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**The practice of shared inquiry: How actors manage *for* strategy  
emergence**

**Sven-Ove Horst**

Erasmus University Rotterdam  
Burgemeester Oudlaan 50  
3062 PA Rotterdam  
horst@eshcc.eur.nl  
Phone +49170-7771807

**Sabine Baumann**

Jade University  
Friedrich-Paffrath-Straße 101  
Wilhelmshaven, DE 26389  
sabine.baumann@jade-hs.de

**Rita Järventie-Thesleff**

Aalto University School of Business  
P.O. Box 21230  
FIN-00076 AALTO, Finland  
[rita.jarventie-thesleff@aalto.fi](mailto:rita.jarventie-thesleff@aalto.fi)  
mob. +358503482051  
+358405141281

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# **The practice of shared inquiry: How actors manage *for* strategy emergence**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper problematizes the applicability of traditional top-down strategic planning in a continuously changing media industry and builds a practice-theoretical perspective for analyzing strategy emergence. Through a qualitative analysis of 22 interviews, with media professionals and consultants of a German-based print magazine company, we identify a jointly enacted practice that we call “shared inquiry”. This practice includes recursive and adaptive strategizing actions towards (1) searching and learning (actions of employees), (2) facilitating and questioning (actions of managers), and (3) guiding and reflecting (actions of consultants). We demonstrate how these actions form a mechanism through which media managers create the conditions to cope with continuous change and how they manage in order to achieve strategy emergence both locally and on an organization-wide level. Ultimately, we show how strategic actions can be mapped in a continuum that supports “responsive coping”.

**Keywords:** strategic media management; strategy-as-practice; change management; process-theory; emergent strategies; responsive coping

**Wordcount** main text:  $\approx$  10.000 words

## INTRODUCTION

Strategy processes and practices are needed more than ever to help managers make sense of their challenges and anticipate or respond to ongoing developments in today's rapidly changing environments in a strategic manner (Burgelman et al., 2018; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006; Wolf & Floyd, 2013). As an important voice in the field, Hamel (2009, p. 3) claims that we should "reinvent strategy making as an emergent process". This statement is echoed by a long tradition of special issues on strategic planning (Wolf & Floyd, 2013), and strategy processes (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006), as well as collections around strategy as practice (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2015a), who have reiterated that we need more research on strategy emergence to better understand the phenomenon (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, pp. 29-31) and conceptual adaptations to contexts where the assumptions around classical strategic planning do not work (Chari, Katsikeas, Balabanis, & Robson, 2014; A. Lowe & Jones, 2004; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Wolf & Floyd, 2013).

This is particularly the case in the media industry, where companies are transforming towards an open future. This future brings new products, business models and cultural practices (Achtenhagen, 2017; Deuze, 2012; Evens, Raats, & von Rimscha, 2018; Küng, 2017a; G. F. Lowe, 2016; Mierzejewska & Shaver, 2014; Wirtz & Elsässer, 2017). In addition, organizations are driven to become more entrepreneurial (Will, Brüntje, & Gossel, 2016) and more adaptive (Baumann, 2013). Essentially, this rapid and continuous change, which characterizes both the strategic environment and internal structures, work-processes and practices of media organizations (Daniels & Hollifield, 2002; Ekdale, Singer, Tully, & Harmsen, 2015; Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Villi, 2014; Picard, 2009), makes traditional approaches to strategic planning often quite ineffective. In consequence, media organizations need to develop new approaches and patterns of strategic thinking (Daidj, 2018, p. 111).

This is exemplified by current industry reports (PwC, 2016a, 2017) and statements by top managers in the media industry. For example, Davin Wenig, CEO of eBay, explains that managers need to prepare themselves to understand that disruption and change are normal in a digital company, and that instead of thinking of them as failures, we should embrace change (PwC, 2016b, p. 5). Similarly, Neustar's CEO Lisa A. Hook perceives that "the goal is to create an ever-evolving organization that brings everyone along. That's the art of becoming rather than trying to dictate where we'll be in five years. Even if I tried to tell you what I think we're going to look like in five years, I'd be absolutely wrong." (PwC, 2016b, p. 18). While these statements are pointing towards the normality of change and importance of keywords such as "emergence", "becoming" and "evolution", we have very limited knowledge about how, in fact, media managers can strategize for such continuous change and emergent organizational realities.

To address this gap, this paper studies how media professionals manage for strategy emergence. We are presenting an analysis of qualitative data that draws from 22 interviews with media professionals and consultants around the headquarter of a large German-based print magazine company. The company is a good case because the interviews were conducted when it was adapting a new strategy and its members faced great uncertainty about their new course of

action. Moreover, they faced the need for greater digitalization of work processes, while enhancing collaboration and innovation across the entire organization. As will be shown, this is a strong case for addressing this phenomenon.

Now, to better understand strategy emergence in this organizational context, we build a theoretical framework that is grounded in processual conceptions of organizational change (Beech & MacIntosh, 2012; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) and current practice-theoretical descriptions of emergent strategies (Burgelman et al., 2018; Chia & Holt, 2009; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Research on strategy-as-practice suggests that strategy is something that people in organizations *do*, as compared to something that an organization *has* (Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Whittington, 2006). It shifts our focus towards the actions, constellations and local mechanisms through which people strategize. Hence, it regards strategy as an organizing practice of organizational members where *strategy making* becomes “an umbrella term that describes the myriad of activities that lead to the emergence of organizational strategies” (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 3). With this approach, strategy is “construed as an organized consistency of purposive actions” (Chia & Holt, 2006, p. 636).

This means, instead of exercising actions that are targeted towards a pre-defined goal that are purposefully planned, strategic actions may be directed towards understanding and overcoming immediate obstacles (Chia & Holt, 2006, p. 644). These actions can consist of, e.g. creating, supporting and promoting an organizational context that enables employees to participate in ‘doing’ strategy. Particularly in creative work, this means that instead of managing strategy traditionally, organizations manage *for* increased participation, knowledge exchange and adaptation by various organizational actors (cf. Malmelin & Virta, 2017).

Essentially, this conception opens up our research frame to involve different kinds of practitioners (Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017), and shifts our focus to local actions of media practitioners coping with unfolding and emerging strategic realities (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). In situations of ambiguity and uncertainty “media managers” exercise practical and context-dependent judgement (Stacey, 2012, p. 108), which includes balancing creativity and economic demands simultaneously (Horst & Moisaner, 2015; Virta & Malmelin, 2017). Therefore, managers, journalists, media sales, digital product developers and consultants act strategically when they influence and participate in shaping local circumstances of collaboration, decision-making and knowledge sharing from which strategy in the organization emerges.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. We first review how the rapidly changing media environment challenges traditional views on strategy and then describe the practice-based perspective on emergent strategy in these contexts. Next, we present our methods and materials and proceed to the findings section. Based on our analysis, we were able to identify a practice of “shared inquiry”, which is characterized by recursive and adaptive strategizing actions towards (1) searching and learning (actions of employees), (2) facilitating and questioning (actions of managers), and (3) guiding and reflecting (actions of consultants). Furthermore, we elaborate on these practices and show how they are situated in a continuum of recursive to

adaptive actions that lead to “responsive coping”. This relates to our understanding of managing for strategy emergence, which is targeted at managing unfolding realities through indirect actions regarding change (Chia, 2014) and by attentively making sense of what is going on (Stacey, 2012, pp. 107-109). This creates the conditions to manage *for* strategy emergence, as opposed to managing strategy as a thing (Golsorkhi et al., 2015a; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). These findings are discussed in the light of current literature on strategy emergence and managing continuous chance (e.g. Burgelman et al., 2018; Chia, 2017; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Finally, we draw conclusions based on our study.

