

# Perspectives on strategy and innovation for societal change

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## ABSTRACT

Strategy is an important element for our understanding of the organizations. The strategy reflects the organizations behavior, its tools and methods and its perspectives of the world. It is found in all levels of the organization, as a projection of its employees, processes, products and values. Our understanding of it can help us provide effective tools and methods to either compete or implement. In this paper, we examine strategy through the lens of innovation and ask why and how should we do strategy. A field review of industrial strategies using a case study approach provides a real-life dimension to categorizing modern strategies. Our paper concludes that strategy in industry is complex, drawing characteristics of several schools of thought. This paper can be applied as introduction for those with interest of understanding organizational behavior or it can be used by industrial designers conducting a external and internal analysis of companies.

**KEYWORDS:** Strategy, design, innovation, societal change, social science

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century industry has come a long way from producing the T-model in conveyor-belt manner to offer knowledge based, free services like Wikipedia. Our view on value is constantly changing. The popular academic books of Porter and Ansoff do not provide the nuanced array of strategy perspectives we need to understand modern companies. Currently, strategy is a term widely used about different aspects of the company. Strategy is found in all departments of the organization; business, design innovation and development. The list of processes the strategies influence is endless. This implies how important strategy is to the company. As a consultant, employee, shareholder or competitor, understanding strategy can help us with insight for making

better decisions. This article is meant to provide the reader with a broad approach to understanding strategy, using both literature and real-life case studies to discover strategy in industry. Also, the article proposes how to develop strategies for purposeful innovation leading to societal changes.

## 2. WHAT IS STRATEGY AND WHY DO WE STRATEGISE?

This section is going to establish the concept of strategy, starting with its definition. The definitions of strategy are many. A definition provided by Henry Mintzberg (Mintzberg H., 1987) will be presented and exemplified. Lastly we will reflect upon the validity of the definition. The particular definitions of Mintzberg extend traditional definitions as it best can be described

as a conceptual definition. It consists of five P's of strategy:

*Perspective* – “A way of seeing things”, a reflection of our beliefs and experiences.

*Plan* – “A intended course of action”, the way of responding to the interpreted future.

*Position* – “To occupy a location”, internal ability to occupy an environmental space.

*Ploy* – “A outwitting maneuver”, this to create the illusion of the organization occupying an environmental position.

*Pattern* – “A series of behaviors”, the strategy can emerge as a pattern from previous actions.

This understanding of strategy implies that it basically can be found anywhere we look. For example; a child can have a *plan* to jump over his neighbors fence to collect his lost ball. He can also use the ball as a *ploy*, kicking the ball in the neighbor's lawn to collect an apple. Both can be considered strategy in Mintzbergs definition. The next section will connect our definitions to *how* and *why* we conduct strategy.

In the previous section, we described the example of a boy loosing his ball on the neighbors yard. In this section we will introduce Whittington's two components of evaluating strategy (Whittington, 2001); process and outcome. Process is defined as a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end. By this definition the boy's process can be considered his *plan* to jump over the fence and the end of the process is obtaining his ball. Obtaining the ball is *why* he does it, jumping over the fence is *how* he do it. This brings us to another scenario. What if the boy plans to jump the fence but the fence is too high for him to jump? He then has to improvise using his own creative skills to overcome the challenge. The action of which the kid is taking is called an emergent strategy, a strategy as the result of a pattern of behavior (Mintzberg, Bruce, & Joseph, 2005). The form the strategy actually took is called realized strategy. The components that polarize the field of strategy are if the strategy process is deliberate or emergent. A second component of strategy is outcome. Outcome describes the consequence of the

strategy and is closely related to what the company wants as a result of the strategy. The definition of Mintzberg is consistent with literatures general agreement on the existence of emerging strategies. In contrast Oxford dictionaries definition of strategy as “a plan of action designed to achieve a longterm or overall aim” (Oxford University Press, 2014) is not sufficient to cover the field of emergent strategies. This way, Mintzbergs definition proves more valid when considering deliberate and emergent strategies. To obtain a thorough understanding on these contrasting strategies of process and outcome, the next chapter will introduce Whittingtons four generic strategies.

