Between talk and text: a discursive approach to strategic planning continuity in a higher education institution

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Abstract

This paper explores, through a case study in a Spanish higher education institution, how strategy text has been reproduced and what implications it has entailed upon the collective engagement or disengagement in the continuity of new texts. The analytical scheme is drawn on strategizing as social practice and it takes a discourse perspective of strategy as text. As follows, the discussions presented in the paper suggest that the strategy texts were seeing as isolated parts, which may have not provided affiliation among the university collective action. This leads to observe that the use of the texts was characterized as being an instrument of control, rather than a guide to provide a future direction. The mismatch between the texts and the talks from the university practitioners, may suggest continuity with no consecutiveness within the strategy text reproduction, where the local practices were seem to run independently from the engagement in the text production and reproduction.

1. Introduction

Throughout the eras of growth and change in higher education, there have been opportunities and challenges. At the same time, institutions, particularly public ones, have had to balance competing demands from multiple constituencies. As a

consequence, for many years literature has discussed and taken note of change in the university system (Hellstrom 2004; Henkel 2005; Jarvis 2000; Kondakci and Van den Broeck 2009; Margolis 2004). Within this context, studies dealing with the ever increasing attention paid to university management are particularly interesting (Bryson 1988; Buckland 2009; Clark 2003; Martinez and Wolverton 2009). Hence, the need for effective strategy making was critical for public universities, yet there remains a predominance of few systematic studies dealing with the process of generating strategies and putting them into practice within the university sector in their particular contexts.

This challenge gave rise to a need for more research on strategizing in the higher education sector, and some studies have made strides towards the recognition of culture and context in the university strategic management (Gioia and Thomas 1996; Gioia et al. 1994; Jarzabkowski 2004; Shattock 2000). Generally, an emphasis on practice illustrates how the interaction between individuals, activities, artefacts and sites to define issues, talk through them, construct stories around them, and 'resolve' them through an articulation that becomes socially embedded (Brown and Duguid 1991). The emphasis of recent practice-based analyses of organization is on ongoing practices of action and interaction and the importance of participation in interaction, engagement in practice, and becoming a member of a collectivity and how these function to sustain the 'logics of action' that inform practices (Townley 2008). The concept of collective action implies that a number of individuals have, for perceive themselves to have, a collective interest. In so far as this interest is real, that is the jointly held resource has a value that can be transferred to the members, it is commonly thought that individual action to extract benefits from this resource results in lower net benefits for the group than would be the case if the group acted in an organized manner and coordinated their efforts (Olsen 1967). If there are no or few mechanisms for coordinating action in a group that share an interest in a resource, there is a problem of collective action.

These problems of collective action can be quite relevant in the context of universities, because as argued by Buckland (2009), it has a 'cell' structure for strategy, whereby interior teams, individuals or segments can devise, innovate, implement and experience strategic success or failure without coherence with or compromise of other interior strategic units. In such a way, universities are characterised by, among other features,

goal ambiguity, diversity professional interests, as well increasingly competitive environment and pressure to boost managerial capacity. These features can have a relevant influence on how specific strategy tools are produced and reproduced and how collectively engagement or disengagement occurs. In the particular case of strategic planning much of the value of engagement lies in the very process of producing the text.

In this manner, the paper examines the strategic planning program continuity in a public university in the midst of these collectively action previously described. At the core of the study is the analysis of *how strategy text has been reproduced and what implications it has entailed upon the collective engagement or disengagement in the continuity of the new texts*. The case study uses an analytical scheme on strategizing as social practice (Denis et al. 2007) and a discourse perspective of strategy as text (Palli et al. 2009). The scheme is based on a systematic examination of the main factors that are considered to be responsible for enabling or constraining the reproduction of the strategic plan. These are linked to (organizational culture, bureaucracy and routines), resources (economic, technical and human) and power (systems of interests and influences).