## **Literature review**

Scholars in media management have a strong tradition of studying strategy and change in media organizations. In this section, we discuss current research and describe some of the challenges that researchers have identified in media organizations when applying conventional approaches of strategic planning and top-down initiated change.

### ***Managing change in media organizations***

Top-down initiated changes frequently face challenges when they proceed towards implementation. Especially employees’ involvement and engagement in change initiatives is hard to establish, because local work cultures might hinder idea implementation. For example, Daniels and Hollifield (2002) show that newsroom professionals respond negatively to changes in their work environment and work moral is reduced. They claim that for managers, “organizational change is a losing proposition”, because they will be held responsible for change management efforts (Daniels & Hollifield, 2002, p. 675). Yet, despite this difficult position, managers are important for influencing the organization through facilitating collaboration and bridging the newsroom with non-news departments (Gade, 2008).

Managers thus play an important role in balancing organizational tensions and facilitating change (Achtenhagen & Raviola, 2009; Horst & Moisaner, 2015). Indeed, Achtenhagen and Raviola (2009) show that structural, processual and cultural tensions need to be actively managed to avoid dysfunctionalities and support change. Furthermore, van den Bulck and Tambuyzer (2013) show that understanding the collision of organizational practices that are linked to convergence (digitization) with existing practices from analogue media is important for supporting individual adaptation and identity change. In particular, when these tensions are deeply rooted in local work contexts, where practices as a response to the inherent complexity of news production (Sylvie & Gade, 2009) have been built up over time and become institutionalized (Lowrey, 2012), then, supporting strategic change of organizational practices may be tremendously challenging.

The way managers facilitate change depends on their local context. For print-media Tameling and Broersma (2013) exemplify a case of “de-convergence” in a newspaper newsroom. Here, the employees’ resistance was so strong that instead of vertical convergence, where everybody would need to be able to perform practices of news production for print and online services, the

people fared better with horizontal convergence, i.e. by creating two newsrooms with specific journalistic standards and values (Tameling & Broersma, 2013). To ensure a smooth process of managing change, Massey and Ewart (2012) contend that management should create a workplace climate that is open to organizational change, and then leverage that climate into active employee support for a specific change. Furthermore, these ideal managers should engage strategies to recalibrate attitudes and beliefs that do not fit well with the change and to leverage those that already do (Massey & Ewart, 2012, p. 221). While this is important, it disregards that *in practice* culture or “organizational climate” can hardly be managed, because attitudes and beliefs cannot be controlled by management (Alvesson, 2004; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). In the same way, approaches to manage culture ignore that organizational patterns are not only dependent on what managers do (see, e.g. Stacey, 2012). Nevertheless, we learn that a better understanding of the mechanisms, dynamics, and outcomes of organizational change would help news managers more effectively “manage” change (Massey & Ewart, 2012, p. 222). This points to the importance of this research.

### ***Managing strategy in media organizations***

Research in the field of strategic media management aims at approaching and conceptualizing organizational challenges, so that practitioners can work successfully towards developing their organization’s future in strategic manner (Achtenhagen & Raviola, 2009; Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2014; Küng, 2010; Maijanen & Jantunen, 2014; Mierzejewska & Shaver, 2014; Oliver, 2013). This research often focuses on the organizational level, and elaborate how to carefully select an environment, build core competencies, or design long-term strategies (Colapinto, 2010; Küng, 2008; Vukanovic, 2009), such as new multi-platform or content strategies (Goyanes & Dürrenberg, 2014). Following this tradition, research analyzes how organizational changes impact financial performance (van Weezel, 2009) and how new distribution strategies might be best adopted to enhance production activities, content development and business models (Doyle, 2013; Evens et al., 2018). They show how media organizations can move towards higher margin activities through vertical integration and horizontal concentration (Daidj & Jung, 2011) and describe the importance of path-dependency for an organizations strategic development (Cestino & Matthews, 2016). They confirm that financial investors can support dynamic capabilities in media organizations (Hasenpusch & Baumann, 2017) and describe the strategic approaches of media firms for responding to market changes (Horst, Murschetz, Brennan, & Friedrichsen, 2018) by focusing on macro-organizational behavior. In a complementary manner Maijanen (2015) explores the evolution of a dominant logic and strategic framing, and illustrates the contradicting forces that media organizations need to balance (Maijanen & Jantunen, 2014), thereby exemplifying a greater awareness for processes of decision-making and change.

Yet, very few studies seem to be addressing micro-aspects of organizational strategy, such as individual practices, decision-making processes, team developments or learning. Within the few exceptions, there is for example Oliver (2008) who urges that action learning may encourage individual reflection and insightful questioning to enable individual strategic learning in organizations. Drawing on the concept of ambidexterity, Järventie-Thesleff et al.

(2014) uncover differences in strategizing activities for print and online publishing. More recently, Horst and Järventie-Thesleff (2016), building on a narrative approach to strategy, describe future-oriented storytelling processes through which groups of media practitioners make sense of their strategic environment and stabilize meaning structures in their organizational context.

The need for developing our understanding of strategy and creating new conceptions in the field is underlined by Küng (2017b, p. xvi) who reports that media organizations seem to abandon rigid strategic planning in favor of opportunistic and more tactical moves. These responses become necessary because the pace, scale and scope of change in the media sector have undermined traditional approaches to strategy (cf. Daidj, 2018). Furthermore, accompanying these empirical observations, we seem to lack a more elaborate understanding of how and what kind of “practices” may support strategy emergence and continuous change (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). This is a critical gap because the rapidly transforming media environment and unfolding changes in work practices make it necessary to create knowledge, concepts and approaches that allow managers and employees to act strategically in the face of continuous change (Chia, 2014; Langley et al., 2013) and inform their actions from a perspective that is responsive to the unfolding processual complexity and opening of strategy work (Hautz et al., 2017; Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

For that matter, it is important that we adequately conceptualize these new strategizing activities and analyze which ones work well for conditions of continuous change. To do that, we build a theoretical perspective of strategic management that problematizes the notion of management control and questions what happens if we shift our view towards seeing change as the norm, instead as something extraordinary (Chia, 2014; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). With this we abandon some of the shortcomings of traditional strategy research and contribute to a more reflective analysis of how practitioners manage strategy emergence (Burgelman et al., 2018; Chia & Holt, 2009; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014).