### 3. GENERIC STRATEGIES

In this section, we will review Whittingtons generic strategies and reflect on its ability as a tool for juxtaposing strategies. Whittington divides outcome by the elements of profit-maximizing and pluralistic outcomes. By these measures, Whittington dissects perspectives on strategy into four categories, which will be shortly summarized here. The *classic approach* represents the deliberate, profit maximizing strategies. It is the oldest and most influential strategy. Utilizing rational planning methods that dominate most textbooks. It relies on strong leaders creating the strategies in a hierarchical system of command. It draws organizational inspirations from the military with a top-down leadership-approach. It promotes conflict rather than co-operation and draws rational economic philosophy from the eighteenth century of Scotland where return of investment is key for profit maximization. The *evolutionary approach*, representing the emerging and profit maximizing strategies draws on the metaphor on biological evolution. It substitutes the laws of the market with the jungle. This means that they do not believe you can effectively guess or make prognosis about the market future. Instead of investing large in one uncertain strategy, the best you can do is to invest in several small incentives and wait which one of them the environment chooses as the sustainable solution. The

*Processual approach* favor pluralistic values and emerging processes. They emphasize the imperfect nature of human life, focusing on the cognitive human boundaries to make rational analysis of the market. They believe that firms are not united to optimize one single utility, such as profit. This because the coalition of individuals brings their own personal objectives and biased views to the organization. Instead they want strategy to be formed like how a crafter is forming his clay, involved and formed by personal touch, inspired by artistic improvisation. Finally, the *systemic* approach is relative in accordance to cultural contexts. The processes are deliberate, usually generating plural outcomes. It emphasizes the importance of sociologic sensitivity. As different social context revolve around the company, different approaches must be considered. A company with Japanese stakeholders will not respond to strategy in the same way as an American owned company.

This section has introduced the concept of generic strategies. Whittington is consistent with the acceptance of emergent strategies and argues that outcome is an important to the characteristics of strategy. The next section will present an extensive overview of strategic schools. To validate Whittingtons generic strategies as a tool for aligning strategies, an juxtaposing of the *schools of strategy* and the *generic strategies* will be conducted.

#### **4. ALIGNING 10 SCHOOLS OF STRATEGY WITH GENERIC STRATEGY PERSPECTIVES**

This section is going to review the 10 schools of strategy as authored by Henry Mintzberg (Mintzberg, Bruce, & Joseph, 2005) through the lens of Whittingtons generic strategies. Lastly, the review is going to result in a graphical matrix, illustrating how the 10 schools can be aligned with Whittington's Generic Perspectives.

#### **4.1 A review of the 10 schools of strategy on Whittingtons Genreic Strategy framework**

##### **The design school**

The design school of strategy has a process that revolves around external and internal input resulting in a SWOT analysis. This makes up for the characterization of external threats and opportunities, dealing with social changes, economic trends and competitive changes. One of the key authors of this school wrote that strategy formation should be a deliberate process of conscious thought (Andrews, Bower, Hamermesh, & Porter, 1982). This reflects the schools deliberate nature. In terms of value, the design school plans around efficiency (Power, Gannon, McGinnis, & Schweiger, 1986). Speed of operations, market share and salesforce are reflective of a profit maximizing planning phase. On the other side evaluation of human resources and employee morale reflects value on a pluralistic basis.

##### **The planning school**

The formation of strategy by the planning school is considered a formal process. Both design and the planning school shares a perspective of rational planning (Ansoff, 1987). However, the degree of planning extends that one of the design school because of the focus on decomposing plans into distinct steps of checklists. Budgeting is the way of the planning school to control its strategic objectives. Controlling the company by hierarchy measuring every department by profit maximizing factors like growth, return on investment and projected income (Mintzberg H., Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning, 1994).

##### **The positioning school**

The perspective of the positioning school is that of a market environment always being generic. It argues that the market can be decomposed into a limited set of positions (Porter, 1980). The input of the analysts serves as important information to be able to read the market positions. This proves as a school encapsulating its perspectives into deliberate strategies. Its value perspective emphasize highly on market share, specifically the BCG matrix (Porter, 1980), verifying its profit-maximizing orientation.

### **The entrepreneurial school**

The process of the entrepreneurial school revolves around the entrepreneur as the chief executive. The process is molded to fit the executive's cognitive perspective. Mintzberg describes that the process is deliberate in its vision but emergent in how it unfolds. This way we cannot decide whether it's strictly deliberate nor emergent. As the process, the value perspective also is inherent in the entrepreneurs mind. Generally the ultimate goal of an entrepreneur is the growth of his work, which is closely related to economic income and profit. This way the entrepreneurial school arguably tends towards profit maximizing strategies.

