy-making. In particular, we adopt an 'in-time' view to examine strategy-making as the fluidity of the present experience. We draw on a longitudinal, real-time study in a small Finnish software company. On the basis of our analysis, we found five manifestations of 'in-time' processuality in strategy-making. We further identify a temporality paradox that arises from the engagement of managers with two contradictory times: constructed linear 'over time' and experienced, becoming 'in time'. These findings lead us to re-evaluate the nature of intention in strategy-making and to elaborate the constitutive relation between time as 'the passage of nature' and human agency. Consequently, we argue that temporality should not be treated merely as an objective background or a subjective managerial orientation, but as a fundamental characteristic of processuality that defines the dynamics of strategy-making.

Keywords: Strategy-making, temporality, agency, relationality, event, becoming, processuality

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Introduction

Time and temporality are key issues in process organization research in general (Cunliffe, Luhman and Boje, 2004; Huy, 2001; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas and Van de Ven, 2013; Tsoukas, 2016) and in strategy process research in particular (Fenton and Langley, 2011; Hydle, 2015; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). In previous strategy process literature, time has been approached from two main perspectives: as an objective dimension of strategy-making (Van de Ven, 1992; Sonenshein, 2010) and as a subjective construction (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Vesa and Franck, 2013). Studies that have adopted an objective view of time have treated it as a linear and divisible dimension for strategy-making and contributed to strategy process research by shedding light on the chronological sequencing of events (Burgelman, 1983; Pettigrew, 1990; Sonenshein, 2010). More recent strategy process studies have examined time as a subjective

construction and showed how various constructions of temporality (past, present, and future) either enable or constrain collective strategy-making (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Vaara and Pedersen, 2013; Vesa and Franck, 2013). However, both of these above-mentioned views treat time as if it were a passive background for human agency in strategy making. We argue that strategy research needs to go beyond the distinction between objective and subjective time and re-evaluate the relation between time and human agency.

To extend the notion of objective and subjective time, we adopt an ‘in-time’ view of temporality (Hernes, 2014). In general we conceptualize time as a human attempt to abstract “*the passage of nature*” (Whitehead 1920: 54). Thus, in this paper, we use time as a concept to describe the ongoing experience of becoming reality. On the other hand, we use temporality to refer to the way periods of time (the ongoing present) connect and relate to other periods in a backward (past) and forward (future) direction (Dawson 2014: 286). According to the ‘in-time’ view, the past and future are immanent in the fluidity of present experience (Chia, 1999; Dawson, 2014; Schultz and Hernes, 2013). We argue that by adopting the ‘in-time’ view, we can approach temporality in a way that prioritizes the experience of temporal flow over the chronological arrangement of discrete events (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017). This means that we acknowledge that time is a creative force that also works on us (Hernes, 2014).

Adopting the ‘in-time’ view adds to recent studies of strategy process research that have examined the temporal nature of strategy-making (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Vaara and Pedersen, 2013; Vesa and Franck, 2013). These studies have shown that the subjective articulation, interpretation, and negotiation of the past, present, and future affect managerial strategy-making. We extend this notion by examining time as the fluidity of the present. This approach has two main implications. First, it enables us to challenge the over-emphasis on intentionality in human agency that is said to prevail in strategy literature (Chia and Holt, 2009; MacKay and Chia, 2013; Rasche and Chia, 2009). In other words, we show how time can also

frame human agency. Second, it enables us to examine how the past and future are immanent in the fluidity of present experience (Bakken, Holt and Zundel, 2013; Dawson, 2014; Schultz and Hernes, 2013). Hence, we can extend the prevailing ‘over-time’ perspective on strategy processes (Langley et al., 2013) and better understand the inherent situatedness, complexity, and uncertainty of intentional strategy-making (Tsoukas, 2016). Consequently, we are able to re-evaluate the constitutive relation between time and human agency in strategy-making.

In this section we examine how both the ‘over-time’ constructions and ‘in-time’ experiences of managers simultaneously enable, restrain, and constitute strategy-making. We use strategy-making to mean the open-ended and continuous process of practical coping that results in actual decisions and acts that are defined retrospectively as deliberate and purposeful strategy (Tsoukas, 2010). Empirically, this study builds on two years of participation in strategy-making meetings in a small Finnish software company (Alpha). Since the company was small and manager-owned, even the top management was engaged in practical work. This enabled us to examine both the processes of intentional strategy-making and strategy emergence through everyday practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006).

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows. First, we provide insight into how time and temporality have been considered in previous strategy process research. Second, we present the ‘in-time’ view of temporality as a lens for examining managerial strategy-making. Third, we describe the process of data analysis and our empirical findings. Finally, we discuss the contributions of this study.

Temporality in strategy research

In the following we elaborate on how previous strategy process literature has dealt with the role of time and temporality. In particular, we distinguish two perspectives on temporality in strategy-making: the objective and the subjective (Hydler, 2015). The objective perspective on temporality

approaches time as a chronological platform for strategy-making, while the subjective perspective focuses on the socially constructed nature of temporality in strategy-making.