### **Theoretical lens: A practice approach to strategy emergence**

Foundational work on strategy emergence dates back to the ideas of Mintzberg (see e.g. Mintzberg, 1994; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) which describe a “realized strategy” as a pattern in organizations actions over time, which is not only based on residually planned activities (deliberate strategy), but includes actions that do not derive from the intentions of top management (emergent strategy) (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014, p. 1204). This means that strategy is seen as an active and exploratory process that extends well beyond one individual, top management team, or context (Chia & Holt, 2009, p. 179). On that basis, *emergent strategy* is defined as “an organizational pattern that is the outcome of the interplay of local actions, practices, and intentions of all staff contributing to strategy making in the organization” (Horst & Järventie-Thesleff, 2016, p. 6).

Advances in practice theory enable us to conceptualize emergent strategy because they shift our focus to the performances and actions of people in a context that result in patterns which

are filled out and reproduced through successive moments and interdependencies to sustain the practice (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012, p. 7). A *practice* is defined as a routinized type of behavior that connects bodily and mental activities, things in use, background knowledge such as local understanding, know-how, emotions and motivations (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). The basis is an immanent *logic of practice*, which contains localized knowledge in the form of a strategic congruence and disposition that actions have a purpose for achieving desired or emergent goals (Chia, 2014; Chia & Holt, 2009).

Following Gherardi (2012), a practice provides sensibility that is partially given and partially emergent, thereby ordering the flow of work, and allowing for segmentation into subsets of coherent and interdependent activities, and codification into recognizable and socially sustained patterns of action (Gherardi, 2012, p. 202). Therefore, practices can be viewed as the unit of analysis in social contexts (Gherardi, 2012, p. 202). However, because there is “an emergent as well as deliberate quality to social worlds [...] it remains the task of the [researcher] to uncover the taken-for-granted practices that shape social life, applying a critical lens in order to expose the unacknowledged” (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 5). When studying strategy practices, the focus is on the doings and sayings of strategy practitioners, and examining issues that are relevant to those who are dealing with strategy, either as strategists in a media organization engaged in strategic planning or other activities linked with strategy, or as those employees, teams members and external consultants who have to cope with the strategies and their implications (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2015b, p. 1).

Essentially, a practice-theoretical perspective on strategy emergence shifts attention to the day-to-day activities and practices through which strategies and changing realities are managed in organizations (Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2014). Therefore, practitioners’ actions are strategic when they submit to the rules of their practice from which a sense of future potential emerges (Chia & Holt, 2006, p. 647). In other words, their intentions are rooted within local practices to achieve a future goal (see also Stacey, 2007). As a consequence, top management’s and employee’s strategic intentions both contribute to the emergence of strategic patterns over time. The management *of* strategy becomes a practice of managing *for* strategy emergence.

Therefore, we see strategy as a reflective practice that includes not only the managers that devise strategic visions, but also those who participate locally in managing their teams and creating local responses to organization-wide challenges, thereby opening up our lens of what is considered as strategy work (Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington, Cailluet, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011). This means that middle-managers play an important role in interpreting the direction of the top-management to ensure implementation, which may at times create “unintended outcomes” (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005). They are seen to translate ideas into everyday actions, e.g. when relating to outside stakeholders (Rouleau, 2005). Furthermore, not only media managers, but also journalists, media sales experts and digital product developers, as well as outside consultants are contributing to understanding and managing for strategic emergence in the firm. As Stacey (2012, p. 107) describes, “the patterns they recognize [and contribute to] are the emerging patterns of interaction that they and other people are creating”. Because of this intertwined nature, it is currently perceived that such locally initiated

spontaneous responses, the ad hoc ‘making dos’, may generate better longer-term outcomes than more deliberate and direct forms of intervention (Chia, 2014; Chia & Holt, 2009, p. 186). This is aligned with Mintzberg’s view (Mintzberg, 1994; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) as well as with newer studies focusing on organizational-level aspects of emergent strategy (Chari et al., 2014; A. Lowe & Jones, 2004; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014).

We draw on recent advances around strategy process and practice research, which suggests that taking a “strong process ontology” (Langley et al., 2013) can provide a path for a combinatory perspective on strategy process and practice themes, which is particularly helpful for understanding strategy emergence (Burgelman et al., 2018). From this view, we see that every aspect of the organization is constantly and simultaneously a product of activity, meaning that there are no states (such as before and after) and that any single set of activities (such as practices) is part of a larger, moving whole (Burgelman et al., 2018, p. 10). Organizational change is endemic, natural and ongoing (Carlsen, 2006; Chia, 2014, 2017; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). It occurs in and arises from everyday interactions, where actors engage in processes of establishing new meanings for organizational activities (Thomas et al., 2011). It is seen to take place because of ongoing adaptations in practices; thus, change emerges out of actors’ accommodations to and experiments with everyday contingencies, breakdowns, exceptions, opportunities and unintended consequences that they encounter (Orlikowski, 1996, p. 65). Working with emergent strategy however, is not an individual possession, competence or skill, but rather a social process containing different practices (cf. Stacey, 2012, p. 109). This means, “interdependent individuals can only develop and sustain the skills of practical judgement through participation with each other” (Stacey, 2012, p. 109). Therefore, key concepts for researching strategy emergence on a local level are, for example, recurrent interactions, response repertoires, emergent patterns, improvisation and translation (cf. Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 366).

Following a processual lens Beech and MacIntosh (2012, p. 3), change management can be defined as being based on skills of judging situations, selecting and adapting from prior practices in order to develop new ones and subsequently being able to understand and evaluate how these actions are working and thus make appropriate judgements. For them, a change manager is an active learner engaged in a continuous cycle of asking searching questions so that circumstances and purpose can be understood and matched to action (Beech & MacIntosh, 2012, p. 3). This kind of “practical judgement” is the experienced-based ability to notice what is going on and intuit what is most important to a situation (Stacey, 2012, p. 108). Fundamentally, this is connected with practice theory, because the constant reproduction of such activities may generate dynamics for constant improvement, adaptation and change in a practice as a response to altered conditions (Gherardi, 2012, p. 203). Moreover, Shove et al. (2012, p. 144) explain that practices produced in a context are outcomes of complex, essentially emergent processes over which no single actor has control. This means, managers are by implication part of the patterns, systems and social arrangements they hope to manage: they do not intervene from the outside, nor have their actions an effect in isolation (Shove et al., 2012, p. 145). Instead they learn, adapt, change, facilitate, support, connect, communicate, mediate and contribute ‘from within’ (cf. Chia, 2017). This focuses our analysis on the activities and

practices through which managers, team leaders and other actors in our context manage strategically amidst ongoing change. Our research question is: *How do media actors manage for strategy emergence?*

## METHODOLOGY

### Research context

Empirically, we employ a constructivist qualitative methodology (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) to analyze data from the context of a large German print-magazine publisher that needs to deal with continuous change. The organization was established over 50 years ago and currently employs over 10,000 people worldwide. It is seen as one of the key players in the German market publishing a variety of well-known and leading magazines for regional markets, including special interest magazines and well-known general interest brands.

While it differentiates itself traditionally from other large players through producing high quality content, it is increasingly active in digital media, expanding through acquisitions of digital start-ups and online platforms, as well as making investments to grow organically. But adapting to advancements in digital media and responding to declining markets in print is difficult because the media practitioners need new skills for working in the digital environment, for responding to the local and organization-wide changes, and to be able to strategize differently. Therefore, this media company is a prime example of a media organization that struggles to find a new sustainable strategy and new strategizing practices in an environment characterized by continuous change and emergence.