2. Strategizing as social practice: bringing together talk and text

The 'practice-thinking' connotes a world in which activities and knowing always have a specific 'where' and 'when': they are always 'situated'…competent action always happens within a materially, historically and socioeconomically defined horizon, a 'context' that far from being pre-given emerges as a result of the conditions put in place by the practices themselves (Nicolini et al. 2003). Consequently, emphasis is very much on activity, action, acting on and in; the situational and emergent; sense-making or ongoing construction of meaning; trial and error; and the contingent in socially constituted practice (Townley 2008). Particularly with respect to management and strategy research, in the integrative framework to study strategy as practice (Whittington 1996), the concept 'practice' refers both to the micro-level (i.e. the doing of actors) and the macro-level (i.e. different socially defined practices on which the actors draw when 'doing strategy') and strategic activity is activity, related or unrelated to the formal, intended strategy, and it impacts the 'strategic outcomes, directions and competitive advantage' (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). In this manner, strategy is carried out through individual discourse and action, is contextually embedded in a set of social,

political, and economic relations (Hendry 2000). From this perspective, strategy is fabricated by situated and local practices of strategizing using strategic tools and models which are mobilised through tacit and collective knowledge regarding the future of the organization (Denis et al. 2007).

Therefore, strategizing involves multiple individuals, and it is based on the idea that actors ensure the mediation between action and cognition through ongoing talk and, in such a way, contribute to the structuration of strategic change processes (De la Ville and Mounoud 2003). Most often, language is seen at the centre of these activities and it is through language that strategy is linked to action and routines in practice (Rouleau 2005). The practice perspective suggests that strategizing consists of mobilizing explicit and tacit knowledge through everyday discourse and action, and different studies have taken particular focus in these actions and interactions. For instance, Samra-Fredericks (2003) has explored the talk in interactions; she has showed how strategist implicitly through talk about operational issues constitutes 'facts' about organizational weaknesses. In another hand, Hendry (2000) exploring the communicative discursive aspects, suggested that a strategic decision should be communicated and re-communicated, continually refined and adapted through dialogue. In that sense, by considering that strategy formation is not just the prerogative of the dominant coalition, seen strategy as social practice invite us to consider the actions of a greater number of actors, being them managers or not (Denis et al. 2007). Accordingly, from this perspective, a strategist may see more clearly how any strategic initiative will necessarily be constructed, reconstructed and renegotiated through ongoing practices and routines (Lozeau et al. 2002).

While methodological issues have so far not been a key focus of s-as-p research, the need for innovative and creative approaches to study strategizing has been recognised (Balogun et al. 2003; Denis et al. 2007; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2007). This acknowledgment on creative approaches to study strategizing also recognises the importance of dealing with the materiality of the strategizing process, according special attention to the tools and technologies that managers and others use on doing strategy (Whittington 2004). In order to deepen on these discussions, specifically regarding on how strategy text are produced and how it changes along the time, we will draw on a theoretical frame which sees strategizing as a social practice, coupled with a central

focus on the strategy text as a communicative artefact which is built through the means of bureaucratic routines and practices among that collectively action.

3. Discourse perspective of strategy as text

Bringing about the previous discussion on the production of texts, their construction process is done bounded by that collectively actions and interactions, which can be strongly influenced from a variety of aspects, as long as written documents do not have the stability or finality that may be assumed (Townley 2008). Plans can act as a goal, a schedule, a theory, and as a precedent according to the circumstances of their use (Cyert and March 1963). For instance, Van Maanen and Pentland (1994) note how organizational records are not neutral, factual, or technical documents, but are "self-conscious" and "self-interested". In such a way, assigning things, people, and actions to categories is foundational for coordinating activity distributed in time and place. Like so, standardization, the agreed upon rules for the production of a textual or material object, imposes a classification system that allows for replication over distance, over time, and over heterogeneity. It ensures a regularity of definitions or objects from one sphere or location to another, from one context to another, eradicating the local through extending the boundaries for practices (Townley 2008). Those agreed upon rules determine the organization activities, authority relations, connections among subunits, and decision making structures. As Wittgenstein demonstrates, rule following is about normativity. "To follow a rule is to participate in an institution to adopt or conform to a custom or convention" (Bloor 2002). It is the normative standards of a number of interacting rules followers that maintain a consensus by collectively monitoring, controlling, and sanctioning individual tendencies in interpretation.