The objective perspective approaches temporality chronologically by presenting it as a timeline that consists of measurable and divisible units. The objective perspective on time can be seen in both the actual practices of strategy-making and in the conventions of strategy process research. In the actual practices of strategy-making objective time is regarded as an artefact of intentional strategy-making (Yakura, 2002; Vaara and Pedersen, 2013) and also as a measure for valuating human labor (Cunliffe et al., 2004, Ingold, 2000, Lee and Liebenau, 1999). Hence time is treated as a scarce commodity for individuals and a resource to be managed (Roe, Waller and Clegg, 2009).

In addition to the actual practices of strategy-making, the objective perspective resonates with conventional strategy process research (Melin, 1992; Van de Ven, 1992). The central contribution of the process perspective has been to show how organizational strategy-making unfolds over time. This has led to a proliferation of longitudinal methods that seek a better understanding of how organizational strategy unfolds dynamically (Burgelman, 1983; Mintzberg, 1978; Pettigrew, 1990). For example, Melin (1992) examined strategy-making by describing series of events, short episodes, epochs, and biographic history. On the other hand, time has been treated within the strategy-as-practice field (Vaara and Whittington, 2012) as an objective platform from which practices emerge (Jarzabkowski, 2003). This means that temporality has been expressed retrospectively as a linear succession of immobile, isolated moments and events, or by completely freezing the present moment that analytically separates the past, present, and future as distinct categories. In sum, the objective perspective has treated time as a passive background of strategy-making.

The subjective perspective on temporality (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015) differs from conventional strategy process research by highlighting the socially constructed nature of time in

strategy-making. In particular, these studies have shown how strategies are formed, negotiated, and renewed through subjective experience of temporality, namely the past, present, and future. Consequently, these studies have examined temporality through narratives (Barry and Elmes, 1997; Fenton and Langley, 2011; Vaara and Pedersen, 2013), framing (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013), and temporal ordering (Hydle, 2015; Vesa and Franck, 2013).

Especially the narrative perspective on strategy (Barry and Elmes, 1997; Fenton and Langley, 2011) has been pivotal in improving our understanding of the role of time in the processes of strategy-making (Vaara and Pedersen, 2013). In their study, Vaara and Pedersen (2013) elucidated the role of narratives as a means to construct temporality in strategy-making. In particular, Vaara and Pedersen (2013) highlighted the role of prospective stories in strategy-making (Boje, 2008) and showed how time and space are intertwined within strategy narratives. In addition to the narrative approach, Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013) used the notion of temporal work and showed how temporality is embedded in the work of strategists through negotiations between different interpretations of the past, future, and present. They showed that projections of the future are shaped by interpretations of the past and present.

From the perspective of temporal ordering, Vesa and Franck (2013) examined the relationship between strategy work and temporality by observing real-time top management team meetings. They argued that the core of temporality lies in the experienced time that is negotiated and organized during strategic planning. They found that managers seek to arrange and order the past and the present into a linear and coherent temporal experience. Finally, in a recent study, Hydle (2015) showed how different organizational actors shape strategy through various temporal orientations. Top management was said “to strategize in the past,” project managers were seen as strategists with a present orientation, and professionals, as the company’s innovators, presumably formulated future strategy (*ibid*, 659).

The studies above have advanced our understanding of how the meaning of the past and future are socially constructed and how these constructions affect present strategy-making. However, despite the contributions of these studies, we argue that temporality could be seen more broadly than as a product of either individual or collective sensemaking. In other words, time as the passage of nature (Whitehead, 1920) also occurs beyond human constructions of it. Hence, we argue that strategy scholars should extend the notions of time and temporality by adopting an ‘in-time’ view, according to which strategy-making takes place in the fluidity of present. This means that we give primacy to the experience of temporal flow over constructions of the past-present-future that we notice (Langley and Tsoukas 2017: 5). Next we present our conceptualization of the ‘in-time’ view.

The ‘in-time’ view

Time is a central issue in process organization research (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017; Tsoukas, 2016; Hernes, 2014; Langley et al., 2013). In particular, these studies have followed the metaphysical definition of time as the flow of becoming reality (Whitehead, 1929). Hence, process organization studies have challenged both the objective and subjective conceptualizations of time as passive and separate from lived experience and have suggested an ‘in-time’ view of temporality (Hernes, 2014; Hernes, Simpson and Söderlund, 2013).

