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# **STRATEGIC PLANNING AS COMMUNICATIVE PROCESS**

ANDREAS PAUL SPEE

Doctor of Philosophy

**ASTON UNIVERSITY**

September 2009

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# ASTON UNIVERSITY

## STRATEGIC PLANNING AS COMMUNICATIVE PROCESS

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### THESIS SUMMARY

This thesis looks at the construction of a strategic plan within a British university (Unico). After a change in leadership, the well-known strategic planning sequence was adopted to set directions according to Unico's three Missions, followed by the development of respective goals and measures. The evolving strategic content coincided with the development of Unico's strategic plan. I was fortunate enough to be able to follow Unico's planning efforts over 10 months, from the first planning meeting to the completion of its strategic plan. Selecting a longitudinal case study approach, multiple data sources provided the basis for the empirical research. The main data source provided non-participant observation (n = 25) and ten versions of Unico's strategic plan. Additionally, seventy-six interviews were held with participants at various points in time.

In order to examine the strategic plan's construction, I reconceptualised strategic planning as a communicative process consisting of oral talk and written text. Through this interplay strategic planning activities come in to being. Such reconceptualisation provided a conceptual framework to study the in situ interactions without neglecting contextual characteristics embedding the communicative process. Strategic plans are currently seen as promoting inflexibility and reinforcing the institutionalised nature of formal strategic planning. Adopting dialogism, as advocated by Bakhtin and Ricoeur, this research provides novel insights into the dialogic of strategy talk and strategy text, such as a strategic plan. Findings illustrated that a strategic plan production cycle provided a meaning making platform for its participants. Through recurrently amending the plan, its content became increasingly specific while at the same time reflecting agreed terminology.

This thesis makes theoretical contributions in four areas. Firstly, it offers an alternative view on strategic planning, which is reconceptualised as a communicative process that comes into being through individuals' interactions. Secondly, it elaborates on the strategy-as-practice perspective, focusing on the under-explored area of individuals' interactions at the micro level, without neglecting contextual characteristics and material artefacts. Thirdly, it elaborates on the dialogic of text and agency/conversation, distinguishing between talk and text. It also extends the notion of co-orientation by introducing aspects of materiality, context and time. Fourthly, contributions are made to the literature on strategic planning in universities, illustrating that strategic plan production provides a meaning-making platform for participants, bridging diffuse power relations between senior managers, academics and administrators. Methodological contributions are made with respect to i) theorising about social interactions, including material aspects; ii) adopting a dialogism as advocated by Ricoeur and Bakhtin; and iii) introducing the notion of temporal space.

**Keywords:** strategic planning; strategy-as-practice; co-orientation; dialogism; Bakhtin; Ricoeur

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As previous students have already stated, embarking on a PhD is an individual and, at times, lonely journey. Following my research interest, this quote from a Departmental Head summarises the main challenge faced in one sentence: 'Paul, to write your PhD on strategy is impossible'. Without my family, friends and in particular my fiancée's support I could have not survived the strong winds and also enjoyed celebrating little steps that brought me closer to the journey's final destination manifested in the following pages.

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*Thank you to all who contributed to getting this manuscript written.*

## **DECLARATION**

This thesis is entirely my own original piece of work, based on data that I gathered and analysed. All extracts and non-original work have been appropriately attributed and cited. No part of this thesis has been published as yet, or submitted for a degree elsewhere.



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## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

### Common object X

The common object X refers to the focus of an interaction between at least two individuals, for instance A and B. The common object X captures the *something* that an interaction is about, the behaviour of A to X and of B to X.

### Content

For the purpose of this thesis, content refers to the semantic theme(s) that are manifested in written form in the strategic plan.

### Co-orientation

The concept of co-orientation captures any social interaction. At a minimum, it consists of the interaction of two individuals A and B. The topic of their interaction is referred to as common object X. The common object X is thus the glue of the social interaction. The ABX relation was established by Newcomb (1953) and has been adapted by scholars associated with the Montréal School of organisational communication led by James Taylor (Cooren and Taylor 1997; Taylor and van Every 2002; Taylor et al. 1996).

### Decontextualisation

Decontextualisation occurs when talk becomes materialised in a written text. Through decontextualisation, the written text is freed from the contextual characteristics that embedded the talk. Hence, they cannot be traced when looking at the written material. This concept was adopted from Ricoeur (1981).

### Distanciation

The concept of distanciation has its roots in hermeneutics. It occurs as talk becomes materialised in written form. Through distanciation the speaker's mental intentions become detached from the text.

### Expressive aspect

The analytical concept of expressive aspect captures the emotional evaluation of the semantic theme that was enacted in an utterance. This concept is adopted from Bakhtin (1986a).



## Glossary of terms

### Goal

A goal is defined as an end that is expected to be obtained within the period covered by a plan. This definition of goals is informed by Ackoff (1970).

### Mission

A Mission states an organisation's direction. Unico had three Missions: Research, Teaching and Third Stream. Furthermore, each Mission consisted of several objectives that articulated a Mission's espoused strategic direction.

### Objective

An objective refers to an end that is not expected to be obtained until after the planning period, but toward which progress is expected within that period. This definition of objectives is informed by Ackoff (1970).

### Recontextualisation

Recontextualisation occurs when a written text becomes enacted in talk. Through recontextualisation, an individual voices his/her interpretation of a document's content. This concept is adopted from Ricoeur (1981).

### Referentiality

The analytical concept of referentiality captures the semantic theme that an enacted subject of talk refers to. This concept is adopted from Bakhtin (1986a).

### Strategic theme

A strategic theme captures a particular strategic content of a Mission's espoused strategic direction. Strategic themes thus occur at the objective level. An objective however may express several strategic themes.

### Subject of talk

The analytical concept of subject of talk refers to the semantic theme(s) enacted in talk. The category *subject of talk* is closely aligned with Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of utterance. The subject of talk refers to the topic(s) enacted in an utterance. An utterance may consist of several subjects of talk. The meaning of a subject of talk is influenced by the situation which embeds the utterance's occurrence. The subject of talk is further specified by the concepts of referentiality and expressive aspect.

## Glossary of terms

### Talk

Talk refers to any orally expressed discourse. This concept is adopted from Ricoeur (1981).

### Text

Text refers to any discourse articulated in written form. Written material may be based on anterior talk or it may express ideas that were not previously voiced. This concept is adopted from Ricoeur (1981).

### Utterance

An utterance is a unit of analysis which refers to orally expressed discourse. Its boundaries start with an individual's phonetic expression of language, in the form of words, and ends with the same individual's silence. This concept is adopted from Bakhtin (1986a, 1986b).

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction to topic

This research follows the broad interest within the strategic management literature in what strategy *is* and what managers *do* (Barnard 1938; Gratton and Ghoshal 2002; Gronn 1983; Hales 1999; Mintzberg 1973; Porter 1996; Whittington 1993). Despite strong interest in strategy and its role within an organisation, there is still relatively little empirical research on the fine-grained details of how an organisation's strategy is actually developed. Based on the assumption that an organisation's espoused strategic direction (Mintzberg and McHugh 1985) is articulated within its strategic plan (Ackoff 1970; Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Hussey 1999), this thesis sets out to examine how and by whom a strategic plan is constructed. While it is long established that managers' work is accomplished by talking (Mintzberg 1973), we still have little knowledge of who contributes to the creation of a strategic plan and, especially, what impact, if any, participants have on the plan's content.

In particular, within practitioner orientated literature, strategic plans are seen as facilitating the communication of a firm's strategy. Since the 1960s, managerial guides on *how to do strategic planning* suggest the creation of strategic plans (Ackoff 1970, 1981; Ansoff 1965). Strategic plans may be written with respect to different audiences. For instance a business plan is used for communicating an initial business idea with potential investors (Blackwell 2004; Lane 2006; Martens et al. 2007). Strategic plans are thus used for securing loans with banks and ensuring legitimacy with other institutions, such as the government (Hussey 1999). In 2008 the strategic plans of large organisations, such as Opel or General Motors, were demanded by the American and German government in order to ensure a future beyond 2009. Indeed, in the current economic situation, strategic plans are particularly crucial to attract future investors. At large, strategic plans capture an organisation's espoused strategic direction, articulated in the form of Vision and Mission statements as well as objectives and goals (Hussey 1999; Murdick 1965). However, while strategic plans are vital for securing a company's external and financial legitimacy, the extent to which they facilitate or represent actual strategy has come under heavy criticism (Mankins and



Steele 2006; Mintzberg 1994). This thesis does not seek to analyse a strategic plan as a representation of a firm's actual strategy, but rather to study the association between the plan as a written text and the planning process through which that text is constructed.

In the academic literature, landmark research findings were based on the study of written texts, such as strategic plans and meeting memos; for instance Chandler (1962) or Mintzberg and Waters (1982), to name but a few. While these studies developed conclusions about organisational attributes and outcomes, based on documentary analysis, which has some shortcomings as a method (Reeves et al. 2005), they did not analyse the role or impact of organisational documents on the actual activities within organisations. However, studies in areas other than strategic planning have examined the impact of written artefacts, such as pilot manuals (Bazerman 1995), engineering drawings (Bechky 2003a; Carlile 2002; Winsor 2000) or a patient's file (Frers 2009), on workplace interactions. In order to evaluate the influence of artefacts on strategic planning activities, this thesis looks at the way that written documents within the planning process, such as PowerPoint® presentations and planning documents that are part of a strategic plan, are constructed in practice. Written documents are artefacts that become part of social interactions through their enactment in a series of communicative interactions (Giddens 1984). Communicative interactions occur within different media, such as board meetings (Denis et al. 2006; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008), committees (Hoon 2007), and informal, social interactions (Balogun and Johnson 2004, 2005; Rouleau 2005), as well as through disseminated texts, such as documents and emails (Mantere and Vaara 2008).

While there are several theoretical lenses available to study artefacts as a component of social interactions, such as actor-network theory (e.g. Callon and Law 1997; Latour 1987) or the boundary objects perspective (e.g. Spee and Jarzabkowski 2009; Star and Griesemer 1989), this thesis draws upon concepts that are aligned with those of scholars associated with the Montréal School of organisational communication (Brummans 2006; Cooren and Taylor 1997; Kuhn 2008; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and van Every 2002; Taylor et al. 1996). Following this approach, it focuses particularly on the reciprocal relationship between formal strategic texts as evolving structural representations of an espoused strategy and the agency of those actors involved in shaping the strategic plan (Cooren and Fairhurst 2004; Cooren and Taylor 1997; Putnam and Cooren 2004; Taylor et al. 1996).

A university setting was selected as the research site due to its contextual characteristics, which are particularly relevant when examining social interactions in strategy-making

activities. Universities are characterised by a participative decision-making process (Hardy et al. 1984). Participation provides the opportunity for individuals within a discipline or across hierarchical and horizontal levels to intervene in the planning process (Taylor 1983). For example, meetings appear to be an important practice to enable university-wide strategic action (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). Moreover, universities, and public sector organisations in general (Llewellyn and Tappin 2003), have adopted managerialism as practiced in the public sector in response to institutional pressures in recent years (Anderson 2008; Hardy 1987, 1991b; Lounsbury 2001). Managerialism has arisen in response to declining state funding, increased market pressures, and external requirements for public sector organisations to adopt private sector practices (Clark 1998; Ferlie et al. 1996; Slaughter and Leslie 1999). Thus, top managers have greater responsibility for collective strategic action (Birnbaum 2000; Denis et al. 2001; Fitzgerald 1994; Jarzabkowski 2005). Top managers must thus intervene in and shape strategy with consideration of the power of their academic constituents and their needs for participation (Jarzabkowski 2008).

## **1.2 Structure of thesis**

This thesis is structured in eight Chapters (see Figure 1.1). It focuses on strategic planning activities that are aligned to creating a strategic plan in which an organisation's espoused strategic direction is manifested. Having provided an introduction on the nature of strategic plans, Chapter 2 provides a conceptual framework to examine the role of strategic plans during formalised strategic planning activities. In order to do so, five areas of research will be outlined. First, key points within the strategic planning literature will be presented which set the boundaries for this study. Second, the strategy-as-practice perspective is introduced as it provides a framework to examine strategic planning activities in relation to the situational context. Third, drawing upon the notion of co-orientation, strategic planning will be reconceptualised as a communicative process. This sets the basis to examine the role of strategic plans during in situ strategic planning efforts. Fourth, four dimensions of power are presented as a somewhat neglected area in empirical investigations of strategic planning activities. Fifth, findings on strategic planning within a university context will be introduced. Based on the outlined literature, a conceptual framework is proposed to empirically investigate the construction of a strategic plan and its effects on strategic planning activities.



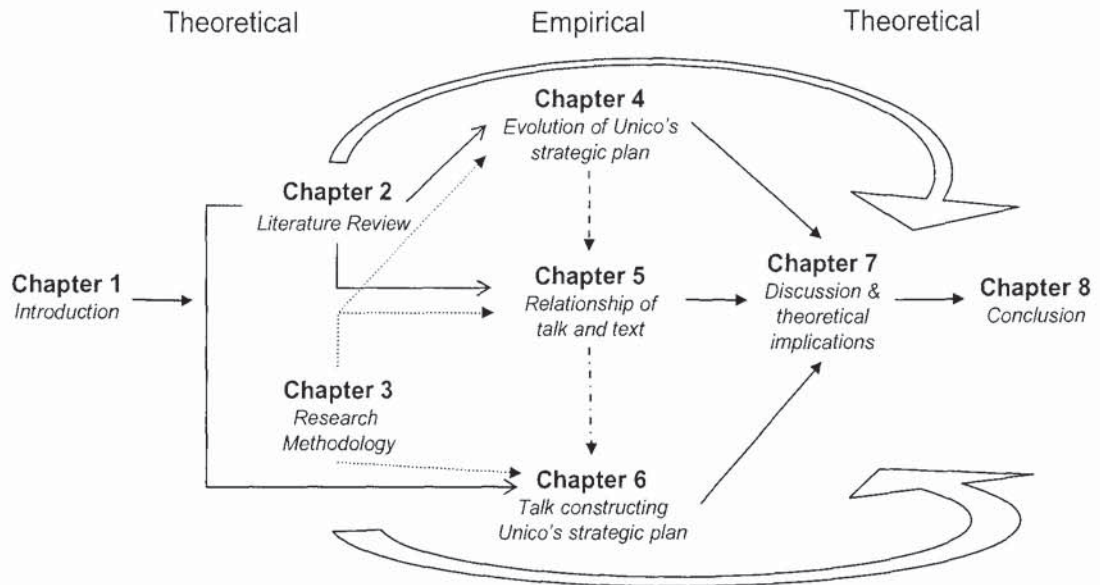


Figure 1.1: Structure of thesis

Chapter 3 presents the Research Methodology that was used to address the following research questions: *1) How is a strategic plan constructed as a communicative process?; 2) What are the implications of this communication process for i) the plan; and ii) the plan production process?.* The chapter is structured in four sections. First, it introduces the ontological and epistemological background of social constructionism which is the stance of this research. Second, it outlines the selection criteria for a longitudinal single case study approach. It also shows the conformity with ethical standards and provides a brief description of the case organisation, a British university called Unico. Data sources are presented, distinguishing between naturally occurring data, consisting of non-participant observation, and documents and researcher-provoked data, in the form of interviews. Third, four phases of the data analysis will be described in detail. Fourth, it demonstrates the quality of research according to the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity.

The subsequent three chapters are empirical and illustrate findings based on three distinct levels of analysis. Chapter 4 focuses on the development of Unico's strategic plan. It illustrates changes made to the strategic plan throughout its production cycle. The plan's content was manifested at two content levels: objectives and goals. Findings illustrate that Unico's plan developed according to three types of content changes across the two content levels.

Chapter 5 demonstrates the recursive relationship of talk and text, in this case Unico's strategic plan. Drawing upon Ricoeur's concepts of recontextualisation and

decontextualisation provided the basis to examine the talk to text relation in more detail. While Unico's strategic plan disciplines talk; talk has the ability to shape the future content of the plan manifested in its subsequent version. Moreover, findings showed that participation in the plan production is crucial as it determines whether an actor is able to influence the plan's future content. It also highlighted that only certain actors were able to make the actual amendments to Unico's plan.

Chapter 6 goes beyond the recursive talk to text relationship that was illustrated in Chapter 5. Bakhtin's notion of utterance and responsiveness provided the basis to analyse talk that led to a content change. An Initiation – Response framework was developed that illustrates eight talk patterns that reflect content changes made to Unico's strategic plan. Furthermore, talk patterns are linked to the types of content change that were identified in Chapter 4. Drawing upon contextual characteristics provided the basis to further explain how talk unfolded resulting in a particular type of content change.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings obtained in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and it offers theoretical implications. It is structured in two sections. The first section interprets the research findings within the outlined literature, in accordance with the three research questions. First, it shows that Unico's strategic plan was constructed within the triadic unit of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. The notion of co-orientation provided another basis to illustrate the plan's construction at a detailed level. Implications for the plan were threefold. The strategic plan's content became more detailed over time, reflecting agreed formulations. Through recurring decontextualisations, Unico's strategic plan became institutionalised. Implications for the plan production process were fourfold. The plan production cycle provides a meaning making platform for its participants. The plan production is shaped by varying participation across Unico's employees. Text producers play a strong role during the plan's construction as they hold power over the content's amendment. As time progressed, the plan became more authoritative. The second section of Chapter 7 provides contributions to existing theory in four areas: i) strategic planning; ii) strategy-as-practice; iii) organisational communication; and iv) strategic planning in a university context. Reconceptualising strategic planning as communicative provides theoretical grounds for future research in the area of strategic planning. It also demonstrated that the production of a strategic plan is strongly aligned with participation and power. Contributions to the strategy-as-practice literature were made according to the concepts of practitioner, praxis and practice. It makes contributions to the organisational communication literature with respect to the dialogic of text and agency/conversation as well as the notion of power. Moreover, the concept of co-

orientation was extended by including notions of materiality, context and time. Findings also provided novel insights in to strategic planning within a university context.

Chapter 8 begins with a summary of this thesis, it then outlines theoretical and methodological contributions. Thereafter, it addresses research limitations and offers future directions for research. It then introduces practical implications. Concluding, it will provide personal reflections on getting access to and working with longitudinal data.



## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

*The organization, like the novel, has to be authored if it is to have an objective reality, for both its own members and the public outside it. It needs to be, as Czarniawska (1997) put it, "narrated". We need to think of the CEO, not as an omniscient hero, but as an author, and an actor, perhaps, but above all a writer. No senior executive, in today's kind of society, can have more than a superficial knowledge of all that occurs in the universe he or she directs. The wise managers are the ones who understand they are not "managing", in the narrow sense, but caught up in a dialogue with the organization and its heterogeneous worlds of meaning. The foolish managers are the ones who imagine that the organization they head is but a passive creation of their conceiving. (Taylor 2003: 139)*

#### 2.1 Introduction

Landmark research findings were based on documents such as strategic plans and meeting memos, see for instance Chandler (1962) or Mintzberg and Waters (1982). While basing research solely on a documentary analysis has shortcomings (Reeves et al. 2005), the analysis of the bearing of organisational documents on the actual activities that they were created in has been largely neglected (Atkinson and Coffey 2004). This thesis focuses on the development of a strategic plan. Strategic plans are integral in the strategic planning process as they facilitate the communication of strategy across an organisation (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Floyd and Wooldridge 1992a; Grant 2003; Kotter 1995; Mintzberg 1994). While it has long been established that managers' work is accomplished by talking (Mintzberg 1973), how does someone contribute to the creation of a strategic plan and, especially, what impact, if any, does talk have on the plan's content?

Prior to outlining the structure of Chapter 2, let me first provide definitions for three key concepts: i) strategic planning; ii) strategic plan; iii) strategy. For the purpose of this thesis, strategic planning is defined as a formalised process of decision making (Andrews 1971; Chandler 1962; Drucker 1959). The process of strategic planning comprises numerous strategic planning activities, such as setting an organisation's direction. A strategic plan is an outcome of a formalised strategic planning process (Ackoff 1981). It manifests an organisation's strategic objectives and goals (Murdick 1965). In this thesis, the concept of strategy is defined as 'a pattern ... consistency in behaviour over time' (Mintzberg et al. 1998: 9). It is 'a situated, socially accomplished activity' (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007: 7).

The Literature Review is structured in six sections. The first section sets out the foci of this thesis. It illustrates debates on strategic planning followed by empirical findings on participation in planning activities and the role of the strategic plan. The first section of the Literature Review concludes by outlining shortcomings within the strategic planning literature. The second section outlines the practice perspective on strategy, henceforth strategy-as-practice, which is interested in what people actually do when strategising, rather than looking at strategy as a property of an organisation (Jarzabkowski 2005; Johnson et al. 2003, 2007; Whittington 1996, 2003). After illustrating the origins of strategy-as-practice, a conceptual framework is illustrated consisting of practitioners, praxis and practice (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). This thesis focus will then be located within existing strategy-as-practice research outlining how a strategy-as-practice perspective offers the opportunity to explore the construction of a strategic plan spanning hierarchical levels. The third section introduces a dialogic view of organisational communication, conceptualising strategic planning as communicative process. The notion of co-orientation, adapted by the Montréal School of organisational communication (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003; Taylor and Robichaud 2004) is introduced as it provides a theoretical lens to examine these communicative activities at the micro level. Moreover, Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation as well as Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of an utterance's components and responsiveness will be outlined to elaborate on the notion of co-orientation. The fourth section addresses the notion of power. It highlights gaps within the strategic planning literature and addresses its absence in the concept of co-orientation. It then introduces four dimensions of power (Hardy 1996; Lukes 1974) and links these to the gaps identified. The fifth section outlines contextual nuances impacting upon strategic planning, as this research was conducted in a university context. Universities are characterised by diffuse power relations and participative decision-making resulting in a pluralistic setting with ambiguous strategic directions. The sixth section provides a conclusion to the Literature Review and outlines Research Questions derived from using an organisational communication lens on strategic planning.