Bringing these aspects into the production of strategy text within a social practice perspective, we highlight that those collectively actions and interactions are mediated by language in the form of talk and text. In that manner, there was an increasingly interest in the strategy and strategizing research field to explore studies with a central focus on language and its discursive activities, which have drawn upon different theoretical lenses and analytical frameworks, either taking a more critical perspective (e.g. Grandy and Mills 2004; Lilley 2001; Samra-Fredericks 2005), or the ever classic narrative approach by Barry and Elmes (1997), or still exploring the discursive resources (Hardy et al. 2000; Maitlis and Lawrence 2003). Indeed, Fenton and Langley (2008) contended

that in general, discursive or narrative approaches have always been loosely associated with the idea of strategy as practice, arguing that there is room for a deeper exploration of this connection, particularly in regard to the role of strategy texts. Several authors have addressed the complexity involved in the production and consumption of strategy texts. Such examples could be the exploration of its rhetorical features by Chanal and Tannery (2005), or its appropriation and intrinsic dualities by Abdallah (2007), as well its relationship between coherence conditions and success (Kahane 2005), or also its communicative acts (Giraudeau 2008; Jarzabkowski and Balogun 2009).

Enclosed by these arguments, Palli et al. (2009) argued that in fact, there is a lack of systematic analysis on strategy texts, which is unfortunate given their central role in strategizing and organizing in contemporary society. On top of that, they have addressed this gap by examining the special characteristics of the genre of strategy, highlighting specific attributes of strategic texts as well as of the negotiations involved in the production and consumption of these texts. At one hand, they have suggested that strategy texts can have specific communicative purposes, particularly in guiding future directions, along with; other identified features were that the document was educative in nature, self –legitimative and allowed for positive identity creation. At another hand, they suggested that the intertextual and intersubjective meaning negotiations also highlight the contextuality of strategy and specially, the contextuality of the key strategy concepts. Correspondingly, in the practice of strategizing, the important task of the strategists seems to be to give contextual sense to concepts. For the particular concern of this paper, the study builds upon a particular focus on exploring the communicative attributes of the strategy text, along with the contextuality of the key strategy concepts involved in the reproduction of the text enclosed by the negotiations within the unit's collective actions.

4. Framing the proposed research method

In analysing the strategy texts, we apply the framework proposed by Palli et al. (2009), specifically concentrating in the communicative characteristics of the text and how the contextuality of the key strategy concepts have been reproduced within the university negotiation practices of implementation. The interpretative approach to the case study, allows us to explore the implementation process and its continuity reflected in the production of new texts. This link between text and talk (interactions mediated by the

texts) are explored in order to offer insights into the study of language in strategy research. Concentrating the analysis within the role played by practitioners (at the micro and macro levels) within their praxis of producing and reproducing the strategy texts, may give us better insights into the process of strategy authorship, communicative actions and sense-making process.

Specifically, this paper tries to explore at one hand, the enactment of the strategy text at a macro level, identifying how the contextuality of its key concepts are rooted within the production of its follow up versions, and at other hand, explore the potential mismatches between the texts (patterns of strategic discourse among the texts) and its implementation in practice (patterns of discourse among practitioners). To do so, we rely on a single case study (Yin 2003). As follows, the research setting is constituted of a large-sized Spanish based university. We then address the strategy text from a discursive approach to strategy (Hardy et al. 2000; Hendry 2000; Laine and Vaara 2007; Rouleau and Seguin 1995). In order to study action in talk and text, seeing strategizing from a social practice perspective, we frame our data analysis upon its discursive perspective, with an emphasis on talk as action (what talk is doing and achieving) and on variability (Wood and Kroger 2000), taking a critical discourse analysis approach (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). This approach argues that the relationship between texts and social practice is mediated by discursive practices. Those discourses and genres which are articulated together to produce a text, and which its receivers draw on in interpretations, have a particular linguistic structure that shapes both the production and consumption of texts.

