BRITISH ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT

BAM CONFERENCE

3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER
ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

Business Development as Internal Strategic Partner

Fatchie Oues

International Centre Greece, University of Strathclyde Business School, Glasgow, UK

fwt.oues@gmail.com

Igor Pyrko

Marketing and Strategy Department, Aston University, United Kingdom

i.pyrko@aston.ac.uk

Viktor Dörfler

Management Science Department, University of Strathclyde Business School, Glasgow, UK

viktor.dorfler@strath.ac.uk

Summary

Internal Strategic Partnership is an emerging role within the everyday practices of strategic management in organisations. This role caters for improved decision making, communication, and a culture of collaboration in the context of strategy formulation and implementation. However, this role is under-researched and its understanding in the literature is limited. In this paper we address the topic of Internal Strategic Partnership by drawing on two empirical case studies conducted with large technology companies in Greece, the United Arab Emirates, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. This way, we provide a number of new insights and recommendations with respect to developing Internal Strategic Partnership in organisations, including the important characteristics required for cultivating such a strategic role. In particular, we explore Business Development department as a promising candidate for leading the Internal Strategic Partnership. As a result, we offer a novel contribution to future strategy research and practice.

Word count: 6,345 (excluding summary and references)

Track 26: Strategy as Practice

Keywords: internal strategic partnership, business development, strategy practice, causal

mapping

Business Development as Internal Strategic Partner

Introduction

Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) is now an established field of literature which has helped to understand strategy as something that organisations *do* rather than something that they *have*. Some of the particularly interesting contributions to this field are the explorations of everyday strategizing activities, roles of the strategy actors, and improved attention to strategy tools and processes (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015; Paroutis, 2015). However, the role of Business Development (BD) as Internal Strategic Partners (ISPs), while being increasingly relevant to the modern strategy practices, remains under-researched – and this is the main focus of our inquiry of this paper.

Within the context of modern competitive strategy this project examines the inspiration of an ISP within the business strategy. The primary aim of this research is to assess the role of the ISP in the decision-making process in organisations. ISPs are not seen in this study as an individual role, but as a role that can be adopted by managers or directors from departments such as BD, Technology, or even the Quality control. In our work we explore the concept of ISPs as being important to developing a partnership culture. Such culture in turn may translate into effective communication and into organisational capability to draw on the cues stemming from everyday practices in the formulation and implementation of strategy. Interestingly, we identify the BD corporate units as being highly promising for filling the ISP role due to being typically seasoned in strategic thinking, acting, and planning.

The research approach is a qualitative one, trying to grasp a rich and complex understanding, and based on it, to develop a theoretical contribution. The reported project employed two case studies, Company A and Company B, in order to examine the pre-mentioned questions relationship. The two empirical case studies were conducted with large technology companies in Greece, the United Arab Emirates, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Company A and interrelated in terms of the services they offer, and they are considered to be currently in the growth stage and operate internationally. In addition, this project draws on an innovative cognitive mapping method which is applied in combination with the dedicated Decision Explorer software (Ackermann and Eden, 2011; Bryson et al., 2004; Bryson et al., 2014). This cognitive mapping technique has been used in this research for analysing rich and messy qualitative data which informs the two case studies.

Drawing on the findings from our empirical research, we add to the concept of Business Development Internal Strategic Partner (BD ISP). We argue that this concept can be important for bridging the decision making, strategy formulation, and strategy implementation as part of strategic management practices. In addition to this, as part of our discussion we recommend a number of practical insights with respect to the development of BD ISP in organisations. Thus,

by drawing on the relevant strategy literature and a rich empirical case conducted for the needs of this study, we aim to build the foundations for further inquiry into this relevant topic.

Theoretical foundations: Strategic Business Partnership

This paper follows an assertion that senior managers who are true strategic thinkers are able to create and add value to the strategy formation of an organisation (Eden and Ackermann, 1998). David Olson Ulrich (1989, p. 87) suggests in his model for transforming the HR business unit, that in order to become a *strategic business partner*, such individuals need to encompass a set of concrete behaviours and activities and adopt a new way of strategic thinking (Urlich et al, 1989, p: 87). Thus, strategic thinking as a 'best practice' can benefit the strategy of an organisation, but also the managers, by creating commitments and enabling them to be considered as strategic partners.

In terms of the strategic business partnership, many existing theories which describe both internal and external partnerships point to the benefits for both the partner and the organisation, including improved expertise and competitive advantage. Similarly, in Hamel's (1991, p. 99) point of view, alliances can offer advantages and may be seen as "a way of short-circuiting the process of skills acquisition". It is widely considered that people are the core success of an organisation (Mintzberg, 2009), and so creating a strategic partnering culture within the organisation is expected to foster collaboration and accrue openness creativity agility and resilience.

However, the concept of strategic partnership is still at the stage of active development both in research and practice. One particularly influential source in this respect is Ulrich (1998) who conceptualised a transformation of the HR business function into the strategic partner function. Ulrich's 'three-legged-stool' model was based on the idea of separating the HR administration, technical expertise and the strategic partner role. Subsequently, Ulrich and Beatty (2001 p. 294) described strategic business partner as a player who contributes to the strategic thinking within an organisation by acting as "coach, architect, builder, facilitator, leader and conscience" (Urlich and Beatty, 2001 p. 294). Consequently, strategic partner has been found to have broad remittance and collaborate with senior managers and line managers in strategy formulation and implementation (Urlich and Brockbank, 2005). In regards to the above, strategic partners are senior managers who interact with the top-level management and are involved in strategy formation by giving insights, new ideas, and so contribute to the management's strategic thinking. Along these lines, strategic partnership is described as "bridging role between business strategy, employee expectation, and execution of strategy" which acts as a partner of business leaders (Urlich, 1989 p. 89). In other words, a strategic partner is centralised in the core business, whilst engaging with various Strategic Business Units and translating their knowledge into business value.