## 2.2 Strategic planning: what about it?

Strategic planning is a particular type of strategy development. There are various classifications of strategy development (see Mintzberg et al. 1998). According to the design school (Mintzberg 1990), strategic planning involves a set of planning activities such as setting objectives and goals, developing targets and performance indicators, and allocating resources (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965, 1991 amongst others). However, the value of strategic planning is heavily debated within the strategic management literature (Miller and Cardinal 1994). For example, Mintzberg (1994), and recently Mankins and Steele (2006), argued that the institutionalisation of strategic planning within organisations detaches planning activities from the doing of strategy. Hence, its activities, embedded in formalised planning systems (Lorange 1979), become marginal in the actual strategy making. Despite heavy criticism and a declining interest in strategic planning within the literature (Whittington and Cailluet 2008), recent studies illustrate that planning remains a popular activity within organisations (Andersen 2000; Hodgkinson et al. 2006; Rigby 2003; Tapinos et al. 2005a). Furthermore, Grant's (2003: 499) study of eight oil majors showed that 'all the companies in the sample engaged in a formal strategic planning process built around an annual planning cycle'.

So, what now? On the one hand, strategic planning is seen as detached from actual strategy-making, hence it is considered to do more harm than good (Mintzberg 1990, 1994). On the other hand, companies still engage in a formal strategic planning process (Grant 2003; Hodgkinson et al. 2006; Tapinos et al. 2005a). In order to shed light on these heavily debated formal strategic planning activities, the first sub-section introduces four streams of strategic planning literature. First, it starts by introducing a normative view on strategic planning offered by its founding fathers (Ackoff 1970; Andrews 1971; Ansoff 1965; Chandler 1962). Two models of the strategic planning process will be introduced. Second, it outlines findings on the link between firm performance and strategic planning. Third, it provides a critique of formalised strategic planning (Mintzberg 1990; Mintzberg et al. 1998). Fourth, it offers alternative views on the role of strategic planning as proposed by scholars adopting a sociological perspective (Barry and Elmes 1997; Knights and Morgan 1991). The second sub-section looks at empirical evidence on strategic planning. In particular, it illustrates that strategic planning activities occur across organisational levels in which top and middle managers play different roles. Top managers are responsible for setting an organisation's direction and the monitoring of its implementation; middle



managers' involvement is crucial as their participation in planning activities affects its outcomes (Floyd and Wooldridge 1992b, 1996; Ketokivi and Castañer 2004). The third sub-section draws attention to the strategic plan, an often neglected product of the strategic planning process. While strategic plans facilitate the communication of strategy across levels (Balogun and Johnson 2005; Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Grant 2003), the creation of such documents and their effects on the planning process have been neglected. Fourth, a summary on the shortcomings within the strategic planning literature will be outlined.

### **2.2.1 Strategic planning: four streams of literature**

The first sub-section introduces four dominant streams of literature that looked at strategic planning. Firstly, it outlines the normative stream on strategic planning. This literature provides models of the strategic planning process and offers frameworks of how planning should be done. For the purpose of this thesis, strategic planning is defined as a formalised process of decision making (Ackoff 1970; Chandler 1962; Drucker 1959). Strategic planning is based on the assumption that 'the future can be improved by active intervention now' (Ackoff 1970: 23). Hence, the purpose is to improve an organisation's performance (Ansoff 1965; Chandler 1962). The process of strategic planning comprises numerous strategic planning activities. Differentiating the strategic management<sup>1</sup> literature into ten schools, Mintzberg et al. (1998) termed the set of activities within formal strategic planning as the design school and the positioning school. Typically, such activities range from setting an organisational direction, to allocating resources, to monitoring the launch of a new product (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965).

According to the normative stream, the strategic planning process consists of three phases: i) setting an organisational direction; ii) implementing strategic decisions; and iii) monitoring the performance of these decisions (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965). These three stages are not discrete but have to be seen as overlapping (Ackoff 1981). Focusing on the aforementioned direction setting stage, Hofer and Schendel (1978) provided a more detailed model (see Table 2.1). Stages 1 and 2 reflect an organisation's direction setting, which will then lead to the implementation phase (Stage 3). In stage 1 an organisation develops objectives and goals. In relation to these objectives and goals, strategies are developed which will result in an implementable strategy (Stage 2). While Hofer and Schendel (1978)

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<sup>1</sup> Strategic planning and strategic management are not seen as discrete fields. However, the term strategic planning is adopted consistently referring to formalised activities occurring throughout an annual planning cycle. For literature reviews on the development of the strategic management field see Day et al. (1990); Furrer et al. (2008); Ghemawat (2002); Nag et al. (2008); Pettigrew et al. (2002); Prahalad and Hamel (1994).

call for a separation of stages 1 and 2; they recognised their interrelatedness and that initially set objectives and goals may be revised before becoming finalised. They suggest that such revision of initial objectives and goals may occur as they are seen as unrealistic during the development of strategies (Stage 2). The product of the organisation direction setting phase is the strategic plan, which articulates the espoused directions and thus provides a means for implementation (Ackoff 1970; Hofer and Schendel 1978).

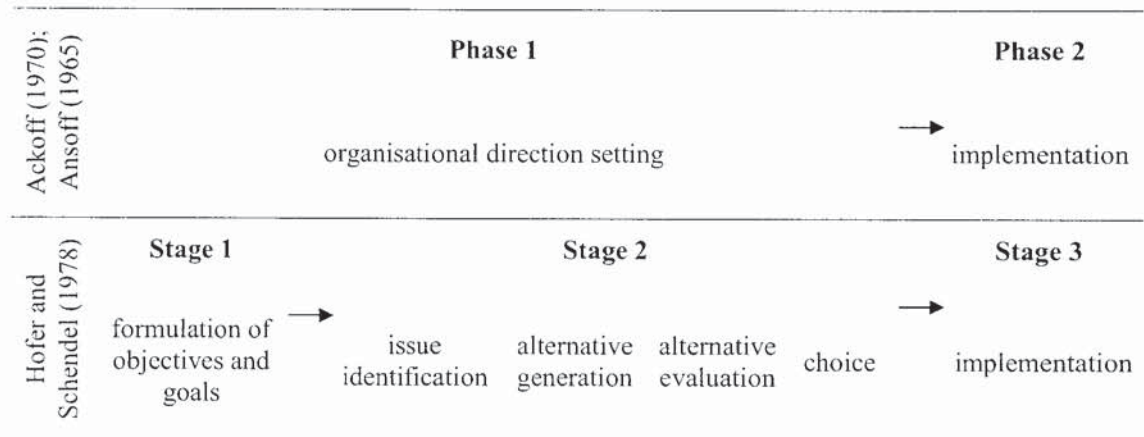


Table 2.1: Formalised steps of organisational direction setting

While these models have been criticised (Mintzberg et al. 1998), they are still adopted by organisations (Grant 2003; Hodgkinson et al. 2006). Setting organisational directions occurs as an organisation states *where do we want to be?* and ways to achieve this future state. This answers the question *how do we get there?* (Tapinos et al. 2005b). Organisational direction is expressed in different ways. This differentiation is apparent in the specific concepts that are commonly used across organisations. These are Vision and Mission statements as well as objectives and goals. Such concepts provide a hierarchy from broad directions, articulated in a Vision, to specific actions as manifested in goals. A vision statement is seen as describing what an organisation should be whereas Mission statements describe an organisation's reason for existence, including market definitions or economic concerns (Ackoff 1981; Miller and Dess 1996). Ackoff (1981: 104) defined *objectives* as 'ends that are not expected to be obtained until after the period being planned for, but toward which progress is expected within that period' and *goals* as 'ends that are expected to be obtained within the period covered by a plan'. The purpose of an organisation (articulated in the form of Vision and Mission statements) as well as objectives and goals, are manifested in an organisation's strategic plan (Ackoff 1970; Murdick 1965). In relation to objectives, Ackoff (1970) acknowledged that their formulation within the strategic plan is key, as too general or conflicting objectives may lead to difficulties during the implementation and monitoring phase. In order to achieve the set of organisational directions, objectives need to be



implemented. Goals thereby provide an orientation for implementing the set direction. In the last stage the actual implementation is monitored to control the achievement of the set objectives and goals (Ackoff 1981; Ansoff 1965). Setting of an organisation's direction and monitoring its implementation are seen as top management responsibilities, while the implementation occurs at lower hierarchical levels (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965). Thus Ackoff (1970, 1981) suggested that planning is most effective when conducted in a collaborative effort across hierarchies, as 'the value of planning to managers lies more in their participation in the process than in their consumption of the product' (Ackoff 1970: 137).

Secondly, it provides evidence on the link between strategic planning and a firm's performance. Following the normative literature on strategic planning offered by Ackoff (1970), Andrews (1971) and Ansoff (1965), research on strategic planning escalated. While some studies offered benefits to organisation's (cf., Miller and Cardinal 1994; Hart and Banbury 1994); others demonstrated that there is no clear evidence (cf., Kallman and Shapiro 1978; Leontiades and Tezel 1980). (Miller and Cardinal 1994). Based on a meta-analysis of past research, Boyd's (1991) suggested that measurement errors are to blame for such inconsistencies in results. Building upon past attempts, Brews and Hunt (1999) indicated that there is a positive relationship highlighting that strategic planning leads to increased firm performance, however only after four years of formal strategic planning activities. Despite considerable empirical research, the value of strategic planning in terms of measurable performance is still unclear (Andersen 2000).

Strategic planning as a rational process that is linked to enhanced firm performance has been opposed by scholars who were interested in the social aspects of the strategic planning process (e.g. Barry and Elmes 1997; Hendry 2000; Knights and Morgan 1991; Langley 1989; Langley et al. 1995; Mintzberg 1977, 1990; Pettigrew 1973). This view of planning moved away from the dependent variable *firm performance*. Research provided descriptions of how strategic planning occurs within organisations, contrasting prescriptions provided by Ackoff (1970) and Ansoff (1965) amongst others. An organisation's actual, realised strategic activities consist of deliberate, intended and emergent issues (Mintzberg 1977; Mintzberg and Waters 1985). This view also firmly opposes the step-by-step planning process of formulation and implementation as proposed by scholars such as Ansoff (1965) as well as Hofer and Schendel (1978). It shows that strategic planning may occur in very different ways (Mintzberg and McHugh 1985). Hence, Mintzberg (1979a) and also

Pettigrew (1992) suggested moving away from a priori assumptions about strategic planning and going into the field to observe what is happening in organisations.

Since the vivid debate (see for instance Ansoff 1991; Mintzberg 1991) between proponents of prescriptive strategic planning (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965) and descriptions of planning activities (for instance Mintzberg 1977; Mintzberg and Waters 1985), interest in strategic planning research has waned, as evidenced by a steady decline of publications on strategic planning (Whittington and Cailluet 2008). Recent evidence however shows that the once heavily criticised formal strategic planning remains important as a practice within organisations, and is still used for direction setting (Andersen 2000; Grant 2003; Hodgkinson et al. 2006; Rigby 2003).

A fourth stream of literature looked at strategic planning from a sociological perspective (Knights and Morgan 1991). In order to explore strategic planning as a social process, scholars adopted various theoretical angles (Mir and Watson 2000), viewing planning as a power play (Bower and Doz 1979; Child and Francis 1977) or language game (Barry and Elmes 1997). Another groups of scholars highlighted communication aspects of strategic planning (Grant 2003; Lines 2004). For instance, Ketokivi and Castañer (2004) showed that strategic planning enables the integration of organisational divisions to embrace common goals across an organisation. The process of integration may occur with regards to developing strategic directions (Wegner 2004) or the dissemination of strategic objectives across an organisation (Grant 2003). In both cases, the strategic plan played an integral role as it provided a visible artefact which was part of the respective activities.

Based on these findings, following two sub-sections will further explore aspects of participation and the role of strategic plans during strategic planning activities.

### **2.2.2 Empirical evidence on strategic planning: who does it?**

While the first sub-section outlined four streams of literature on strategic planning, illustrating debates on the (dis)benefit of strategic planning; the third sub-section addresses who participates in strategic planning. These findings stemmed from scholars who explored individuals' roles within strategic planning in more detail. Individuals who are exercising strategic planning activities have often been neglected when looking at strategic planning (Johnson et al. 2003). However, strategic planning occurs across an entire organisation. Top managers' and middle managers' roles and engagement differs during this process (Floyd and Wooldridge 1992a; Mantere 2008). Despite recognising that these two groups interact during strategic planning (Ketokivi and Castañer 2004; Mantere and Vaara 2008), research



often focused on only one group's activities. However, a few studies took an integrated view on strategic planning examining interactions between top and middle managers.

According to the prescriptions and descriptions offered by its founding fathers, an organisation's direction setting and monitoring is part of the top management team's, or specific planning department's, responsibility, whereas the implementation stage of the strategy process is delegated to managers lower in the organisational hierarchy (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965; Chandler 1962). This view is still prevalent in practitioner-orientated journals (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995). Also, empirical research shows that top management teams (Jarzabkowski 2003; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008; Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2002) and boards (Demb and Neubauer 1992; Hill 1995; McNulty and Pettigrew 1999; Pearce and Zahra 1991; Stiles 2001) influenced planning activities such as direction setting and resource allocation. Moreover, top managers' backgrounds (Hambrick and Mason 1984) and cognitive diversity (Simons et al. 1999) were put in relation to decision outcomes. Despite ample empirical research, proxies such as demographics provided inconclusive findings on strategic decisions (Finkelstein and Hambrick 1996). However, there are several weaknesses associated with research on top managers: i) it aggregated individuals to a team, neglecting, for instance, tension amongst individual team members (Carpenter et al. 2004); ii) it isolated certain strategic decisions, neglecting the messy decision making process (Langley et al. 1995); iii) only recently were other factors such as power dynamics (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki 1992; Denis et al. 2001) considered to influence strategic decision making. Alongside the difficulty of gaining access, the topic of how strategic activities are pursued at the top management level still remains under-researched.

While mostly neglected in the prescriptive literature on strategic planning (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965), there has been extensive empirical research on middle managers' involvement in the strategic planning process (for an overview see Wooldridge et al. 2008). This research stream has its roots in the social learning perspective (Wooldridge et al. 2008), which considers multiple actors' interacting across organisational levels (Bower 1970; Burgelman 1983a, 1983b; Mintzberg 1977) rather than being controlled by a single actor or department. Floyd and Wooldridge (1992a) demonstrated how different role expectations influence strategic activity. Based on this research, Mantere (2008) illustrated conditions that both enable and constrain strategic agency by asking middle managers about their experience. Further research looked at factors promoting or impeding middle managers' participation in strategic planning activities (Ketokivi and Castañer 2004; Mantere and Vaara 2008). For instance, Mantere and Vaara (2008) suggested that the

discursive practices of actors at different levels of the organisation, such as top versus middle managers, may construct different ways of participating in strategy processes. Moreover, empirical studies show that middle managers are not only involved in the implementation phase (Balogun and Johnson 2004; Guth and MacMillan 1986) but also initiate certain strategic decisions; for instance through issue selling (Dutton and Ashford 1993; Dutton et al. 1997, 2001) or championing and synthesising (Floyd and Wooldridge 1992b, 1996). Studies also show that the meaningfulness of objectives and goals at both the senior management level (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991) and middle management level (Wooldridge and Floyd 1990) is derived from members' involvement in the strategic planning process. A lack of participation may otherwise lead to poorly developed strategies (Floyd and Wooldridge 2000; Ketokivi and Castañer 2004). Hence, interactions between top management and middle managers are key to effective planning and implementation (Balogun and Johnson 2005; Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Grant 2003; Rapert et al. 2002; Tourish 2005; Vilà and Canales 2008; Westley 1990). Implicit in these interactions are aspects of power (Hardy and Clegg 1996; Lukes 1974; Narayanan and Fahey 1982), which will be addressed in detail in section 2.5.

Further insights were also gained by looking at ongoing interactions of top and middle managers in relation to particular strategic initiatives. Participating in strategic planning is considered to socialise individuals into identification with and collective commitment to strategic goals (Korsgaard et al. 1995; Schaffer and Willauer 2003). For instance, Wegner (2004) showed that a strategic plan was created as a joint effort including various internal and external stakeholder groups of a municipality. However, Sillince and Mueller (2007) explained the different positions taken by the team, which was formed to transform the use of e-business within the case organisation, and the team's supervisors with respect to the failure of the team's task. Each group of actors constructed their own specific discourse to account for their localised praxis and shift responsibility for the failure. Hoon (2007) compared the formal and informal interactions between middle and senior managers within a public administration and the way that these interactions enabled middle managers to have their ideas incorporated into the organisation's personnel strategy. By contrast, Sminia (2005) showed how lack of interaction between senior and business unit managers caused a breakdown at the firm-level, as each business unit resorted to their own localised praxis in implementing strategy. However, there have been only a limited number of studies that looked at the actual, real time, interactions between top and middle management and the consequences of these in relation to both developing and implementing a particular strategic initiative, or to show how meaning is created (Langley 1989). Sites for these interactions are



informal interactions prior to or after meetings (Hoon 2007), official meetings (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008) and strategy away days (Hodgkinson et al. 2006).

### 2.2.3 Strategic plans: what are they?

The third sub-section draws attention to the strategic plan. A strategic plan is an outcome of a formalised strategic planning process (Ackoff 1981). In this vein, Bresser and Bishop (1983) argued that the more formalised the planning process, 'the higher the chance that parts of the plan will be inappropriate' (*ibid*: 591). During the formalised strategic planning process, the strategic plan is integral to the interactions within and across hierarchal levels. However, there are two contradicting views on the role of plans during the strategic planning process. A few scholars indicate that a strategic plan is part of a communicative process involving individuals across an organisation (Grant 2003; Ketokivi and Castañer 2004; Lines 2004). Others view strategic plans solely as a means to disseminate espoused strategic directions once finalised (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995; Mintzberg 1994). While the creation of a strategic plan is implicit in setting an organisation's direction (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965; Hofer and Schendel 1978); the plan's role during this phase has largely been neglected within the strategic planning literature. To counter such shortcomings, this thesis draws attention to the notion of strategic plans and its impact on the strategic planning process. Firstly, it provides a brief definition of a strategic plan. Secondly, it outlines the critique of using strategic plans. Thirdly, it illustrates the role of strategic plans during the strategic planning process.

Written documents already featured in the early writings on strategic planning, not least as these provided grounds to study an organisation's evolution, perhaps most prevalent in Chandler's (1962) landmark book. In particular, strategic plans are of importance to organisations as they ought to reflect an organisation's espoused direction (Ackoff 1970; Murdick 1965). So what is a strategic plan? The strategic plan is a formal document that captures an organisation's direction (Ackoff 1970). Sections of a strategic plan typically include Vision and Mission statements as well as objectives and goals. It thus articulates courses of action which are manifested in objectives and goals (Murdick 1965). A plan may be created as a master plan, which then shapes plans at the business unit level, or it may be an accumulation of previously developed business unit plans (Ackoff 1970; Drucker 1958, 1959). The usefulness of strategic plans however is debated. Measured as a variable within the strategic planning process, there was no relationship between firm performance and strategic plans (Kukalis 1991; Miller and Cardinal 1994). Furthermore, Mintzberg et al. (1998) criticised the use of formal strategic plans as they reinforce the institutionalised

nature of strategic planning. While such formal strategy documents purport to capture an organisation's intended strategic directions (Mintzberg and Waters 1985), they claim that 'plans, by their very nature, are designed to promote inflexibility' (Mintzberg et al. 1998: 64). Mintzberg and colleagues thus argue that strategic planning has never been strategy making, and that the failure of planning stems from its formalised and institutionalised nature (Mintzberg et al. 1998).

Despite these criticisms (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998) and disillusionment with a plan's enhancement of firm performance (Miller and Cardinal 1994), strategic plans are still created and are thus part of strategic planning activities (Balogun and Johnson 2005; Giraudeau 2008; Grant 2003; Oakes et al. 1998). Based on a limited number of studies, findings showed that a strategic plan has at least three purposes: i) communicating strategy across hierarchies; ii) making strategic content tangible; and iii) legitimising courses of action. Fundamentally, a strategic plan facilitates communication of an organisation's direction across hierarchical levels (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Bresser and Bishop 1983). It thus provides a means to guide implementation of deliberate strategic intentions (Balogun 2003; Floyd and Wooldridge 1994). Therefore, it is crucial that the plan will be interpretable by employees across an organisation (Balogun and Johnson 2005; Collier et al. 2004; Grant 2003). This highlights the strategic plan's role of making the strategic content tangible (Giraudeau 2008; Shaw et al. 1998). Tangibility of strategic content may also occur through embodied metaphors (Heracleous and Jacobs 2008), visually in the form of charts (Eppler and Platts 2009; Fenton 2007) or other artefacts (Whittington et al. 2006).