On that account, the analysis of a communicative event includes the analysis of the discourses and genres which are articulated in the production and the consumption of the text (level of discursive practice); the analysis of the linguistic structure (level of the text) and considerations about whether the discursive practice reproduces, or instead, restructures the existing order of discourse and about what consequences this have for the broader social practice (level of social practice) (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002).

5. Framing the Data Analysis

The empirical basis of the paper consists of two qualitative data sets. The first set comprises the strategy text itself: being the three strategic texts produced by the

University. The second data set consists of semi-structured interviews with members of the top and middle management teams. The interviews have focused on getting the individuals to talk about their involvement on the strategic planning of the university, asking them to identify themselves in a particular point within the planning process that have been undertaken.

Once the dataset was gathered, it was then introduced into a qualitative software in order to facilitate the analysis, although its particular use remained linked on helping us to zoom in upon each unit of analysis which we were interested in exploring. Thereupon, we have started with carrying out a close reading of each strategy text, limiting ourselves in a first stage on drawing upon a set of its communicative aspects, relating them as generators of a "guide" or a pathfinder for future directions. In doing that, we tried to focus upon identifying the key concepts that have emerged from the text. At this stage, the focus was on interpreting the aspects and components within the segments in terms of their content, structure, function and possible consequences. The next step was to consider these aspects and components upon the reproduction of the text into the continuity of new plans, looking up for discourse variability in context.

In the next stage of analysis, we have focus upon the talks from practitioners at the top and middle levels of the university, in regard to their roles and perceptions on the production and reproduction of the strategy text. As follows, our initial analysis shows different categories of talk among the strategy text, along with the ones told by top and middle management. Along these lines, we will specifically look at the interplays of similarity, differences, variability and the positioning that occurs in each of the action in text and talk.

5.1. Discourses variability within the strategy texts

Focusing upon the specific features identified throughout the textual analysis of the strategic plans, we have looked closely to the structure of the strategy texts, particularly upon their main components and expressions regarding priorities and actions, as well the communicative purpose and goals, explanatory expressions about its objectives and benefits. We will focus the analysis upon the latest three strategy texts produced by the university comprehending the period from 1998 to 2006, which we have classified them as ST1, ST2 and ST3, in order to facilitate a better identification.

Our research setting University has an ongoing inclusive quadrennial planning process that was initiated during the 1994-05 academic year, being always attached to the Vice-chancellors term of office. The intent of this strategic planning process was to establish a quality system and planning framework in order to improve the quality of the university teaching, research and services provided. This initiative was driven by the several changes that the Spanish higher education system was experiencing at that moment, specifically derived by the pressures and demands of the society, which has led to the refinement of the primary mission of the institution in which words such as 'quality for society' were reflected. Since this initial planning process has been rolled out, the emphasis has been on 'quality. Toward that end, the Quality Board Office has played the figure responsible for giving the process continuity, engaging in analysis through a crosscutting committee process, and providing guidance and support for planning process within the Units across the University. Over the latest planning cycles (ST1, ST2 and ST3), the emphasis on quality has been a key feature, although the main purposes in each of them has kept skipping or varying from one to another. If in the ST1 the quality has derived from the University mission with the purpose of building a quality system as one of the four lines of the strategic managements system, in the latest two plans, we observe the quality aspect in a more isolated way. For instance, the 'quality' aspect was particularly attached to the strategic lines of the main priority areas, such as: *To articulate effective measures to ensure the quality of teaching and learning*[i] (ST2) or: *To develop systems in order to improve the quality of management* (ST3).

If we look carefully upon the main components and structure organization of each text, we observe that the ST1 presents moreover a mission statement, a vision which provides 'where to go', the main strategic lines, objectives and work plans to fulfil it. The strategic priorities of the text were grounded on teaching, research and innovation, people, alliances and fundraising. The work plans were mainly based upon the establishments of agreements between the University top management and the units. The text highlights that:

 ...this mechanism aims to maintain flexibility as a fundamental aspect in the development of any strategic planning of the Units, which can help on building the future every year, according to a general strategic planning.