Hence, strategic business partner is expected to understand the business needs and support various business functions ranging from finance to operations. In addition to this, strategic

business partner should ideally be able to think 'outside of the box' and create ideas and insights which promote new processes within an organisation. Those ingredients make the strategic partner valuable in the strategy-making process which, as it is claimed by Mintzberg and Lampel (1999 p: 27), can be seen as 'judgmental designing' – i.e. debating, analysing, and programming a demanding environment. Therefore, it is vital for the strategic partner to be actively engaged in driving the strategy formation, rather than taking a detached position of supporting the strategic activities. As noted by Mintzberg, (1994 p: 111), "the big picture is painted with little strokes" and those who make strategy should understand well the business and "get their hands dirty digging for ideas" in order to form strategy from "nuggets they uncover".

Moreover, according to Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), strategic partnership supports the management of internal relations within an organisation, which allows for developing strategic best practices. Through engaging with day-to-day business activities, strategic partner acquires insider and outsider information and evaluates its usefulness for strategic decision making. Therefore, strategic partner is a demanding role which requires a blend of specific skills and knowledge, including good understanding of the business and excellent communication skills. As a result, the most suitable candidates to act in this role are considered the managers who are already key players in the organisation, in particular those of who have been recognised as good strategic thinkers. Creating a partnership culture within an organisation is likely to improve openness, creativity, agility, resilience, as well as foster collaboration and communication between the distinct business functions (Barney and Wright, 1998). Moreover, by prioritizing 'the partnership of strategic thinking' within organisational culture, it is possible to pay more attention to seeing strategy as being emergent (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Chia and Holt, 2009) and so increase the commitment to organisational learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Ackermann and Eden, 2011).

Consequently, strategic business partnership can be seen as a form of collaboration for accomplishing strategic same goals and objectives. As stated by Hamel (1991), collaboration offers advantages which can benefit both sides, and improve their positions. Strategic business partners enrich strategy by helping to view strategy through different lenses, as well as keep the focus on business targets. Having said that, ISPs should be differentiated from external consultancy or non-executive consultancy members of the board. An ISP operates within and between the organisations and is an active member inside the company, thus contributing significantly to communicating and translating the organisational objectives into everyday practice.

Methodological considerations

Comparative case study in the technology industry

This research employs a case study design approach for a better understanding of the role of Business Development (BD) which acts as an Internal Strategic Partner (ISP) in two technology companies. As noted by Meyer (2001 p. 330), the advantage of case study research is in "the opportunity for a holistic view of the process", which is useful for the exploration of the issue of strategy formation.

This qualitative research followed a flexible design encompassing a variety of accepted methods and structures, thus it is data-driven, exploratory, and context-sensitive (Mason, 2002 p. 24). The multiple case study design involves two case organisations, trying to mitigate some disadvantages of a single-case design (Meyer, 2001). Thus two different product-service technology companies were analysed within the same organisation group. The advantage gained from the methodological view is the ability for deep investigation, contrast, and comparison of the two original cases.

This study aims to identify the reasons why organisations may need to have an ISP, and examine the possibilities for BD in adopting this role. In order to reach this answer the relationship of BD with the corporate strategy of companies A and B is examined. Both companies are in the technology industry and are interrelated in terms of the services they offer. Company A is a group of engineering firms which provides design, consulting, delivering and managing critical infrastructure projects. That firm is considered to be in its growth stage, and its current headcount stands at 100 employees. While company B is a Cyber Security firm and it manages projects in the security assessment via 'Extrusion Testing' which is a method for testing the vulnerability of the security of an IT network. Company B currently employs 150 employees. Both companies operate internationally, however company A delivers its services by using third-party products while company B delivers its own products combined with services.

The study participants have been selected from two groups of management: the top management team who are involved in strategy making, and the directors (from business development departments and others) who are not directly involved in strategy formation. Data sampling included purposive sampling, thus seeking information from specific functions which include the data sources that are of interest to this particular study (Given, 2008).

Collecting empirical material

The data collection in this study involved conducting interviews and analysing organisational documents. Following Cohen et al (2007), semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to gain rich insights with respect to participants' understanding of strategic management, the BD function, and their opinions about the ISPs. In other words, we aimed for "fitness for purpose" (Cohen et al, 2007 p. 408).

Moreover, internal documents have been inspected in order to gain a better understanding of the organisations' strategies, including the work of the BD function and the work of the board of directors. The analysis of documents can be useful in describing historical backgrounds, or events, which may add further value to the research (Meyer, 2001). A list of documents analysed as part of this research is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Documents used in the analysis

Type of document	Department	Number of Documents
Documents with Primary Data: 3 year time period		
Internal annual reports	Finance	6
Internal management reports		24
Business Development Reports	BD	20
Internal Budgeting Reports	Finance	20
Documents with Secondary Data: 5 year time period		
Internal Surveys	BD & CTO	2
Publications	MARKETING	10
Events and Happenings	BD	34

Furthermore, twelve interviews were conducted, including with the top level executive management of companies A and B, and the managers of the BD department, as well as the other departments. The two companies share the same CFO and Board of Directors hence an interview with the shared executive member and one member of the board of directors has been included as well. Table 2 below illustrates participants, the timeline, and the duration of each interview.

Table 2: List of interviews structure

	Interviewer	Company	Duration
	Phase one		
1	CEO	A	30 min
2	CEO	B	30 min
3	Group CFO	A and B	30 min
4	Advisor of the Board	A and B	30 min
5	Managing Director	A	30 min
6	Chief of Operation	A	30 min
7	Business Development Manager 1	A	30 min
8	Business Development Manager 2	A	30 min
9	CTO	B	30 min
10	COO	B	40 min
11	Commercial Director	B	30 min
12	Bid Manager	A	30 min

The research topics used in the semi-structured interviews are listed in table 3 below. The semi-structured interview questions were flexible and dynamic were designed in a way so that they addressed the objective of the research. More specifically, we were trying to find out what role can the ISPs play within the organisations and whether the BD function could fit this role.

During data the course of data collection the interviewer would start the interview by asking the participant to describe and evaluate the already established corporate strategy, as well as explain how they felt about that strategy. The types of questions would then shift from more general questions towards more specific questions, e.g. by starting with the general corporate strategy and subsequently closing by discussing the BD role in the role of ISPs.