In our view we draw on Whitehead’s (1920: 54). conceptualization of time as the ‘*passage of nature*’ in which he equated the notions of *becoming* and time. We argue that by following Whitehead’s (1920, 1925, 1929) notions we can re-elaborate three interrelated issues that are relevant for a better understanding of the temporal nature of strategy-making. First, we can take an alternative view on the extensiveness of time and define it in terms of relational events. This means that an individual event does not have an existence apart from any reference to the other events (Mesle, 2008). Central in this notion is the distinction between the

conceptualizations of 'over time' and 'in time.' Second, we can treat temporality as an experienced, uninterrupted flow of the becoming of the present in which the past and future are immanent. Third, we can conceptualize time as an active force that enables us to examine temporal processes without reducing them to products of human agency.

The first issue deals with the linearity and extensiveness of time. In particular, we challenge how the 'over-time' view has taken extensiveness for granted by presenting processuality through a chain of discrete, successive events. In other words, the 'over-time' view assumes that an individual event has enduring meaning, without reference to the event from which it is analyzed. This means that events can be spread out into simultaneous existence, for example to derive effects from causes. To take another view, Whitehead (1929: 35) argued that "*..extensiveness becomes, but 'becoming' is not itself extensive.*" Adopting this notion has two interrelated implications. First, extensiveness can be seen as a retrospective abstraction that is bound to momentual experience (Whitehead, 1929). This means that processes cannot be chopped up into stages or categorized into beginnings and ends. Second, by highlighting the indivisibility of the unfolding of events, temporality can be described as a series of relationally constitutive events (Whitehead, 1929; see also Cobb, 1993; Hernes, 2014; Mesle, 2008) This means that events per se do not have enduring meaning.

The second issue deals with temporality as the uninterrupted flow of the present. This issue highlights the difference between the retrospective and prospective view on processuality. Consequently, notions of the past and the future have unique meanings that enable us to understand the fluid nature of the present in its temporal unfolding. More specifically, the meaning of the past and the future in the present can be understood through the concepts of continuity and novelty (Whitehead, 1929). On the one hand, continuity refers to the causal power of the past in the formation of new moments; new moments create themselves out of the previous world. On the other hand, novelty emerges because new moments are subjects in their

own creation. In other words, despite the causal power of the past, each new moment creates its own uniqueness before turning into a “resource” for the new becoming moment (Whitehead, 1929). In sum, the ‘in-time’ view entails the notion of the future as merely the continuous creation of the present, which means that there is no pre-existing, predetermined future out there waiting to be realized (Mesle, 2008).

The third issue is related to an active view of the passing of time, which means that the creative advance of processuality (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017) cannot be explained as emerging from entities. Treating time as an active force has one key implication; it leads us to analytically locate agency in relational events (Hernes, 2014). This deviates from the conventional way of conceptualizing agency as a property of entities (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Accordingly, the ‘in-time’ view continues the relational notion of human agency, which places agency in the flow of time (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). However, distinctive to the ‘in-time’ view is that it subjugates human agency to relational events. In this approach the notion of agency is not tied to conscious thought or human subjectivity (Whitehead, 1929). This view further stresses that events are not reducible to the individuals that participate in them (Hernes, 2017) just as a whole is not reducible to its constituent parts (Cooper, 2005). Furthermore, the temporal connecting inherent in processes is seen to emerge through the relations between events (Hernes, 2014; Hussenot and Missonier, 2015). Thus, events per se are seen as subjects in processes. Consequently, in accordance with the notion of agentic events, we need to focus on two issues in order to examine processes. First, on how events connect and (re)define each other (Hernes, 2017; Mesle, 2008) and second, on how human beings and materiality evoke their own agency ‘in time,’ through participation in events (Hernes, 2014).

In sum, the ‘in-time’ view differs from objective and subjective views on time by assigning ontological priority to the unfolding of relational events over individual agency. In this way the ‘in-time’ view is in resonance with the unowned view of processes, since the unowned

view highlights that processuality does not emerge either from individual intention or any linear causality (Chia, 2014; MacKay and Chia, 2013; Rescher, 1996).

Research design

Data collection

In our study we adopt a process-relational view according to which both the reality that we try to know and we as knowers are part of a constant process of becoming (Chia and Rasche, 2015; Rescher, 1996). In particular, we stress that knowing comes from direct engagements where the researcher participates in creating the phenomena researched (Cooper, 2005; Shotter, 2006). The empirical design draws on the ideas of group methods in organizational analysis (Steyaert and Bouwen, 2004). Methodologically, the process of data collection resonates to some extent with participant observation (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Laine and Vaara, 2007). The initial reason for choosing participatory methodology was two-fold. First, it offers a way to gain insider-insight into everyday organizational life (Vesa and Vaara, 2014). Second, through participatory research we can explain the emergent and fluid nature of the strategy-making process (Cunliffe, 2015; Langley, 2009). In particular, we conducted a real-time, participatory study with a small group of managers of the case company. This permitted us to examine how actors cope in the ongoing present (Hernes, 2014; see also Langley, 2009; Samra-Fredericks, 2003).