Those agreements were based on a monitoring system, which were coordinated by the director of the unit and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Science Policy (for departments and faculties) or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Academic Policy (for schools), with technical assistance from the Planning and Evaluation Office of the University. Thus, the main communicative purpose of the text was to acquaint the continuity of the actions from the previous plan, but with a strong emphasis on the new things, so we find great amount of sentences such:

...this document also includes a new vision of where to advance... Also during this stage it will be designed other new plans in order to target and guide the development of new strategic actions...
The Programme of activities situates itself between past and future. On thinking ahead it has instrumented new lines of actions...as regard the past; The Programme keeps everything that is already being done...

Thus, there is an expressed self-legitimating feature within the text comparing the past and its need to keep planning the future. Also it introduces some explanatory sentences regarding each strategic line that guides the text sections and give apparent indications of future orientated directions:

...it presents a new programme of action for the coming years, which will continue to promote and generate new sectoral plans,... it will stimulate the implementation of new initiatives by the units and individuals and it will make an effort to identify, support and publicize these initiatives...

At another hand, in the follow up version, the ST2 is constructed upon four main areas, teaching; research, knowledge transfer, society and territory, people, structure and organization. The text construction that is derived from those four main lines highlights some reflections upon each one, introducing a new model of management, which was called: "good government", and presents the corresponding action plans. Thus, it does not follow a strategic plan style; it does not introduce concepts such as "mission", "vision" or "strategic objectives. Instead, the text construction is based around the actions plans from each strategic line and delineates the respective activities. Hence, the authority and voice that have predominance in this text are put forward by the use of verbs in the infinitive, in order to construct the actions with a future orientated time:

...to develop a set of actions aimed at sensitizing and informing the academic community... Also there is the use of the active voice, but only to propose the future intents, such as: *The University aims to be a reference among European universities...*

Although the ST2 is not conceived as a strategic plan, nevertheless there is the constant mention of the planning benefits and relevance for the university, especially on keeping up with the units:

Accomplish a greater coherence of action between different parts of the institution in achieving common goals by applying a new model of strategic planning...;

...planning should allow us to clearly establish the priorities of our institution and give coherence to all elements involved, both from the standpoint of the units and people involved and from the standpoint of the activities to be carried out.

Here also there is a compelling self-legitimatize argument for planning such as:

...planning is a great tool to encourage participation and co-responsibility of the university community, which constitute the best guarantee of success in achieving objectives.

Mention regarding the previous planning experience is found when the text presents the need for restructuring the current methodology in use on getting the units involved in planning:

It has been conducted a monitoring process within the units, which remained pending from the promotion of strategic planning in the previous period...

So, at one hand, the text emphasises how to build the involvement and participation of different agents, and at other, foster the need of the redefinition of the current methodology:

Establish guidelines in order to identify and achieve co-responsibility of the university community with the overall goals of the institution by incorporating recognition mechanisms of individual and collective involvement and participation of the different agents.

Refine the methodology of the strategic planning with units, making it simple, participatory and transparent in order to promote shared responsibility.

Then, moving to the latest text, the ST3, we observe that its structure also does not correspond to a strategic plan, likewise, it does incorporate the basic elements of a "mission", "vision" and so on, so in organization structure terms, it approaches itself to the ST2, in the sense that the basic text construction is built also around lines of actions. Along with, this text is encompassed by the introduction of the government plan and its lines of actions. These lines revolve around five main themes: people, academic activity, the organizational structures, the university society relationship, which are all based upon a management model that emphasised the quality of the university services. Hence, there was a strong emphasis on the new management model. The main components around it were the establishments of objectives and sub-themes for each line, followed by the enactment of short-term and medium-term actions. In such a way, the main communicative purpose of the text was to foster the priorities of the Direction Board for the renewal of the university government team. In that sense, the text directs the reader upon its content:

Through the pages that follow, you will get to know the priorities of the University Board for the management of our university from now until 2010… This plan gives answers to the major commitments that we have assumed with the society…

This is, in short, the spirit of the Government Plan…, which we have formulated from the conviction that our aim is to work with quality, innovative models and new methods to contribute to the sustainable and steady progress of society…

Also it brings in a renewal with the planning aspects which have been carried out previously:

..The model of resource management of the University needs to be agile, flexible and appropriate to the Plan of Government and close to everyone's needs (internal community and society in general). This requires coordination and communication between Functional Units (UF) and the basic units (UB), simplification of administrative processes and balance between centralization and decentralization…

Redefine the model of strategic planning of basic units for the period 2007-2010 under the new context.