With the rise of the Internet, this company was at the forefront of digitalization. The company had specialty news platforms for their magazines, owned search engines and email services. It harnessed the capabilities to produce and deliver high-quality content and reach a wide variety of customers in international markets. Its digital ventures were innovative and allowed the company to become one of the most important print- and publishing houses in Europe. Around 2000, when the Internet boom seemed to stall, the company started to divest from digital ventures to focus predominantly on print. As part of this strategy, they developed new, innovative print-magazines. With a growing digitalization of media production and consumption, the company became, again, more active and renewed its attention to digital media products and services. A close integration between its sales activities and media production ensured growth and success.

Today, the company remains one of the biggest players in the print- and publishing market in Europe. At the same time, the company faces the challenge to develop a strategy for a rapidly changing environment with emergent properties. Therefore, the company routinely works with different types of consultants, expert advisors, coaches and trainers to offer a large variety of training services to organizational centers, teams, individual members and supports them in developing new competencies for managing teams, new technologies and facilitates exchange

between parts of the organization through open spaces and lunch meetings. This is important, because the company needs new practices and use its existing talent for producing high-quality content and facilitate growth and innovation into new areas. At the same time, to become more lean and flexible to respond to market changes, the company has decided to conduct layoffs to increase profitability and efficiency. This highlights the continuous changes under way and the need for successful strategizing practices.

### **Data collection**

The data collected for this study comprises of 22 in-depth interviews with 14 practitioners around the organizations' headquarter (HQ). The HQ was chosen, because it provides a context for analyzing strategy work as many people are seen to contribute to strategy making (Ferlie & Pettigrew, 1996; Strube & Berg, 2011). Therefore, we cover a range of media practitioners, such as (middle) managers in different areas, editors-in-chief, journalists, media sales, IT consultant, and an intern in digital products. These are complemented by interviews with consultants who worked with the case company before (see Table 1 for an overview).

The spectrum of practitioners was intentionally broad to include different perspectives and interpretations around strategy (Hautz et al., 2017). At the same time, this particular selection emerged naturally from trying to get access to the organization at a time when the company laid off employees for the first time in history. This meant being adaptive and respectful to the changes in the organization (Dundon & Ryan, 2010). Through personal contacts and then applying the method of chain referral (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008), it was possible to gain access during a sensitive time of strategic change. The reasons for conducting interviews with consultants were access and timing, but also perspective. At the time of change, they provided an "outsiders" lens towards the ongoing changes, and are seen as relevant practitioners in a strategy context (Whittington et al., 2003).

Even though in-depth ethnographic fieldwork is advised for understanding strategy work (Vesa & Vaara, 2014), it was not an option as people were sensitive about speculations and external observers of other news media. Yet, to be able to describe and analyze "practices", we explicitly focused on descriptions and reflections of everyday tasks, routines and patterns of behavior through asking broader questions such as, e.g.:

- What strategic changes have you experienced during the last years?
- How are you working with new technologies and changes introduced to your work context?
- How do journalists, media sales, and digital development teams work together?
- How are you able to react as an organization adequately to the ongoing changes?
- What are the challenges for working in this kind of environment?

These questions provided a starting point in the semi-structured interviews to respond flexibly towards what the interviewees were saying and diving deeper into their descriptions of events and responses. This way we created meaningful accounts and interpretations of strategic issues in dialogical manner (Czarniawska, 2014, p. 29). Furthermore, by interviewing the consultants

who had privileged knowledge of that context despite not being active in the HQ at the time, we gained an additional perspective for addressing aspects of managing everyday situations.

**Table 1. Interview data**

<b>Position/Category</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Management (M)</b>			
Manager	1	3 h	2014
HR manager	1	1.5 h	2015
Editor-in-chief	1	1.5 h	2014
Management trainee	1	50 min	2016
<b>Employees (E)</b>			
Online journalist	1	1.5 h	2014
Senior journalist (retired editor-in-chief, but still working for different magazines)	2	1.5 h + 1.5 h	2014, 2015
Journalist	4	20 min + 30 min + 1.5 h + 1.5 h	2014, 2015
Media sales representative	1	33 min	2016
Digital media products representative	1	50 min	2017
Internal IT consultant	1	1.5 h	2014
<b>Consultants (C)</b>			
Managing partner media consulting	2	30 min + 15 min	2014, 2015
Partner media consulting	3	30 min + 1 h + 1 h	2014, 2015
Media consultant 1	2	15 min + 30 min	2015
Media consultant 2	2	20 min	2015
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>approx. 22,5 hours</b>	

Our data sampling was purposeful for building in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). As our understanding increased over time, we learned more about which theories we could apply for framing this study (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 192-224). Therefore, some people were interviewed more than once, to follow up on these new ideas (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 103-108). The length of the interviews varied, depending on their function. They were audio recorded and later transcribed. The translation was done by the researchers themselves, when listening to the audio file. This ensured correct translation and simultaneous interpretation of linguistic aspects regarding cultural specificities (cf. Lopez, Figueroa, Connor, & Maliski, 2008). Overall, this allowed collecting relevant data for our study and remain sensitive to the organizational development.

### **Data analysis**

We started with an open interpretive frame to encompass a wide spectrum of ideas and concepts to problematize current understandings of traditional strategizing (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) and understand local patterns of behavior (Shove et al., 2012). This analytical procedure allowed us to do two things: (1) to explore the close relationship between our data and the theoretical conceptions and (2) build new theory for a developing research stream (Charmaz, 2006). Overall, the analysis took place through three stages:

*Stage 1:* From reviewing the literature we found that change and management control were often taken for granted (see e.g. Chia & Holt, 2009; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Hence, we initiated our analytical process by carefully reading and rereading our interview data and color-coded comments where respondents talked about change and strategy. We learned that the practitioners were greatly aware of change. It was central to their work. They experienced it as a continuous process in which many things happened and unfolded (see e.g. Chia, 2014). We noticed that in these quotes, the respondents were referring to both the content and source of change, as well as the actors involved in or affected by the change. Identifying the actors, enabled us to move to the second stage of analysis.

*Stage 2:* Building on the strategy-as-practice approach and research on open strategizing (Whittington et al., 2011), we focused on various actors both inside and outside the company, and on people operating at different organizational levels and hence categorized the quotes in three groups: employees (E), managers (M) and consultants (C). Broadly, our goal was to better understand how they make sense of their strategic challenges (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Specifically, we wanted to know how they interpret and act upon emergent change strategically. Yet, contrary to our expectations, journalists, consultants and managers were quite critical and pragmatic as to what extent strategy and change can be controlled by decisions people make in the organization. Generally, decisions were seen to have an effect, but often not as it was envisioned (cf. Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Chia, 2014). Therefore, an understanding of unfolding change and reactions to strategy emergence evolved.

*Stage 3:* In line with our theoretical framework and good standards for conducting a practice-theoretical study, we performed iterative readings and rounds of interpretation of our material to develop rich descriptions and explanations for the general set of actions and how they unfold over time (Langley et al., 2013). We addressed how the practices link with trajectories of becoming, how resources are mobilized and used pragmatically, focusing on “emergent practices and cooperation in action” (Gherardi, 2012, p. 204). Hence, at this last stage we carried out a thematic analysis of actor-specific quotes through which we developed overarching themes and theoretical constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which helped identifying individual aspects and describing actions from the practice of “shared inquiry”.