The content of the strategic plan is thereby determined by the nature of the strategic planning process (Oakes et al. 1998). For instance, Grant (2003) shows that strategy documents were central in capturing the developing strategy during the strategic planning cycle, as they were constantly revised until a final plan was approved. During the creation of a strategic plan, wording controversies need to be tackled so that the plan reflects shared and agreed wording (Tracy and Ashcraft 2001; Wodak 2000). Constant revisions provide a knowledge sharing amongst participants in the plan's construction (Wegner 2004). Furthermore, the strategic plan acts as legitimising certain actions and restraining others (Fiol and Huff 1992; Jarzabkowski 2005; Oakes et al. 1998). It provides a means to systematically carry out and monitor the implementation of activities in order to achieve the set objectives and goals. For example, both Oakes et al. (1998) and Jarzabkowski (2005), show how the introduction of a formal business planning process systematically selects certain goals and activities as legitimate and, therefore, even in the face of resistance,



focuses debate and action upon those activities at the expense of others. Jarzabkowski (2005) refers to this characteristic of formal plans as procedural legitimacy because the existence of formal procedures attributes legitimacy to particular activities. This aspect of strategic plans will be addressed in sub-section 2.5.6 in more detail. While empirical research established the role of strategic plans as integral in planning, the notion of strategic plans is under-researched in terms of their intended and unintended consequences on the strategic planning process.

#### **2.2.4 Summary: Strategic planning, what about it?**

While research has not found clear links between strategic planning efforts and enhanced company performance (Andersen 2000), many organisations still hold on to a formal strategic planning process (Rigby 2003; Tapinos et al. 2005a). In particular the intended, deliberate aspects of direction setting, despite being heavily debated (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998), are still part of an organisation's annual planning cycle (Grant 2003; Hodgkinson et al. 2006). While recognising attempts to picture strategic planning as an analytical process (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965; Hofer and Schendel 1978), henceforth in this thesis strategic planning is seen as a social process (Hendry 2000; Knights and Morgan 1991; Mintzberg 1977, 1990). The thesis is particularly located within four aspects of strategic planning identified in the literature.

First, strategic planning is perceived as important for communicating an organisation's espoused strategic directions (Bartkus et al. 2000; Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995; Mintzberg 1994). While most of these authors have assumed that communication occurs after the formation of the plan, others indicate that communication is important during the formation of the plan (e.g. Grant 2003; Ketokivi and Castañer 2004; Lines 2004). However, the communicative purpose of planning, the activities that are involved in communication and its impact on either organisational members or on the plan itself are still under-researched. Second, the strategic plan is an integral part of the formalised strategic planning process (Ackoff 1981; Bresser and Bishop 1983; Hofer and Schendel 1978), enabling the communication of strategy across hierarchical levels (Floyd and Wooldridge 2000; Ketokivi and Castañer 2004). However, there has been hardly any research looking at the development of either strategic plans or their role during these activities (Langley 1988). Thus, this research focuses on the strategic plan production process, which is part of the strategic planning process. It includes those activities that have the opportunity to shape the plan's content. Third, strategic planning activities include several actors across an organisation's hierarchical levels. While individuals' participation may vary by hierarchical

level (Mantere and Vaara 2008), participation in strategic planning enhances commitment to goals (Collier et al. 2004; Korsgaard et al. 1995; Schaffer and Willauer 2003). Apart from Langley (1989), past research, however, barely looked at these interactions in real time, due to their research design. Fourth, power relations are inherent in planning activities (Narayanan and Fahey 1982); for example, senior managers and corporate planning departments hold control over who participates in planning activities and ultimately in the content of a plan (Grant 2003; Mantere and Vaara 2008). Planning activities thus ascribe different strategy roles to organisational members (Mantere 2008), and influence the suppression or promotion of different interests within the organisation (Hardy and Clegg 1996; Lukes 1974). This aspect of strategic planning will be discussed in more detail in section 2.5.

In order to address such shortcomings, this thesis aims at investigating how a strategic plan is constructed as part of wider strategic planning activities. For the purpose of this thesis, strategic planning activities will specifically refer to activities that are related to the construction of a plan. The strategic plan is thus considered as integral in the formal strategic planning process, as it captures strategic intentions. This perspective on planning does not view the strategic plan or the process of developing the plan as strategy itself, but rather considers the nature and purpose of those communicative activities through which the institutionalised activity of strategic planning is constituted in organisations (Giraudeau 2008; Grant 2003; Whittington and Caillaud 2008). The following three sections will provide further theoretical grounding to explore communicative activities involved in the process of constructing the plan.

### **2.3 Strategy-as-practice: how does it help?**

While planning activities are seen to be detached from actual strategy making (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998), empirical studies have demonstrated that they are still deeply embedded in organisations, for instance in the formalised steps reified in an annual planning cycle (e.g. Grant 2003). However, little is known about the actual activities which lead to the formulation of a strategic plan, or the purpose that these activities serve within organisations. This lack of knowledge is also reflected within the strategy-as-practice perspective, which calls for studies that illuminate the micro-activities involved in the social accomplishment of strategy (Jarzabkowski 2005; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al.



2003, 2007; Whittington 2006). Thus, a strategy-as-practice perspective was adopted to examine strategic planning activities that are related to the plan's construction.

This section is structured in three sub-sections. First, it outlines origins of strategy-as-practice. Second, it introduces a conceptual framework consisting of three inter-related notions of practitioners, praxis and practice (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). Third, it shows how the practitioner, praxis, practice framework offers to address issues identified within the first section of this Literature Review.

### **2.3.1 Origins of strategy-as-practice**

Strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) as a research topic is concerned with the doing of strategy. It follows the wider concern to humanise management and organisation research (Weick 1979; Whittington et al. 2002). Foci are thus to reveal what people actually do when strategising; the activities of individuals, groups and networks of people (Jarzabkowski 2004; Johnson et al. 2003; Whittington 2003) and their implications for shaping strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). Such a proposed focus moves away from the positivistic research approaches, which dominate strategic management (cf., Bettis 1991; Clegg et al. 2004; Hoskisson et al. 1999; Whittington 2003). S-as-p builds upon the work of seminal scholars in social theory such as Bourdieu (1977, 1990), de Certeau (1984), Foucault (1977) and Giddens (1979). While the practice perspective on strategy does not disconnect itself from previous research (Langley 2007), it shifts its aims significantly, focusing on the micro-level activities deep-seated within organisations (Johnson et al. 2003, 2007; Jarzabkowski 2005; Whittington 2006). Strategy is rather seen as what a company does, instead of what a company has (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). From an s-as-p perspective, strategy has been defined 'as a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategising comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity' (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007: 7-8). Strategy takes its meaning from the social, political and historical contexts in which it evolves (Hendry 2000). This perspective also draws attention to power relations, which are implied in the social interactions when strategising (Foucault 1977, 1980; Giddens 1979). Moreover, s-as-p does not reduce itself to a single stream of strategising activity, but identifies an organisation as having multiple coexisting strategies. These strategies are suggested to occur at different organisational levels, which may not be equally compatible for all members (Jarzabkowski 2005, 2008; Whittington et al. 2002). In brief, strategy as social practice takes a pluralistic, holistic view on formulating, implementing and communicating strategies across organisational levels.

S-as-p is not the first research agenda to attempt to break through the economics-based dominance over strategy research. Rather, it may be seen as the culmination of broader constructivist shifts in strategic management research (Mir and Watson 2000), to which a practice perspective can contribute. It has defined its broad research parameters as studying practitioners (those people who do the work of strategy), practices (the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done) and praxis (the flow of activity in which strategy is accomplished) (Jarzabkowski 2005; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). The next sub-section will outline the conceptual framework of practitioner, praxis and practice in more detail before locating the focus of this thesis within past empirical research in the s-as-p field (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009).

### **2.3.2 Practitioner, praxis and practice: a framework**

This sub-section will now introduce a conceptual framework consisting of three discrete but inter-related concepts: practitioner, praxis and practice (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). Following, each concept will be explained in more detail.

#### 2.3.2.1 Practitioner

Stemming from the critique of traditional strategic management research, s-as-p is concerned with what people actually do when doing strategic work (Jarzabkowski 2005; Johnson et al. 2003; Langley 2007; Whittington 2006). Hence, it brings the actor back in instead of focusing on *the organisation*. Strategy practitioners are broadly defined as ‘both those directly involved in making strategy ... and those with indirect influence’ (Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008: 101-102). A practitioner’s role is influenced by the situation and context determining his/her ways of behaving, acting, thinking (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Reckwitz 2002). Recently, Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) offered a distinction on the types of strategy practitioners, based on past s-as-p research. Studies distinguished between individual and aggregate actors. Some studies looked at individuals and their activities during strategising. For instance, Rouleau (2005) studied how a sales manager’s and a product manager’s activities shaped an organisation’s strategising. Other studies aggregated individuals in to groups of actors. These labelled aggregate actors, for example middle managers, (Balogun and Johnson 2005) or engineers (Laine and Vaara 2007) to describe their activities. Distinguishing between individuals or aggregate actors is crucial as they have implications for the research design (Balogun et al. 2003).



### 2.3.2.2 Praxis

The concept of praxis captures the activity that a strategy practitioner actually engages in. These activities range across and even go beyond the staged strategic planning process. It includes both formal (Grant 2003) and informal (Hoon 2007; Sturdy et al. 2006) interactions to formulate or implement strategic initiatives. Broadly defined, praxis refers to the stream of activity in which strategy is accomplished over time (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). Based on Reckwitz (2002) and Sztompka (1991), Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) defined praxis as 'a stream of activity that interconnects the micro actions of individuals and groups with the wider institutions in which those actions are located and to which they contribute' (*ibid*: 73). This indicates that praxis may occur on more than one level. With respect to the level of praxis, past research was categorised in three areas: micro, meso and macro (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). Praxis at the micro level refers to individuals' or groups of actors' interactions at a particular episode. A number of studies looked at the micro level. For instance, Samra-Fredricks (2003) demonstrated how several senior managers constructed a specific strategic decision. Praxis at the meso level refers to phenomena at the organisational or sub-organisational level. Most s-as-p research was conducted at the meso level (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). Macro level praxis refers to phenomena that occur at the institutional level. Until now, only a very limited number of studies have been conducted at the macro level.

### 2.3.2.3 Practice

Having outlined the concepts of practitioners and praxis, the notion of practices, which is an essential element of the s-as-p research agenda (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2003, 2004; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2003, 2006), will now be introduced. Given the various philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of practices (Schatzki 2006), it was noted that there are many different concepts of practices used within the s-as-p field (Carter et al. 2008; Chia 2004; Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). Practices are entangled and interrelated elements of activity. They are less something that is employed by an actor and more something that is constitutive of acting within the world (Reckwitz 2002). This view resonates with Chia's (2004: 32) notions of practices as a repository of 'background coping skills' upon which actors unconsciously draw as part of their everyday *being* within the world. It is thus hard to separate one particular practice from the interwoven fabric of practices. Schatzki (2006) conceptualises this interrelatedness as a bundle of practices within a spatial and material set of arrangements;

*... that an organisation is a bundle of practices and arrangements thus implies that an organisation consists in interrelated practices transpiring amid interconnected material orders. An academic department, for instance, consists in interrelated practices of grading, teaching, advising, research, decision making, and ceremony transpiring amid interconnected offices, classrooms, auditoriums, laboratories, and so on (Schatzki 2006: 1864)*

Schatzki's (2006) definition illustrates the concept of the practice bundle in more detail as it demonstrates the use of gerunds to highlight the active and constitutive nature of practices. While Schatzki separates out the spatial arrangements and, to some extent, the material elements of practices; Orlikowski (2007) proposes a different view on practice bundles. She advocated incorporation of the material, noting that in many studies of practices, there is an 'absence of any considered treatment or theorising of the material artefacts, bodies, arrangements, and infrastructures through which practices are performed' (*ibid*: 1436). Orlikowski thus conceptualises practices as sociomaterial, inasmuch as the doing of any activity cannot be separated from the material arrangements in which doing occurs.

Drawing together these perspectives from the wider practice literature, Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) noted that practices are a complex bundle involving social, material and embodied ways of doing, that are interrelated. Moreover, Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008: 101) have attempted to translate this complex set of concepts into the practices involved in doing strategy;

*Practices involve the various routines, discourses, concepts and technologies through which this strategy labour is made possible – not just obvious ones such as strategy reviews and off-sites, but also those embedded in academic and consulting tools (Porterian analysis, hypothesis testing etc.) and in more material technologies and artefacts (PowerPoint®s, flip-charts etc.).*

While there is no dominant view on the concept of practices within s-as-p (Carter et al. 2008); scholars draw upon common approaches to practices. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) identified that a large number of studies looked at discursive practices (e.g. Balogun and Johnson 2004, 2005; Sillince and Mueller 2007; Vaara et al. 2004). This may not be surprising as s-as-p is grounded within the linguistic turn in practice theory (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000). Others investigated meetings and workshops as practice by drawing upon Luhman's theory of episodes (Hendry and Seidl 2003; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008) and ritual theory (Bourque and Johnson 2008). For instance, Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) illustrated that conversations unfold differently according to the type of meeting practice. During restricted discussions, talk follows structured turn-taking invited by a meeting's Chair; whereas authority over turn-taking is suspended during the meeting practice of free



discussion (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). A more empirical approach was taken by scholars who examined how practices shaped individuals praxis (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2003, 2005, 2008; Paroutis and Pettigrew 2007; Regnér 2003). An example is provided in Jarzabkowski's (2008) study, which shows that strategising activities were shaped and thus differed by the institutionalised nature of a previously developed strategy. Despite the variety in approaches to study practices empirically, there has been scant attention to material practices, such as material artefacts and technologies (e.g. Denis et al. 2006), and their role in strategy praxis.

The next sub-section will now outline how the interconnected concepts of practitioner, praxis and practice offer to reveal strategic planning activities which lead to the creation of a strategic plan.

### **2.3.3 Practitioner, praxis and practice: links to strategic planning research**

As recent examples showed, s-as-p provides a novel and valuable lens to empirically investigate organisational phenomena (cf., Jarzabkowski and Balogun 2009; Mantere and Vaara 2008; Rouleau 2005). Thus, a s-as-p perspective was adopted to examine strategic planning activities that constitute the creation of a strategic plan. Therefore, this thesis complements findings within the strategic planning literature by adopting the framework of practitioner, praxis and practice. While these concepts are interconnected (Whittington 2006), empirical research may have a dominant focus on one intersection rather than another (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). In this research endeavour, focus is on the intersection of practitioners and praxis, however without neglecting the role of strategic practices on shaping such strategy praxis.

With respect to the type of practitioner, Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) classification of empirical s-as-p studies showed that it mainly focused on aggregate actors' activities. For the purpose of this project, practitioners are individuals who participated in the plan production process. In this study strategy practitioners include participants across organisational levels. This broadens the focus of past research that looked at only one particular group of actors (e.g. Balogun and Johnson 2004; Mantere 2005, 2008). Looking at the level of praxis, past empirical s-as-p research was mainly conducted at the meso level (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). Based on individual strategy practitioners, this thesis aims to contribute to the under-researched area of activities at the micro level (Rouleau 2005; Samra-Fredricks 2003). It also provides the basis to look at individuals' interactions across an organisation's hierarchical levels (Langley 1989) as well as to reveal the notion of power,

which is implicit in any strategic planning activity (Narayanan and Fahey 1982). Moreover, this thesis will examine how the institutionalised strategic planning process shapes practices constituting the creation of a strategic plan. Past research shows that strategic planning is accomplished and embedded in meeting practices (Hodgkinson et al. 2006; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). Focusing on the creation of a strategic plan within formal meetings will provide complementary findings to the construction of conversations at and across meetings. Additionally, the strategic plan may be considered as a material aspect of the strategic planning practice. This practice provides a shared understanding of the activities involved in doing strategy, including those habitual modes such as reviews, meetings and away days, which are all shared and recognised ways of doing strategy (Hendry 2000; Jarzabkowski 2004; Melin and Nordqvist 2007; Seidl 2007; Whittington 2006). While Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) identified various approaches to practices, there has been scant attention to material practices within empirical research (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009; Orlikowski 2007). There are only a few published works on the role of material artefacts and technologies, such as PowerPoint®, number systems (e.g. Denis et al. 2006). This thesis aims to address this gap by examining how strategic planning activities are manifested in a material outcome, the strategic plan.

#### ***2.3.4 Summary: strategy-as-practice: how does it help?***

The strategy-as-practice perspective offers a conceptual framework consisting of interconnected concepts of practitioners, praxis and practice. It provides a basis to examine strategic planning activities at the micro level. In this thesis, practitioners are individuals who participate in the plan's development spanning organisational hierarchies. It thus follows calls to conduct research at the micro level, contributing to the limited body of studies in this area (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). As set out in section 2.2, the focal strategy praxis of this thesis are activities that constitute the creation of a strategic plan. While it is difficult to disentangle the bundle of practices (Schatzki 2006), this research project looks at communicative practices, which constitute a strategic plan's development. Following Orlikowski (2007) the strategic plan provides a material artefact that is part of the sociomaterial enactment of a practice. This study thus attempts to investigate their role during planning activities empirically.



## 2.4 Dialogic view on organisational communication

Following Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) suggestion to explore gaps within existing s-as-p research by drawing upon theoretical perspectives from other fields, this section looks at the organisational communication literature to conceptualise strategic planning as a communicative process. It provides further detail and theoretical depth to examine strategic planning activities at the micro level, which have not been addressed in depth.

This section is structured in three sub-sections. First, key terminology in the communication literature will be defined. Second, the notion of co-orientation (Newcomb 1953), adapted by the Montréal School of communication led by James R. Taylor (Taylor et al. 1996; Taylor and Van Every 2002), will be introduced after outlining its premise about an organisation and organising in particular. Third, I will draw upon Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation as well as Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notions of an utterance's components and responsiveness to elaborate on the notion of co-orientation.

### 2.4.1 Language, discourse and communication: key terminology in the organisational communication literature

The concept of co-orientation provides a framework to examine social interactions at the micro level. However, before embarking in detail on describing the notion of co-orientation, I will firstly introduce key terminology within the communication literature. Notions of language and words as well as discourse and utterance will be explained as these are central building blocks within communication theory. Providing clarity on these concepts is essential to avoid ambiguity that has arisen, especially in relation to the notion of discourse, and the neglected link between discourse and communication (Jian et al. 2008; Kärreman and Alvesson 2008; Putnam 2008; Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Taylor 2008). Communication is thereby seen as constituting organisational reality. It comes into existence through social interactions. During these social interactions, humans draw upon words and material aspects (Berger and Luckman 1966; Taylor et al. 1996).

The relation of words and language systems will be explained as this thesis focuses on social interactions expressed using words. Words consist of signs, such as letters. Language then refers to a system that incorporates signs, which are put together to form words (de Saussure 1966). Each language system, such as Cantonese, French or Swahili, follows a specific logic that is reflected in grammatical and lexical structures. Such common

structures and neutral meanings of words enable human interactions. They are also captured in dictionaries (Bakhtin 1986a; Fiol 1989). As Daft and Wiginton (1979) point out 'most words have multiple meanings, and users may detect various shades of meaning in a given statement' (*ibid*: 180-181). Meaning is thus shaped by the situational use of words in a particular context (Bakhtin 1986a; Gray et al. 1985). The actualisation of language is captured by the concepts of discourse and utterance which will be described in the next paragraph.

Discourse and utterance are two concepts that capture the realisation of language. The actualisation of language via words constitutes any social construction. In recent years, the notion of discourse has attracted much attention. For instance, there are several special issues in management journals (*Academy of Management Review* 2004; *Human Relations* 2000; *Organization Studies* 2004) and communication journals (*Discourse & Society* 1999; *Management Communication Quarterly* 2005) that addressed various aspects of discourse and discourse analysis, as well as several books (for example Grant et al. 1998; Jaworski and Coupland 1999; Phillips and Hardy 2002; van Dijk 1997) and other journal publications (for instance Maguire and Hardy 2009). Definitions of discourse are strongly aligned to a scholar's discipline (Keenoy et al. 1997), which triggered Grant et al. (1998) to suggest that 'it is all things to all people' (*ibid*: 2). At a fundamental level, discourse, and in relation discourse analysis or studies, refers to the study of language use, cognition and interaction in social situations (van Dijk 1997). Similarly, Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) distinguish between discourse studies that approach the notion of discourse as a construct, such as leadership, identity or power and/or a process. The methodological debate (Phillips and Hardy 2002) in relation to discourse analysis will be addressed in Chapter 3. Due to the vast array of meanings that are entangled in the notion of discourse, I will draw upon the concept of utterance to explain language use (Bakhtin 1986a). An utterance has to be seen as a unit that occurs during a speech communication. It has an absolute beginning and an absolute end (Bakhtin 1986a). An utterance starts as an individual orally expresses something by drawing upon words. It may consist of several sentences or just a single word, such as *STOP*. An utterance ends as the individual finishes talking. As another individual may start speaking, a new utterance begins. The notion of utterance will be explained in more detail in part 2.4.3.2.