5.2. Talk as action in the strategy text production and reproduction

As follows we will now concentrate on the "talks" from practitioners at the top and middle levels of the university, concerning their views within the production and

reproduction of the strategy planning process undertaken by the university. Thereupon, in the final part of this paper, we will concentrate ourselves in contrasting the discourses interplay upon the key aspects and purposes fostered by the strategy texts within talk.

5.2.1. Narratives told by top management

Strategy making in universities involves many different actors; are often fragmented and may vary according to individual units. Thus, we have talked to some informants from the top management in order to explore their roles and perspectives about the continuity of the different text productions. The University has gone through a process of Vice-chancellor change very recently and the previous Vice-chancellor, which was the responsible for delivering the ST3, was re-elected. Then, right now the top management team find themselves in a process of rearrangements. Hence, the informants were mostly involved in the implementation of the ST3 and currently are engaging in the elaboration of the new strategy text, which should be delivered in the next year. There was a clear perspective that the text has served as giving a direction and support for the university management throughout the previous term of office. As one informant addressed: *The plan* ((referring to the ST3))[ii] *…was a little guidance from the previous term, and with the recently elections results, in fact we are awaiting* ((restructuring of the current top management team)) *in order to do something similar for this new term which we are just starting.*

The framework which has been employed during the ST3, was considered as a pilot case by the top management, in the sense that in the previous stages (frameworks used within the ST1 and ST2) they have follow a different negotiation strategy within the units: *…it has been something quite different from previous ones…perhaps in the earlier stages, we had a more individualized strategic planning for all units (1.5), and then also another very important difference was that in these early stages it could be notice an increasingly growth within the units endowments, which were then consolidated according to the achievement of the previously established objectives. Then in the plan we are now* ((referring to the ST3)) *(.) this economic endowment could no longer grow at the same rate and even less to achieve:: a level of consolidation, then we were forced to choose a different strategy in approaching the planning within the units…*

This new strategy was based in a framework being elaborated and approved by a Commission for planning and evaluation, which was established by the government council at the beginning of the previous Vice-chancellor term of office. Their task was to define the set of performance indicators in order to allocate the university budget according to the level of activities of each individual unit. The launch of this process has been quite troublesome, especially regarding the definition of the set of indicators that could encompass the heterogeneity of the all individual units. Then, once the indicators have been established, each year the allocation of the budget were done according to the results of the level of activities of each unit. In this manner, the unit which had a better performance would receive a growth in its budget, on the contrary, the unit which had come forward with a low performance, would see a reduction in its budget. In such a way, the strategy meant to carry out a close follow up with the low performance units in the sense that they would receive all information regarding the areas they were in need to improve, and in base of this information, they could negotiate a strategy project or initiative in order to receive additional resources.

Therefore, reflecting upon the negotiations within the units planning framework, the basic relationship between middle and top management levels were rooted around resources. Although when confronting this perspective with one of our informants, his narrative was very compelling, stating that the engagement from the units involved much more then only resource issue: … *it not only served as a purely economic issue, I believe that the units have been keen to see what information they could get from the reports they were receiving annually (.) … and based on the information given, one could make decisions* ((present or not present a local strategic initiative))*, on how to move in one direction or another…*

As respect to the follow up and the main differences from the previous strategy text produced, there was an explicit indication that the principal components were known, although there were no engagements upon their implementation: … *I recall the framework from previous strategic planning; but I did not live it, or (.) lived it in a distance, from my department.* That could suggest that the text production and reproduction could not fulfil the gap between the authors and the readers of the text. In such a way, it may suggest that the actors outside the sphere of the top management feel that they live it in a kind of "distance", or it is not "theirs".

