Senseshaping in organizations:
A video-based study of retrospective strategizing

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the work of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving

following...

a strategy as practice perspective:

i.e. “strategy is a kind of work that people do, with stuff, in society” (Whittington, 2007)
the work of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving

following...

Weick’s (1995: 4) perspective on strategy as a framework by which people make sense of the direction of their organisation, involving both:

• ‘sensemaking’, constructing the frames
• ‘sensegiving’, communicating the frames (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1992)
the work of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving

such strategic sensemaking and sensegiving is often retrospective
Weick (1995) on strategic planning:

“…Strategists take credit for their foresight, when they are actually trading on their hindsight. A well-developed capability for hindsight is neither a dramatic accomplishment, nor especially rare…” (p.78)
sensemaking & sensegiving involve:

- social argument
- probing, mutual checking, editing
- mutual trust
- typically meetings or ‘episodes’ (Hendry & Seidl, 2003)
- potential risk and resistance (Balogun & Johnson, 2004)
- artefacts and technologies (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007)

... hence ‘senseshaping’
definition

senseshaping is…

embodied interaction, that is shaping and shaped by material things, and is the means for shared and emerging understandings (in our case, organizational strategy)
case study

research site...

• health care firm (Florida)
• several hospitals plus clinics
• 1990s was a period of growth and strategic development
• also a period of economic turmoil & regulatory pressure
case study

data collection...

• in 1998, observations, interviews, and videotaping of the top management team (“President’s Council), shortly before a regulatory review by the JCOH

• in 2007 & 2008, interviews with three key members of the President’s Council
case study

episodes involve three potentially risky and skillful steps...

- initiation
- conduct
- termination

(Hendry & Seidl, 2003)
case study

(sample data and analyses)
case study

so what?

Whether or not strategies begin in the head, they necessarily take a social and a material form; strategy is unavoidably shaped by the affordances and constraints of bodies and things, through practices that can be captured on videotape.
case study

so what?

the team’s understanding of their past is mediated through embodied maneuvering and in the present, as they produce visual artifacts that they can then carry forward
case study

empirical contribution…

senseshaping practices include:

• organizing a participation framework
• reconfiguring senseshaping frameworks
• reframing the artifact
case study

methodological contribution...

through video-based methods, researchers can capture the process, not merely the product of retrospective sensemaking
case study

theoretical contribution

senseshaping is embodied interaction, that is shaping and shaped by material things, and is the means for shared and emerging understandings—in our case, organizational strategy