### 2.4.2 Co-orientation: a framework to examine organising

Having introduced key terminology of communication theory, the next sub-section will outline the notion of co-orientation. Co-orientation is a concept that provides a basis to examine social interactions at the micro level. In accordance with other communication scholars (e.g. Eisenberg et al. 1998), the underlying assumption in the notion of co-orientation is the view that an organisation is socially constructed and continuously reconstructed. This approach moves away from the simplistic idea of communication as message exchange between sender and receiver (Shannon and Weaver 1949) to a more fundamental view of communication as organising social life. It runs counter to the argument that there is one reality *out there* that we can discover. In this view, organisation is not a pre-existing and separate entity from communication but rather is constituted within and brought into being through a communicative process. Such an approach highlights the duality between action and structure (Berger and Luckman 1966; Fairhurst and Putnam 2004; Giddens 1984; Putnam and Fairhurst 2001) and consists of a recurrent, reciprocal relationship between text and agency (Cooren 2004)/conversation (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor et al. 1996). Within this dialogic, texts are both the medium and the product of a communicative process, with some texts becoming increasingly abstracted representations over the course of multiple iterations. Furthermore, social order is conceptualised as the ongoing interplay of individuals and material aspects of human life (cf., Giddens 1984; Latour 1987, 1993; amongst others). Meaning is thus constructed and bound within the situated communicative context (Eisenberg et al. 1998; Gray et al. 1985).

Embedded in the recursive relation of text and agency/conversation is the notion of *co-orientation*. It was developed by Newcomb (1953) and adapted by scholars associated with the Montréal school of communication (see Brummans 2006; Cooren and Taylor 1997; Kuhn 2008; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003, 2006; Taylor and Van Every 2002; Taylor et al. 1996) whose foundations are based on seminal works in the field of linguistics such as Austin (1962), Greimas (1987) and Searle (1969). Through co-orientation (see Figure 2.1 for an illustration) organising occurs within a communicative process. Co-orientation focuses on a common object X - the content of what the interactions are about – that emerges out of the ongoing interactions between actors A and B (Newcomb 1953; Taylor 2003; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). The link in the interaction of A and B is thus the common object X. Thereby, A and B may be individuals or groups of actors (Taylor 2006). Each interaction has to be seen as taking place reflexively because it refers to what went on prior to the current interaction. As any specific interaction is part of sequentially occurring interactions, it becomes the reference point for future interactions. Hence, it is crucial to

consider situational and contextual nuances that embed a social interaction, such as the language system and temporal location of the actual interaction, as they shape both its production and perception (Bakhtin 1986a; Taylor 2006; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). In the management literature, these nuances are also referred to as [grande] Discourse (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000), genres (Bazerman 1995, 2003; Orlikowski and Yates 1994), or societal and historical practices (Chia and MacKay 2007; Whittington 2006) to name but a few.



Figure 2.1: A-B-X system (adopted from Newcomb 1953: 394)

Although the notion of co-orientation offers a framework for examining communicative mechanisms that grounds organising in human interactions, without neglecting contextual nuances, which is a main weakness of organisational communication studies (Iedema 2007; Putnam and Fairhurst 2001), there are several shortcomings aligned to it. While present in the notion of co-orientation, material aspects such as memos or reports are hardly problematised (Grouleau 2006). Only recently, scholars within the Montréal School of organisational communication drew upon material aspects such as procedures (Cooren and Fairhurst 2004) to illustrate their role in shaping human interactions. However, there has not been a longitudinal account that offers further insights into the temporal and spatial aspects of the ABX relationship, nor the construction of a material artefact through co-orientation. Generally, there appears to be a lack of process studies within the field of communication, as noted by Monge et al. (1984). Thus, it was suggested to look at how a common object X enters and how it sustains social interactions (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). Additionally, while outcomes from communication are implicit in the concept of constructing particular socio-material and spatial realities, such as 'organisation', there has been little focus on specific manifestations of these outcomes, such as, for example, a strategic plan.



### 2.4.3 Dialogism

In order to elaborate on the Montréal School's adaptation of the notion of co-orientation, I will draw upon specific concepts of the two founding philosophers of dialogism, Paul Ricoeur (1981) and Michail M. Bakhtin (1986a, 1986b). Both philosophers advocate dialogism at the epistemological level. They take a dialogic approach to talk as sequential and never ending sequences of utterances, writing and interpreting written text. Before introducing Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation, as well as Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notions of an utterance's components and responsiveness, I will outline similarities in Ricoeur's (1981) and Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) approach to dialogism. This task was completed in relation to both scholars' specific concepts that will be drawn upon. These may, however, not be reflected in other works authored by Ricoeur (1970, 1974, 1976, 1990) and Bakhtin (1984, 1990).

Both, Bakhtin and Ricoeur's point of departure was critiquing Ferdinand de Saussure's (1966) mechanistic view of language, which is reflected in the distinction of speech [parole] and language [langue]. In their view, language is a code which provides the grammatical structures and lexical compositions, which 'belong to nobody' (Bakhtin 1986a: 85). A fundamental assumption in their shared interest in the realisation of language, is that language needs to be expressed either orally or in writing in order to be perceived by others (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b; Ricoeur 1981). Orally expressed discourse (Ricoeur 1981) / an utterance (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b) is seen as ephemeral phenomena<sup>2</sup> that is 'realised temporally in the present' (Ricoeur 1981: 133) and '[it] is determined by the unrepeatable individual context' (Bakhtin 1986a: 88). Both philosophers, even though differing in the unit of analysis and depth of analysis<sup>3</sup>, take the stance that a speaker expresses his/her intention (Ricoeur 1973: 100) / a 'speaker's individual speech will' (Bakhtin 1986a: 79) by selecting certain words and composing them in a sentence, which is expressed phonetically. Moreover, their notion of dialogism has a strong link to the contextual embeddedness of the speech situation and appropriation of a written text (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b; Ricoeur 1981). The meaning conveyed in discourse (Ricoeur 1981) / an utterance (Bakhtin 1986a) is determined by the immediate situation. Words gain their meaning from the composition of the discourse/utterance as well as the words embedded in discourse/utterances that will follow and that preceded the current/immediate sentence/utterance. What differentiates Bakhtin and Ricoeur's dialogic approach is their different foci. While Bakhtin (1986a,

<sup>2</sup> see Ricoeur's (1981: 133-136) distinction between 'discourse as event' and 'discourse as meaning'

<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur (1973) uses the sentence as unit and otherwise any orally expressed talk (Ricoeur 1981), while Bakhtin uses an utterance as unit of analysis. Furthermore, Bakhtin (1986a) introduces an utterance's components, which will be outlined in more detail.

1986b) is particularly interested in orally expressed utterances and its embeddings in flow of talk with one or several interlocutors, Ricoeur (1981) focuses on the dialogism of discourse and written text. However, I would like to note that while Ricoeur (1981) focuses on the talk to text and text to talk relation, he does not neglect the talk to talk relation. In a similar vein, Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) focus was on the talk to talk relation while not neglecting utterances being expressed in writing.

#### 2.4.3.1 Ricoeur: recontextualisation and decontextualisation

In order to further elaborate the Montréal School of organisational communication, I draw upon one of its founding philosophers in the communication literature, Paul Ricoeur (\*1913; †2005). In particular, I introduce two of his concepts, recontextualisation and decontextualisation (Ricoeur 1981), which provide further theoretical grounding to reveal those activities that constitute strategic planning. A range of Paul Ricoeur's work has influenced scholars within management and organisation studies in recent years (cf., Anderson 2004; Heracleous 2006; Heracleous and Barrett 2001; Heracleous and Hendry 2000; Ng and de Cock 2002; Waistell 2006) but it has not been adopted empirically (Iedema and Wodak 1999).

Before outlining the notion of recontextualisation and decontextualisation in detail, let us firstly define the term 'text', as there have been different conceptualisations (Putnam and Cooren 2004). While text is often referred to as both oral and written discourse (see Cooren and Taylor 1997; Kuhn 2008; Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004; Taylor et al. 1996), I distinguish between talk and text (see Ricoeur 1981). *Talk* is considered as any orally expressed discourse. It occurs in a current, immediate context-bound situation. I refer to any discourse or ideas expressed in writing as *text* (Ricoeur 1981). A text may be based on anterior talk and/or an author's individual ideas, which he/she may not have voiced before. As an outcome of a strategic planning process (Ackoff 1981), a plan is developed as a joint effort spanning various individuals (Wegner 2004), similar to a policy document (cf. Tracy and Ashcraft 2001). In a text however, the author's/authors' intention, which is inherent in the materialised statement, becomes objectified. Similarly, authors within the organisational communication domain termed this *objectification* which occurred as a result of textualisation (Anderson 2004; Geisler 2001; Robichaud 1999). Hence, situational aspects, such as time, place, to whom and why a particular statement is made, cannot be traced in the written statement. Rather than negating context, a criticism of many organisational discourse analyses (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Sillince 2007), Ricoeur (1981) positions talk within the immediate context



of its production, whereas text can move between contexts, albeit losing much of the contextual elements of its production. This distinction between talk and text offers us the opportunity to examine the strategic plan as a text – a written document – that is constructed in a relationship with the talk that occurs during the activities of the strategic planning process.

For Ricoeur (1981), the fundamental reason to distinguish between written and spoken discourse lies in the notion of *distanciation*. *Distanciation* occurs when talk becomes materialised in text. Thus, the text inscribes the meaning of what was said. However, through *distanciation* the speaker's mental intention becomes detached from the meaning expressed in the text. Through *fixation*, talk becomes an object which may be stored and archived. It is thus accessible to others and may endure over time and space (Smith 1984). *Distanciation* therefore leads to the *decontextualisation* of the talk (see Figure 2.2). The text is freed from the context-bound and situation-based talk upon which it is based and appears as an atemporal object (Ricoeur 1981). Ricoeur thus highlighted that 'the text possesses an inherent plurivocity that allows it to be construed in more than one way' (Thompson 1981: 53), as it may be interpreted by multiple individuals or by the same person again and again.



Figure 2.2: Illustration of recontextualisation and decontextualisation (based on Ricoeur 1981)

This notion of plurivocity may be better understood through the concept of *recontextualisation*. For *recontextualisation* to occur, a text needs to be enacted by an individual in his/her talk. As such talk occurs in a different situation and is most likely to be embedded in a different context to that in which the text was produced, individuals try to relate the text to their current contextually embedded situation. That is, they move the text into their current context and interpret it within that context. Thus, a text becomes *recontextualised* as an individual actualises the meaning of the text in his/her current situation. However, as the text inscribes *decontextualised* meaning (Ricoeur 1981), there

may be multiple, even competing, interpretations amongst several individuals when enacting the same text in new contexts. While others have also alluded to this cycle of recontextualisation and decontextualisation in text-talk relationships (Figure 2.2), in particular highlighting how texts assume increasingly durable representations of the 'real' (Iedema 1999: 51), Ricoeur's specific concepts have not been widely used empirically in the management literature. Indeed, this gap has been the basis for calls for further empirical research (e.g. Iedema and Wodak 1999).

#### 2.4.3.2 Bakhtin: an utterance's components and responsiveness

To further elaborate on the concept of co-orientation, I will draw upon the notions of an utterance's components and responsiveness brought forward by the Russian philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1986a, 1986b). Without going in to depth about his biography, Bakhtin (\*1895; †1975) wrote his manuscripts during the 1920s to mid 1970. Due to the tense socio-political environment during the Second World War and the strict regime of the Soviet Union, some of his thoughts, however, were only published in Russian and then translated in to other languages after his death in 1975, whereas other manuscripts were destroyed and remain lost forever (Holquist 1986). Thus, Bakhtin's work started to influence writings outside Russia in the fields of management and organisational communication from the early 1980s (e.g. Anderson 2005; Barge and Little 2002; Baxter 2003; Beech 2008; Boje 2001, 2004, 2008; Hawes 1999; Hazen 1993; Jabri 2004; Jabri et al. 2008; Mandelker 1995; Miller 1984; Shotter 1992, 1997). Furthermore, only recently a special issue in *Organization Studies* was devoted to Bakhtin's notion of polyphony (see Belova et al. 2008). In the following paragraphs I will point out similarities inherent in the concept of co-orientation and Bakhtin's line of thinking. I will then introduce an utterance's components and responsiveness in more detail as they illuminate our current understanding of organising through co-orientation. To recap, an utterance starts as an individual orally expresses something by drawing upon words and ends as the individual finishes talking.

The notion of co-orientation and Bakhtin's dialogic view on utterances share the same presupposition, in that there needs to be a relationship between 'complete utterances of various speaking subjects' (Bakhtin 1986b: 117); that is, the A – B relationship (Newcomb 1953; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003, 2006; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). Without this dialogism, the semantic theme (Bakhtin 1986b), the common object X with respect to co-orientation, does not come into existence. Furthermore, the semantic theme (common object X) is constructed through an ongoing dialogic. The meaning is contextual (Bakhtin 1986b) and may differ amongst individuals who engage in this dialogic relationship. Hence,



Bakhtin refers to contextual meaning as the semantic theme (common object X) that emerges out of such dialogism. The nature of the contextual meaning reveals the reasoning for Bakhtin to distinguish between a sentence and an utterance.

*Two or more sentences can be absolutely identical (when they are superimposed on one another, like two geometrical figures, they coincide); moreover, we must allow that any sentence, even a complex one, in the unlimited speech flow can be repeated an unlimited number of times in completely identical form. But as an utterance (or part of an utterance) no one sentence, even if it has only one word, can ever be repeated: it is always a new utterance (even if it is a quotation). (Bakhtin 1986b: 108)*

While there is alignment on viewing meaning as emerging within this dialogic relation of A and B (co-orientation) or as Bakhtin termed it 'I/self' and 'other/another' (see Holquist 1990: 150); Taylor (2003) pointed out that Bakhtin's writings offer deeper insights in to the dialogic relation captured in the notion of co-orientation. In particular, I will draw upon Bakhtin's notions of an *utterance's components* and *responsiveness* as they provide a basis to elaborate on the concept of co-orientation. Furthermore, this will advance our current understanding of how organising happens. A presupposition to introducing an *utterance's components* and *responsiveness*, is Bakhtin's relational view that an utterance has to be seen with respect to other utterances' themes (co-orientation: object x). Relationality of an utterance, expressed here and now, refers to something that has been uttered in the past as well as something that may be uttered in future.

#### *An utterance's components*

An utterance is determined by its referentially semantic content and expressive aspect (Bakhtin 1986a). Hence, each utterance has at least a semantic content and an expressive aspect. Both concepts have to be seen as intertwined. For explanatory reasons, however, these will now be introduced separately. The concept of referentially semantic content (thematic) is similar to the common object X (co-orientation). Bakhtin offered two complementary and intertwined angles to analysing an utterance's semantic content at a detailed level. An utterance's semantic content may already have been enacted during the same speech communication, such as a meeting; or it may not have been enacted. During a speech communication, an utterance may have the same semantic content (common object X) as a previous utterance; or it may introduce other semantic content that differs from the ones that were already uttered. Embedded in Bakhtin's deep seated distinction between *I and other*, he suggested that '[o]ur speech ... is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness," ...' (Bakhtin 1986a: 89). The temporal and spatial context in which an utterance occurs thus sets boundaries on what the semantic

content refers to, for instance, table conversations, intimate conversations among friends, intimate conversations within the family (Bakhtin 1986a). Relating to strategic planning, conversations during the creation of a strategic plan differ, for instance, from discussions about a specific aspect of a merger or acquisition.

Another component of an utterance is the expressive aspect. Using Bakhtin's words, an expressive aspect is defined as

*... the speaker's subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content of his utterance. The expressive aspect has varying significance and varying degrees of force in various spheres of speech communication, but it exists everywhere. There can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance.* (Bakhtin 1986a: 84)

Taylor (2003) linked Bakhtin's concept of expressive aspect with the notion of modality. Modality is a feature of human interaction rather than a linguistic category. The speaker's modality is revealed through his/her intonation in voice and tone, as well as the modal function of a verb, which is embedded in the context of the social interaction (Bybee and Fleischman 1995; Greimas 1987). Here again, Bakhtin's differentiation between sentence and utterances comes to bear, as the expressive aspect occurs within an utterance, the entire spoken discourse by an individual, and not by sentence. This differentiates Bakhtin (1986a, 1986b) from speech act theorists such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). An utterance's referentially semantic content and its expressive aspect determine its composition and style. As each utterance occurs in a distinct and novel situation, it is individual and unrepeatable (Bakhtin 1986a). While the same words may be chained together in the same way in two utterances; the context of their actual uttering differs. Moreover, it 'is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely novel and unrepeatable ...' (Bakhtin 1986b: 119-120). An utterance thus has contextual meaning. An utterance's meaning is derived from the words that were selected and hence uttered. Each word gains meaning in relation to its surrounding words and in relation to the utterance's referentially semantic content. The use of words is individual and contextual. Hence, meaning is based on these situational and contextual nuances rather than on neutral dictionary meaning (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b).

### *Responsiveness*

Having outlined an utterance's components, I will now introduce Bakhtin's (1986a) notion of *responsiveness* in more detail. Responsiveness is closely aligned with an utterance's



relationality in terms of its embeddedness in the speech communication. He even argued that

*... an utterance is defined ... - most important of all - by its direct relation to other utterances within the limits of a given sphere of communication. It does not actually exist outside this relationship.* (Bakhtin 1986b: 122)

Based on the last quote, we have seen that Bakhtin (1986a) viewed an utterance's occurrence as being related to what was uttered previously during the speech communication, while acknowledging that it may also relate to a future state. Hence, anything that is said occurs as a response, while at the same time an utterance will trigger a response once uttered. Quoting Bakhtin (1986a)

*Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word "response" here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the other, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account. After all, as regards a given question, in a given matter, and so forth, the utterance occupies a particular definite position without correlating it with other positions. Therefore, each utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication.* (Bakhtin 1986a: 91)

In other words, Bakhtin (1986a) assumed that each utterance 'is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response' (*ibid*: 94). Furthermore, Bakhtin (1986a) differentiated between an author and an addressee. While an utterance's uttering is executed by the author, an utterance's responsiveness is reflected in the notion of the addressee. An addressee may be someone, a person or collective, who directly participates in the immediate situation, which is similar to the Montréal School's adaptation of co-orientation. Additionally, Bakhtin (1986a) considered that an utterance might be addressed to an 'indefinite, unconcretized other' (*ibid*: 95) with varying degrees of proximity (Bakhtin 1986b). That is, even if an utterance is made in isolation, it is always made with consideration of some individual or collective addressee that the author envisions in the act of uttering. Drawing upon Bakhtin (1981), Wegner (2004) illustrated that a municipality's strategic plan is written in anticipation of an audience's response. In Wegner's (2004) case, the audience spanned internal participants and the city's council. Bakhtin's (1986b) notion then advances the current focus on the notion of co-orientation, the relationship between person or group A and B, by introducing the aspect of a superaddressee. The superaddressee is 'not any mystical or metaphysical being ... he is a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance, who, under deeper analysis can be revealed in it' (Bakhtin 1986b: 126-7). An

uttering person, with greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a responsive understanding of this invisible third party that '[who] stands above all the participants in the dialogue' (Bakhtin 1986b: 126-7).

Taking up Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of responsiveness, it is crucial to consider the temporal context that embeds an utterance's occurrence. Who is the speaker? Who does the utterance address? What does the speaker talk about (an utterance's referentially semantic content) and how (expressive aspect)? The context of the utterance, its embeddedness in the speech communication, is key, as the speaker, after uttering, may become the addressee as another speaker immediately utters a response. This strong contextual grounding offers another aspect to the notion of co-orientation (Taylor 2003). As Grouleau (2006) noted, the concept of co-orientation lacks the link to context. Furthermore, Bakhtin offered theoretical grounding for considering contextual situatedness, which had generally been a shortcoming of organisational discourse analyses (Iedema 2007; Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Sillince 2007). The context embedding a particular speech communication, such as a planning meeting, determines what topics may emerge in utterances (Bakhtin 1986a). This is also highlighted by Orlikowski and Yates' (2002) concept of temporal structuring. In line with practice scholars' conceptualisation of time (cf., Giddens 1984), 'time is instantiated in organizational life through a process of temporal structuring, where people (re)produce (and occasionally change) temporal structure to orient their ongoing activities' (*ibid*: 685). The context of a speech communication and wider institutional norms thus structure individuals' activities. Material artefacts, such as a protocol (Cooren and Fairhurst 2004), may thereby instantiate the re-enactment of those norms during interactions. However, considerations of the temporal context, which embeds any interaction (Giddens 1984), have largely been neglected in both organisational communication studies (Monge et al. 1984) and strategy process research (Langley 2007; Mosakowski and Earley 2000).

#### **2.4.4 Summary: Dialogic view on organisational communication**

The third part of the Literature Review conceptualised strategic planning as a communicative process. In order to examine the construction of a strategic plan at the micro level, the notion of co-orientation was introduced (Newcomb 1953; Talyor 2006; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). It provides a fine-grained framework to look at social interactions between actors A and B with respect to a common object X. So far, the notion of co-orientation has neglected the role of material aspects during social interactions (Grouleau 2006). Thus, specific concepts were introduced to further elaborate on the ABX relationship incorporating artefacts. First of all, talk (orally expressed discourse) was differentiated from



written text. A written text thereby provides a material artefact. Furthermore, Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of decontextualisation and recontextualisation offer insight into the evolution of a particular written text as part of ongoing interactions. Moreover, Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of an utterance's components and responsiveness advances the ABX relation at a theoretical level. Drawing upon and elaborating on the concept of co-orientation not only provides a basis to examine strategic planning activities but also to look at the role of strategic plans during these ongoing interactions. The temporal context, embedding any social interaction (Giddens 1984), will also be conceptualised as it has been largely absent in organisational communication studies (Monge et al. 1984) as well as in strategy process research (Langley 2007).