### **The cognitive school**

This school can best be described as a theoretical approach of bringing cognitive psychology into strategy formation (March & Simon, 1958). The discussion of cognitive limitation inclines this strategy to form emerging strategies. Generally, the school values that the mind of the strategist has ability to be flexible and creative in a given situation. This way outcome focuses on learning, increasing this mental ability.

### **The learning school**

The learning school sees the environment as comprehensive and complex (Lindblom, 1959). Therefore this school is inclined to learning processes as the best way of improving. This makes for an emergent school with its value perspective pivoting around learning and the pluralistic values it provides.

### **The power school**

The power school generates strategies as a result of interaction between parts as the parts agree through the principle of power (Allison, 1971) the result is a emergent strategy. The outcomes of the power school are considered pluralistic, varying from political power to influencing shareholders or improving communication network.

### **The cultural school**

The school of culture focuses on the collective as a vital resource for competition (Normann, 1977). The perspective of the company is formed through social interaction. This way, a tacit

perspective of strategy is formed. This can be described as a deliberate strategy, even though it's not always conscious. The cultural school values the benefits of culture being unique for their company (Barney, 1991). This can be considered as a pluralistic outcome perspective because of the way they can diversify and create unique offers can take many forms.

### **The environmental school**

The environmental school emphasizes the force of the environment as the main strategic factor for the organization. It believes its direct impact on strategy to be minimal. The decision making of the environmental school acts as a reaction to environmental forces. This way the process of which the strategy is made, is emergent. The school emphasizes the means of capital as a flexible resource of surviving. Therefore, it tends to profit maximizing measures to survive.

### **The configuration school**

The configuration school focuses on organizational "stages" as it needs to adapt with time. The way to meet the organizational rearrangements can vary, it may demand a simple reactive decision, occupying a position, adapt to local rules etc. Therefore each school of thought is represented in this school according to the context of which the company is in.

This has been a review of Mintzbergs ten schools of strategy. Through the lens of generic strategies, considering strategic outcomes proves important for understanding the intentions of the strategies. This concept can contribute to answer why strategy is done. The next section will align the different schools, asking in what degree the schools compare to each other in terms of process deliberateness and value perspective.

## 4.2 Juxtaposing the 10 Schools with the generic strategy perspectives

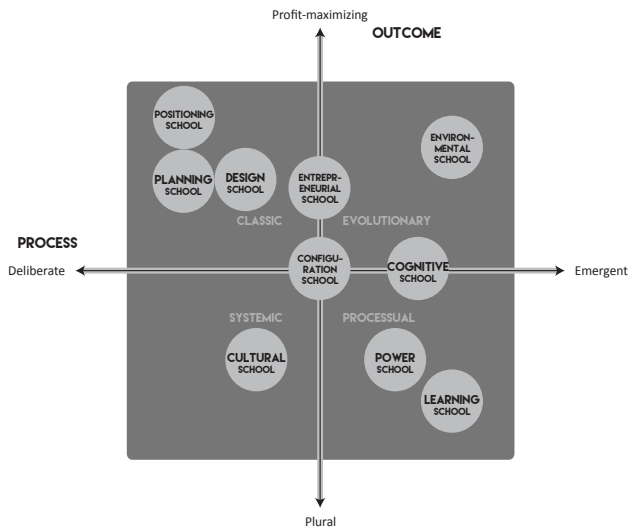


Figure 1: The adoption of Whittington’s “Generic strategies” (Whittington, 2001) and the evaluation and integration of Mintzberg’s ten schools of strategy (Henry, Lampel, & Ahlstrand, 2005).