5.2.2. Narratives told by middle management

From the stand point of the middle management, we may see some variability on the perspective upon the reproduction of the text within the enactment of the strategy at the unit levels. And this conduct us back to the problem of the "collective action", encompassed by the stronger dependence on external sources of funding (and a concomitant concern for quality expressed by many different stakeholders), a devolution of top-down authority and the growing treatment of academic departments as "cost-centers", which has led to the perception in many cases that the institutional leadership needs to be "improved upon" (Askling 2001). Upon this context, our informants, directors of academic schools, underlined some "boundaries problems" when it comes to the strategy making. Therefore, their positions were mostly bound to the culture characteristics of the individual units in respect to their way of "doing things".

For instance, in one of the academic school, its operational characteristic follows a hierarchical system, so that all activities and decision processes go through the formal way by the agency of the school board. Often through these formal ways, some elements of resistance are created, and then the particular characteristic of the management style of the unit, which works in a system of networks, comes to play a particular role. The practices in place by the unit is run by the idea of "organization-as-network", where it has a minimum of formal structures and relies instead, on the formation and dissolution of teams to meet specific objectives. This network structure utilizes information and communications technologies extensively, and makes use of know-how across the unit, which ended up allowing building better arguments upon those elements of resistance that could emerge during the decision-making processes. So, according to the school director, there are formal ways that continue through the hierarchical structure of the school, but also they count with the advantage of working "locally" in their "network structure", which allows them to go throughout informal paths, by creating what they called "bridges". These "bridges" could also often lead back to conflicts, and here we see the influence of institutionalised practices, which according to the director: …m*any times when there is an element of contradiction, this structure* ((the university pyramidal structure)) *plays a more general opposition to these parallel cultures* ((the organizational-network))*, rather than being inclusive. - …in many cases the hierarchy of the University plays rather as an adversary to the school…*

As respect to the relationship of the school within the strategic planning framework promoted by the University, according to the director, the focus lies within the numbers, rather than within the processes themselves. As a result, from the unit perspective, *the projects presented are characterized more as a way to protect ourselves… this protection means that we are playing the game under the established rules… Therefore, when submitting the projects, we generate indicators in order to be measured, based on numbers which we were already accomplishing and then, we can guarantee the additional funding… and on the other hand, once we get the funding, we use it in other projects that we are real interested* ((this is a process of creating other bridges)). *So, the projects presented in these frameworks are basically fairly general, in order to fit in the framework of the university*.

Another director from an associated school put forward that the situation of the school as an associated center, functions in a quite different way from others university schools, so the relationship with the university are also divergent. Nevertheless, he says that they have the University as a reference, but there are situations where they could not fully enter the game: *This situation is a bit odd, because first it seems that everything works as the University way, but you always have differential facts and these facts leads to situations that when applying the two rules* ((from the standpoint of the university or from the school standpoint))*, the two have always been misapplied, heh ... at least this is the feeling I have, or I'm likely wrong ... but, I see that whenever there are two paths, and there is one that interests me more than another, I always try to go for that, and they* ((the university)) *say: no, you have to go for the other way* ((under the rules game imposed by "them" – university)).

6. Discussions

The purpose of this paper was to analyse how the text and discursive practices are interplayed within the production and reproduction of the strategy text in a university setting, and what implications it has entailed upon the collective engagement or disengagement on its continuity.

In such a manner, looking throughout the three strategy text, the variability of the discourse emerging from each text, based on the interpretation of the key components

and aspects that have emerged, adapted or renewed, we can suggest that it was a result from the necessity of adapting the text to a new context and reality. In another words, the two latest texts have been produced and delivered as a result of a top management team renewal. Therefore, the texts were strongly influenced by the changes within the top management, being delivered from an electoral campaign program. We precisely see continuity without consecutiveness, in other words, there was no cohesion or connection going from one to another, the university kept planning, but the initial bet for the strategic planning being made in 1994 apparently got lost in the ST2, and this rupture are not clearly justify within the following version, and then successively, which led us on seeing them as isolated "parts". Thus, the changes emerging from the production and reproduction of the strategy texts are characterised rather as being a radical breakdown (Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2002) more than emerging from a recursiveness and continuity. It may suggest that planning has not built consistency within the organization culture, and with each top team renewal, there was the need to reconstruct it, in order to produce a new text that they would feel as "theirs".