## **2.5 What's missing? Power**

This section will address the notion of power that is implicit in the strategic planning process (Narayanan and Fahey 1982; Pettigrew 1973, 1977). However, it has not been explicitly addressed in-depth beyond contextual descriptions.

This section is in four sub-sections. First, it outlines that notion of power that is lacking within both the strategic planning literature and the concept of co-orientation. Second, it introduces four dimensions of power i) power as resource; ii) power as process; iii) power as meaning; iv) power as system (Hardy 1996; Lukes 1974). Third, it looks at the role of power with respect to written documents during workplace interactions. Fourth, it links the gaps identified in the strategic planning literature and in relation to the notion of co-orientation with different aspects of power.

### **2.5.1 Power in the strategic planning literature**

The notion of power is not new in the field of strategic planning (Bower and Doz 1979; MacMillan 1978; Mintzberg 1979b; Pettigrew 1977). Planning activities are prone to individuals' personal interest and different interpretations about what an organisation's strategic intent should be (Bowman and Johnson 1992; Floyd and Wooldridge 1992b). Moreover, planning activities ascribe different strategy roles to organisational members across organisational levels (Floyd and Lane 2000; Mantere 2008). In highlighting the notion of power, this thesis responds to criticisms that power has been neglected in empirical research on strategic planning and in the field of strategy-as-practice (Carter et al.

2008). This study thus attempts to pay greater attention to the effects of power on the micro activities constituting an organisation's strategic planning process. This research also attempts to overcome the narrow view of power within the strategic planning literature (Hardy 1996), and thus introduces a multi-dimensional view of power (Foucault 1980, 1982; Lukes 1974). So far, power has been dominantly conceptualised as one-dimensional (Hardy 1996), being used to move scarce resources and hence to change behaviour (Narayanan and Fahey 1982; Schwenk 1989).

### **2.5.2 Power and the notion of co-orientation**

Apart from critical studies (Fairclough 1995, 2001; Fairclough and Wodak 1997), the notion of power has received limited attention within the field of organisational communication (Hardy 2004; Hardy and Philips 2004). In particular, the concept of co-orientation (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003; Taylor and Robichaud 2004) does not account for differences in actors A and B. Taylor (2003) points out that any dialogic perspective results in an exclusion of the ones who are not participating in the relation of A and B, but does not address this issue in more detail. While Bakhtin's writing (1986a, 1986b) provides a basis to elaborate on the notion of co-orientation (see part 2.4.3.2), he does not theorise about the notion of power (Hawes 1999). Due to the limited attention paid to power, within the organisational communication field, its four dimensions will now be introduced.

### **2.5.3 Four dimensions of power**

Before linking aspects of power to literature in strategic planning and organisation communication, its notion will be briefly explained. Similarly to discourse and practice, *power* is a vague concept with debates about its definition (Lukes 1974; Nagel 1975). Rather than defining power in a plain statement, it will be illustrated according to its facets. Power is seen as implicit in the communicative process of strategic planning (Knights and Morgan 1991). Four dimensions of power will now be introduced, with each approach determining the study of power (Hardy and Clegg 1996; Lukes 1974). These dimensions however operate simultaneously (Clegg 1989; Mangham 1986).

#### 2.5.3.1 Power as recourse (1<sup>st</sup> dimension of power)

The first dimension of power advocates that powerful actors are able to influence decision outcomes. Hence, other individuals will do certain things, which they would have not done otherwise (Dahl 1957, 1961; Parsons 1963a, 1963b). This view focused on individuals' behaviour in relation to issues, but not any issues, only issues with observable conflict (Clegg 1989). Certain individuals are more powerful, as only they are able to influence



others' decisions. The main criticism of the first dimension of power rests on the assumption that conflict is clearly observable. This approach is limited in that conflict may well exist even when it may not be directly observable or may not even be articulated (Giddens 1968; Hardy 1991a; Lukes 1974).

#### 2.5.3.2 Power as process (2<sup>nd</sup> dimension of power)

The second dimension of power is rooted in Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 1963, 1970) critique of the behavioural focus advocated by Dahl (1957, 1961) and Parsons (1963a, 1963b). Bachrach and Baratz advocated the notion of non-decisions affecting the decision making process. Their focus was on 'the ways in which decisions are prevented from being taken on potential issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests' (Lukes 1974: 20). In this view, powerful actors are able to deliberately suppress and exclude certain issues and individuals from the decision-making process. The source of power rests within the decision making process and its participants (Hardy 1996). While the second dimension of power elaborates on the first notion of power, it still focuses on the observable aspect of conflict (Hardy 1985).

#### 2.5.3.3 Power as meaning (3<sup>rd</sup> dimension of power)

Out of the deficiencies of the first and second dimension, Lukes (1974) developed a third dimension of power. While the first two dimensions of power rest on the assumption of observable conflict (Clegg 1979, 1989; Hardy 1985), Lukes (1974) claimed that conflict may even be prevented from arising. Such prevention occurs through 'shaping [peoples] perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things' (Lukes 1974: 24). The source of power rests in the management of meaning. This refers to the deliberate use of symbols, words and rituals to legitimise certain actions and restrain others (Hardy 1996). The management of meaning has often been considered to be associated with hierarchical power (e.g. Ranson et al. 1980). However, meaning may equally provide a source of power for lower level or professional employees, who adhere to their own meaning structures within a given context (Jarzabkowski 2008). For instance, Sillince and Mueller (2007) illustrate how a team talked themselves out of creating and implementing a strategic initiative due to their supervisor's ambivalence about the responsibility for the project. Moreover, Maitlis and Lawrence (2003) showed that the lack of meaning of a particular strategic intent for musicians resulted in a failed strategy launch for an orchestra.

#### 2.5.3.4 Power of the system (4<sup>th</sup> dimension of power)

While the first three dimensions occurred as response to one another (Clegg 1979, 1989); the fourth dimension of power is based on a distinct set of writings (Foucault 1980, 1982). It refers to the 'power embedded deep within the organisational system that everyone takes for granted' (Hardy 1996: S8). The system is constructed through norms and rules that set 'what is and what is not "normal", and what is and what is not available for individuals to do, think, say, and be' (Clegg 1989: 155-156). Through systemic power surveillance order is ensured. However, even within this system there may be different groups that try to secure power over the development of strategy. These groups may be occupational, such as engineers, or functional, such as top managers (Knights and Morgan 1991).

#### 2.5.4 Four dimensions of power: strategic planning

While introduced separately, the four dimensions of power have to be seen as interwoven (Clegg 1989; Mangham 1986). This thesis goes beyond the narrow view of power. In the past, power within strategic planning was mainly seen as occurring with respect to observable conflict and as a process to move resources (Hardy 1996; Narayanan and Fahey 1982). Overcoming such shortcomings advances the conceptualisation of power in the field of strategic planning. The four dimensions of power will now be introduced in reverse order as any social interaction is considered to re-enact given structures (Giddens 1968).

According to the fourth dimension of power, the existing system, in this case the institutionalised strategic planning process, embeds any activity (Knights and Morgan 1991). Within this system there is already a certain distribution of power that may be regarded as taken for granted, or at least not questioned. Hence, individuals act in a certain way without knowing why they act that way. Implicit in the institutionalised strategic planning process is the practice that top managers, responsible and accountable for an organisation's performance, set an organisation's direction that others ought to implement (Ackoff 1970; Andrews 1971; Ansoff 1965; Chandler 1962). Furthermore, an organisation's distribution of power may determine who holds authority over the creation of a strategic plan, whether it is the board of directors or a strategic planning department (Grant 2003; Ocasio and Joseph 2008). The third dimension, the power of meaning, reveals how individuals, such as musicians (Maitlis and Lawrence 2003) or a project management team (Sillince and Mueller 2007), try to shape a strategic content's meaning, or fail to do so, and why. The second dimension of power recognises participative (Collier et al. 2004; Mantere and Vaara 2008) and non-participative forms of power (Ainsworth et al. 2005; Westley 1990). This may show who is able to contribute to, and thus able to shape, the strategic



content during the strategic planning process. It also opens-up, using Carter et al.'s (2008: 93) term, those issues that are not talked about and excluded from the agenda. Finally, the first dimension of power, to allocate resources and to oblige others, particularly lower level employees, to undertake activities that they would not otherwise undertake, is prominent and unquestioned within existing studies, for instance on the role of strategy implementation (cf., Balogun 2003; Balogun and Johnson 2004, 2005) and resistance to implementation (cf., Sillince and Mueller 2007).

### **2.5.5 Four dimensions of power: co-orientation**

The notion of power has received limited attention within organisational communication research (Hardy 2004). It has also been neglected in the concept of co-orientation, as pointed out by Taylor (2003). Although Robichaud et al. (2004) and Taylor and Robichaud (2004) include contextual characteristics, aspects of power are still absent when applying the notion of co-orientation to talk. Moreover, power is an aspect that has been missing in Bakhtin's theorisation (Hawes 1999), despite his recognition that any social interaction is embedded in a particular time and space (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b). The four dimensions of power provide further nuances to look at situational characteristics embedding social interactions in an organisational context. In particular, each of the four dimensions of power advances our understanding of the ABX relationship. As with the sub-section on power in the strategic planning literature, the four dimensions of power will be introduced in reverse order.

The fourth dimension of power provides a lens to look at the taken-for-granted contextual and situational characteristics and how these impact upon social interactions (Clegg 1989; Hardy 1996). A meeting, for instance, is determined by the set of rules that are invoked by the meeting's first officer. Social interactions that occur during such meetings are restrained by these rules (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). Yet in co-orientation studies, such as Taylor and Robichaud's (2004), they neglected how the meeting's topic: the succession of a retiring CEO of a large Canadian company, and the meeting's format, may have contributed to the interaction between the CEO and his associate. The third dimension of power sheds light on the emergence of a common X during a meeting. According to the third dimension of power, conflict over an issue may be prevented from arising (Lukes 1974) because of the management of meaning. With respect to the ABX relationship, it is important to look at the role of the common object X in meaning-making during the interaction between A and B. For instance it may show that A and B negotiate over the meaning of X in order to prevent misinterpretation, or manage the meaning, of a further actor, Z, who is not present.

However, meaning as power has been neglected within current studies adopting the concept of co-orientation. For example, in the study of a mayor's consultation with communal representatives, Robichaud et al. (2004) fall short when explaining whether conflict over the state of streets was stimulated by the mayor's presentation, prior to opening the floor to participants, or whether certain topics were excluded from discussion, as these may have had greater consequences for the running of the town, such as the state of the budget. The second dimension of power recognises participative and non-participative forms of power (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 1963). This highlights further aspects on the emergence of the common object X during a meeting or across meetings. For instance, such focus demonstrates who is able to introduce X or who is not able to participate in talking about X at a particular point during a meeting. The first dimension of power differentiates whether individual A orders person B to do X or whether B resists doing X. However, current studies adopting the concept of co-orientation also failed to address these first and second dimensions of power.

### **2.5.6 Plans and the notion of power**

As previously outlined (see sub-section 2.2.4), the notion of strategic plans during strategic planning activities needs to be addressed in more detail. This sub-section will show that strategic plans may provide a source of power. Thus, they may serve other purposes during the strategic planning process than simply being a tool to communicate strategic content across organisational hierarchies (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Mintzberg 1994). For instance, Oakes et al. (1998) showed that strategic plans have power effects such as legitimising certain courses of action. Empirical findings on the role of strategic plans during the strategic planning process, however, are scarce. In order to explore the legitimising role of strategic plans in more detail, I will draw attention to other written documents, such as engineering drawings. As public documents (see Winsor 1999), both strategic plans and engineering drawings are seen as a product of an activity (Geisler 2001). They facilitate future actions towards a larger goal, such as organisation (Wegner 2004).

Both strategic plans and engineering drawings also provide authoritative texts, which constitute power relations and inscribe an organisation's legitimate courses of action. Such specific texts thus direct attention and discipline individuals' activities (Kuhn 2008). Studies in the manufacturing context showed that the role of engineers was implicit in the work process and re-instated in the educational difference between engineers and technicians. Engineers were thus able to manipulate the content of the drawings, whereas others were only *receiving* information (Bechky 2003a, 2003b; Carlile 2002). Hence, these written



documents ascribe power relations, as they determine legitimate and illegitimate courses for action. It indicates that such power relations are closely related to who holds authorship over the drawings content (Bechky 2003a, 2003b).

Studies indicate that engineering drawings both enable and constrain social interactions amongst different groups of actors. They provide the means for engineers to communicate with other groups of actors to ensure that a blueprint results in an assembled machine (Carlile 2002, 2004; Geisler 2001; Winsor 2000). However, other studies demonstrate that these drawings also hamper social interactions and further embed pre-existing systemic power relations. For instance, Bechky (2003a, 2003b) illustrates that the drawings' inscribed information, encoded in a particular language that was not understood by assemblers, always made assemblers inferior actors. However, such actors are not totally lacking in power but may find alternative ways to construct power relations by attributing greater meaning to other artefacts. For example, in Bechky's case, another material artefact, a prototype of the machine, was attributed greater meaning than the drawings by the assemblers. They thus passively resisted the controls and inferior role implicitly ascribed to them by the drawings and modifications of the drawings. Rather, engineers began to use the prototype as a means of facilitating interactions between engineers and assemblers. With regards to a wording change, Tracy and Ashcraft (2001) showed that a school board used technical editing, inadvertent changing and wordsmithing to agree on the amended policy document. This shows that material artefacts play a vital role during socio-political interactions. Informed by findings in other areas of research (Bechky 2003a, 2003b; Carlile 2002, 2004; Winsor 2000), I attempt to identify how strategic plans influence strategic planning activities and how authorship, or its omission, promotes the inscription of meaning.

### ***2.5.7 Summary on power***

This thesis follows a call to 'put power back into the equation' (Hardy 1996: S14) in order to highlight its dynamics. Power is not seen as central driving force but rather as embedding the communicative process (Knights and Morgan 1991). Moreover, introducing four dimensions of power (Hardy 1996) elaborates on current strategic planning research as it mainly takes a narrow view, focusing on only the first dimension of power (Hardy 1996). Also, it advances research within the field of organisational communication (Hardy and Phillips 2004) and on the concept of co-orientation (Taylor 2003), as power has largely been absent in both areas. This research thus introduces the notion of power that inevitably

embeds social interactions in the workplace, and cannot be ignored when applying the concept of co-orientation.

Power is seen as being relationally implicit in the strategic planning process (Clegg 1989; Mangham 1986). This results in a certain, taken-for-granted, power distribution that constitutes an organisation's hierarchical levels. Within this hierarchy certain actors are able to influence others' behaviour. While participation in the strategic planning process is seen to ease implementation (Balogun and Johnson 2004) and hence a strategy's success (Collier et al. 2004), non-participative aspects of the second dimension of power have not been addressed in depth in the planning literature. This thesis moves away from the assumption that there needs to be observable conflict in social interactions, which is major criticism of the first and second dimension of power (Lukes 1974). Moreover, it is recognised that certain issues are prevented from emerging, through the management of meaning. The strategic plan is thereby seen as an integral device that may enable or constrain strategic planning activities. As an authoritative text, it is also seen as inscribing an organisation's legitimate courses of action and its constituting power relations (Kuhn 2008).

## **2.6 Strategic planning in a university context**

As this research was conducted in a university; literature on strategic planning in a university context will be outlined. Universities were already sites for research, for instance, on decision making (Cohen et al. 1972; Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008; Salancik and Pfeffer 1974) and strategy making (Hardy 1987, 1990, 1991a; Hardy et al. 1984; Jarzabkowski 2003, 2005, 2008; Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2002). Within the literature there are several views on universities, considering them as organised anarchies (Cohen and March 1974; March and Olsen 1976), professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg 1979c, 1988) or a collegial community of scholars (Clark 1971, 1972; Goodman 1962; Millet 1962). Research conducted in several Brazilian universities showed that different views on universities are closely aligned to a university's organisational structure and leadership style (Hardy 1990, 1991a). Without favouring one view over the other, strategy making in universities is determined by three characteristics across the various views on universities. They are characterised by i) diffuse power structures; ii) participative decision-making, resulting in iii) a pluralistic setting with ambiguous strategic directions. Moreover,



at the university level, strategic plans have been seen as decorative rather than representing a university's shared courses of action (Cohen and March 1974; Lozeau et al. 2002).

*Diffuse power relations* are a key characteristic of a university (Cohen and March 1974). This process stems from decentralised and loose-coupled university structures (Weick 1976) and results in professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg 1979c). Key actors within universities are academics and central administrators. Due to the specialised expertise within academia, decisions with respect to teaching and research can only be made by professors. Universities' diffuse power structures thus empower particular professors (Cohen and March 1974). Central administrators' roles are to ensure financing and other support services such as estates. The university as a whole, however, is run by neither academics nor central administrators but only by collective choice (Hardy et al. 1984). This decision process is embedded in formal governance systems such as Senate.

This results in another characteristic of universities: *participative decision-making* (Hardy et al. 1984). It provides the opportunity for individuals within a discipline or across hierarchical and horizontal levels to intervene in this process (Taylor 1983). While scholars, viewing universities as a collegial community of scholars, claimed that consensus will be found to be driven by common interest (Goodman 1962; Millet 1962), others criticised this view as too idealistic and offered a political model (Baldrige et al. 1978; Ladd 1970). Thus, Hardy et al. (1984) argued that neither view will dominate the decision-making process. Instead it will depend on the circumstance and content of the decision as well as the university's context (Hardy 1987). If decisions cannot be taken solely by professors or central administrators, they will emerge during a complex participative decision-making process. For instance, such decisions include the creation and design of research centres and departments, as well as budgeting (Hardy et al. 1984). Thus, meetings appear to be an important practice to enable university-wide strategic action (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008).

A university is also seen as a *pluralistic setting with ambiguous strategic directions*. Empowered by the diffuse power structures, diverse groups are able to pursue their self-interest during the decision-making process. Conflicts over the content of decisions inevitably arise, making the university a highly pluralistic setting (Hardy 1991b). Even though decision-making is of participative nature, collective strategies at a university level are difficult to arrive at due to the divergent strategic orientations of its diverse groups (Cohen and March 1974; Jarzabkowski 2005; Jarzabkowski and Sillince 2007). To arrive at deliberate, intended strategic directions that are shared across the university, which is a

premise of formal strategic planning (Mintzberg and Waters 1985), is thus seen as difficult if not actually impossible (Hardy et al. 1984). Objectives and goals are therefore expressed ambiguously to bridge multiple interests (Ring and Perry 1985; Stone and Brush 1996). This is also reflected in the use of strategic plans (Lozeau et al. 2002). Within universities, strategic plans are either compiled from individual departments'/schools' plans or, if created by the top management, decorative, with no impact on academic issues, such as teaching and research. The accumulation of local plans, however, leads to a disjointed university plan with no coherently expressed direction (Cohen and March 1974). As a result, a university has no clear strategic focus due to its school/departmental level strategies being unrelated (Hardy et al. 1984).

Despite these views of the pluralistic, participative nature of the university and its diffuse power relations, in recent years, universities, and public sector organisations in general (Lewellyn and Tappin 2003), have adopted managerialism in response to institutional pressures (Anderson 2008; Hardy 1987, 1991b; Lounsbury 2001; Scott et al. 2000; Townley 2002). Managerialism has arisen in response to declining state funding, increased market pressures, and external requirements for public sector organisations to adopt private sector practices (Clark 1998; Ferlie et al. 1996; Slaughter and Leslie 1999). Under these conditions, top managers have greater responsibility for collective strategic action (Birnbaum 2000; Denis et al. 2001; Fitzgerald 1994; Jarzabkowski 2005). However, the above characteristics of the university come into tension with this increase in managerialism. Top managers must thus intervene in and shape strategy with consideration of the power of their academic constituents and their needs for participation (Jarzabkowski 2008). These characteristics make universities a valuable context in which to focus upon the interactions between top managers and other staff within the strategic planning process. In order to facilitate strategic planning, as practiced in the public sector, common meaning across an organisation needs to be created. For instance, Gioia et al. (1994) illustrated that 'strategic planning' was an ill-defined metaphor as members did not have previous experience with such tasks at a university. Hence, planning served the purpose of constructing meaning amongst a task force and constituents within the case university. The strategic plan provided a symbolic device for the construction of such meaning. This suggests that strategic planning and plans are adopted for other reasons than conveying strategic directions (Faber 2003; Lozeau et al. 2002). However, the purpose of planning in universities and its constituents as well as the usefulness of plans or the process by which members attribute meaning to planning activities remains under-researched.



*Summary on university setting*

Universities provide a unique setting to examine strategic planning. They are characterised by diffuse power structures, participative decision-making processes and goal ambiguity. While it is recognised that universities have deliberate, intended strategies (Hardy 1990, 1991a), these are seen as primarily reflecting administrative issues such as space allocation (Cohen and March 1974). While the university context is increasingly located within forces to adopt more managerialist approaches to planning (Hardy 1991b; Lounsbury 2001), there is only limited knowledge about collective strategic action at the top management level of universities (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008).

**2.7 Conclusion of Literature Review and Research Questions**

Strategic planning may be seen as a bluff. It starts by making claims that formal planning activities increase a firm's financial performance (Ackoff 1970; Andrews 1971; Ansoff 1965). Over the years, scholars have almost obsessively engaged in finding such a link. However studies have only provided scattered results (cf., Anderson 2000). Mintzberg and colleagues opposed the step by step approach inherent in the normative literature on planning concluding that planning is not strategy-making (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998). A further set of scholars approached strategic planning from a sociological perspective suggesting that planning may be a language game (Barry and Elmes). So what is it, then, that keeps academic scholars and managers alike debating about strategic planning?