This summary will give us illustrative overview of the ten schools of strategy through the lens of *generic strategies*. By juxtaposing two overviews of strategy we can obtain a more nuanced perspective of the strategic field and validate *generic strategies* as a tool for the evaluation. We will start this section by discussing the placement of the strategies. The planning school and the design school both have plans for profit maximizing. However, they acknowledge the importance of i.e. staff morale and human recourse capital (Power, Gannon, McGinnis, & Schweiger, 1986). These two schools are mainly separated by their attitude towards process. The design school considers the typical design model as a framework whereby the planning school has a much more formal approach (see (Rothchild, 1980)). The positioning school believes that their process is mostly predetermined. Once the position of the company is identified, a set of predisposed tools decides which strategy they use. Their philosophy has economical intentions, resulting in a high focus on profit maximizing strategies in comparison with the planning and

design school. The entrepreneurial has a more natural approach to the process than the other classical schools. This schools process and outcomes highly depend on the entrepreneur and his perspective. However, Mintzbergs comment on the entrepreneur’s ambition for growth is plausible. This makes for this strategy tending towards profit maximizing outcomes. The environmental school is developed by highly emergent strategies in contention with the classical approaches because of its reactive approach to strategy. The deliberate side of the strategy revolves around keeping resource flexible and available when they are needed. The focus on profit maximizing strategies is not as high as the positioning school because of their lack of control of the outcome. Still they believe their survival is dependent on profit, more so than the planning and design school. The cognitive schools process is highly emergent as it is a result of the strategist cognitive experiences. The strategy has no indication of inclining towards profit maximizing or plural outcomes. The power school strategy process emerges from social bargaining. Because of its intention to influence shareholders, the strategy can be considered more pro active than reactive. Therefore it is considered to have less emergent outcomes than the environmental school. The process generates mainly plural outcomes like political influence but price negotiation is also a priority for the power school. The ability of the learning school to think of their actions in retrospect reflects an emergent, reactive behavior like the environmental school. The outcomes of the strategies are plural, revolving around increasing knowledge capacities of management and the collective. The cultural schools strategy formation is a result of a tacit, shared perspective of the direction of the company. The outcome of the strategies are highly dependent on country and culture, therefore it is rated as focused on plural outcomes but might tend to profitable strategies if the context is right. The configuration school is represented by every school and is classified in the center of the illustration.

This section has discussed and compared the different schools of strategy proving the utilization of *generic strategies* as a tool for evaluating strategies. In the next section we will reflect on strategy from the viewpoint of product design asking, *how* and *what* should be the purpose of strategy.

## 5. STRATEGIZING FOR INNOVATION

To connect the relevancy of strategy to the field of industrial design, this section is going to examine ideal strategy through the lens of innovating. As we have seen in the previous section some do it for political influence, some do it for increased knowledge and learning and some do it for profit. The meaning of value varies. Even in different disciplines the word has different connotations. A product designer strives to innovate, to generate new ideas, stimulate unmet needs or introduce new products. The notion of Schumpeter's *creative destruction* (Schumpeter, 1934) describes how the innovation process drives company's forward in its competitive environment. If the process of innovation is what generates competitive advantage, what should the outcome of the innovation process be in terms of values? In the Phillips design paper "Rethinking value in a changing landscape" (Brand & Rocchi, 2011) presents the future as a *transformation economy*. They suggest that we are approaching a time where we have to transform existing lifestyles to new ones, as a consequence of the industrial economy. They describe problems as the sacrifice of virgin forests for economic gain and depletion of oils and minerals for mobility and pollution. The demand for transformation from this lifestyle will generate people's mindset from productivity to addressing collective issues where the ability of adaptable thinking is a valued skill. A demand for products that contribute to transformation on different levels will arise. In order to meet this expected demand, a prescriptive approach is needed. The deliberate approach will help in formulating and implementing the strategies that are aimed at future objectives. In the next section, we will present a deliberate perspective

of the innovation process. Using this we can get an understanding of how innovation can be conducted as an approach of dealing with societal change.

### 5.1 The innovation process

This section is going to provide a framework for discussing the innovation process within a company. The work of Jan Buijs provides us with a method for communicating the innovation process. The Delft Innovation Method (Buijs, 2012) is a deliberate way to innovate products or services from within a company from a design thinking perspective. He states that innovation is a complex process of psychological, economic, technological and cultural events that revolves around people from inside and outside of the company. Innovation processes are temporary, meaning they allow competitive advantage for a short time only. The practical order of the process will vary but has a rational logic sequence. It is important to be sensitive to the external environment. Knowledge and insight about users and competitors plays an important role. His innovation model consists of five stages: product use, strategy formulation, design-brief formulation, development and market introduction. It balances activities around the internal resources of the company and the external environment.