Thus, it may imply that the strategy text does not belong to the University, rather it belongs to their authors: the top management in charge, which could be associated to one strong argumentation for the problems of collective engagement within the text. As follows, the texts may not have being used in order to entail a vision or a direction from a communicative purpose perspective as suggested by Palli et al. (2009), but rather as being a political or administrative obligation. This goes in consonance with the argumentation by Hellstrom (2004) where both the duality between entailing vision, direction and strategy with executing and disseminating routines, are dependent on maintain an acceptable psychological contract, or a "pre-contractual" relationship with the constituent parts of the "academic" organization. Which in the case of the university analysed, they were mostly based upon economic and technical resources, as indicated by one of the school directors, *the negotiations and decisions process always go down to money matters.* In line with these reflections, by considering the arguments of Denis et al. (2007), that from a social practice perspective, the strategy formation is not just the prerogative of the dominant coalition, but actions of a greater number of actors, being managers or not, we see that the university have not moved out from the "cell" structure of doing strategy, as indicated by Buckland (2009), the texts are not determinist and of short horizons, they are aspirational but largely formless, which does

not connect the management with the strategy process of the "periphery". The "bridges" built to cross over institutional bureaucracy, as stated by one of the informants, reinforces that perspective of 'cell' structures of doing strategy, where local practices and success initiatives seem to run independently of the general strategy outcomes of the large institution.

And at another hand, if we focus upon the perspective that any strategic initiative will necessarily be constructed, reconstructed and renegotiated through ongoing practices and routines as argument by Lozeau et al. (2002), we observe that the incentive for and the shape of the texts were seen as framed by funding demands and prescriptions, rather than by emerging strategies or by being derived from the "day-to-day job" itself, not from a superimposed activity of strategy framed around "numbers". Thus, the views from middle management support that reflection, as one informant asserts: *...all that comes from the executive office, we have to translate it in somehow...* Or that: *The university focus on the isolated results, for the reason that they are mostly concerned with obtaining the overall numbers rather than looking closely inside the processes or local practices that generate such results...*

This may indicate a perspective mismatch between the top management talk and the middle management talk, where the central role of the different strategy text in the praxis of strategizing in the university (Hendry 2000) might be strongly influenced by the institutionalized routines and practices that creates a system of rules functioning under incentives and compensations, which does not support the construction of "bridges" that would allow working on continuity rather than keeping up build upon the discontinuity. In this way, from the standpoint of the top management, there is a relationship of controlling the numbers, but with an intention of showing them (units) that they were doing good here and not that good there, but following the strategy of leaving to them (units) the autonomy to decide on which areas they would think it was worth working. At another hand, the discourses from the middle management, suggest that this practices of negotiation does not go beyond the use of the texts as an instrument of purely control, more than a tool to guide future directions, which does not foster affiliation or identification, which could rather be driven by a strong system of rules of interests and influences.

The analysis have suggested that the interactions between the strategy text and the different practitioners within the university, were mostly based within the perspective of "lets follow the rules in order to be protected and then we can feel free to keep doing what we were already doing", which shows that the construction and use of knowledge in the chain of spoken and written genres with the university, suggests relevant wholes to be covered. In that sense, we are aware that the study did not go deep on the face-to-face interactions within the text and its intertextuality in all the levels of the university, as well, addressing the translation process by the different practitioners, which might give another insights into the discontinuity or continuity of the text and the role of language and discursive practices on the strategy text production and reproduction. Hence, we consider these discussions on a base of preliminary results in the framework of a work in progress.

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[i]The examples used throughout the data analysis have been translated from Catalan and Spanish.

[ii] We have used the transcription conventions indicated by Wood and Kroger (2000) which was derived by the system developed by Atkinson and Heritage (1984).