## **FINDINGS: CONSTRUCTING THE PRACTICE OF SHARED INQUIRY**

Our analysis suggests that working with an emergent future becomes possible through the practice of “shared inquiry”. This practice is jointly enacted by managers, journalists, employees in marketing, sales and digital products, and consultants. It is characterized by recursive and adaptive strategizing actions towards (1) searching and learning (actions of employees), (2) facilitating and questioning (actions of managers), and (3) guiding and reflecting (actions of consultants). These practices are situated in a continuum of recursive to adaptive actions that lead to “responsive coping” with strategy emergence.

## **Actions of the employees: searching and learning**

Our analysis shows that employees look towards the managers, trying to interpret their actions and statements as well as eye the developments in the industry in order to extract cues for what they would need to do. Employees are conscious that digitalization changes work processes, influences their daily routines, and is creating new competition from technology and software giants that are becoming more focused on creating content and delivering it across their media platforms (Hess, 2014; Lindgren, 2017). However, the actual challenge for the employees is that changes are felt to be open-ended and unpredictable. They seem to produce new questions and exercise pressures for learning:

*More money and attention are flowing towards digital processes. However, there is no clear understanding, which digital processes are important. (E, Journalist)*

*It's a lot of searching that is going on right now, and I've been experiencing that for the last years. (E, Internal IT Consultant)*

*The job as a journalist, the way in which I have learned it, how I like it and makes sense to me will not exist in the future. I don't feel threatened by this. I don't have any sleepless nights, because luckily, I am quite flexible. (E, Journalist)*

From the interviews we see that the employees describe a growing complexity of information and a perceived relevance of their job to create interpretations for their audiences. They observe, challenges from an organizational trade-off between online and print. However, this may create more inquiry and shared sensemaking:

*In many editorial offices they now begin to link the print side and the online side. This creates a greater context for discussion, but online presupposes more time pressure than print. (E, Senior journalist)*

*[For these ongoing changes] asking questions is the core, but also learning by doing is important. You are simply trying out new things and then ask somebody if it doesn't work. (E, Media sales)*

Generally, the interviews show a drive towards discussions and active inquiry about what is going on. It seems that the employees react individually and locally to the tensions and ambiguities they are facing. These challenges may be part of the development towards a more open strategy, because through their practice-based contribution they are sharing the burden of “having to do something”, which is connected to the dilemma of empowerment (Hautz et al., 2017, p. 302). They talk about needing multimedia skills, experience to draw on, technical skills and affinity, and being more customer-oriented (Online journalist). Their responses show openness to change and having to work flexibly with an emergent situation:

*To work with change and think more in terms of “cross-media” you need to be responsive, open and interested. You need to be ready to absorb the changes so that you*

*can work with them, and you need to have a general interest in the matter. (E, Media sales)*

*You have to find your niche, and you have to position yourself. This is the way [to adapt]. You have to trust in your own abilities. It is a very tough job, and the times are difficult. This will not become better any time soon. (E, Online journalist)*

These individual responses lead to changes on a larger scale. As the employees develop new techniques and skills for digital media and a new work environment, these create changes in work practices in their teams and the organization.

*With the ongoing changes the work practices will change, this is clear. You have to work much more with the social media. This is a big chance, but the publishing houses have to give support so that you can do your work qualitatively well. (E, Senior journalist)*

*Sometimes strategy changes over time, because the employees change; you adapt to the [environmental] changes in this way and still everything turns out to be different from the strategy that was given. (E, Media sales)*

Overall, the first aspect of the practice of “shared inquiry” consists of employees actively inquiring about the changing conditions and thereby creating meaning about the nature and impact of these changes. The employees use their understanding of this active inquiry to inform their actions. As an outcome, the employees continuously adapt and cope responsively with the situation.

### **Actions of the managers: facilitating and questioning**

We see that the managers are aware of the challenges that employees face. They know about the difficulties of un-learning work practices that have been routinized over decades. They express that their task to act strategically consists of facilitating and questioning; in order to be able to find out how to respond to new conditions and work with emergent situations. On the small scale, this may mean to create meetings between people that haven’t talked with one another to reduce fear of the unknown and create a common understanding. At the same time, these practices are challenged by the current organizational structures:

*We have to learn every month that our journalists don’t have to fear working with the new people from digital products. A digital developer and a journalist (a thinker of content) can sit down for a coffee and talk with another, create ideas, and bring together two worlds, which may currently still be separated. (M, Manager)*

*I think the difficulty is to put it to practice every day, in the structures, which are there, but which have been changed quite a lot. That’s why we need to think a lot about intersections. I think it is quite difficult, because you still have to produce, but at the same time think about what this person could also be interested in. It’s really a change in the style of work and a change in working together. (M, HR Manager)*

The managers are carefully looking at the advertising and consumer market. They inquire continuously about what is going on: How does the market develop? What do the developments tell us? On this basis, they show skepticism about how the advertising market may be developing. This development may make it difficult for marketing managers to understand where their money is going, because intermediaries complicate the relationships between products and advertising budgets. This active inquiry shows that managers are quite aware of the emerging complexity. Generally, the managers feel the changes and the need to find answers to pressing questions. This may be related to the dilemma of disclosure, in which managers need to respond to expectations of audiences about sharing information and giving strategic direction (Hautz et al., 2017). Therefore, they ask searching questions, which can help making sense of the situation and facilitating organizational responses towards the ongoing changes. The following quotes are exemplary for how managers actively inquire:

*As a media company, you have to ask yourself: “Do mass media still exist? Is there still a mass in society? One industrial mass society?” (M, Manager)*

*[Inside] the company we continuously have to ask, how do we react to this? How do we cope with it? How can we set up the organization for the future to react to these changes that you cannot grasp? This is still the biggest challenge. (M, HR Manager)*

*We ask: What is actually our core competence as a media organization or especially at [the company]? It is that we are able to produce an immense variety of contents in a multitude of high-quality ways – ranging from a travel documentary, to a dossier in the [flagship magazine], over a campaign at [special interest magazine] – the entire range of products. Do we not actually lose a lot if we say this only goes into one channel? Or maybe two channels? This is print and this is the website. Shouldn't we think what else we could do with this content? But this leads back to what we have discussed: communities of interests, thinking about target audience groups, thinking in interest groups, taking the client's perspective, and opening the view. (M, HR Manager)*

This quote exemplifies that the managers are aware of the referential process of strategizing that they have adopted. While this awareness may come through in the reflective circumstances of the interview, their practice may indeed hold concrete answers how to cope responsively with emergent situations. The searching for answers and ideas, and the constant questioning are coupled with trying to bridge between people and facilitate goal-oriented working together.