Table 3: List of interview questions

	INTERVIEW TOPICS
1	Is there any form of established strategy? If yes, does it take the form of a strategic plan or something else? How often is this strategy re-evaluated? How does it emerge? How is it implemented? Who are the parties involved in the various aspects of strategy making?
2	External environment such as competition, technology, customers, economy, political and social conditions have a significant influence on the company's operation. Can your strategy manage and balance this?
3	Do you believe that your internal processes can properly evaluate value the benefits and threats streaming from the above external events? How about threats?
4	Do you believe that the offering of the organisation and the market desires and needs are aligned in your organisation? To what extent? Engaged to each other? Are you happy with how your strategy copes with this?
5	Do you think the input from the business development function should influence the strategy decision-making (especially in the strategy of the offering of the company)?
6	The Business Development Management interacts with several departments within the organisation, do you believe that it contributes in the communication process to meet the organisation objectives?
7	Is there an area in the strategy formation process and methodology that you feel you are lacking?
8	Do you think that an "Internal Strategic Partner" will add value in the organisation in reference to the decision-making? Does the concept work for you?
9	In your perspective, are there any risks or barriers in considering the Business Development function as an Internal Strategic Partner in terms of the success of the business?

Data analysis

In this project we adopted a cognitive mapping technique to code and analyse the semi-structured interviews in order to "represent subjective data more meaningfully" (Eden, 2004). Cognitive mapping is a suitable method for working with messy and rich qualitative material (Bryson et al. 2014). Cognitive mapping is described by Eden (1988) as a technique that is used for modelling individual's thoughts, ideas and believes using a directed graph which is visually presented as a map of "networks and arrows" (Eden, 2004). As the richness of qualitative information "comes with complexity" (Eden 1998 p. 9), in this paper we work specifically using the SODA (Strategic Options Development and Analysis) cognitive mapping approach, which is suggested for constructing qualitative interviews (Eden, 2004). According to Pyrko, Dörfler and Eden (2017 p. 5) this method of analysis is "well suited for working with rich idiographic qualitative empirical material", because it helps the researcher to "tuning the attention to the interview situation" and thus better reflecting on the interviewee's thinking (Pyrko and Dörfler, 2014).

The mapping technique requires specific guidelines to be followed so that it can result in a meaningful map with valuable information (Pyrko et al., 2017). First, we started developing a separate map for each individual interview by listening to the audio recordings of the

interviews. By mapping we mean breaking down a problem which has been caught on the interview into separate phrases of approximately 12 words and stating them in an actionable form, while trying to maintain the original wording of the interviewee (Pyrko and Dörfler, 2014). The second step of the mapping process consists of linking those separate phrases, named 'concepts' or 'nodes', with one another using causal arrows which signify 'may lead to' relationships (Pyrko and Dörfler, 2014). It is typically useful to construct the map in a hierarchical form and place the detailed actions statements at the bottom of the bottom, and then include more general statements and goals and the top of the map (Pyrko and Dörfler, 2014).

Based on this process we modelled each interview separately, following the same order in which the interviews were conducted. Each interview included 30 to 40 statements. We coded the interviews by working with complete audio recordings, without stopping. However, the interviews were coded typically one week after the interviews had taken rather than in 'real time' as it is recommended by Pyrko and Dörfler (2014). The objective of this was to ask additional questions to fill potential gaps within the map. For this reason, the interviewer revisited some managers in order to confirm the mapped interview and add some missing information, where needed.

Once the final individual maps were constructed we 'tided' each of them following Eden's guidelines which involve: i) verifying the wording of statements and the direction of the arrows, in particular when reading the concepts from bottom up, where the relationship of the links can typically express the 'because' or 'in order to' actions which constitute causality ii) checking for double-headed arrows which explain the same chain of causality linking one node to another iii) adding some additional links and statement from the literature review. Figure 1 below illustrates an example of the map resulting from the interview with the General Director.

The analysis of each company's case was conducted using the aggregated map, and so we merged the individual interviews together into one single map for each of the two cases. In order to combine these different maps together we merged the concepts with similar meaning (Pyrko and Dörfler, 2014). This showcases the nature of the shared language and understanding of the management team within each company (Eden, 1992). Therefore, statements from different managers were merged so as to link the maps together where it is possible.
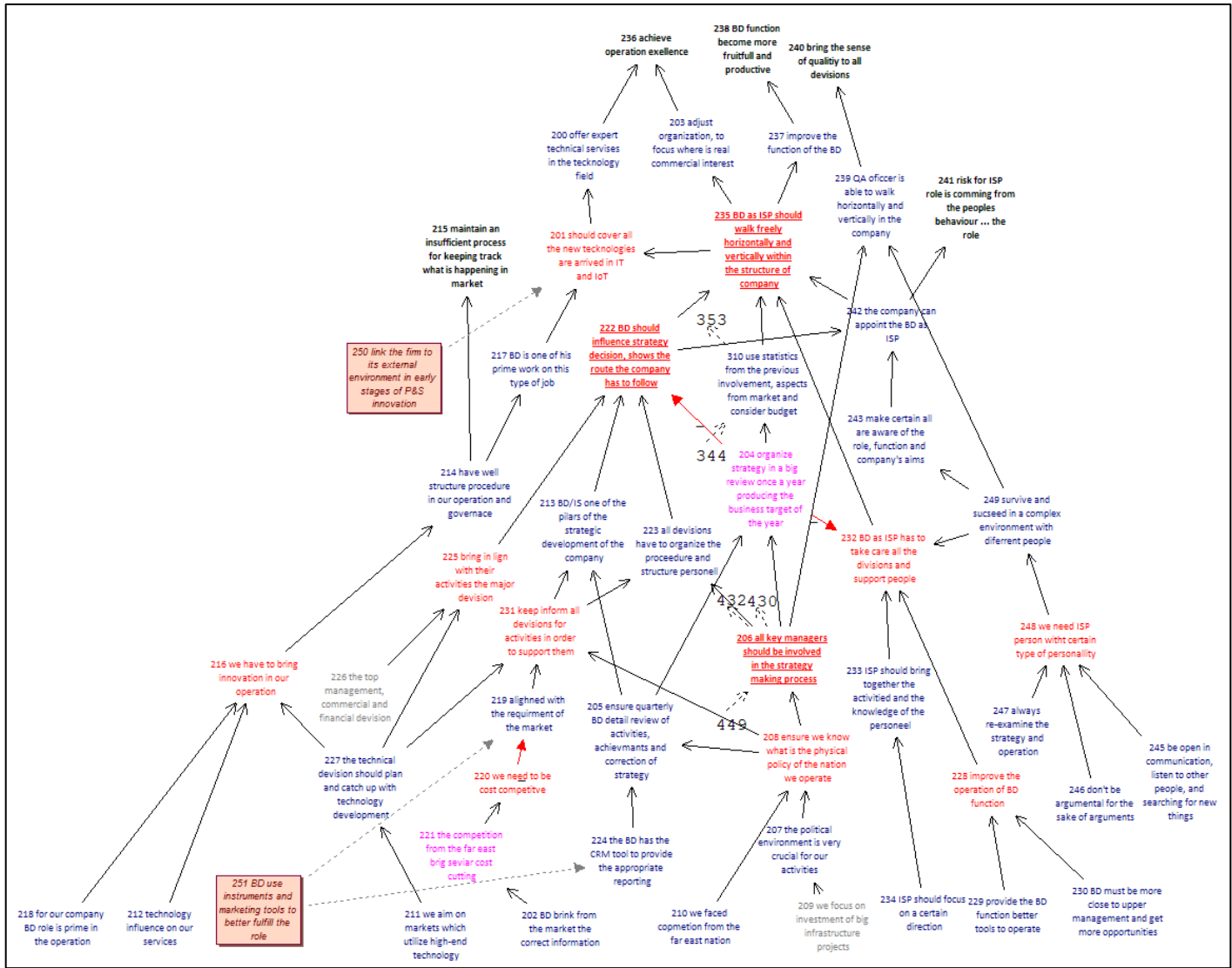
Figure 1: Interview map - The General Manager