In order to look at formal strategic planning activities, the s-as-p practice perspective is adopted to examine these planning interactions at the micro level. It looks at intended and unintended consequences of an institutionalised strategic planning process. Drawing upon concepts in the organisational communication literature, I re-conceptualise strategic planning as being constituted through a communicative process. This view goes beyond the commonly held view, within the strategic management field, of communication as occurring after a plan is developed (e.g. Bartkus et al. 2000; Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995; Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998), to regarding the plan as an emerging text that is constructed within the communication process. I suggest that the strategic plan is not only the result of planning activities but also that it shapes the planning activities that take place during the process of its development. Through these recurrent activities, the formalised

planning process, which has often been as taken for granted, is constantly constructed. This conceptualisation thus reveals the planning activities, which constitute a formalised planning process, and at the same time, construct a tangible outcome of this process, the strategic plan. Furthermore, a strategic plan provides a durable text, which inscribes authority and thus reinforces power relations. As a textual artefact, a plan thus becomes authoritative and may also legitimate future courses of action (Jarzabkowski 2005; Kuhn 2008; Oakes et al. 1998; Winsor 2000). This perspective on planning does not view the strategic plan or the process of developing the plan as strategy itself, but rather, considers the nature and purpose of those communicative activities through which the institutionalised activity of strategic planning is constituted in organisations (Giraudeau 2008; Grant 2003; Whittington and Cailluet 2008).

Based on the above literature review, I view the strategic planning process and the production of a plan as a communicative process, deriving the following research questions: *1) How is a strategic plan constructed as a communicative process?; 2) What are the implications of this communication process for i) the plan; and ii) the plan production process?.* In current organisational research, documents have been somewhat taken for granted (Reeves et al. 2005). Adopting an approach which has a reciprocal relationship between text and talk at the core provides a novel approach with which to examine the activities involved in strategic planning, because it places the plan at the centre of the process, as a textual artefact that is constructed and altered through the communicative interactions between different actors. Hence, a planning document is both constructed through communication and also acts as an outcome of ongoing communications, that serves to capture and stabilise preceding communications, so shaping the communications that follow. The planning document is thus a textual representation that both constructs and is constructed by the strategic planning activities.



## CHAPTER 3

### Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

Taking a strategy-as-practice perspective (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2003, 2007; Whittington 2006), this thesis looks at the construction of a strategic plan as part of formal strategic planning activities. Reconceptualising strategic planning as a communicative process provided the basis for investigating a strategic plan production. The communicative process consists of a recurrent interplay of talk and text. Talk refers to any discourse expressed orally and text refers to written discourse manifested in a written artefact. Through this recurrence, strategic planning activities come into being. According to this view, the strategic plan is seen as an emerging text. Based on the Literature Review, the following Research Questions informed this study:

- 1) *How is a strategic plan constructed as a communicative process?;*
- 2) *What are the implications of this communication process for*
  - i) the plan; and*
  - ii) the plan's production process?*

Chapter 3 outlines the Research Methodology with respect to the empirical methods used to answer these research questions. It consists of five sections. First, it locates the research within ontological and epistemological foundations of social constructionism. Second, it provides detail on the selection criteria used when deciding to follow a longitudinal, single case approach to investigate the construction of a strategic plan within a communicative process. It then addresses conformity to ethical standards. Following this, a case description, as well as information on the British university sector, is provided, as this research was conducted within a British University. It also outlines the collection of multiple data sources. Third, it illustrates the data analysis in detail. This research is based on three units of analysis: the strategic plan production cycle; strategy talk; and textual artefacts. The data analysis went through four phases, which will be illustrated in more detail. Fourth, it demonstrates the robustness of the research in terms of trustworthiness and authenticity. Fifth, a summary to Chapter 3 will be provided.

### 3.2 Social constructionism: Seeing and knowing about the world

Implicit in the research questions is the way we think about the world and see reality (ontology) as well as what we know about it (epistemology). Before turning to the methods that were used to investigate the outlined phenomena, I will briefly locate my view of the world and knowledge within an established social science paradigm of *social constructionism* (Burrell and Morgan 1979).

My thesis is embedded in the view that the world and its constructs, such as organisation, are socially constructed. From this perspective, also referred to as social constructionism or constructivism (Berger and Luckman 1966), an organisation is continuously constructed and reconstructed through the interplay of multiple actors and material artefacts (Giddens 1976). At an ontological level, there are multiple realities that reside within individuals' consciousness (Burrell and Morgan 1979). At an epistemological level, individuals' understandings co-emerge out of social interactions, which may also include the material aspects of interaction, such as a table or a spoon (Denzin and Lincoln 2003; Lincoln and Guba 2003). The intellectual foundations of social constructionism were laid by Wilhelm Dilthey, Edmund Husserl and Max Weber amongst others. In social constructionist research, meaning is pluralistic and cannot be reduced to a single meaning. Hence, interpretative studies are indicated, engaging with the research subject in order to gain insights about the meanings attributed to the investigated phenomena (Burrell and Morgan 1979). The research subject is thus considered as the participant who continuously constructs his/her social reality (Denzin 2001). In this research these are individuals participating in the communicative process of constructing a strategic plan. Following social constructionism, Lincoln and Guba (2003) view methodological choices rooted within hermeneutic and dialogic traditions. Adopting these traditions in organisational studies, scholars have been interested in the interpretation of texts (Prasad 2002). I take up a particular stance within hermeneutic traditions, *dialogism*, brought forward by Paul Ricoeur (1981) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1986a, 1986b). According to this view, an individual's talk needs to be seen in relation to what went on before and after the actual event of uttering. Meaning is thereby contextual and embedded within the ongoing flow of social interaction.

While Chia (2000) pointed out that a social constructivist point of view is now firmly established and accepted amongst management scholars, he flagged up that not much is known about how phenomena, such as an organisation, are constructed and sustained.



Within this realm, I aim to reveal how the strategic planning process is continuously constructed by multiple actors. Re-conceptualising strategic planning as a communicative process (see section 2.4) provides a basis for considering the reciprocal interplay between individuals' talk and the text that is constructed. This research approach is located within the field of discourse, which provides a very broad category of 'language use relative to social, political and cultural formations – it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order' (Jaworski and Coupland 1999: 3). At the most micro level, discourse captures an individual's engagement in his/her social construction (Chia 2000; Parker 1992). For example, discourse at the spoken level enables examination of an individual's externalised consciousness, as expressed in language (Chia 2000). These individual accounts, then, provide the basis for uncovering meaning in relation to the situational context in which the accounts are embedded. At a more abstracted level, discourse refers to 'collections of texts that bring organisationally related objects into being as they are produced, disseminated and consumed' (Hardy 2004: 416). My main interest in this research endeavour is to reveal how discourse, as an interplay of talk and text, is actually constructed and re-constructed in the context of strategic planning.

### **3.3 Research Method: a case study approach**

In order to reveal how a strategic plan is constructed within a communicative process, a single in-depth case study was selected (Yin 1994, 2003). As already discussed, research methods are aligned to the ontological and epistemological point of view (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). A case study approach allows observations of real-time actions over time, in order to gain insights from individuals who are part of the construction of social reality (Lincoln and Guba 2003; Yin 1994, 2003). This section is in four sub-sections. First, it outlines case selection criteria. Second, it illustrates this research project's conformity to ethical standards. Third, it provides a brief case description. Fourth, it introduces four main sources used for data collection: observations, artefacts, e-mails and interviews.

#### **3.3.1 Case selection**

As appropriate to my research focus, I adopted an ethnographic, longitudinal (12-month) single case study approach (Langley 1999; Pettigrew 1990; van Maanen 1979; Yin 1994). As I was interested in the evolving association between strategy text and strategy talk, I used theoretical sampling to select a case that reflected the phenomena under investigation

(Eisenhardt 1989). Specifically, I opted for a case study in which I could follow the institutionalised strategic planning process in detail, from the initial proposal of a new strategy to the production of the final document. A university setting was very appropriate to my study for two reasons. First, others have found that universities typically follow ritualised strategic planning cycles in order to be accountable to external bodies (Birnbaum 2000; Hackman 1985; Hardy 1991b; Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2002), thus providing a suitably iterative and formalised planning process. Second, in order to fulfill collegial expectations about ostensibly democratic governance processes, universities typically have wide participation in the planning process (e.g. Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Hardy et al. 1984; Jarzabkowski 2008; Simon 1997), which provides a suitable context in which to study communicative processes.

Access was sought through the use of a research flyer (see Appendix A) that outlined the background of the research and benefits to the case organisation. Personal networks were used to disseminate the research outline (Cassell 1988). After a period of two months, successful access negotiations took place with the Vice-Chancellor of a British university (Unico). Access was granted to observe meetings and interview key participants. Unico was thus selected pragmatically because of the quality of access negotiated (Barley 1990), as in-depth data and organisation-wide collaboration was essential to observing communicative processes in real-time (Pettigrew 1990). A single in-depth case study was chosen, as limited resources in terms of time and funding prohibited collecting data in further settings. Moreover, my research questions were aimed at developing in-depth explanations of situated phenomena and hence did not necessarily indicate comparison of multiple case studies (Tsoukas 1989; Yin 2003). As I was able to enter Unico at the start of its strategic planning cycle, I could follow the strategic planning activities in real time. I entered Unico at the initial meeting, where the new Vice Chancellor met with Unico's top management team for the first planning meeting. Thereafter, I sat in planning meetings across hierarchical and horizontal levels. Due to the quality of access, I was also able to stay at the research site for lunches, dinners and to listen to conversations during the informal parts of meetings. This provided contextual nuances, which proved helpful when analysing the data. Data collection occurred during a period of 12-months. The natural cut-off point for the data collection was the publicising of Unico's strategic plan. At this time, Unico set its strategic directions and developed specific objectives to achieve, as well as performance indicators to monitor these objectives over the next five years.



### 3.3.2 Ethical considerations

Research ethics is an important issue in any social science research (Miles and Huberman 1994; Taylor 2001), in particular with semi-ethnographic research (Silverman 2001; Taylor 2001). Prior to entering the field, an outline of the study was submitted to and successfully passed the Aston Business School's Research Ethics Committee. This scheme covers and thus ensures ethical considerations and beneficence as well as non-maleficence. Aston Business School's Research Ethics guidelines are in compliance with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Ethics Framework.

Access to an organisation was sought using a research flyer that outlined the background of the research and benefits to the collaborating organisation (see Appendix A). There were no obvious hazards, either physically or mentally, associated with the research project. Various appropriate contacts, such as with the director of the DBA programme, were made in order to get in touch with potential collaborators (Cassell 1988). The research flyer was then sent to targeted individuals within Aston Business School's DBA and MBA programme based in the university sector, in order to make initial contacts that might lead to a suitable case site. A positive signal came from a British university (Unico). Prior to any data collection, an access negotiation with the most senior executive (Vice-Chancellor) of the organisation took place.

During access negotiation, assurance was made that any initial discussion would be on a no-commitment basis, offering withdrawal at any time. Thereafter, I agreed with the Vice-Chancellor that I would be able to be a non-participant observer in any meetings across the organisation and that tape recording of meetings would be allowed. At the following top management team meeting, I was introduced by the Vice-Chancellor. Informed consent was given by each top manager, which also ensured the collection of data in their respective area of work.

Throughout the data collection period, the researcher was introduced before each meeting, and informed consent was given to observe and recorded the meeting (ten Have 1999). Interviewees were selected because they were participants in Unico's planning process, both at senior management level and as delegates at strategy away days. Due to time constraints, I did not interview every meeting member who participated in the planning process. My selection of interviewees ensured a representative sample of participants, as I covered all types of delegates by university level and department. Interviewees voluntarily agreed to take in part in the study. They were informed about the purpose of the study and were

offered withdrawal at any time. In case participants were approached due to their position, they were informed that withdrawal from the research has no adverse effects on their career progress. Additionally, confidentiality and anonymity agreements were reached so that both participants and the case organisation remain anonymous. Thus, in future publications as well as in this manuscript no real identities of participating individuals during workshops, meetings and interviews will be revealed. Additionally, the participating organisation will always be referred to as Unico, which is a fictional name given by the researcher, which carries no connotation to the organisation apart from the information that will be provided to explain the context of the study. Moreover, any material that was collected remains confidential, ranging from meeting transcripts to e-mails (ten Have 1999). In addition, the collected data is stored on password protected hard discs in a locked room with no access to unauthorised individuals.

### **3.3.3 Case description**

This sub-section provides an overview of the wider context of the Higher education environment and the case organisation (Unico). It is structured as following. First, it outlines external market conditions within the university sector in general. It then provides descriptions of Unico's internal context.

#### 3.3.3.1 Higher education environment: changes in the university sector

This part summarises broad changes within the higher education environment from the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) until January 2008. This period provides the relevant contextual information in which to situate my case study. While developments thereafter affected Unico's strategic planning process, it was not part of the observation period.

Universities operate in a regulated market. This affects their strategic manoeuvring in terms of teaching and research. Regulations restrict universities in their recruitment of undergraduate students from Britain (HOME) and the European Union (EU). The Higher Education Funding Council for England<sup>4</sup> (HEFCE) sets a quota for each university in England. It states how many HOME/EU students are to be recruited per year. If a university recruits students above their set quota, they face charges, which may even lead to monetary penalties. Furthermore, HEFCE regulates the amount of student fees to be charged for undergraduate (UG) courses by determining a minimum and maximum charge which cannot be undermined or exceeded. HEFCE however only restricts HOME/EU student numbers

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<sup>4</sup> Information on the Higher Education Funding Council for England is available at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk)



with respect to UG courses. Moreover, the government's widening participation scheme rewards universities for recruiting students coming from low income or minority backgrounds (see also HEFCE strategic plan 2006-11). Postgraduate (PG) degrees are not regulated; neither in student numbers nor in fees. Additionally, the government has initiated new courses, such as Foundation Degrees, which commenced in 2001-02. Student numbers for these courses are also not regulated by HEFCE.

HEFCE also dedicates a fixed research income to universities for a designated period of time. It allocates research funding selectively according to the university's score in the research assessment exercise (see RAE 2001). Based on these results, ranked from 1 to 5\*, each university earns funding for a particular period of time. Universities achieving a 5\* performance in the RAE gain a larger share of HEFCE research budget than does a 2\* university. Alongside HEFCE research funding, universities apply for funding from other sources such as the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), European Research Councils or private sector firms.

Generally, universities' Missions are teaching and research. Therefore, each university can be classified as teaching-led, research-led or balancing these two activities. This classification is best explained in relation to a university's income generation. Universities' income streams consist of three activities: teaching related activities; research related activities and other activities (HESA 2001). Teaching-led universities' income mainly stems from students' fees, while research-led universities' income mainly results from research contracts. Some universities have a balanced income generation as neither teaching nor research dominates. Moreover, universities engage in other activities, such as consulting or Knowledge Transfer Partnerships with private or public sector organisations (Lambert Review 2003; Sainsbury Review 2007), which are seen as third stream activities. As explained above, HEFCE plays a strong role in setting the basis for a university's income stream in that it regulates the amount of UG HOME/EU students and allocates a certain research budget. Hence, if a university wants to increase its turnover, it needs to engage in activities that are not HEFCE regulated.

There are market factors in the Higher Education (HE) environment that impact upon universities. These factors include i) a change in demographics; ii) students' increasing mobility; iii) increasing skills of adults already part of the working population; and iv) the harmonisation of degree programmes within the EU. According to latest demographic

figures, Britain faces a decreasing number of 18-year olds until 2020 years (Leitch Review of Skills 2006). Due to HEFCE's regulation of the recruitment of UG students, lower numbers of 18-year olds will put another squeeze on English and Welsh universities over the following years. Moreover, students across the UK and the world are becoming increasingly mobile. For instance, British students are now able to do their UG and PG courses in other countries, such as Australia and The United States. The Leitch Review of Skills (2006) also pointed out that universities need to contribute more effectively to the transfer of skills to adults who are already part of Britain's working population, in order to ensure Britain's economic future. Since 1999, universities within the European Union have harmonised their local university systems by adopting the structure of Bachelor and Master degree programmes as manifested in the Bologna Declaration. This increases the international competition for students even further. For instance British or Malaysian students are now able to enter specialised Master programmes, such as in engineering at a German or French university. These changes in the HE environment increase the competition between universities, in particular with respect to student recruitment and research contracts.

#### 3.3.3.2 A microscopic view of Unico

Unico is a small to medium-sized British university. It does not have international recognition apart from a few subject areas in which it is world-leading. It achieved university status in the first wave of Polytechnics converting to universities in the early 1960s. Since it became a university, Unico has had five Vice-Chancellors<sup>5</sup>. Unico is located in close proximity to the centre of a large British city. Within the region, there are several other established universities. While this results in a fierce competition for student numbers, at the same time, it enables cross-university collaboration for large research initiatives.

Due to its size, Unico has only a small number of academic departments with limited disciplines. Decision-making within each department is standardised, manifesting professional bureaucracy at each level (Mintzberg 1979c). Each Department's Management Committee discusses operational and strategic issues, whereas decisions can only be approved by the Departmental Board. Specific boards, with respect to teaching and research activities, report to the respective Departmental Board. Size of academic departments and quality of the programmes, however, vary across Unico. Size of academic departments differs across Unico with respect to student numbers and research income. While some

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<sup>5</sup> including the current one



disciplines earned highest performances in the RAE 2001 and in league table results, others struggle to recruit students to run programmes. Moreover, it is perhaps not surprising that there are different management styles within each academic department.

As a university, Unico is run by the top management team consisting of senior academics and administrators. The team meets every fortnight to discuss operational as well as strategic issues. Within Unico, there had not been a strong sense of a university, with each Department heading off in different directions or, to use a quote by the Finance Director, *'it is like XX islands going off in different directions, whatever direction they chose without a whole body around them'* (Interview 6). This may not be surprising, as it illustrates the loose coupling that is considered to characterise educational institutions (Weick 1976). It, however, resulted in penalties from HEFCE for overshooting the set UG HOME/EU numbers and budgetary losses. In order to shake up and to steer Unico, instead of departments pulling in different directions, a new university leader (Vice-Chancellor) was appointed. The new Vice-Chancellor (VC) formerly held a senior management position within a leading British university. The new VC has both an academic and a professional background in private organisations. The recruitment of a university leader with experience in the private sector illustrates the general shift to introduce private sector management, also referred to as managerialism, within universities (Hardy 1991b) and the public sector (Llewellyn and Tappin 2003). A lack of coherence in Unico's strategic direction was also demonstrated in the strategic documents, as the new VC pointed out *'... I was sent an awful lot of documents ... And they seemed to me very disjointed. There was a sort of strategy that had come from finance. There was a research strategy ...'* (Interview 11).

While the top management team runs Unico in terms of operational and strategic issues, final decisions need to be approved by two governing bodies. Unico governing bodies are The Senate and Council. Senate consists of representatives across academic ranks and from the host university's student body. A quota determines the number of representatives per rank and department for academics. Academic members are elected by their respective department and rank, whereas Student Representatives are voted for by students. The role of The Senate is to make key decisions about teaching and research activities, whereas Council's role is to govern, manage and regulate the finances, property and business affairs of a university. Council also has the power to reject the Senate's recommendations. Members of Council are drawn from four groups: the university's top management team, academics from Unico, lay members and Student Representatives. Academic members are elected by The Senate whereas lay members are nominated by a relevant committee and

appointed by Council. Top management team members and Student Representatives are members of Council as per position held.

During the ten-month observation period, several changes occurred across Unico. Restructuring initiatives at the university level included the reduction of members in the top management team and Council. Further restructuring occurred as the Library changed its line management and now reports to the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research. Moreover, new titles were introduced for senior academics and administrators, which reflect shifts towards managerialism (Hardy 1991b). Additionally, reviews of Unico's current committees and committee structures were under way. Also, new positions were created and integrated in Unico's structure. New senior academics and administrators were recruited across Unico, including a new Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and a new Departmental Head. Further contextual characteristics will be introduced in section 3.4.

#### **3.3.4 Data collection**

Following a case study approach, I collected multiple data sources (Yin 1994, 2003). Data collection consisted of four main sources that are distinguished in naturally occurring data and researcher provoked data (Silverman 2001). Naturally occurring data were non-participant observation, e-mails and artefacts including Unico's strategic plan. Researcher provoked data were interviews and also e-mails. Collecting both types of data provided the basis to triangulate data sources (Yin 2003) and thus to not rely only on retrospective recollections but also to follow the flow of actions in real time (Silverman 2001).