*It is really important to have an Internet presence. We have to be present through electronic magazines. We have to get onto the phones of the users. We have to be present on Facebook, on Instagram, and even Twitter. We just started to think about that, even though it is really late. I don't have a solution yet for Twitter. What do we want on Twitter? (M, Editor-in-chief)*

Furthermore, managers seem to bridge and facilitate others when having to work across different departments in the organization. Essentially, the management of intersections is key. A manager explains:

*Working with a lot of people from various departments is difficult, simply because you have to work with so many people [from you need input]. For example, a journalist of one magazine is fully entrenched in his topic. This is a totally different type of person than the media sales person that has to go to the clients and sell advertisements. Because you are working with so many people that are all different, the biggest challenge is setting deadlines for receiving content in time. [...] For me, the core activity was managing intersections. (M, Management trainee)*

Overall, the second aspect of the practice of “shared inquiry” consists of the active sensemaking of the managers which becomes the basis for their actions. Through asking questions, they search for local responses to market needs and provide leadership for their employees. Surprisingly though, they have trouble in seeing what leadership may mean in their changing context. However, our research uncovers that increasing reflexivity is an important step to finding an answer.

### **Actions of the consultants: guiding and reflecting**

Our analysis shows that that the consultants’ task is to support the managers and employees of the organization through providing tools for guidance in change processes and working as a surface of reflection for the continuous changes. They help widen and deepen communication across organizational levels and stimulate reflection within groups to help produce greater meaning around organizational change (Stacey, 2012, p. 109). They may provide structural support for managers which are facing difficulties in finding a vision for the organization in a quickly changing market and simultaneously create awareness for patterns of change. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

*What I experienced so far is that it is immensely difficult to develop a vision for the future in today’s environment, because you cannot look so far ahead anymore. The market has become so dynamic that you cannot adequately judge [the outcome of] many developments. You can –maybe– plan for a medium-term and develop ideas, but long-term planning, where the organization should be in ten years is impossible. There are too many factors that create uncertainty. (M, Management trainee)*

*It is essentially a leadership task [we provide]. [...] You need to be able to reflect on the conflicts and paradoxes arising from continuous change at different levels: the individual level, the group level, the organizational level. This is what we enable our clients to do. (C, Managing partner media consultant)*

The consultants enable managers to make decisions more reflectively. They do so by explaining the organizational role or “function” of the manager, which essentially involves making decisions when things are ambiguous, mediating between different opinions and voices, and leading through asking questions. Moreover, because they allow observing and questioning (Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2009) these conversations anchor group members in the present as they make sense of the past in the present and open up more varied and reflective ways of building the future (Stacey, 2012, p. 109). This is important because leadership in

continuous change needs to create commitment and balance expectations (Hautz et al., 2017, p. 302) as well as provide security for the employees through inclusion. This can be achieved by being transparent about decisions and intentions for the team and organization, and through admitting when they don't know better. In other words, for coping with continuous change successfully, managers need to provide security for the process. This is demonstrated by how the consultants support the media organization.

*The employees need process security and not result security. The employees need to be able to work and be productive. (C, Media Consultant 1)*

*Our approach [to supporting change] is that we understand that the resources and competencies for change and development in organizations are already there. The employees know their market, their organization, and their colleagues best. We are only helping them to bring this potential to the open. [...] We do this by asking questions. We also work with them and help them develop their personality, their reflexivity, and bit-by-bit we come towards it [the locally sustainable solution]. (C, Partner media consultant)*

Indeed, by exploring what has worked well in the past and generating shared ideas and understandings about current or prospective patterns of behavior, their teams can help constructing answers about what to do (cf. Stacey, 2012, p. 109). By being open to their teams and including them confidently in the process of emergence, managers can generate a wider spectrum of ideas and responses, as seen in higher commitment, more empowerment and greater strategic variety (cf. Stieger, Matzler, Chatterjee, & Ladstaetter-Fussenegger, 2012). This shows that employees in non-management positions contribute to shaping the development of organizational responses to ongoing change. At the same time, opening up one's strategic behavior is not easy, because it needs an ability to cope with ambiguity, uncertainty, and anxiety (Stacey, 2012, p. 108). This is exemplified in the following expression of one journalist who had participated in a change management workshop:

*I think people are much more self-confident today than they were before. You can include them much better if you try to treat them at eye level. If you tell your team, "you have to work with less money, do you have an idea?" Why don't you try it? See if maybe the team has an idea. Nobody does that. Nobody dares to do that. (E, Journalist)*

Overall, the third aspect of the practice of "shared inquiry" consists of consultants providing guidance and enhancing reflection. This generates reflexivity around group processes and attentiveness towards organizational dynamics that all actors contribute to. It is evident that this is an important aspect of the practice which enables reflexive strategy actions which are essential in managing for strategy emergence.

### **The practice of shared inquiry: Characteristics**

Our analysis shows that the practice of "shared inquiry" reflects broader themes such as openness and transparency, which are characteristic for open strategizing (Hautz et al., 2017;

Whittington et al., 2011), as well as connects with aspects of emergent change, such as attentiveness, sensitivity and learning (Chia, 2017). Specifically, we find that the practice of “shared inquiry” is constituted through adaptive and recursive actions of the employees, managers, and consultants that lead to “responsive coping” and create the conditions to *manage for* strategy emergence on an aggregate level (see Figure 1).

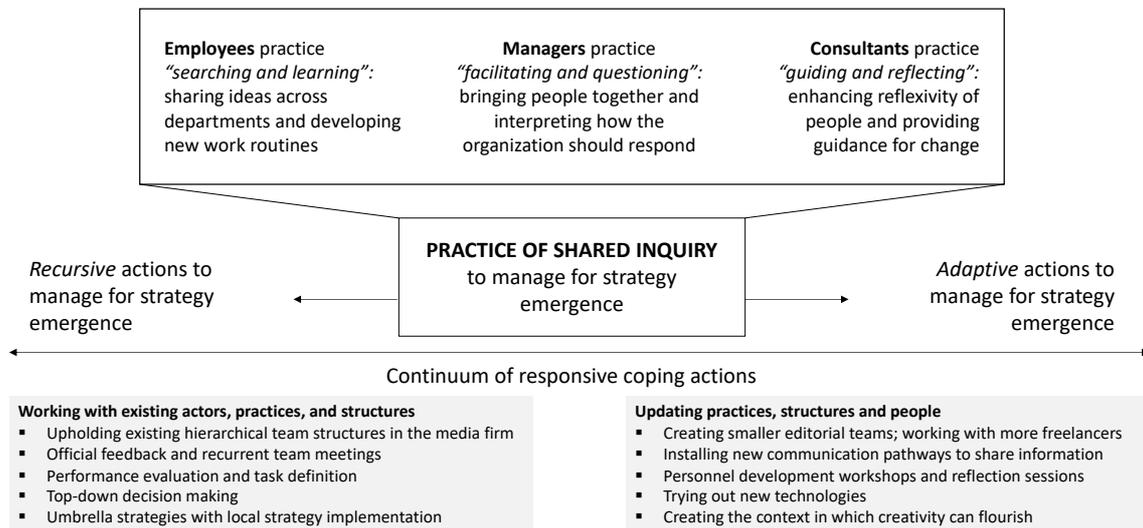


Figure 1: The practice of shared inquiry (The authors)