Buijs innovation process reflects a deliberate innovation process encouraging the purpose of innovating for change. This will provide as our process framework as the next section will reflect on what outcomes are desirable for societal change.

### 5.2 Innovation values

This section will provide a framework for value perspectives arguing for what strategic outcomes that will be relevant for industry in the future. There are several value frameworks generated by the deliberate strategy schools. Jay Barney argues for the resource-based view of the company for generating competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Michael Porter argues for the utilization of cost and differentiation as values for competitive advantage (Porter, 1980). To be able

to change behaviour of actors in society, the framework needs not only a internal focus. It need to have a focus on those who need to change. Den Ouden presents in her book "Innovation design" (den Ouden, 2012) a value-framework to support innovation for positive societal change. She argues that for societal change to happen, an innovation must occur to encourage behavioral change. She differentiates the framework in *levels of value*; value for the user, the organization, and the ecosystem and for society. Next she elaborates on how psychological, economic, sociologic and ecologic perspectives can provide value for the different levels. Den Ouden argues that for an innovation to be of societal significance it has to be used over extended time. In this section we will cover the different perspectives of innovation value.

*Value for the user*

The user is according to den Ouden the ultimate target of innovation. It is important that to be able to change behavior, the product has to be pleasurable.

*Value for the organization*

The organization is in this context an organization that is innovating to create sustainable value for itself by providing added value for its costumers.

*Value for the ecosystem*

The ecosystem includes all various stakeholders of various phases of the innovation process. The different stakeholders benefit from each other for mutual effectiveness and survival.

*Value for society*

Society is the highest level of value in this model. All the previous actors are part of society.

This section has proposed a framework for understanding values from different perspectives. To encourage societal change, innovation must satisfy all shareholders of the innovation. It also has to stimulate the shareholders values on the different perspectives of value. The next section will explore strategy in practice.

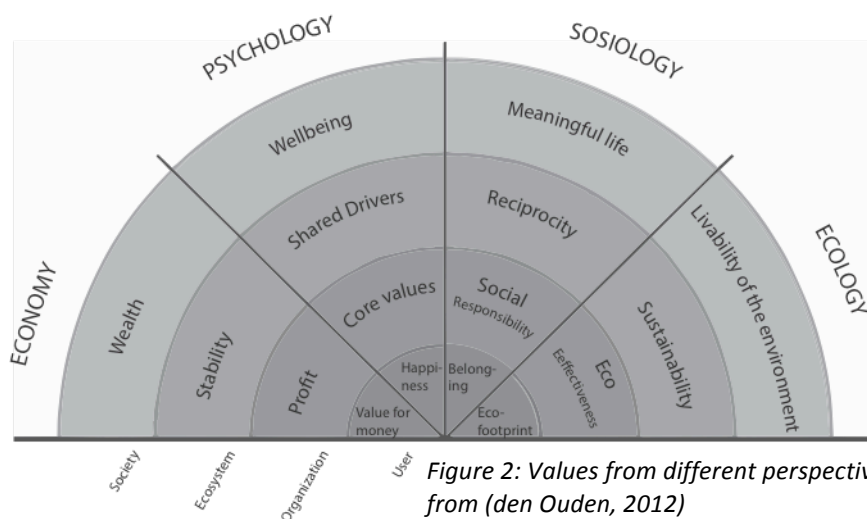


Figure 2: Values from different perspectives. Adopted from (den Ouden, 2012)

## 6. CASE STUDY RESEARCH

To obtain a practical understanding of strategy, this section will cover two real-life cases on perspectives of strategy and its relation to the innovation process.

### 6.1 Method

A case study research method was developed to support three research questions, the questions were designed to explore strategy as a phenomena occurring in the company. To be able to do this, a relation between our knowledge about strategy and the questions was established:

- (1) *How can industrial strategies be aligned in the system of generic strategies according to process and outcomes?*
- (2) *What connections can be made to Mintzberg's 10 schools and how will it nuance the positioning of these 2 companies within the generic strategy framework?*
- (3) *How relevant are the structured "Delft innovation method" and "the Value Creation Framework" for companies, who aim to strategize their innovation efforts?*

The method is conducted as a case study research. This to support the explanatory (Yin, 2009) nature of the questions. The method focuses on contemporary events and does not require control over behavioral events. The units of analysis will be two Norwegian companies of different industries presented in table 1.