##### 3.3.4.1 Naturally occurring data

Naturally occurring data exist independently of the researcher's interventions, such as in structured situations like courtrooms (Taylor 2001). Main data sources, providing the basis to follow the association between strategy text and strategy talk over time, were the multiple versions of the strategy document (n = 13) and meeting data (n = 25). During initial interviews with senior leaders of Unico, meetings were selected that addressed Unico's strategy development. Since strategy was not discussed at all meetings across Unico, I needed to be selective. I focused solely on formal meetings within Unico as these constituted the formal planning process that I was interested in, and they provided the communicative platform in which strategy documents were discussed, as illustrated by other research within universities (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). Throughout the data collection period, I used my personal contact with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and a senior administrator to receive meeting agendas across Unico. Based on this information, I



attended those meetings where Unico's strategy initiative was discussed at university or departmental level. Due to high quality access, I was able to audio record 20 of the 25 meetings. Audio recordings also included several break-out group meetings that occurred during strategy away days. In total, observations accumulated to over 112 hours. Audio tapes have two advantages as they preserve sequences of talk and so provide the basis to replay real conversations, which improves interpretation of transcripts (Silverman 2001). Key discussions that occurred at meetings were therefore transcribed and provided the basis for my analysis, in addition to detailed observational notes that were also taken during meetings (aspects of selection will be addressed in more detail in section 3.4). Observational notes included the physical setting, participants, issues and time spent per agenda item. These notes were typed up immediately after the meeting. Where the researcher could not attend meetings due to other commitments (two instances), details were obtained shortly after the events. This had the benefit of proximity in time to current events, and thereby provided the basis to accurately keep track of the sequence and nature of events (Leonard-Barton 1990).

As a researcher, I was not part of any discussions during meetings. I remained a passive observer throughout the data collection period, engaging strictly in direct observation. At the observed meetings, I was never involved in any discussions, ensuring my status as "outsider" (Taylor 2001). I also ensured physical distance to the participants during observations. For instance, I did not sit on the same table as participants. During observations, I sat on a separate chair to look at participants' facial expressions and to take notes about the discussions and other circumstances. At full-day meetings, I barely engaged in discussions over lunch; rather I listened to conversations amongst participants. In terms of the dress code, I was dressed as appropriate for formal meetings and interviews with members of the top management team and smart casual at meetings and interviews with participants at lower ranks.

I was also able to collect each version of Unico's strategic plan. At the observed meetings the specific textual content of each version of the strategy document was discussed and thereafter amended. Overall, I collected thirteen versions of Unico's strategic plan, from the first to the final version. This includes the plan presented in the form of a PowerPoint® or a Word® document. Additionally, e-mails provided another data source. Via e-mails, Unico's strategic plan was disseminated and sometimes comments were made with regard to its particular content. Using personal contacts, I was either put in CC as a receiver of the actual message or was forwarded the message once it was sent. Further documents, including

meeting agendas and minutes, PowerPoint®s and past strategic plans were collected. Meeting minutes proved to be crucial, as these provided the basis for following the decontextualisation of strategy talk.

#### 3.3.4.2 Researcher provoked data

The second category of data was provoked by the researcher. This data would not exist without my intervention (Silverman 2001). To collect this type of data, I engaged directly with participants in Unico's strategic planning process in three ways: i) informal chats; ii) semi-structured interviews; and iii) e-mails. Before and after meetings, I collected data in informal discussions with participants. This allowed me to verify my impressions and to maintain contact with gatekeepers of future meetings, such as senior academics and senior administrators. Building up social capital ensured future access to observe meetings and to break the ice between observer and researcher. Another data source was semi-structured interviews. They provided contextual insights about Unico in general and individual reconstructions of particular events and strategic issues. Moreover, I did not rely on only one 'key informant' (Yin 2003: 90), but attempted to cover a wide range of views of an event and of the details of strategic issues (see Appendix B for an example of an interview guide). Therefore, after a meeting I got in touch with several participants who were involved during strategic discussions. Using semi-structured interviews, I enquired about similar topics in a conversational style, encouraging the interviewee to respond in an open ended fashion. Specifically, 76 interviews were conducted throughout the strategic plan production cycle. Interviews lasted typically between 45 and 60 minutes. Apart from one interview, all were audio recorded. Notes were also taken during and after the interview to capture body movements and other characteristics, which enriched the data collected. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Multiple interviews with key participants were conducted over time to capture various interpretations of the plan's content. I was thus able to understand varying interpretations of particular content formulations across Unico, which were often rooted in participants' respective work areas. Furthermore, interviews were used to gain information about and access to future events. Personal contact with participants in the strategic planning process was maintained via e-mails.



### 3.4 Data analysis: Analytical method

This research looks at the construction of a strategic plan. Taking on board Chia's (2000) line of thinking, I will examine the way that a strategic plan is constructed, how it comes in to existence through recurrent interactions, and its intended and unintended consequences for both the process and the content of the plan. In s-as-p terms (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006), the research looks at the praxis, the specific flow of strategic planning activities with respect to the plan's creation, which is part of the institutionalised practice of strategic planning. An analytical category that captures the social construction of life, world and organisation is discourse (Phillips and Hardy 2002). Thus, it is *discourse* that researchers are interested in when looking at the situated use of language and its contextual meaning (Taylor 2001). However, to overcome the broad notion of discourse (Grant et al. 1998), I follow Iedema's (2007: 937-938) recent call to separate discursive and material elements, in order to view them as co-emerging. Such separation occurs at an analytical level, as social interactions are comprised of an interplay of individuals' interactions with material aspects (Giddens 1984). In order to analytically distinguish between the discursive and material, I draw upon Ricoeur (1981) to differentiate between spoken and written discourse. Herewith, any orally expressed discourse is termed *talk*. It occurs in a current, immediate, context-bound situation. I refer to any discourse or ideas expressed in writing as *text*. A written text thereby provides a material artefact (Ricoeur 1981). This distinction may also be seen as the traditional view of discourse (Oswick et al. 2000; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975).

This section is divided in two sub-sections. The first part demonstrates three inter-related units of analysis: i) the strategic plan production cycle; ii) strategy talk; iii) and textual artefacts. The second part illustrates four phases of the Analytical Method.

#### 3.4.1 Units of analysis

This sub-section will now outline three inter-related units of analysis: i) the strategic plan production cycle; ii) strategy talk; and iii) textual artefacts. The notion of context is implicit within the units of analysis and will be neither treated separately (Pettigrew 1992) nor ignored (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Sillince 2007).

The first unit of analysis is the strategic plan production cycle. It refers to the sequence of events that constitute the strategic plan's creation over time (Van de Ven 1992). It also

includes contextual characteristics embedding the meetings that constitute the time and place of strategy talk and textual artefacts' co-emerging. While the strategic plan production cycle is part of the strategic planning process, it refers only to the activities that have the opportunity to shape the plan's content. Thus, the strategic plan production cycle is completed once the final strategic plan is created. Thereafter, amendments to the plan's content cannot be made until another plan production cycle is initiated.

The second unit of analysis is strategy talk. Strategy talk refers to utterances that occurred within the strategic plan production cycle. An utterance thus provides a distinct unit of analysis (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b). It is separate from the linguistic unit "sentence" as proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) amongst others. The notion of utterance accounts for contextual characteristics during the speech situation (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b) whereas context has been neglected by focusing on the sentence as linguistic unit (Sillince 2007). As already stated in Chapter 2 (sub-section 2.4.1), an utterance starts as an individual orally expresses something by drawing upon words. It may consist of several sentences or just a single word, such as *STOP*. An utterance ends as the individual finishes talking. As another individual may start speaking, a new utterance begins.

The third unit of analysis is textual artefacts. Textual artefacts here do not refer to transcribed audio recordings but to naturally occurring texts, such as meeting agendas and minutes. They are seen as products of verbal acts (van Dijk 1997). Until now, textual artefacts have been used as background material within social science research (Atkinson and Coffey 2004). I follow a recent shift, viewing them as part of and thus constituting social interactions (Prior 2004; Silverman 2001). As other research has already shown, documents such as engineering drawings organise and structure workplace interactions (Bechky 2003a, 2003b; Carlile 2002, 2004; Winsor 2000). This research focuses particularly on the development of Unico's strategic plan during the plan production cycle. Also, other documentary sources, such as meeting agendas and minutes, are included within my data analysis. For instance, Atkinson and Coffey (2004) point out that meeting minutes constitute what was decided at a meeting.

### **3.4.2 Analytical method**

As is typical of rich qualitative research, my analysis goes through several phases (see Jarzabkowski 2008; Langley 1999; Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998). The data analysis is informed by re-conceptualising strategic planning as a communicative process. In relation to the notion of co-orientation, I will draw upon Ricoeur's (1981)



concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation, complemented by Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of utterance and responsiveness. Implicit in my analysis are the contextual characteristics which embed any social interaction (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b; Ricoeur 1981).

My data analysis went through four phases. In the first phase, I looked at the contextual characteristics that embedded Unico's strategic planning activities. I term the time-period during which Unico's strategic plan was constructed the *strategic plan production cycle*. I then identified that Unico's strategic plan production cycle went through five periods, which differed according to key questions that were posed to participants during Unico's strategic planning efforts. Considering these contextual characteristics across various points in time ensured that the different periods emerged from the data rather than being imposed by the researcher.

In the second phase of my analysis, I focused on the strategic plan's development. Multiple versions of Unico's strategic plan provided the level of analysis. Thus, I looked at changes to Unico's strategic plan that occurred during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Iterations occurred until a final version of the plan was announced.

In the third phase of my data analysis, I shifted the level of analysis to the interrelation of strategy talk and Unico's strategic plan. Drawing upon Ricoeur's (1981) notion of recontextualisation, I looked at individuals enacting Unico's strategic plan in their talk. Furthermore, I draw upon Ricoeur's (1981) notion of decontextualisation to show that talk has the ability to shape the strategic plan's future content. This analysis provided the basis to link talk instances with content changes made to Unico's strategic plan, as identified in Phase 2.

In the fourth phase of my data analysis, I shifted the level of analysis to the talk level. I drew upon Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notions of an utterance's components and responsiveness, in order to provide a detailed analysis of how talk, as identified in Phase 3, shaped the content changes made to Unico's strategic plan.

#### 3.4.2.1 Phase 1

In the first phase of my analysis, I looked at contextual characteristics that embedded Unico's strategic planning activities. Unico's strategic planning process was triggered by

the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor (VC). This was pointed out by a member of the top management team who noted that

*... a new Vice Chancellor comes in to give a new start to things in the university, so the university tends to undertake a review of its strategy. A well-known planning sort of sequence of events is that you look at your vision, you look at the mission, you look at the plans, you look at the objectives, you implement those plans, you monitor them, and then you revisit the whole process. (Senior Administrator, Interview 25)*

The quote above also illustrates that Unico's strategic planning process followed a typical planning structure (see Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1991), consisting of a Vision, Mission statements, strategic objectives and key performance indicators (KPI), each of which was developed over successive phases of the strategic plan production cycle. These planning activities were entangled with the production of a strategic plan, manifested in a document, as a member of Unico's top management team stated during an interview.

*... and I think also the view that I and my colleagues have is that we are very keen that this strategy review is followed through, does result in a new strategy and then results in the plans being developed that will allow that strategy to be implemented. (Senior Administrator, Interview 25)*

Unico's strategic plan was under construction during a period of 10-months. The underlying principle of a text production cycle is that the current state of the plan's content (what the organisation will do) is illustrated in the latest version of the document. This version then provides the basis to discuss all or parts of the plan's content at the various planning meetings. After most of the meetings, the content of the strategic plan was amended in the light of discussions that occurred at these precedent meetings. Each new version of the strategic plan provided the basis for discussion at a subsequent meeting. The production of the plan occurred iteratively until the top management team decided that it was ready to publish as Unico's new strategic plan. To use the words of a top management team member, 'it will be up to the (top management team) to validate the final writing of the strategic plan.' (Senior Administrator, Interview 25). In addition, he added that 'I'm sure that the Vice Chancellor will have a big hand in that and should so do' (Senior Administrator, Interview 25).

Temporal bracketing strategy was used to break the longitudinal data 'into successive adjacent periods' (Langley 1999: 703). In order to identify distinct phases, I looked at contextual characteristics that embedded discussions at various meetings. To accomplish this task, I turned to questions that occurred repeatedly at a meeting. Looking at the key



questions that embedded meetings during the strategic plan production cycle, I identified five distinctive periods during which Unico's strategic plan was constructed.

Period I (1 month) involved initial discussions about the plan's content amongst top management team members. The guiding question that shaped these discussions was *Where do we want to be in future? What is it that we want to do?*. They were manifested in PowerPoint® slides, with each member holding a copy. The meeting itself was run in an interactive manner with each team member having to get involved in the discussions. After the meeting, meeting minutes were produced and the plan's content was amended in light of discussions held at the top management team meeting.

The second period (4 months) was characterised by a university-wide consultation. At the start, Unico's employees received a copy of the strategic plan via e-mail. Thereafter, three separate one-day meetings were scheduled. Discussions at those meetings were framed by the guiding question *What else should we do?; What should we not do?; How do we deliver (specific actions)?*. Similarly to the first meeting in period I, these questions were manifested in PowerPoint® slides that outlined the plan's content. Participants spanned three groups; i) a representation of Unico's recently appointed staff; ii) senior Heads across academic and non-academic departments; and iii) members of Council. During several break-out sessions, meeting delegates were requested to address specific questions relating to the espoused strategic direction that was expressed in the strategic plan. Additionally, several non-academic departments had specific consultations with a member of the top management team to collect their views on the plan's content. This organisation-wide consultation resulted in many comments which were reflected in official meeting minutes.

In period III (2 months), a new version of Unico's plan was created which integrated some of the comments voiced during period II. The top management team met to discuss the current state of the espoused strategic direction that was manifested in the strategic plan. The discussions were shaped by the recurrent question *Is there anything missing?; Do we need to re-formulate?*. Once the terminology of the strategic plan was discussed, it was sent out to each top team member to again have a look at the then amended formulations.

In the next period, period IV (2 months), Departmental Managers were consulted in order to set targets. Once targets for each Mission had been agreed, they were added to the

document. Furthermore, a selection of Unico's senior managers across academic and non-academic departments was invited to an away day that lasted for three days. During these days, delegates' discussions were focused on *What are the specific actions to achieve the strategic direction? How do we measure it?*. Delegates were divided into groups to address these questions with respect to particular areas of Unico's strategic plan.

Unico's strategic plan was finalised during the last period (1 month) and was approved by Senate and Council. At this stage, some final tweaks were made to the plan's content. The guiding question during the last period was thus *Only specific questions please?*. The finalised strategic plan then provided the basis for future meetings about the University's espoused strategy, particularly serving to legitimate specific courses of action, however the content itself was no longer subject to amendments.

Table 3.1 provides an overview of contextual characteristics that embedded Unico's strategic plan production cycle. We can see that sections of Unico's strategic plan were discussed at different points in time. As outlined above, I focused on the guiding questions that provided a dominant referential content, shaping discussions that occurred during the respective periods. Hence, I labelled each period according to the dominant period's characteristics.

	Period I	Period II	Period III	Period IV	Period V	
Sections	<b>Vision;</b> <b>Mission;</b> objectives; goals KPI	<b>Vision;</b> <b>Mission;</b> <b>objectives;</b> <b>goals</b> <b>KPI</b>	<b>Vision;</b> Mission; <b>objectives;</b> <b>goals;</b> KPI	<b>Vision;</b> Mission; <b>objectives;</b> <b>goals;</b> KPI	Vision; Mission; objectives; goals; KPI	
Period characteristics	Description	Initial discussion of strategic direction	Organisation-wide consultation	Let's pull it all together?	Agree targets	Last twists
	Guiding question	Where do we want to be in future? What is it that we want to do?	What else should we do? What should we not do? How do we deliver (specific actions)?	Is there anything missing? Do we need to re-formulate?	What are the specific actions to achieve the strategic direction? How do we measure it?	Only specific questions please?

Table 3.1: Phases during Unico's strategic plan production cycle



### 3.4.2.2 Phase 2

In the second stage of my analysis, I looked at content changes between subsequent versions of Unico's plan. Specifically, I i) defined the versions of the document; ii) developed a coding scheme that provided the basis to iii) identify three semantic effects of the content change, in terms of the conveyed meaning of the strategic plan's amended content. I then developed iv) a decision tree to detect and then consistently code content changes. Lastly, v) I looked at the effect of the content changes to Unico's espoused strategic direction.

Due to high quality access, I was able to get each of the current versions of Unico's strategic plan, as they were developed. This also included a copy of the draft strategic plan that was developed prior to the new VC's arrival. This plan was developed in a steering group and completed six month prior to the new VC's arrival. However, as Departmental Head C described it during an interview, this plan was '*... a strategy, a very brief outline strategy before the new Vice-Chancellor came in*' (Interview 3). With respect to the strategic plan's content the new VC stated that '*it includes some rather disjoint pieces of information. And some rather unrealistic projections.*' (Interview 11). Using the words of a senior manager within Departmental B '*it was inevitable, predictable that we would have a revision of our strategy giving new direction.*' (Interview 10).

As a starting point for my analysis, I identified the versions to be included in the data analysis. Overall, I collected thirteen versions of Unico's strategic plan. However, I discarded three versions, as these were only used for informative purposes, whereas their displayed content, with respect to the Vision and Mission, was not different to previous versions. So, ten versions of Unico's strategic plan provided the basis of my analysis, as they were the versions discussed at the respective events (see Table 3.2). Once the strategic plan production cycle was completed, Version 10 provided the basis for future discussions across Unico. However, its content has not been subject to change.

Period	Version	Date	Event
I	1	03-01-07	Top management team
		10-01-07	Senior managers, Department A
	2	16-01-07	Strategy Forum Research
		31-01-07	Senate
		07-02-07	Departmental meeting, Department B
		Feb-Mar	Departmental meeting, Department D
		07-03-07	Admin A
	3	07-03-07	Senate
		27-03-07	Admin B
		28-03-07	Admin C
03-04-07		Away day, senior management	
II	4	04-04-07	Away day, recently appointed staff
		09-05-07	ABS strategy forum
	5	16-05-07	Council
		23-05-07	Academic Assembly
		23-05-07	School Board, Department D
		24-05-07	Away day, Department A
		03-07-07	Strategy Forum Research
	6	04-07-07	Away day, senior management, Department C
		09-07-07	Away day, senior management Department B
		24-07-07	Away day, recently appointed staff Department C
III	7	27-07-07	Top management team
IV	8	31-08-07	Top management team
	9	17&1809	Away day, senior management
V	10	24-10-07	Senate
		26-10-07	Top management team
		31-10-07	Council

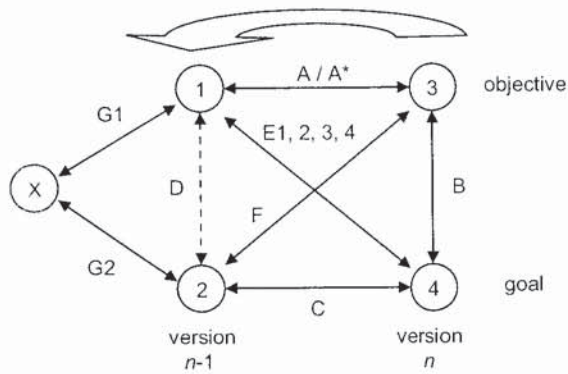
Table 3.2: Version of Unico's strategic plan per period

While Unico's strategic plan consisted of several sections, such as Vision and Mission statements, I only selected the plan's content development that articulated an organisation's espoused strategic directions. These are manifested in objectives and goals, which are listed in relation to an organisation's Missions. A Mission statement describes an organisation's reason for existence (Ackoff 1981; Miller and Dess 1996). Unico has three Missions: Research, Teaching and Third Stream. Following Ackoff's (1981: 104) definition, *objectives* are 'ends that are not expected to be obtained until after the period planning for,



but toward which progress is expected within that period' (*ibid.*: 104). *Goals* are defined as 'ends that are expected to be obtained within the period covered by a plan' (Ackoff 1981: 104). Based on these definitions, a Mission's espoused strategic directions were manifested in Unico's strategic plan at two content levels, *objectives* and *goals*. Each objective was identified as it was manifested as a main bullet point, often followed by a number of sub bullet points. Furthermore, each objective had several *goals*. A goal expressed further detail of how to achieve the objective. In Unico's strategic plan, goals were articulated in the form of sub bullet points. They were thus listed beneath the respective objective. In the case of Unico, goals were then used for quantifying and setting specific targets per planning year. However, the focus of this study was the development of objectives and goals. Such data reduction provided a clear focus for my analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). On this basis, I traced each change in the textual content of each objective and goal that occurred from one version of the strategy document to the next. I looked through the ten versions chronologically, starting with the initial plan, which was presented at the first meeting (period I) and compared it with the next version that was provided at a subsequent meeting (see also Giraudeau 2008).

Secondly, I developed a coding scheme to identify each content change to objectives and goals within the three Missions. In order to do so, I regarded the content in each new version of Unico's evolving strategic plan (version  $n$ ) in relation to the content expressed in the prior document (version  $n-1$ ). Figure 3.1 demonstrates graphically the alternatives for how a plan's content could be amended. These seven relationships emerged out of my data analysis.



- ① = objective (main bullet point): reference point in anterior version  $n-1$
- ② = goal (sub bullet point of 1): reference point in anterior version  $n-1$
- ③ = objective (main bullet point): reference point in latest version of document (version  $n$ )  
-> reference point 3 becomes reference point 1 when comparing this version with a subsequent version
- ④ = goal (sub bullet point of 3): reference point in latest version of document (version  $n$ )  
-> reference point 4 becomes reference point 2 when comparing this version with a subsequent version
- ⓧ = content from reference point 1 or reference point 2 was taken out of the Mission (version  $n-1$ )

Figure 3.1: Illustration of coding relationships

Comparing content that was expressed in reference points 1 and 2 in version  $n-1$  with the content that was manifested in a new version of the document (version  $n$ ), pictured as reference points 3 and 4, provided the basis to identify whether a content change occurred and the relationship of the change. So, reference points 3 and 4 were the unit of analysis. In order to detect a content change, these two reference points need to be compared to reference points 1 and 2, which were expressed in the anterior version  $n-1$ . For example, in order to determine whether a particular objective (reference point 3) in Version 3 changed, it needs to be compared to reference points 1 and 2 in Version 2. Table 3.3 provides further explanations of the eight coding relationships which emerged during my data analysis. They illustrate alternatives of how the content of Unico's strategic plan actually became amended during the strategic plan production cycle.