The empirical data were collected over a two-year period (2011-2013) in a research project focusing on business model development that was part of a large national level research program called Cloud Software. The site of data collection was a small Finnish software company seeking international growth (Alpha, pseudonym). The data consist of 16 face-to-face meetings with two researchers and three managers of the company that were recorded and transcribed (cf. Samra-Fredericks, 2003). The meetings were arranged as part of the research

project with the initial purpose of working together to find ways to develop the company's business model. However, after the first meetings it became evident that business model development was only one of the many issues that the managers wanted to discuss. Thus, the discussions ended up consisting of topics that the managers considered important at the time of the meeting. These topics were related to internationalization and growth strategies. Thus, at the time the data had been collected, temporality was not the focus of our study. It was only during the early stage of data analysis that the researcher 2 (R2) started to examine the role of time in strategy-making.

Alpha was established in 2006. At the time of data collection, Alpha was run by five owners. Alpha was then offering a software solution to manufacturers and retailers to help its customers visualize physical products during sales events. At the beginning of the data collection, Alpha had 25 employees and operated in Europe. However, the majority of the customers were based in Finland where Alpha was the market leader. Although Alpha's explicit strategic objective at this time was rapid growth through increased internationalization, the management group had not yet determined how internationalization and growth would be achieved. This, in fact, was one of the factors motivating participation in the research project.

The data of the study

Each meeting started with a discussion about "what's going on" in the company and proceeded with a more focused discussion of issues that the managers considered relevant. The participants in the meetings were three managers from the company: the CEO/Co-founder (CEO), Chief Operating Officer/Partner (COO) and Sales Manager (SM), and two researchers, of which R2 is the first author of this study (R1 = Researcher 1, facilitator of the meetings, not an author of this study, R2 = Researcher 2, a participant observer in the meetings). Table 1 describes the data.

In nine meetings the discussion progressed freely and in seven meetings various workshop frameworks were also used at the initiative of the researchers. These frameworks were used both to facilitate discussion around business development and to cover the topics from various viewpoints. As an active participant in the meetings, Researcher 2 asked follow-up questions and commented on the topics discussed in order to create dialogue.

Date of the meeting	Duration	Topics discussed
		FU = frameworks used to structure the conversation
08/29/2011	2h 37min	The managers introduce the company, general discussion about current challenges
09/29/2011	3h 48min	Talking about the product and customer relationships, managers also bring up challenges and new ideas, FU
10/13/2011	3h 14min	Imagining the changes taking place in the future, FU
11/28/2011	3h 9min	Creating future scenarios, FU
12/15/2011	2h 16min	Trying to figure out the implications of cloud technologies for the current business model, FU
01/27/2012	2h 47min	General discussion about contemporary challenges, then talking about two specific customer cases in terms of those challenges and finally trying to devise a new, cloud-based pricing model
03/16/2012	2h 16min	General discussion, then working on a new pricing model
04/17/2012	2h 44min	General discussion, then working on a new pricing model during which the discussion takes up a couple of new business ideas
06/07/2012	1h 53min	General discussion, then working on a new pricing model
08/10/2012	2h 29min	General discussion about what's going on
10/16/2012	2h 26min	General discussion about what's going on
12/20/2012	2h 34min	General discussion about what's going on
02/20/2013	3h 19min	Strategizing related to a new product concept, FU
04/10/2013	2h 14min	Strategizing related to a new product concept, FU
05/06/2013	2h 55min	General discussion (the facilitator-researcher not present)
06/03/2013	1h 38min	General discussion, then strategizing related to a new product concept. FU.
2011-2013	-	R2's personal notes from the meetings
2011-2013	-	Material produced in the meetings (PowerPoint slides)
Data hours:	42.3	

Table 1 The research data

Data analysis

We started our analysis with three separate readings of the transcribed recordings and by grouping the text into themes with NVivo. However, we note that the overall analysis involved ongoing reflection between the data and theoretical work (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). The initial purpose of thematic grouping was to identify central issues from the transcription texts, which consisted of over 800 pages. The following themes were identified: customer relations, decision-making and boundary setting, identifying and solving problems, future constructions, stories of events, Alpha's practices and actions, temporal dynamics, strategy, novelty and practical logic.

In our second phase we used the 'in-time' view as a lens to analyze the themes mentioned above. In particular, we used two guiding research questions. First, '*what are the manifestations of 'in-time' processuality?*' and second, '*what is the role of time in strategy-making?*' By using these two questions, we identified instances in which references by managers to events suggested that these events influence their intentions in strategy-making.

In our third phase we started to track the unfolding of temporal events where the influence of time was identified. However, this did not mean that we sequenced the events chronologically in a way that would assume that events have an enduring meaning. Instead, our analysis focused on two aspects in the unfolding of events: first on the relations between events and managerial strategy-making, and second on the temporal relations between events. In analyzing the relations between events we focused on how they emerged 'in time.' This means that we examined how each present event entailed notions of both the past and future. However, in the relational analysis of the unfolding of events we strove to identify how the notions of the events shifted between meetings as the new present events created a novel viewpoint to the past events. In the following section we present our findings.