	Company 1	Company 2
No. employees	15-25	300-400
Sector	Industrial design	Safety and communication
Industry	Marine	Electronic

Table 1: Presentation of selected cases

The logic linking from the data will be conducted applying the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) using the principal of selective coding. Selective coding is an approach to coding where the codes are selected pre-analysis. By

generating a selection of conceptual codes based on our research questions, the evidence of which we examine will reveal a clearer connection to what we ask by reviewing aims and characteristics of the company. The evidences are based on interviewing members of the organization and analysis of web-sites and news articles. The conceptual codes are constructed from our nuanced perspectives of strategy, innovation values and the innovation process. This will help us evaluate how the company strategies can be related to our theoretical approach. The result of the method will be evaluated on the background of the concept scores and applied to our nuanced map of strategic perspectives.

### 4.2 Result

This section will present the results of the selective coding through a code matrix browser. The results of the selective coding will be used as a foundation for discussing the research questions.

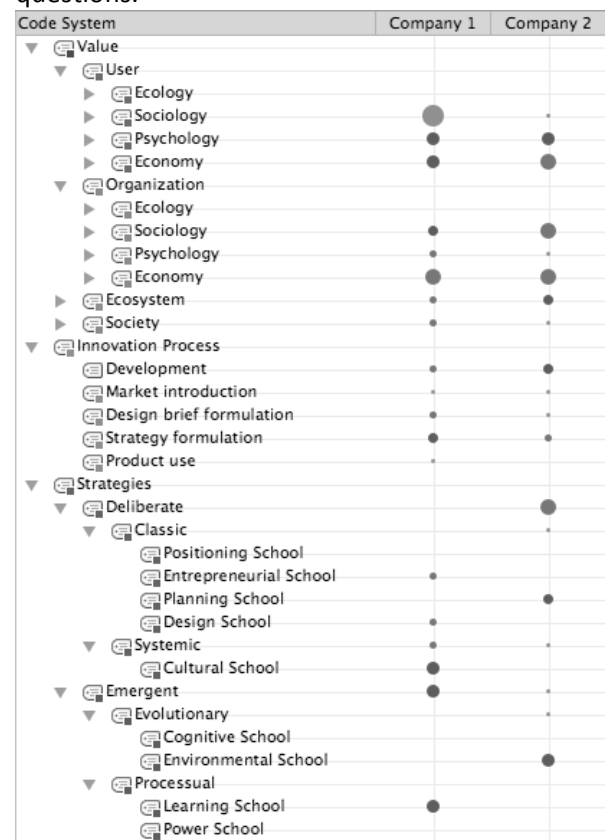


Figure 3: Overview of the results from selective coding. The size of the circles reflects the business focus on the relevant concept.



(1) How can the companies aims and characteristics be positioned according to strategic outcomes and processes?

This research question poses attention to the codes of “Value”, “Deliberate” and “Emergent”.

Figure 3 reveals a distinctive gap between the two companies. The aims and characteristics of company 1 revealed an emergent approach to process. The evidence connected to the interview revealed an arguably distant relationship to explicit processes, highly suggestive of an emergent approach. Their value perspective was spread around several value perspectives; sociologic, psychological and economic. This reflects a strategy that produces plural outcomes, including profits.

Company 2 had a much more explicit approach to processes. The attitude of the company showed this by being very aware of several processes in their company. Their value perspective was mainly concentrated around economic and sociologic perspectives reflecting a more profit maximizing oriented strategy.

In conclusion company 1 aims and characteristics reflects processes and outcomes that are comparable to a processual approach to strategy. *Emergent process to produce plural outcomes.*

Company 2’s approach to process and outcomes are comparable to the one of the classical strategies.

*Deliberate and profit maximizing.*

(2) What connections can be made to Mintzberg’s 10 schools and how will it nuance the positioning of these 2 companies within the generic strategy framework?

This research question poses attention to the codes related to the ten schools of strategy.