On the left side of the graphic we situate recursive actions supporting strategy emergence. *Recursive* means that the socially accomplished reproduction of sequences and actions follows a negotiated sense in relation to an existing template or repertoire of behavior to address a new situation (Clark, 2000, p. 67). It is more routinized and based on “how things have worked in the past” (Jarzabkowski, 2004, p. 531). This becomes evident as hierarchies and team structures remain rather strong and stable even though the move towards smaller teams and more external journalists is evident. They adhere to performance evaluations and task definition, even though they are continuously changing. Here, a manager explains:

*We have many job descriptions now that many people that work for the company cannot even read and understand. [...] We now need ‘android back end developers’, and this is certainly a distinction to the classical journalist focusing on text or that other key account manager for sales. (M, Manager)*

Even though top-down decision-making and classical strategic planning remains practiced, the impact is seen to be low by the middle managers and employees of the organizations. This is shown in critical reflections which are exemplified by the following quote:

*The digital transformation strategy from the top management won’t work by just putting old and new things alongside. (E, Internal IT Consultant)*

This means, you actually need to change the structures and practices across the entire organization. But this is difficult to do with recursive practices, because they stress a more

unified conception of strategy, pre-defined methods of giving feedback and operationalization of strategy into explicit targets (Mantere, 2005, p. 169). Therefore, you need to keep it open enough for allowing people to make independent interpretations and local decisions that can help coping with emergent realities. This is closely connected with “autonomous strategic behavior” for supporting emergent strategy (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014).

On the right side of the graphic we situate adaptive actions that are supporting strategy emergence. Adaptive actions are more open, learning-oriented and can be more radical. They facilitate varying degrees of change from incremental adjustments to radical reorientation (Jarzabkowski, 2004, p. 535). The focus is on learning and sharing information across teams, organizational silos and facilitating exchange between people. Communication pathways and open cultures that support connecting with people are key. These aspects are practiced in the organization through lunch meetings and a great variety of opportunities for personal interactions. Furthermore, adaptive strategizing actions are facilitated through development workshops offered by coaches and trainers which further peoples’ skills and enable them to adapt their behaviors to new situations. As highlighted by Stacey (2012, p. 109), management and leadership coaching is a ‘technique’ for fostering practical judgment which allows a reflexive engagement with organizational challenges and “grounded ways of taking account of the future in the present”. This is why many managers make use of these programs, workshops and knowledge dispersed in the organization This is showcased in the following quote:

*Managers approach me and they say, for example, we are merging these departments ... or I have taken over a new team [...] can you help me? (M, HR manager)*

Organizationally, supportive team settings and shared learning allow building adaptive routines and practices, which place an emphasis on a dynamic understanding of strategy and individual interpretations achieved through impromptu discussions and learning (Mantere, 2005, p. 169). This understanding shifts the emphasis to the sensemaking of all participants as an essential aspect of deciding on adaptive and recursive actions when coping with strategy emergence (cf. Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Furthermore, we see that the influence of personal connections and social networks across the organization is high. This is complementary to existing literature because in these conditions people may exercise practical judgement in recognizing patterns of working together and themes emerging from group interaction (Stacey, 2012, p. 110). Furthermore, it underscores an indirect control of actors over processes (cf. Shove et al., 2012, p. 145). These elements facilitate a continuous negotiation and re-interpretation of processual change and strategy emergence. They are essential because they “create an on-going opportunity for variation, selection, and retention of new practices and patterns of action” which allow generating a wide spectrum of outcomes and responses (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 94). Together, employees, managers and consultants create the basis to manage for strategy emergence.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our aim in this paper has been to better understand how media organization manage for strategy emergence. Our study shows that through the practice of “shared inquiry”, employees, managers, and consultants create the conditions that enable them to cope with continuous change and manage for strategy emergence. Below, we discuss the contributions of our study in greater detail.

### *Contribution to media management research*

First, our paper contributes to the field of media management, especially to research on *managing strategy* and *managing change* in media organizations by conceptualizing the practice of “shared inquiry” as an alternative approach to planning and design-based strategizing that allows managing for strategy emergence. We find that media practitioners balance elements of recursiveness and adaptation when working with emergent strategic change. These are not either/or decisions where you always focus on one type of practice that contributes to either extreme (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Mantere, 2005). In contrast, these strategic actions are more about an interpretation of circumstances and active sensemaking (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), which creates a sensibility for drawing on a wide range of actions, some of which may be more suitable for a given situation. In line with previous work, rather than being predefined, these actions are more dependent on their modus operandi and a practical sensibility for “what is needed” (Chia & Holt, 2006). In contrast to Mantere (2005), we show that performance evaluation of a journalist may not only be recursive but also adaptive, supporting learning and facilitation of ideas. Similarly, strategy operationalization may not just involve recursive plan following but interpretation and adjustment towards local situations in the media organizations thereby showing elements of adaptation. In other words combining existing routines with adaptive actions is critical for media organizations today.

Our study elucidates that “responsive coping” becomes a habit as change becomes a normality. We see that all interviewees were acutely aware of the ongoing challenges they face and that they focus on finding novel ways to adapt organizational routines, structures, and everyday work-practices to changing circumstances. This means change constitutes a “strategic normality” (Daidj, 2018; Küng, 2017b) where coping with uncertainty is important. Especially people that have been in the job a long time, such as some journalists, may fear changing work practices and not see a future in their profession as it once was. But when they uphold old practices in recursive manner, they may hinder strategic renewal (Horst & Moisander, 2015) and rather prolong adaptation.

We demonstrate that strategy arises from coping with change. This coping can be bold and innovative such as starting a new camp for idea development in the organization’s startup-incubator. In the same way it can be less radical and more incremental such as writing a new app for a magazine, trying out a new way to reach customers for advertisements, or changing the style of writing in cover pages in a niche magazine. Contrary to macro-oriented approaches (Evens et al., 2018; Vukanovic, 2016; Wirtz & Elsäßer, 2017), these strategic actions may not reorient an entire business model. Nevertheless, as our study has shown, they are enormously

successful for ensuring strategic survival, because they allow people to playfully develop ideas, visions and possibilities and develop the future in shared manner.

We find that strategy derived from operational practices may enhance the chances of exploiting strategic benefits in unpredictable environments. Generally, media industries have always been volatile and failures are common in hit-driven settings. However, both speed and variability of the current changes are unprecedented, which makes managing extensive disruptiveness a normal practice. Clearly, the practitioners from our study seem aware of this challenge. As former recipes of prescriptive best practices and strategy implementation are becoming obsolete, organizations need to move towards genuine adaptation, responsive coping, and more modular or network-based structures (Baumann, 2013). When it is no longer the big fish eating the small ones, but the fast fish eating the slow ones, responsiveness becomes an additional factor in addressing ambidexterity (cf. Virta & Malmelin, 2017).

Concerning the *transferability* of our concept we contend that while the analysis draws from a specific context in the media industry, the phenomenon of having to manage emergent strategy and finding new ways to adapt to digitization is by no means limited to large media organizations nor only to the media industry. But because qualitative research does not aim for generalization, the challenge rather is to understand and interpret these practices and invite readers and evaluators to make connections between elements of our study and their own understandings and personal experience (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006, p. 28). Consequently, small media organizations may not have the resources to hire consultants but providing guidance and reflection for their teams is just as important for them in managing for strategy emergence. However, strategic guidance and reflection in their organizations may come in other forms as they transform these experiences to their conditions. Similarly, other contexts that are highly knowledge-driven with a strong focus on creativity may benefit from increased reflection about how to support change, facilitate learning, knowledge-sharing, and idea development.