The resulting maps were analysed using three types of analysis with the help of a dedicated *Decision Explorer* software: a) central analysis, b) domain analysis, and c) loop analysis. By centrality we mean how tightly interlinked the given concept is with respect to the rest of the map. Hence the higher the centrality score, the more influence the concept potentially has on the map. In addition, we performed a complementary analysis called domain analysis, which calculated the number of links surrounding each concept, and this resulted with the top 10 'possible key issues' on the map. The third type of analysis was the loop analysis which helped to identified vicious and virtuous feedback dynamics between the concepts on the maps. Those feedback loops importantly point to the self-reinforcing dynamics within the analysed data, and so they can lead to the possibly interesting areas for further exploration.

Findings

Company A

The nodes with high domain score and high centrality score indicated possible 'key issues' which are described below. It may be of particular interest to explore statement 445: *The Company needs Internal Strategic Partner (ISP) such as Business Developer (BD) or Chief Technology Officer (CTO) managers*. The chain of argument which drives statement 445 indicates that in order for the action in this statement to materialize, the company needs to rely on their managers and get direct input about strategy, and that may be necessary to establish a better strategy process. It may also be the case that all key managers be involved in the strategy-making process, in order to ensure the input of where technology is going, which drives us to another hot company's key issue 131: *we need to make a new step to follow the technology*.

Looking further down into the statements, there appears to be lack of interaction between departments, which is clearly stated in key issue 365: *somebody needs to integrate information and keep the continuous flow of information* and 138: *encourage and ensure easy and close communication between all departments*. Following the links, we can see the role of the BD as an ISP is directly related to this key issue, which I will analysed later on.

Finally, very interesting is statement 235: *BD as ISP should walk freely, horizontally and vertically within the structure of the company*. Issue 235 comes out in the case of BD acting in the ISP role, and in order to achieve this, the role requires trust, personality and the ability to work closely with all departments. Consequently, statement 235 leads us directly to the key issue 222 which concerns BD influencing the strategy decision (within the ISP role) and shows the route the company has to follow.

Moving to the next level of analysis, we examined an interesting 'vicious cycle', i.e. a positive feedback loop that escalates harmful outcomes for Company A (Figure 2). In particular, statement 351 "*BD as ISP can provide reporting to be reviewed in the SC*", appears to indicate a significant constraint in 332 "*delay in decision making*" because 330 "*decisions are done in one place*", which leads to the issue of 369 "*Steering Committee (SC) should take decision easy and move forward faster*". Consequently, the company may not re-evaluate immediately the

strategy and cost its flexibility, in order to align with needs of the market in terms of budgeting and offering.
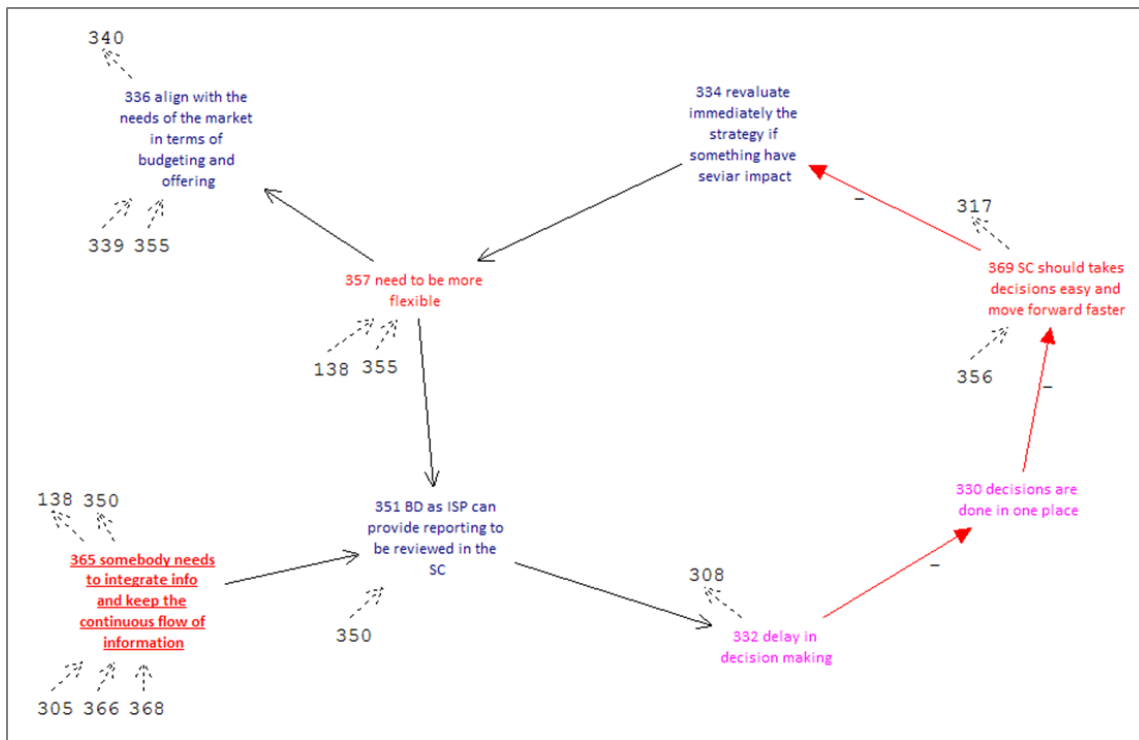