Manifestations of ‘in-time’ processuality

Through our analysis described in the previous section we identified five manifestations of ‘in-time’ processuality. These manifestations are *black swans*, *a chameleon past*, *the uniqueness of a lived present*, *unowned causality*, and *the conditionality of time*. In table 2 below we present these manifestations and explain their implication for the process of strategy emergence.

Table 2. Manifestations of ‘in time’ processuality

Manifestations of ‘in time’ processuality	Explanation and implication for strategy emergence
1. Black swans	Strategy-making is characterized by the continuous emergence of unforeseen events. These events introduce radical novelty and disrupt repetition. This manifestation emphasizes the unpredictable, non-linear nature of strategy-making.
2. Chameleon past	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 relations between events. This manifestation pinpoints how cause-effect relations are constructed retrospectively, namely as the “effect” event defines the “cause” event. Consequently, events significant for strategy emergence cannot necessarily be recognized by strategists when they happen.
3. Uniqueness of a lived present	Human agency in the lived present is evoked from within unowned events and is thus tied to them. This means that participating in an emerging situation produces managerial actions from within the situation. Hence, strategic actions can also be immediate responses to uncontrollable present situations that have irreversible, unknown causal power in relation to future events. Analytically, this blurs the boundary between planned activity and practical coping.
4. Unowned causality	Unowned causality is manifest in strategy emergence as the heterogeneity of becoming. This means that we can identify fragments of causality in both relations between different events and between intentions and events. However, this causality is unowned in nature because present events cannot be reduced to any single cause, neither to a single event nor intention, since events and intentions are mutually constitutive.
5. Conditionality of time	The temporal nature of reality defines the relational dynamics of human lives and hence limits human agency to one lived event at a time. This manifestation illustrates how human agency is framed by the temporal nature of reality. We can not choose the conditions of the time we live in, but we can choose what we do in the events in which we participate.

Black swans

‘Black swans’ as the manifestation of ‘in-time’ strategy emergence refers to the continuous emergence of *unforeseen events* (cf. MacKay and Chia, 2013). A black swan is characterized by unpredictable novelty, and thus it can not be anticipated on the basis of past events. However, regardless of how essential this characteristic is to our notion of black swan, as an event it can be mundane even though its effect can be major.

As an example, one ‘black swan’ event in particular had perceptible causality in defining subsequent Alpha’s strategy. This event was an unexpected contact in 2012 from a notable Australia-based company, Beta (pseudonym). Alpha’s sales received an email from representatives of Beta in which they expressed interest in offering Alpha’s software solution to the company’s customers as part of a new service platform. The prospects of such a relation seemed financially lucrative. This contact eventually led to a business relation that Alpha’s managers regarded as radically different from their past relations. Alpha’s management had not even considered the possibility of forming such a business relation before this contact was made.

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

Beta’s representatives found Alpha through the Internet. Despite Beta’s intentional search for a partner, the initial formation of the business relation was based on coincidence. Hence, the black swan event can not be explained solely by Beta’s intentions since Beta encounter with Alpha on the Internet was a coincidence. After the initial contact from Beta, a Japan-based company operating in the same industry as Beta approached Alpha. In addition, other Asian companies in the same industry soon started to perceive of Alpha as a prospective partner. This unfolding of events led Alpha to recognize the possibility of replicating their business concept in geographical locations beyond Australia. Thus, the managers’ intentionality emerged as the events unfolded.

CEO: The situation right now is unbelievable. I would say that after a long time there’s finally a kind of new ‘vibe’ here. There seems to be a new scenario of sorts in all this. 10/16/2012

This imagined possibility of replicating the new partner logic made the present situation look even more positive to the managers. Consequently, the imagined possibility described by the manager as an ‘unbelievable situation’ can not be reduced to a single source, for example to the intentions of either Beta’s or Alpha’s representatives. It would seem to indicate that intentions can be seen as embedded in unowned processes.

Chameleon past

Apart from illustrating the influence of black swans for strategy emergence, the Australian contact from Beta shows how the meaning of past events changes as new events relate to them in becoming the present. This leads to our second manifestation of ‘in-time’ strategy emergence, namely the *chameleon past*. We use the chameleon past to refer to how the meaning of identifiable events change continuously as new events emerge. Furthermore, the meaning of any single event is not analytically enduring, since the becoming of new events constitutes the meaning of past events.

This can be seen from the data as follows. While the initial reference from Beta’s contact person can be retrospectively defined as a ‘black swan’ event, it was not immediately clear what it would mean in practice. The subsequent events such as conversations between the people working for Alpha and Beta and trials with ‘end customers’ continuously redefined the meaning of the black swan event. This cumulative effect of the relations between the events reinforced the managers’ conception of a temporal continuity that became ‘the Australian case.’ Although these relations between events were initiated by the black swan event, the strategic significance of the black swan emerged only retrospectively in relation to later events. Hence the meaning of the case shifted continuously. In sum, this means that human agents define causes from the perspective of the effects.