The companies showed signs of taking on several of the schools of strategy. Company 1 had relations with the learning school by needing a champion to initiate the strategies and focusing on learning processes in day-to-day business. It has its link with the entrepreneurial school as it is lead by a strong, well known leader considered the founder of the company. It also had its links to the design school of strategy as some of the

tools for generating products are closely related to the typical design school process (Henry, Lampel, & Ahlstrand, 2005). The most comparable school of company 1 is the cultural school with its collective mentality of sharing a tacit perspective on strategy. Valuing the user from a sociological perspective which can be considered a plural outcome of strategy. Company 2 had close links to the planning school as main parts of the innovation process was highly deliberate, demanding control and structure of work and documentation. They also shared links with the environmental school, having a emergent way of dealing with the competitors advantages. They tended to the users need for “profit for money” (den Ouden, 2012) but also valued “safety” as a psychological user factor.

In conclusion the connection the companies have with the schools of strategy are distinct. Some of the tools and methods of the schools of strategy reveals company 1’s close relationship with the cultural school and company 2’s relationship to the planning and design school. An graphical overview of the positioning of the companies can be found in figure 4.

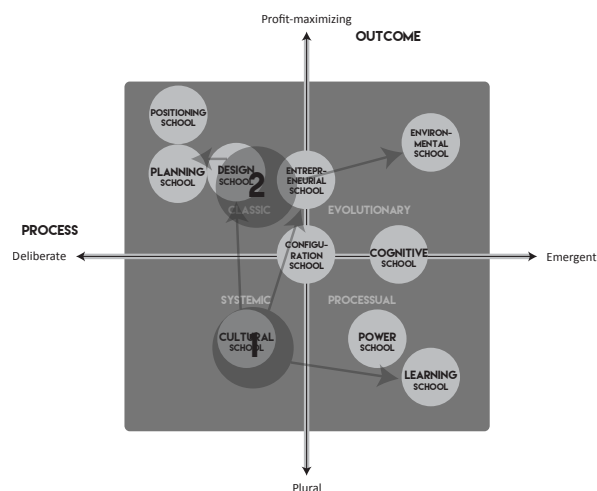


Figure 4: The comparison of researched companies in the nuanced perspectives of strategy.

(3) *How relevant are the structured “Delft innovation method” and “the Value Creation Framework” for companies, who aim to strategize their innovation efforts?*

Main parts of the interviews revolved around questions connected to the Delft innovation method. The selected code of “Process” reflects the company’s emphasis on each phase. The results reflected the companies did participate in each of the process elements, proving the methods relevancy. Approaching each element of the innovation process by their unique strategy. The Value Creation Framework contributed in identifying value on different levels from the different perspectives of value. The results of figure 4 reflected the companies high focus on organization and user, while societal change can only occur if all four levels are satisfied. In conclusion the companies does not emphasize the objective for societal change because of the lack of focus on the values of the ecosystem and the society. However, this increases the relevance of the Value Creation Framework as a value perspective for innovation.

## 7. DISCUSSION

This article emphasizes Whittington’s generic strategies as a tool of evaluating strategies. Whittington’s way of considering the *process* as the factor to describe the company’s deliberate or emergent nature is a approach that inclines the company to look inward for strategy reflection, “Is our processes rational or natural?”. A important factor that is not covered by this perspective is the way the company looks at its environment, “is the environment confusing or is it predictable”. The way the company is thinking about its environment is also describable for what measure they take; planning or learning. Can this call for a more nuanced model for evaluating the deliberate or emergent nature of company strategies, considering axis of process to plural perspectives of the company?

The results of the case studies point in the direction that strategy in business is complex and cannot be characterized by one school of

thought. The two cases provided overlapped several of the schools of thought and conflicted both emergent and deliberate processes. However, it was possible to draw lines to schools of thoughts that influenced the strategies in different degrees. Looking at the results from the companies’ perspective of value was highly influenced by user and organizational value. This may occur because of the evidential focus of the research study which focused more on uncovering information about the inside of the company rather than its ecosystem or environmental society.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This has been a study on strategic perspectives and its relation to innovation for societal change. The paper has developed a broad approach to the concept of strategy, suggested generic strategies as the evaluation tool and applied it to theoretical schools of strategy and real-life approaches to strategy. The paper also suggests *how* and *why* actors of the innovation process can strategize for societal change. The paper concludes with conducting a real-life case study, proving the application of generic strategies as a evaluation tool. This resulted in a overview of the field of strategy and a method of reviewing strategies in industry. The paper can be useful for actors interested in understanding companies, how they do strategy and why they do it. The paper can be particularly useful for industrial designers and other actors of the innovation process conducting internal or external analysis for their company, providing a more precise description of companies.

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