Figure 2: Negative loop analysis Company A

It is worthwhile mentioning that statement 365: *somebody needs to integrate info and keep the continuous flow of information,* reinforces this negative loop. To put it in other words, in the case where all internal and external information is collected and integrated into one center, where it can be managed and used appropriately, it affects directly the consequent actions and changes the desired direction. If someone were to grasp the complexity of this situation of the issue on 365, then they should be able to manage it, and diminish the effect of this vicious cycle.

On the other hand, the positive loop generated from the same merged maps describes a situation where the interaction between the statements has a positive outcome (Figure 3). An overview of this virtuous circle is that the company should rely on their managers, especially the BD and CTO, to get impute and decide the strategic direction because they are close to the market, vendors, and clients. By reading the loop, it is evident that statement 412: BD and account managers listen to the market and have contacts with the clients and statement 438: BD is the important part of deciphering the market's wants and needs, drive this positive feedback cycle. More specifically, with statement 409: the market has two ways of speaking: clients and vendors, and since BD and assigned managers are the ones to identify the trend of the markets, the strategy direction follows the correct path in terms of the company's objectives. This loop accommodates a steady iteration of actions which cause a positive result, to the company's strategic direction. The SC (Steering Committee) considers important to rely on managers and

their view, for strategy guidance. Indeed, the SC should trust their managers as the literature review suggests as per statement 449: *strategy making is 'social' process has to emerge from managers of different level*, and only then 'true' strategy can be achieved. Nevertheless, the SC identifies the need of the ISP role for such managers, to facilitate the decision making.
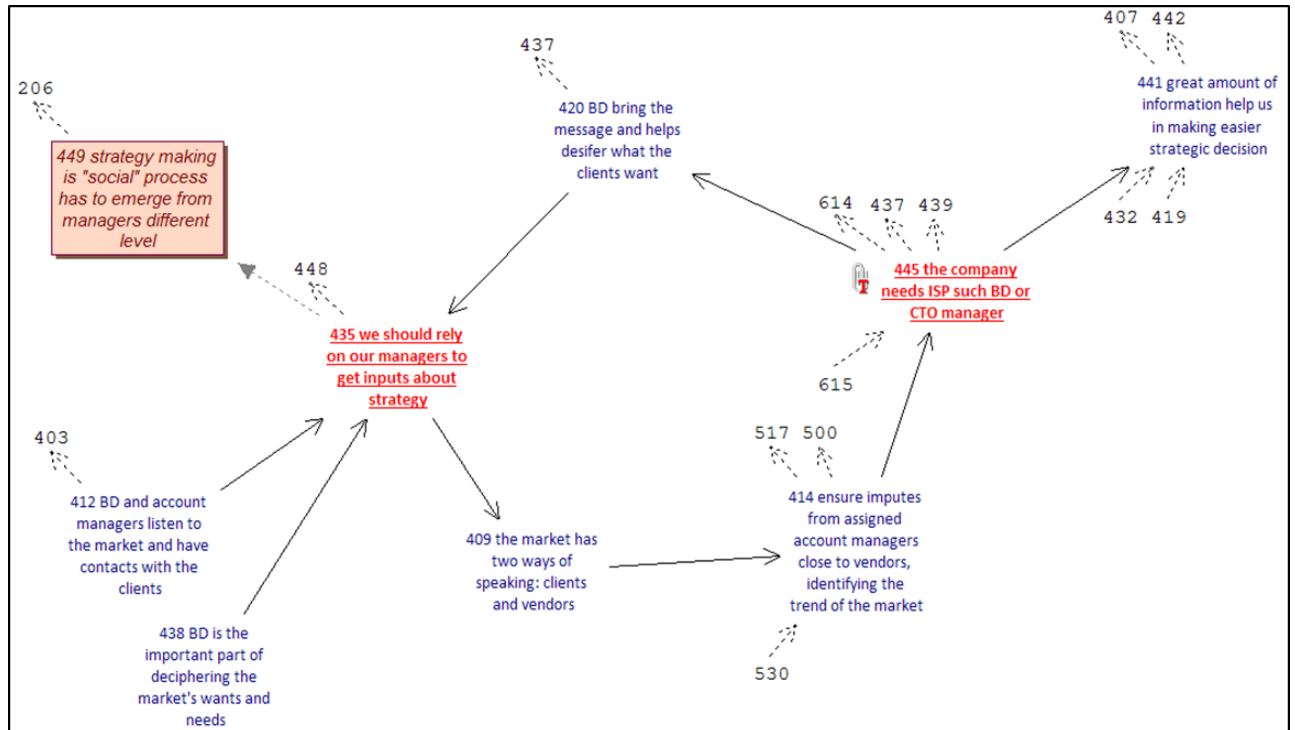