The uniqueness of a lived present.

We define the third manifestation of ‘in-time’ strategy emergence as the *uniqueness of a lived present*. On the one hand, we use the term ‘lived present’ to refer to the actual present situation in its eternal becoming. On the other hand, we use ‘uniqueness’ to refer to the immediacy and irreversibility of that present. Accordingly, the uniqueness of the lived present helps us to explain the temporally indivisible human experience that creates the necessity of immediate actions within an emerging event. This is shown in the following excerpt from our data. In this excerpt the CEO describes a negotiation with representatives of the potential customer. In this negotiation the CEO had to make an immediate suggestion for the pricing of their solution because he wanted to establish a new pricing model for this new customer relationship. This was because the previous, standard pricing model used for the software solution would have been too low for this new global and larger-than-typical customer.

CEO: There at the meeting we had to, we had to make up those regions immediately [for pricing]. [...] this part was really hard-going, luckily we had worked on it. [...] Of course it would have been easier if we had considered it even further. Then we would have had even more leverage at the meeting. I had to come up with the regions immediately. And then finalize them right there. That these are the regions. Without having time to think whether Asia really is one. 04/17/2012

In the excerpt above the uniqueness of the lived present becomes visible because the CEO could not postpone the pricing proposition to a more convenient future setting in order to have time to consider the options carefully. Instead, the response within the emerging situation had to be immediate. In the above ‘meeting-in-becoming,’ the CEO also recognized the irreversibility and causal power of the pricing proposition for subsequent events in the customer relation. Hence the momental uniqueness of the meeting becomes explicit through its immediacy and irreversibility. This event also shows how managerial agency was enacted and improvised *from*

within the unique moment. The CEO's actions cannot therefore be understood without reference to the meeting event itself. However, in spite of the improvised nature of the pricing proposition, the excerpt shows that modifications for the pricing had been discussed previously. Hence, previous pricing discussion events that took place in both project meetings and internally, within the company, also influenced the pricing proposal given to the customer. This makes it impossible to determine the extent to which the pricing proposition was an immediate improvisation and the extent to which it was the outcome of past work.

Unowned causality

The fourth manifestation of 'in-time' strategy emergence is *unowned causality*. We use 'unowned causality' to refer to a notion of becoming according to which the unfolding of events is heterogeneous in nature (Chia, 1999). This heterogeneity means that even though past events have identifiable causality in relation to the subjective present, we analytically refuse to reduce the unfolding of events to a specific origin, either to a single event or to any human intention. However, this does not mean that it would be pointless to identify fragments of the causality. In other words, both past intentions and events are immanent and hence have causal power in becoming the present. In sum, in terms of strategy-making, the present is not reducible to either specific managerial intentions or past events.

One of the key strategic decisions concerning Alpha's internationalization was related to the countries in which the sales and marketing efforts should be focused. As an example, one seemingly rational decision to enter the Japanese market has fragments of unowned causality from both intentions and coincidental events. One of the former workers in Alpha's software development moved to Japan and worked from there for Alpha. This worker approached Alpha's managers and suggested that he could become a reseller in Japan together with a Japanese partner that had suitable contacts with Japanese firms.

CEO: And we considered this a while and thought that it fits 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 a foothold there in a way. We have a guy that is inside the culture, but with whom we can nevertheless communicate in Finnish. 11/28/2011

The above excerpt illustrates how the past events of hiring a person who later happened to move to Japan can be seen as having causal power in relation to the managers' decision to enter the Japanese market. Thus, these past events, which seemed strategically insignificant at the time of their occurrence, eventually became pivotal for emergence of the managers' intentions to enter the Japanese market. This notion means that managerial intention per se cannot be seen as something that exists *ex ante* or originates from a specific or dominant source. Neither could intentions be seen as possessive or enduring. Instead, any intention can be seen as constituted in and through events. In other words, managerial intentions continuously shift *from within* unowned events.

The conditionality of time

The last manifestation of 'in-time' strategy emergence is the *conditionality of time*. We use this manifestation to mean that each individual can participate only in one emerging event at a time. This means that ongoing organizational processes are conditioned by temporal reality. In particular, temporality creates the conditions under which individuals are able to act. For example, international growth is limited by the number of sales relations in which Alpha's sales people can participate and the development of the software solution is limited by the coder's ability to write code. The temporal constraints of the lived present create the operational frames for strategic plans. In other words, the lived present conditions in which strategic activities are enacted, since the managers would like to do more than is possible. This means that even though multiple future strategic scenarios were created in the meetings, only those strategic plans that were connected to the tangible challenges of the lived present were operationalized. In other

words, the present moment and its continuously emerging challenges define the action even though the managers expressed their awareness of the importance of taking purposeful steps toward identified and preferred strategic objectives. This means that in order to be operationalized, strategy plans require temporal continuity in relation to the challenges of the lived present.

