Exploring emotions in the practice of strategy: A video-based analysis of top team meetings

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Research Questions

1. What kinds of emotions are used in strategizing during the meetings of a senior organizational team?

2. What kinds of emotional dynamics do these emotions generate in the team?

3. How do these emotional dynamics shape the way strategy is developed in the team?
Method

- Microethnography - the microscopic analysis of recorded pieces of naturally occurring human activities and interactions (Streeck & Mehus, 2005).
- Observation, audio- and video-recording of a sequence of top management team meetings over three months
- Audio-files transcribed
- Context: a medium-sized computer game company in Canada
# Emotional Dynamics & Forms of Strategizing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue type</th>
<th>Emotional Dynamics</th>
<th>Forms of Strategizing</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic, Decision not required</td>
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Data Analysis - 4 stage process

1. Coding emotions & emotional dynamics
2. Coding strategizing practices
3. Exploring the emotion-strategizing interplay
4. Building framework through repeated comparison and reflection
Stage 1: Coding Emotions & Tracking Emotional Dynamics

- RQ1: What kinds of emotions are used in strategizing during the meetings of a senior organizational team?
  - Code the expressed emotions

- RQ2: What kinds of emotional dynamics do these emotions generate in the team?
  - Identify sequences of emotions around an issue = emotional dynamics
Stages 2 & 3: Coding Strategizing & Its Interplay with Emotion

- RQ3: How do these *emotional dynamics shape the way strategy is developed* in the team?
  - Code strategizing practices
  - Identify sequences of practices around different issues = strategizing processes
  - Explore relationship between emotional dynamics and strategizing processes
Stage 1 *Close up*: Coding Emotions

**Developed Emotion Expression Coding Scheme**

- Integrated 9 existing emotion expression coding schemes
- Amended with our observations from the data
- Assigned emotion expression code to each utterance
- Coded 9 emotions expressed in the discussion of 42 issues: 
  *excited, amused, relaxed, angry, annoyed, frustrated, contemptuous, embarrassed, and neutral*

**Moving from emotions to emotional dynamics**

- Sequence of emotions expressed from the beginning of an issue discussion until decision made/issue changes
Stage 2 Close Up: Coding Strategizing Practices

Developed Strategizing Practice Coding Scheme

- Drew on existing literature (e.g., Beck & Fisch, 2000; Currall et al., 1999; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Sturdy et al., 2006)
- Included observations from our data
- Example practices: initiating an issue, proposing, rejecting or selecting of a proposal

Moving from strategic practices to strategizing

- Sequences of practices around different issues = strategizing processes
Stage 3 *Close Up*: Coding Strategizing & Its Interplay with Emotion

Iterative process to investigate relationship between two processes

- For each issue associated with a clear emotional dynamic, worked through data again to tell strategizing story
  - focused first on critical incidents of strategizing (Beck & Fisch, 2000) – e.g., proposals, counterproposals

- Developed skeleton strategizing plot for each emotional dynamic – e.g., when several group members expressed “excitement” in a sequence (*energetic exchange* dynamic), there was an outburst of new proposals (*generative strategizing* process)
Stage 4: Framework Building Through Repeated Comparison and Reflection

- The relationship between issue type and emotional dynamics
  - What is common to the issues associated with intense emotional dynamics (and different from those discussed in an emotionally neutral manner)?
  - What is common to the issues discussed with intensely positive emotional dynamics, and no negative emotions?
  - What are the mechanisms through which issue type shapes emotional dynamics?
# Emotional Dynamics & Issue Type

<table>
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<th>Immediate decision not required</th>
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</tr>
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<td>• Energetic exchanges (4)</td>
<td>• Emotional Tugs of War (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Neutral discussion (1)</td>
<td>• Unempathic interaction (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Depleting barrage (1)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Recurrent confrontation (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Operational issues</strong></td>
<td>• Energetic exchanges (1)</td>
<td>• Amused encounters (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Neutral discussion (11)</td>
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Stage 4: Framework Building Through Repeated Comparison and Reflection

• The relationship between emotional dynamics and strategizing process
  • What kinds of strategizing plots are there?
  • What is common to the strategizing processes associated with a particular emotional dynamic?
  • What are the mechanisms through which emotion shapes strategizing, and strategizing shapes emotion?
## Emotional Dynamics & Forms of Strategizing

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Some Reflections

- Approach allows an extremely rich analysis of hard-to-grasp practices and processes.
- But data quantity and unit of analysis (i.e., issue) quickly create analytic overload. 
  macro micro-ethnography
- Gain from coding at micro-level and then building up?
- Could we have done otherwise?
A Few Take Homes

- Start where the data draw you (emotion vs. strategizing)
- Code the codable (emotion vs. emotional dynamics)
- Analyze in close detail; then zoom out to see patterns and tell more abstract stories (always be abstracting)
- Iterate and reiterate
- Deadlines are helpful....but timescales are long