Figure 3: Positive loop analysis Company A

Company B

The statements which exercise the strongest influence on the map, based on the domain and central analyses, suggest that it may be of considerable interest for Company B to examine the chain of arguments which drives the key issue: w*e need a process for a secondary check and evaluation of feedbacks* (statement 425). The lack of feedback from the "bodies" key departments, it may be the case that they need an ISP in the organisation as a catalyst for the SC (statement 317), to ensure that *we can see the changes in trends and switch quickly* (statement 310), in order to *achieve the goal of differentiate ourselves and provide value to the company* (statement 307). In addition, statement 317 will also have a positive impact on the key issue, statement 736: *we should be working on a team basis, communicate properly,* particularly, *BD can act as a catalyst for better communication and alignment (statement 313).*

However, key issue in statement 633 which listed first in the results table, approaches a different view of the ISP, which indicates the CTO or the Product Manager acting better in an ISP role especially for Company B. On the ground of, that they need *people with very good understanding of the technology market* (statement 319), in order to *reassess the strategy properly when they launch a new product* (statement 600), and *avoid the negative goal of*

launching products which are in front and quite advance to the market desire (statement 609). In that matter, I will consider later on the value of CTO acting in an ISP role.

Another key issue with high impact on the model is statement 122: *strategy should be a set of procedure rather than depends on how personal interact with each other.* Laddering down the map, it is clear that this strategic issue originates from the lack of formal internal processes in revaluation and value the benefit and threat from the external events. Additionally, this key issue is related with statements that point the lack of flow of information (vertically and horizontally) in order to integrate different views in a formal process, rather than making strategy by relying only on the CEO and Shareholders desire.

The loop analysis identified a vicious cycle for Company B. This is caused from the lack of formal internal procedure for better reassessment of strategy and communication with the Board of Directors as mentioned earlier. Many things presented internally are not discussed, in order to save time, and this constrains people from expressing ideas and opinions. This impacts several departments. This vicious cycle is reinforced from the desired action in statement 213: *ensure continues exchange of ideas presented and discussed*, which is contrary to the constrain in statement 226: *need to discuss things presented internally… not doing that for saving time.*

In addition, statement 218: *ISP can take all the info and present some useful summary,* also reinforces this problematic situation. In particular, in the case that an assigned ISP manages to gather all the different ideas and information and communicate them to the Board, aiming towards a more successful strategy formation should eliminate the "snowballing" of this continuous cycle.

The previous loop has questioned the process of reassessment of strategy and the flow of communication in terms of the different ideas emerged. However, a different view is depicted in this loop (Figure 4) which shows the virtuous cycle of communication process in the case of gathering and integrating all the information and the different views in one centre, in order to ensure the continuous revaluation of strategy as an ongoing process. As strategy is considered an ongoing process, the Board should exchange with the ISP and senior managers all the information and feedback needed, in order to reassess and re-evaluate strategy. The action which drives this positive cycle is statement 127: *senior managers should formally take part in strategy formulation process, provide feedback*, therefore the Board should consider all the different views before taking any strategic decisions, which will be integrated in one centre. Additionally the same centre should ensure the evaluation of the execution of strategy, so that can be always be aligned with the market's need.
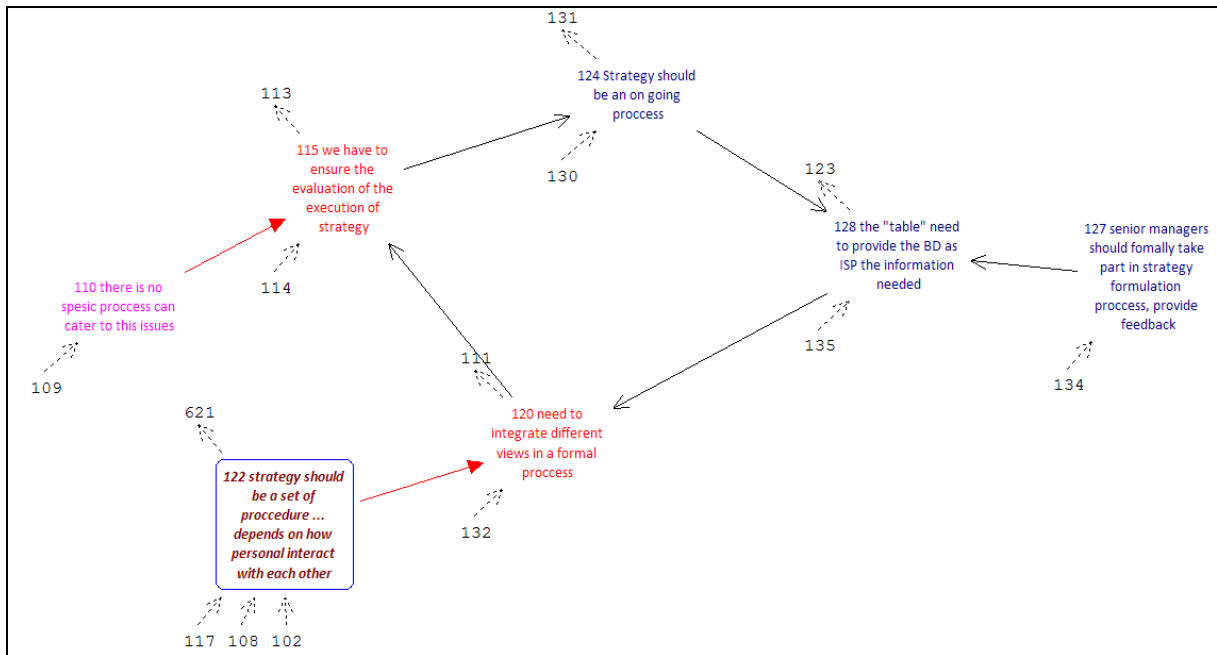
Figure 4: Negative loop analysis Company B