COO: But now we need to understand what the key business issues for supporting this are. 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... 01/27/2012

The temporality paradox

In the previous section we focused on the manifestations of 'in-time' strategy emergence. In this section we elaborate on how managers live and operate in two temporalities simultaneously: 'over time' as the constructed linearity and 'in time' as the experienced present. Even though both 'over time' and 'in time' seem logical when considered in isolation, they seem contradictory when juxtaposed (see Lewis, 2000). From the perspective of strategy-making, this means that managers seem to live and operate in a temporality paradox because conceptually, both over time and in time can be construed as contradictory while at the same time they are interrelated elements of strategy-making (cf. Smith and Lewis, 2011). In other words, strategy-making can be characterized by the co-existence of both of these temporal conceptualizations.

From the data, the 'over time' temporality became explicit when managers expressed a sense of over-time linearity. This can be shown for example in how they reflected upon organizational development issues. In particular, managers talked about their organizational actions in these "development mode" talks as a sequential, cumulative process extended over time. This meant that they divided their actions into a linear continuum of the past, present, and future. In this process, past actions had 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

chronological actions not yet taken. On the basis of the above notions, we describe ‘over-time’ strategy-making as the establishment of constructed linearity. In other words, the ‘over-time’ linear platform is used in organizing actions.

This ‘over-time’ strategy-making implicitly uses objective, linear time as a platform that provides a temporal extension to the present that supports repetition and the cumulative development of actions.

CEO: This is what we have done. We have put two virtual servers [on the cloud]. [...] They are on Azure, so artificially we are now in cloud. 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'll have already investigated the technicalities and solved the problems. 12/20/2012

The above excerpt illustrates how constructed linearity is used in implementing a new technology for the software solution. Thus, implementation is described as steps, the first of which has already been taken. The others will only be planned in the future.

However, the construction of over-time linearity can be seen as a result of practical coping with the conditionality of time. Dividing complex acts into cumulating subactivities may be considered necessary for strategic planning and operationalization. However, relying on constructed linearity caused problems for the managers since they continuously faced new events that conflicted with the constructed linearity. In other words, acting in accordance with constructed linearity narrowed managers’ scope for action when emerging events required a response. This became explicit when commitments to constructed linearity bound the managers to stick with pre-organized actions and thus their ability to maneuver in emerging situations was restricted.

CEO: [... there is the picture where the American Indians attack the fort. And in the fort they have barrel-loaded guns. Then a salesman comes there with a machine gun and says: "hey, look what I have." And they just tell him "sorry, we're too busy right now." This is what it's all about. - 10/16/2012

In addition, the example below shows that reliance on constructed linearity is not always sustainable because strategy-making also necessitates immediate responses to the unfolding of everyday mundane challenges .

CEO: In this customer case, we have three problems. There is the geographical problem, because so far we've had our servers in Finland. And then, there is the problem related to content production. And there is the scalability problem in our pricing model. This is an urgent issue that needs resolving now. 01/27/2012

Another example of 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 something called markerless AR to the roadmap." 02/20/2013

As the above quote illustrates, the roadmap manifests a linear ordering of intentional actions whenever they involve making modifications to the software. In this way, the roadmap can be seen as a constructed linearity in the continuous, cumulative development of a software solution. This roadmap is constantly modified in response to evolving events. However, in the above example it took a while before the emergence of new competition was addressed intentionally, as the managers were tied to their earlier developmental commitments. In other words, these pre-organized development activities prevented immediate responses to the emerging competition. Hence, over-time organizing of the software development activities affected the ability of managers to respond to the emerging competition in time. Linearity constructed 'over time' and present experienced 'in time' co-exist and are interrelated, and thus neither of them completely determines intentional actions. In sum, the temporality paradox becomes explicit through tension between linearity constructed 'over time' and the emergence of new events 'in time.'

Discussion and conclusions

Temporal work is now acknowledged as one of the key issues in strategy process and practice research (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). However, recent developments in process organization research (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth and Holt, 2014; Hernes, 2014; Langley and Tsoukas, 2017) have opened up new avenues to broaden our understanding of temporality in strategy-making by conceptualizing it as an inherent characteristic of processuality rather than as an outcome of human sensemaking. Thus, we have argued that we need to extend the analysis of the various temporal orientations of organizational actors (e.g. Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015) by examining how the relational becoming of events creates lived temporality for human agents. This allowed us to approach temporality without reducing it to a product of human actors (Rescher, 1996). In our empirical analysis, we first identified five manifestations of ‘in-time’ processuality in managerial strategy-making: *black swans*, *a chameleon past*, *the unicity of a lived present*, *unowned causality*, and *the conditionality of time*. Second, we examined how these manifestations related to the forms of temporal strategy work. As a result, we showed how managers operate in a temporality paradox.