### ***Contribution to practice-theoretical studies***

Second, we contribute to advancing practice-theoretical research on strategy emergence by empirically exploring and theoretically elaborating on the characteristics of the practice of “shared inquiry” and showing how this enables responsive coping. In comparison with Balogun and Johnson (2005) who highlight that middle managers play an important role in making sense of change, we show that middle managers’ actions are only part of a constellation of actions of people that (willingly or unwillingly) contribute to the larger organizational responses to change. In contrast to Rouleau (2005) who presents that middle managers should translate strategy statements into actions for their employees which are aligned with the existing strategy, we uncover that middle managers focus more on constructively defining what is going on and how they should act, often together with their teams. However, this does not mean that they are neglecting orders from above. Instead, the strategic visions and ideas from above are so broad and sometimes even vague, because of the uncertainty in the changing media environment that more joint efforts are needed to construct local meanings and responses.

Our empirical findings show that strategizing for emergence is not about being in control but giving up (our idea of) management control. This may be surprising because even though it is in congruence with conceptual research on strategy emergence (Chia, 2014; Chia & Holt, 2009) strategy often remains understood as controlling outcomes, predicting changes, and “disciplining the future” (Kornberger, 2013). In fact, this understanding is echoed in early understandings of emergent strategy where Mintzberg and Waters (1985, p. 271) claimed that “emergent strategy does not have to mean that management is out of control, only – in some cases at least – that it is open, flexible and responsive, in other words, willing to learn”. However, as part of the ontological shift associated with practice-theory (Kouamé & Langley, 2017; Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001), it has become clear that emergent phenomena and social processes may lie beyond an individuals’ ability to predict or control (Shove et al., 2012, p. 145). Consequently, strategizing needs to be open to organizational change and provide space for improvisation, learning, and sensemaking (cf. Balogun & Johnson, 2005) because no one can say in advance whether an organization makes the right moves or not. This means, rigorously designed strategies may actually hinder success when managers aim to calculate and predict futures instead of allowing strategy to emerge (Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008, p. 115). Essentially, managers are suggested to create the space for letting strategy emerge. Therefore, we suggest that managers facilitate the conditions for sharing, experiencing, learning, and trying new things in creative manner, because these become important to understand and give meaning to newly forming realities.

Our research showcases that by opening up our frame as to what is considered strategy, strategic activity and a strategy practitioner may help the field in creating –like in this case– more inclusive and updated models for managing (media) organizations and managing for strategy emergence by creating conditions where practices like “shared inquiry” can be enacted. Notwithstanding the importance of addressing decision-making and cognition of top-management actors (Maijanen, 2015) or focusing on senior-editors (Sylvie, Lewis, & Xu, 2010), broadening our scope and methodologies to include a greater variety of actors, emotions, technologies, tools to better understand ongoing processes and developing practices (Burgelman et al., 2018) may be critical as we move towards greater digitization and embeddedness of digital media technologies in everyday life (Deuze, 2012; Lindgren, 2017). Therefore, understanding how digital media impacts and shapes strategizing activities, brand developments, work processes, as well as self-identities (Horst, 2019; Horst & Murschetz, 2019; Nambisan, 2018) may help to critically reflect on and support ongoing change, as well as contribute towards constructing meaning around digitization, managing information, and mediatization of society (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). For us as academics, the challenge becomes to adequately theorize media management practice and to formulate research findings in such a way that they become applicable for managers and employees of media companies, as well as people managing media in other contexts. In doing so, we can increase the relevance and broaden the perspectives for our growing field (Achtenhagen, 2017; Ots, Nyilasy, Rohn, & Wikström, 2015; Rohn, 2018).

### ***Practical implications***

Third, our study offers practical implications. We suggest to managers that their conception of strategy should be broadened from managerially and carefully designed strategy work to managing for strategy emergence. In times of rapid, continuous change, strategy is less similar to chess-like macro-competitive moves to ensure a dominant market-position for the organization (Chan-Olmsted, 2006; Daidj, 2018; Horst et al., 2018; Küng, 2017b; Lindén, 2012; Naldi, Wikström, & Von Rimscha, 2014; Strube & Berg, 2011) but instead more similar to a local, inclusive and creative micro-organizational practice of searching, knowing, and building which allows crafting possibilities and “making a future” (Comi & Whyte, 2017). In our study, this is exemplified by journalists who were attentively asking what they could do to develop themselves or to come up with a new product. This is represented in the managers’ way of asking questions like “what they could do with new media technologies like Twitter” or “how to bring their teams together for sharing knowledge”. This is shown in the consultants’ guidance and reflection. This complements existing research on strategy and change management in the media industry, because it accentuates the importance of managing for strategy emergence through contextual sensitivity, human interaction, and diverse interpretations. This means, managers are advised to invite genuine participation, instead of simply creating “better communication of the mission statement” or “giving more time for implementation” in a change initiative (Ekdale et al., 2015, p. 954). For that matter, it may be necessary to drop stereotypical conceptions like “street-level implementers” (cf. Massey & Ewart, 2012, p. 220). This connects with the need for media organizations to become more entrepreneurial (Will et al., 2016) and passively manage conditions for serendipity in which creativity may emerge (Malmelin & Virta, 2017).

In addition to a broader view on strategy work, our study shows how approachable leadership might become a key for managers. Our interviewees stated the need for better communication during times of change, to create possibilities for exchange, and balance tensions between people. This is important because it highlights that leadership in media organizations is essentially about managing contradictions and opposing demands (Pérez-Latre & Sánchez-Tabernero, 2003). Therefore, managers in media companies need to become facilitators to harness relationships and cooperation (Raelin, 2013). In line with a facilitating leadership approach, it is beneficial to involve employees in idea generation. Our study suggests that employees feel better and more secure when they can participate in shaping decisions, develop ideas for ongoing changes, and feel generally included. It may support collective organizational sensemaking about emerging changes and the creation of meaning around strategic challenges. Therefore, it can be a fruitful practice that reduces the burden for managers by distributing responsibility to teams and other employees that participate more actively. In addition, pursuing collaborative adaptation and knowledge sharing across platforms may open a path towards greater inclusion in creating innovation and strategy making (Nambisan, Siegel, & Kenney, 2018; Plesner & Gulbrandsen, 2015). This is important because both inclusion and transparency are the hallmark of good journalism and media as well as good standards of practice in a mediatized society. Towards this aim, fostering leadership that allows reflective growth and adjustment in times of change, without sacrificing the principles of the media profession is key (Pérez-Latre, 2014, p. 1107). Furthermore, this could attract new talent to more traditional

media organizations with an aptitude towards digital realities in times when they are competing with digital tech-giants such as Google, Apple, or Facebook around future talent.

Overall, the challenges for media managers remain immense, but they may find comfort in knowing that by adjusting little things in their everyday practices they may have large positive effects on their employees and organizations, and together shape the possibilities of managing for strategy emergence in creative and reflexive manner.

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