Discussion

This study shows that the role of the Internal Strategic Partner (ISP) is essential to the organisations for bridging the gap between business strategy, execution, and evaluation, and at the same time eliminate bottlenecks in the decision making process. The Member of the Board of Company A and B claims that "The CEO should identify people with strategic thinking within the company and support them" (Figure 5). However, in order for an ISP model to work successfully, it should be encapsulated by people with certain personality and specific characteristics.
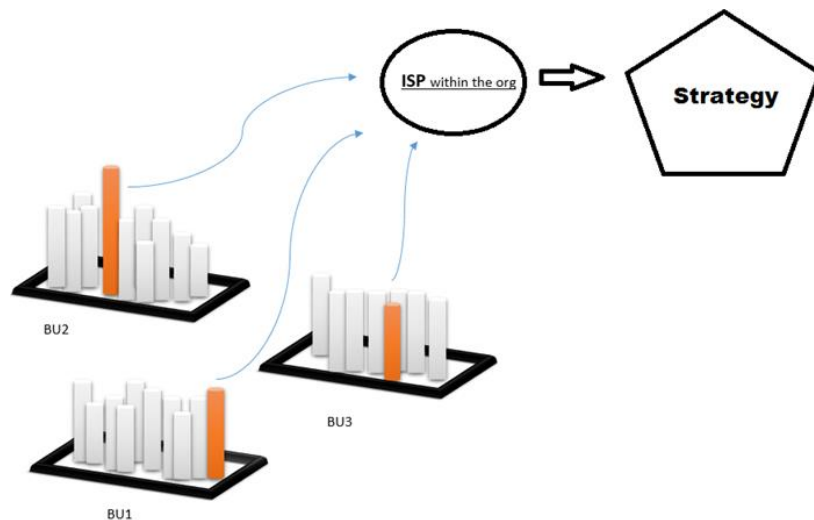

Figure 5: ISPs within the company from different business units

The ISP model is not unique to one only person or function but could be one or more ISPs within an organisation, since the role could be distributed to an existing manager or director within the company rather than be a separate position. According to the results of the analysis conducted, in the technology companies, the ISP role could be adopted by managers or directors from departments such as Business Development, Technology, Technical or even the Quality control.

More specifically, based on the data presented, Company B expressed the need to assign an ISP role to the CTO among others, who will align the company's product and services to the technology market (statements: 633, 319, 600, and 609). In each case, an ISP should be empowered to the key centers, so that they can increase the flow within the organisation, boost the 'pulse points', and achieve the desired performance.

As described earlier in Company's A positive feedback loop, what it boils down to is that the upper management does correctly rely on their managers for the strategy direction. However, the pitfall in the process is the lack of a proper communication and information system which affects the Board reaching decisions. Therefore, an ISP concept will come to enhance communication and facilitate the decision-making process for both Company A and B, hence become more flexible.

The role of the ISP in Company's A decision-making process could be expressed as an account person for formulating and directing strategy, by gathering information needed, presenting it to the board in order to make decisions. Our findings suggest that there is an absence of a coordinating system in terms of the information from different stakeholders which needs to be passed to the decision-making center. In addition, the vicious cycle indicates that such absence eliminates agility both for taking decisions and updating the company's offering model following technology. Therefore, the ISP will create a concrete internal process and formalize a strategy review process, with steps and feedback for evaluation. Such actions will eliminate bottlenecks in the decision-making center, increase Company's flexibility in order to stay on track with the market, adapting to new technologies and re-evaluating the positioning when needed, on time.

Accordingly, the ISP concept is valuable for Company B and can work perfectly by taking into account the size of the company and the industry it operates. The Company's objectives among other, are to "*move quickly and adapt successfully*" (statement 210) in terms of the products and services, "differentiate ourselves and provide value to the company (statement 307) and "be the niche provider" (statement 330). And yet, the data has shown that the company is struggling with its alignment with the technology market and the need to refresh its strategy process approach. It is plainly evident from the findings that they need an ISP in the organisation as a catalyst for the decision-making center, which is considered one of the most important. In this respect, the ISP concept will play an main role in the strategy formulation by integrating different views, combining and keeping many key people in touch, in order to exchange ideas. The ISP then will present and discuss a fruitful summary of these ideas with the board in order to anticipate and compensate for external events. In addition, the ISP will be held accountable

for providing feedback from the strategy execution and then re-evaluate the strategy tactics, something which is missing from the strategy-making process in Company B.

Following the discussion of finding in terms of the ISP role and explaining the reasons and the benefits of establishing an Internal Strategic culture within the mentality of Company's A & B, we suggest an approach to implement the ISP concept to be encapsulated in the BD role. Within this environment, the BD person can be an ISP within the organisations, and deemed with trust from the board. The overall role of the Business Development Internal Strategic Partner (BD ISP) revolves around four areas of expertise: (1) Business Development Management – acting as the strategist, executer, and facilitator; (2) Corporate Entrepreneur – managing resources, and guiding movements into a new product-market combination; (3) Integrating Generalist – being "the ear to the ground" for implementing opportunities for growth, while combining new ideas and different views internally; and (4) Strategic Partner – presenting all the above to the board to guide strategic decision-making process. The BD ISP acts on behalf of the organisation and effectively brings to the surface new strategic options for the company, formulates supporting strategies, translates these into operational next steps, and oversees their execution. As such, BD ISP will in effect act as an idea centre for new business initiatives that percolate up through the organisation.

There is no 'one size' or standard process for any position, especially for an ISP role which should be organized to best serve each company's specific purpose as defined by the strategic priorities. The BD ISP instinct and intelligence will be a balancing act within the company, however it requires a proper forming process to be put in place with a pre-agreed set of actions, in order to obtain the information and authority needed to achieve positive results. The BD ISP should work closely with core departments and collect all inside information, hence should be part of the budget and operational stage of the company. At the same time, it should provide information to all department which concerns the external events such as the technology, suppliers, and competitor progress. When the BD ISP completes this process it can formulate a report and map out the next steps of strategy, at which point he should present to the decision makers facts and opportunities with concise reporting and advice for further actions. The Board should also exchange information with the BD ISP in order to agree on the strategic objectives and priorities. Finally, the BD ISP should oversee the execution of the agreed external and internal strategic plans, provide, feedback both to the departments and the Board and re-evaluate when needed. A relative point to consider is that a clear job description should be communicated, namely the role itself and the tasks, in order for the BD ISP to acquire authority, trust, and clarity and walk freely, horizontally and vertically within the structure of the company. In addition, the BD ISP should obtain the technical knowledge of the company's core subject, especially excellent knowledge of the processes and how the business operates. Then by combining a financial aspect, it should penetrate the market.