Our study suggests interrelated contributions to two streams of literature. First, we add to the process perspective on organizational research (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Hernes, 2014; Langley and Tsoukas, 2017) by elaborating the relation between time as the passage of nature and human agency. Second, we add to the process perspective on strategy research in two ways. First, we re-examine the nature of intentions in strategy-making (Chia and Holt, 2006; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). Second, we extend the notion of temporality in strategy-making (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013).

In terms of process organization studies, by showing how human intentions emerge from within relational events, we contribute to the understanding of events and human agency as mutually constitutive (Chia, 1999). This approach enables us to show that human intentions are embedded in events rather than in a causal relationship with them. However, this does not mean

that we are of the opinion that events determine human agency. Subsequently, the 'in-time' view enables us to overcome the dualism between events and human agency. More specifically, it allows us to engage with prehensive processuality (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017) and hence to understand the temporal nature of human agency without falling into methodological individualism (Ingold, 2000). Thus, we argue that to better understand the temporal unfolding of events, we should not reduce processes to either a single event or to the intentions of human agents, but instead to examine them relationally. Consequently, the 'in-time' view opens up the possibility to approach the agential nature of relational events (Hernes, 2017). This means that while we recognize the agency of human actors, the 'in-time' view enables us to take into account that time also works on us through the unowned becoming of events (Hernes, 2014).

Approaching the nature of individual intention from the 'in-time' perspective also impacts how we understand strategy-making. This is particularly relevant for studies of strategy emergence (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Mirabeau and Maguire, 2013), because our view challenges the assumption that intentionality and emergence are opposites of each other in a continuum (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). By placing explicit emphasis on the fluidity of the experienced present, we show how strategic intentions are constituted in and through unowned events. In other words, we re-examine the nature of intention in the Mintzbergian view on strategy process (intended, deliberate, and emergent strategies) according to which realized strategies can be evaluated in terms of the degree of intentionality and emergence. Instead, we extend this notion by showing that intentions are fluid by nature and thus should not be treated as *ex ante*.

In addition, by adopting the notion of 'in time,' our study continues the recent strategy research that has examined the role of temporality in strategy-making (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Vesa and Franck, 2013; Vaara and Pedersen, 2012). In spite of recent developments with respect to strategy as temporal work, previous strategy literature is still strongly characterized by

practices of intentional decision-making and over-time planning. In other words, previous studies have mainly focused on the various forms of constructed linear ‘over time’ in strategy-making. Thus, by empirically indentifying the temporality paradox, our study shows how managers simultaneously engage with two contradictory conceptualizations of time, namely constructed linear ‘over time’ and the experienced present becoming ‘in time.’ Hence we argue that the temporality paradox emerges as *the lived present makes managers rely on linearity constructed ‘over time’ when organizing action; they are at the same time bound by this constructed linearity, which makes it challenging to relate to continuously emerging new events ‘in time.’* In sum, this study builds theoretical bridges between two views on strategy processes, namely between subjectively constructed linear temporalities (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013) and unowned everyday practical coping (Chia and Holt, 2006; MacKay and Chia, 2013).

Last, this study has its limitations. First, while in our empirical analysis we have mostly focused on manifestations of ‘in-time’ processuality, at the same time we acknowledge that this can lead to downplaying of ‘over-time’ strategy-making. Second, even though participating in the strategy-making conversations enabled us to gain in-depth, real-time data on strategy-making, we acknowledge that involvement in the daily operations of the examined company would have enabled even more profound elaboration of some of the aspects of the temporal dynamics. Moreover, we note that this study has limitations related to our focus on the managerial perspective in strategy-making. Thus further research that would focus on the non-managerial viewpoint in strategy emergence could complement the findings of this study. Last, we acknowledge the impact of the interpretation of the observer in data collection.

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Jenni Myllykoski

University of Oulu Business School, Finland
 Pentti Kaiteran katu 1, P.O. Box 4600, FI-90014 University of Oulu, Finland
 jenni.myllykoski@oulu.fi

Anniina Rantakari

University of Oulu Business School, Finland
 Pentti Kaiteran katu 1, P.O. Box 4600, FI-90014 University of Oulu, Finland
 anniina.rantakari@oulu.fi

Jenni Myllykoski, (D.Sc.) is a researcher at the University of Oulu Business School, Finland. Her research focuses on strategy-making, change and temporality in process organizational research in general and strategy research in particular. Her research is informed by process philosophy, particularly by the writings of Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead. In her doctoral dissertation, “Strategic change emerging in time”, she examined strategic change from the perspective of temporality.

Anniina Rantakari (D.Sc.) is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oulu Business School, Finland. Her key areas of interest are the process and practice perspectives on strategy, narrative research, and the dynamics of power and resistance in organizational research in general and strategy research in particular. In her doctoral dissertation ‘Strategy as dispositive – essays on productive power and resistance’ she examined strategy-making from a Foucauldian perspective.

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