Concluding remarks

Why Internal Strategic Partner? It can be concluded that the role of the ISP is valuable in corporations, first for informing and/or facilitating the decision-making process and second for streamlining the operation of the business overall and by doing so helping the implementation of the strategy. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that corporations should adopt the ISP concept and assign managers and directors who can think strategically to act in this role, in order to create an internal strategic partnership culture. This culture will enhance communication and performance and make the organisation more flexible and effective in its strategizing. Overall, while the ISP concept is marginalised in the academic literature, it is a very useful concept for practicing strategists in organisations.

Why the Business Development function? Broadly translated, our findings indicate that the Business Development corporate unit has been identified as one of the most appropriate candidates to act in this role, as they are already key players in the organisation and have been recognized in terms of their strategic thinking. This contribution is particularly significant as the literature typically identifies Human Relations as a suitable ISP. Therefore, I created a new model of Business Development as the Internal Strategic Partner, namely the BD ISP. It can be argued that the Business Development unit it is not one of the most researched topics, and even less so the Internal Strategic Partner. Still, the present findings confirm that the role of the BD ISP will take both companies' products and services to the next level and will set the pace on strategic direction through workshops and better communication.

Bringing the two previous comments together, we explored a relatively rarely used concept, namely the BD ISP. As the BD ISP was found to be a valuable concept for both organisations under analysis, it is safe to argue that BD ISP *can be* a useful concept that deserves further studying. According to the research findings, the BD ISP concept can be considered a promising aspect of escalating the strategy performance of Company A and B and this illustrates that the BD ISP concept can be useful, even though the precise scope of validity is beyond the aim of this study.

References

Ackermann, F., & Eden, C. (2011). Making Strategy: Mapping Out Strategic Success. London, UK: Sage.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1978). Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective. Reading, MASS, USA: Addison Wesley Longman.

Barney, J. B., & Wright, P. M. (1998). On becoming a strategic partner: The role of human resources in gaining competitive advantage. Human Resource Management, 37(1), 31-46.

Bryson, J. M., Ackermann, F., & Eden, C. (2014). Visual Strategy: Strategy Mapping for Public and Nonprofit Organizations. San Francisco, CA, USA: John Wiley & Sons.

Bryson, J. M., Ackermann, F., Eden, C., & Finn, C. B. (2004). Visible Thinking - Unlocking Causal Mapping for Practical Results. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Chia, R., & Holt, R. (2009). Strategy without Design. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). Research methods in education. 6th ed. London, UK: Routledge.

Eden, C. (1988). Cognitive mapping: a review. European Journal of Operational Research, 36(1), 1-13.

Eden, C. (2004). Analyzing cognitive maps to help structure issues or problems. European Journal of Operational Research, 159(3), 673-686. doi:dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0377-2217(03)00431-4

Eden, C., & Ackermann, F. (1998). Making Strategy: The Journey of Strategic Management. London, UK: Sage.

Given, L. M. (2008). The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Hamel, G. (1991). Competition for competence and interpartner learning within international strategic alliances. Strategic Management Journal, 12(1), 83-103.

Jarzabkowski, P. (2004). Strategy as Practice: Recursiveness, Adaptation, and Practices-in-Use. Organization Studies, 25(4), 529-560.

Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J., & Seidl, D. (2007). Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective. Human Relations, 60(1), 5-27.

Jarzabkowski, P., Kaplan, S., Seidl, D., & Whittington, R. (2015). On the risk of studying practices in isolation: Linking what, who, and how in strategy research. Strategic Organization, 14(3), 248-259.

Mason, J. (2002). Qualitative researching. 2nd ed. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Meyer, C. B. (2001). A Case in Case Study Methodology. Field Methods, 13(4), 329-352.

Mintzberg, H. (2009). Managing. San Francisco, CA, USA: Berret-Koehler.

Mintzberg, H., & Waters, J. A. (1985). Of strategies, deliberate and emergent. Strategic Management Journal, 6(3), 257-272.

Mintzberg, H. (1994). The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning. Harlow, UK: FT Prentice Hall

Mintzberg, H., & Lampel, J. (1999). Reflecting on the Strategy Process. Sloan Management Review, 40(3).

Paroutis, S., Franco, L. A., & Papadopoulos, T. (2015). Visual Interactions with Strategy Tools: Producing Strategic Knowledge in Workshops. British Journal of Management, 26, 48-66.

Pyrko, I., & Dörfler, V. (2014). SODA in Qualitative Research: Using Cognitive Mapping for Analysing Semi-Structured Interviews. The Twenty-eight Annual Conference of the British Academy of Management, Belfast, Northern Ireland , UK.

Pyrko, I., Dörfler, V., & Eden, C. (2016). Thinking together: What makes Communities of Practice work? Human Relations, 70(4), 389-409.

Pyrko, I., Dörfler, V., & Eden, C. (2017). Trans-Organizational Learning across Healthcare Organizations. EGOS 2017 33rd European Group for Organizational Studies Colloquium, Copenhagen, Denmark, 6-8 July.

Ulrich, D., Cody, T., LaFasto, F. & Rucci, T. (1989). Human Resources at Baxter Healthcare Corporation Merger: A Strategic Partner Role. Human Resource Planning, 12(2), 87-103.

Ulrich, D. (1998). A New Mandate for Human Resources. Harvard Business Review, January-February.

Ulrich, D., & Beatty, D. (2001). From Partners to Players: Extending the HR Playing Field. Human Resource Management, 40(4), 293-307.

Ulrich, D., & Brockbank, W. (2005). The HR Value Proposition. Boston, MA, USA: Harvard Business School.

Whittington, R. (2006). Completing the Practice Turn in Strategy Research. Organization Studies, 27(5), 613-634.