Coding relationship	Referentiality in version $n-1$	Description
Relationship A	Existing content	Content expressed in reference point 3 was amended when compared to content manifested in reference point 1.
Relationship A*	New content	A new objective or goal was introduced. Hence there has not been any content expressed in reference points 1 or 2.
Relationship B	New content	A new goal is introduced. Hence there has not been any reference point 2. In order to interpret the meaning of the goal, it needs to be regarded in relation to reference point 3.
Relationship C	Existing content	Content expressed in reference 4 was amended when compared to the content expressed in reference point 2.
Relationship D	Existing content	Relationship D provides a basis for comparison on the relation between objective and goal between version $n-1$ and version $n$ . However, a content change is not possible to be detected according to relationship D.
Relationship E	Existing content	Content expressed in reference point 1 becomes a goal. <u>E1</u> : Content becomes a goal under the same objective. <u>E2</u> : Content becomes integrated in an existing goal within the same objective. <u>E3</u> : Content becomes a goal under in relation to another objective. <u>E4</u> : Content becomes integrated in an existing goal within another objective.
Relationship F	Existing content	Content manifested in reference point 2 (goal) becomes an objective (reference point 3).
Relationship G	Existing content	Content, expressed as objective (G1) or goal (G2) does not feature within any objective or goal within the respective Mission.

Table 3.3: Explanation of coding relationships

Thirdly, I identified three semantic effects that resulted from a content change between version  $n$  and the anterior version  $n-1$ : i) *new specificity*; ii) *increasing specificity* and iii) *reducing specificity*. With effects, I refer to the conveyed meaning of the strategic plan's terminology in the amended version  $n$ . The coding scheme, illustrated in Figure 3.1, provided the basis to identify three types of content change.

- *new specificity*

requirement: No reference point in the Mission within version  $n-1$ .

coding question: Has there been a reference point (objective or goal) in the anterior version ( $n-1$ ) within the Mission?

reasoning: As there has been no reference point, a new objective or goal ultimately shapes the articulation of a Mission by providing more specificity to the espoused strategic direction within the respective Mission.

- *increasing specificity*
  - requirement: An existing reference point in the Mission within version  $n-1$ .
  - coding question: Does the new content (version  $n$ ) increase the informative value in comparison to the statement it relates to in version  $n-1$ ?
  - reasoning: It occurs as a particular content (objective or goal) becomes more specific, i.e. its ambiguity decreases.
  
- *reducing specificity*
  - requirement: An existing reference point in the Mission within version  $n-1$ .
  - coding question: Does the new content (version  $n$ ) decrease the informative value in comparison to the statement it relates to in version  $n-1$ ?
  - reasoning: It occurs as a particular content (objective or goal) becomes less specific, i.e. its ambiguity increases.

Fourthly, I developed a decision tree (Miles and Huberman 1994) to consistently code each content change that occurred within the three Missions, Research, Teaching and Third Stream (see Figure 3.2). For this stage, I followed guidelines to analyse qualitative research (Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998) and used questions during the coding process. In order to identify the effect of each content change, I asked the first question (Q1a): *Has there been a reference point (objective or goal) in the preceding version ( $n-1$ ) within the Mission?* Version 1 of Unico's strategic plan provided the basis for comparison with Version 2's content. If there had been no reference point in a previous version, then each content change was coded as ***new specificity***. I would then proceed to the next question, (Q2), which will be covered shortly. If however there was a reference point in the previous version of Unico's strategic plan, then I would ask the second question (Q1b): *Does the new content (version  $n$ ) increase the informative value in comparison to the statement it relates to in version  $n-1$ ?* Now, there are two alternatives. If the statement in version  $n$  enhanced the informative value of the existing content in version  $n-1$ , then the content amendment was coded as ***increased specificity***. The informative value of a statement may for instance be enhanced by adding a direct object to the existing statement. A direct object is a noun or pronoun that receives the *action* of a verb or shows the *result* of the action. It answers the question *What?* or *Whom?* after an action verb. If however the statement in version  $n$  DOES NOT enhance the informative value of the existing content in version  $n-1$ , then I would ask another question (Q1c): *Does the new content (version  $n$ ) decrease the informative value in comparison to the statement it relates to in version  $n-1$ ?* A content change with a confirmative answer would then be coded as ***reduced specificity***. Following a negative response to Question 1c, I would proceed to the next question (Q1d):



*Has there been a semantic content change?* I then coded content change as *cosmetic*, if the content change did NOT result in a semantic content change (answer to Q1d: NO). An example within the Teaching Mission was the change from “promote” (Version 6) to “promoting” (Version 7). However, if I identified that the content change led to a semantic change (answer to Q1d: YES) but was not coded as such, so far, I would go back to Question 1b and Question 1c in order to code the effect of the actual content change accordingly. In those cases where I could not identify whether the content change led to a semantic change or not, I would term the content change as unidentifiable.

Once the effect of a content change was coded (Q1a to d), I would then ask further questions in order to identify how the content actually changed in version  $n$  in relation to version  $n-1$ . As already outlined above, the content articulating a Mission’s espoused strategic directions was manifested in objectives and goals. The next questions therefore states *At what level is the content in version  $n$  listed?* (Q2) and *At what level is the content in version  $n-1$  listed?* (Q3). Based on the relation between the level at which the content is expressed (version  $n$ ) and was expressed (version  $n-1$ ), I further coded each content change according to seven coding relationships, A to G, which are illustrated in Figure 3.1 and further explained in Table 3.3.

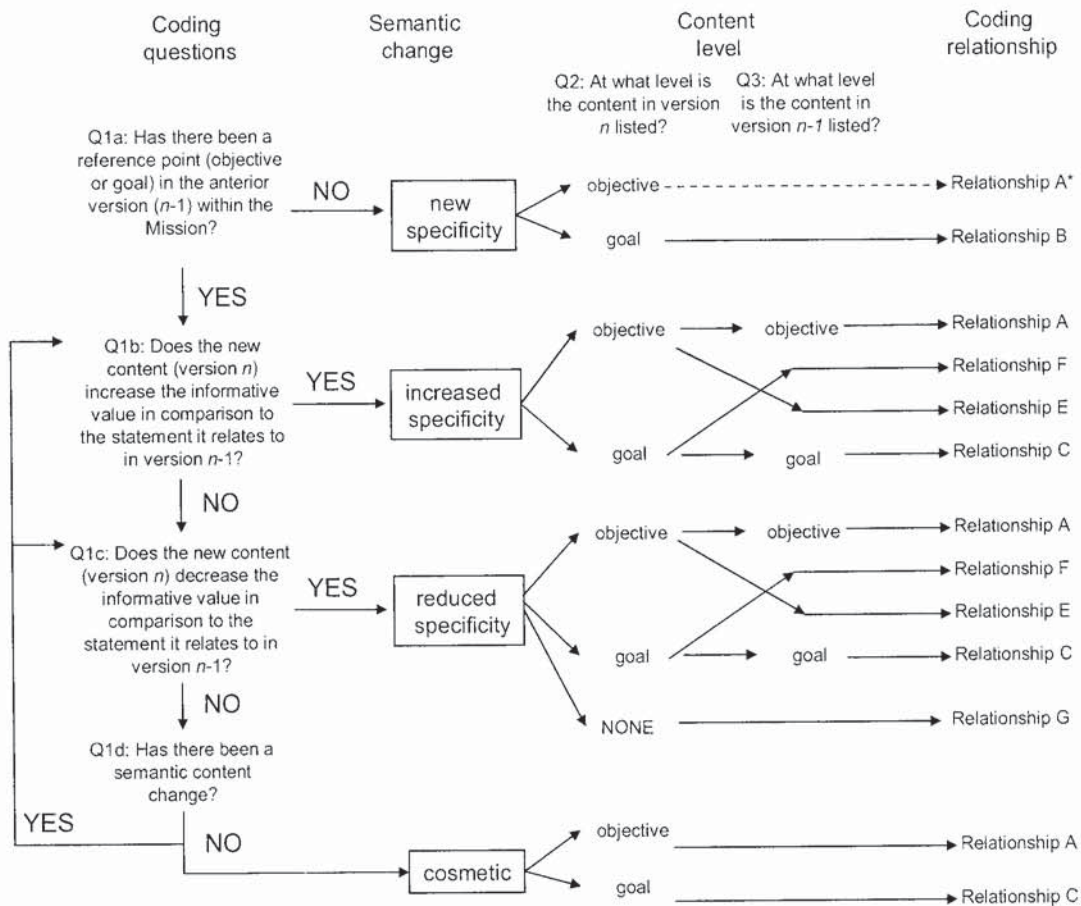


Figure 3.2: Decision tree to code changes made to strategic plan

The decision tree (see Figure 3.2) provided a basis to consistently code content changes occurring across Unico’s three Missions; it also ensured inter-coder reliability. In April 2008, an experienced qualitative researcher cross-coded the results I obtained. I provided him with the decision rules (Questions 1 to 4) and two coding examples. We reached an inter-coder reliability of 93% (Miles and Huberman 1994). Overall, I identified that 169 of the 182 content changes led to one of the three categories for a semantic content change. The remaining content changes either did not lead to any semantic change or were unidentifiable in terms of whether a change occurred (n = 9).

Based on decision rules, Table 3.4 explains types of content change in relation to coding relationships.



Content change	Coding relationship	Description
New specificity	Relationship A*	A new objective is introduced. Hence there has not been any reference point 1 in version $n-1$ .
	Relationship B	A new goal is introduced. Hence there has not been any reference point 2 in version $n-1$ .
Increasing specificity	Relationship A	Content expressed in reference point 3 is amended to the content expressed in reference point 1.
	Relationship C	Content expressed in reference point 4 is amended to the content expressed in reference point 2.
	Relationship E	Content expressed in reference point 1 becomes a goal.
		<u>E1</u> : Content becomes a goal under the same objective.
<u>E2</u> : Content becomes integrated in an existing goal within the same objective.		
<u>E3</u> : Content becomes a goal under another objective.		
Reducing specificity	Relationship A	Content expressed in reference point 3 is amended to the content expressed in reference point 1.
	Relationship C	Content expressed in reference point 4 is amended to the content expressed in reference point 2.
	Relationship F	Content expressed in reference point 2 (goal) becomes an objective (reference point 3).
	Relationship G	Content, expressed as objective (G1) or goal (G2) does not feature within any objective or goal within the respective Mission.

Table 3.4: Type of content change per coding relationship

In order to detect and manually code a content change; for each version of Unico's strategic plan, I created a separate document to compare the content that was expressed in version  $n$  with the content manifested in the anterior version  $n-1$ . I highlighted each content change in version  $n$  in colour. Following this style of coding, I developed a more sophisticated system of illustrating content changes. Once I identified a content change, I copied the objective or the goal from both versions ( $n$  and  $n-1$ ) into a research database in the form of a Microsoft® Excel® spreadsheet (see Table 3.5 for an illustration). The first column indicated the number of version  $n-1$ . The next column illustrates the actual content of an objective or goal in version  $n-1$ , which then formed the basis of comparison. Column 3 shows the number of the subsequent version (version  $n$ ). The next column then illustrates the content that has changed when compared to the content expressed in column 2 (version  $n-1$ ). Once the effect of the content change and the coding relationship were identified, following the set decision rules (Figure 3.2), they were added in column 5 and 6 respectively. All content changes were thus captured coherently in a research database.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
Version	Reference points 1 and 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 and 4 (version $n$ )	Content change	Coding relationship
Version 6	- outstanding combination of quality and value to attract fee-paying students from home and abroad: the best investment	Version 7	- ensure outstanding value for money	Reducing specificity	relationship A

Table 3.5: Stage 2 - coding example - Teaching Mission

In the last stage of Phase 2, I isolated content changes that were made at the objective level in order to identify whether there were shifts to Unico's espoused strategic direction during the plan production cycle. Therefore, I looked only at content changes that were coded as coding relationships A, A\*, E, F or G1. Looking at the conveyed meaning of each objective, I identified several *strategic themes* within each Mission. A *strategic theme* expresses a distinct strategic content or aim. It thereby consists of more than one word. An objective may also express several strategic themes. Each objective may thus consist of one or several *strategic themes*. For instance, one of the objectives that was expressed in the Third Stream Mission (Version 1) “- spin-out and exploitation of Unico's research IP(Intellectual Property) in collaboration with Science Park” consisted of three *strategic themes*: “spin-out” with “exploitation of Unico's research IP” and “collaboration with Science Park”. After I singled out each *strategic theme* per objective, I followed their development in detail.

Having traced each strategic theme's development, I looked at the types of content change that occurred during their development to identify a pattern per strategic theme. In those patterns that were identified as “**theme is degraded**” and “**theme is removed**”, I did not trace their development further, as they were no longer considered as *strategic themes*. Nor did I account for amendments that were made during the development prior to the theme that was degraded within, or removed from, a Mission. Overall, I identified five patterns that accounted for the evolution of strategic themes across the three Missions during Unico's strategic plan production cycle (see Table 3.6).



Coding relationship	Pattern development	Explanation
Relationship A	<b>added specificity</b>	Specificity is only added to the strategic theme. Hence, the level of detail increased in expressing the strategic theme.
	<b>amalgamation</b>	At least one instance of increasing specificity and at least one instance of reducing specificity occurred during the strategic theme's development. Thereby, the meaning of the initial statement may not be manifested in the final version.
Relationship A*	<b>new theme introduced in last version</b>	At the last iteration of Unico's strategic document a new theme is introduced. Hence, a novel espoused strategic direction is manifested in the respective Mission.
Relationship E	<b>theme was degraded</b>	A strategic theme, expressed at the objective level, becomes a goal within the same Mission. As a strategic theme became degraded, I did not consider its prior development with respect to previously occurring content changes.
Relationship G1	<b>theme was removed</b>	As a strategic theme disappears, its conveyed meaning does not express Unico's espoused strategic direction within the respective Mission. There were two alternatives of how a strategic theme was removed:
	- theme got deleted	A strategic theme was deleted and thus disappeared entirely from Unico's strategic plan.
	- theme moved within plan	A theme is removed from the Mission but was moved to another section within the planning document.

Table 3.6: Explanations on strategic themes pattern development

To illustrate the type of analysis, Table 3.7 provides an illustration of each *strategic theme's* development within the Teaching Mission. However, as I took each *strategic theme's* development as a level of analysis, I was unable to investigate whether there were competing strategic themes expressed i) within the same Mission and ii) when considered in relation to other *strategic themes* within other Missions or sections within Unico's strategic plan.

Strategic themes	Version										Theme pattern	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
professional & vocational	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	only added
teaching excellence	x	x	x	x	x	x						moved within plan
graduate employability	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			moved within plan
value for money	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		amalgamation
outstanding student support	x	x	x	x	x	x						theme degraded
innovative approaches to learning and teaching	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			theme degraded
Unico experience widely accessible			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		Amalgamation
widening participation						x						theme degraded
ethical 'good world citizen'			x	x	x	x	x	x	x			theme deleted
intellectual development			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		only added
deliver a world class student experience											x	new theme
continuous improvement of learning experience and environment											x	new theme
develop partnerships with a range of stakeholders											x	new theme
improve quality											x	new theme
increase national and international profile											x	new theme

Table 3.7: Teaching Mission - strategic theme development

### 3.4.2.3 Phase 3

While Unico's strategic plan provided the sole level of analysis in Phase 2, in the third phase of my analysis, I looked at the interrelation of strategy talk and textual artefacts, in particular Unico's strategic plan. Unico's strategic plan and other textual artefacts such as meeting minutes are therefore seen as a product of social interactions (Prior 2004). Drawing upon Ricoeur's (1981) notion of recontextualisation and decontextualisation provided a theoretical and analytical basis for looking at how the strategic plan's content evolved in relation to the strategy talk that occurred during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. As identified in Phase 2, Unico's three Missions provided foci with respect to the strategic plan's content. Following Ricoeur (1981), an individual's recontextualisation needs to be interpreted with respect to situational and contextual characteristics. Thus, I included



contextual nuances such as the distinct characteristics of each production cycle's period that were outlined in Phase 1 of my data analysis.

Phase 3 consisted of three steps. Firstly, I looked at other textual artefacts that could give clues about what the strategy talk was about during a meeting. I thus focused on meeting minutes and my observational notes, as these ought to provide a snapshot of *what* had been talked about at meetings. In order to follow the development of Unico's three Missions, manifested in its strategic plan, I identified meetings where the Research, Teaching, and Third Stream Mission were talked about during Unico's strategic plan production cycle.

Secondly, building upon meeting minutes and observational notes, I listened to actual strategy talk that occurred at meetings during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. As I could audio tape most of the meetings, I transcribed parts and went back to and listened to actual data during the data analyses (Silverman 2001). In particular, I looked for relationships between strategy talk and Unico's strategic plan (Strauss and Corbin 1998), examining how the plan's content was enacted by individuals (recontextualisation) and also how it shaped the actual talk.

Looking at and comparing specific instances of the text/talk relationship, I drew upon the decontextualisation/recontextualisation theoretical framework (see part 2.4.3.1) in order to examine how strategy talk inscribed different meanings associated with the plan's content, according to the particular contexts and social relationships between individuals recontextualisations. Henceforth, strategy talk will be referred to as *talk*. Talk was shaped by the strategic plan's content; objectives and goals provided coding categories. For this task, I used a computer assisted programme for qualitative research, NVIVO 2.0. It has been designed to assist in the analysis of rich, text based data that are not easily reduced to numbers (Richards 2002a, 2002b). Each of Unico's three Missions provided a TREE NODE (see Chart 3.1). Topics enacting the plan in talk were captured in the form of CHILD NODES. During this coding process, I also differentiated whether the enacted plan's content was manifested as an objective or a goal. This distinction was further explored in Phase 4 (see part 3.4.2.4). A passage of talk may also appear within more than one CHILD NODE. For instance, the passage 'we've got to really centrally develop very good, innovative ways of developing and delivering courses, e-learning, blended learning, flexible learning, whatever learning you want to call it.' was coded in two CHILD NODES: "IT2supportL&T" and "innovative app2L&T" under the TREE NODE L&T. If topics were not manifested in a strategic plan, a new CHILD NODE was created; otherwise it was coded as "other" under the respective

Mission TREE NODE. By chance, the number of CHILD NODES is similar across Unico's three Missions (Research: 25; Teaching: 26; Third Stream: 24). The number of passages per CHILD NODE varied from 2 to 73.

The screenshot shows the NVivo interface with a tree view on the left and a data table on the right. The tree view shows a hierarchy starting with 'explore talk to text', which branches into 'L&T', 'Research', and 'CommEng'. Under 'L&T', there are 27 child nodes. The data table on the right lists these nodes with columns for 'No.', 'Passages', 'Created', and 'Mentioned'.

Node	No.	Passages	Created	Mentioned
professional&vocational	1	37	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
teaching excellence	2	14	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
grad employability	3	18	09/06/2008 ...	21/09/2008 ...
value&money	4	2	09/06/2008 ...	24/06/2008 ...
innovative app2L&T	5	40	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
accessability	6	33	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
ethical good world citizen	7	8	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
cont improvement of L exprince	8	13	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
intellect dvlprmt	9	15	09/06/2008 ...	21/09/2008 ...
dvlp partnerships	10	4	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
improve quality	11	8	09/06/2008 ...	29/08/2008 ...
international profile	12	15	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
other	13	74	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
infrastructure	14	32	09/06/2008 ...	21/09/2008 ...
increase student numbers	15	75	09/06/2008 ...	26/09/2008 ...
flexibility	16	15	09/06/2008 ...	11/08/2008 ...
foundation degrees	17	16	09/06/2008 ...	15/09/2008 ...
IT2support L&T	18	25	09/06/2008 ...	21/09/2008 ...
widening participation	19	4	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
collaboration	20	1	09/06/2008 ...	29/08/2008 ...
international	21	8	09/06/2008 ...	26/09/2008 ...
placement	22	37	09/06/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
CPD	23	12	09/06/2008 ...	26/09/2008 ...
plans&actions	25	8	18/06/2008 ...	26/09/2008 ...
teaching quality	26	2	15/09/2008 ...	22/09/2008 ...
stakeholder	27	1	23/09/2008 ...	23/09/2008 ...

Chart 3.1: Screenshot of coding categories in NVIVO

Thirdly, I examined how talk was associated with changes made to Unico's plan (decontextualisation). I started again by taking up other textual artefacts that could give clues about content changes made to the strategic plan, as identified in part 3.4.2.2. Looking at meeting minutes and content changes which occurred from version  $n$  to version  $n-1$ , I could already identify that talk, as reflected in these meeting minutes, shaped changes made to Unico's strategic plan. I thus looked at each content change displayed in the research database, illustrated in Table 3.5 (see part 3.4.2.2). I then compared these with the talk captured in the CHILD NODES. In order to identify and capture the relationship between talk and content changes, I extended the existing research database. I added another three columns to capture the relevant information that relates to the content change (see Table 3.8), the date and whether it was talk or talk reflected in intermediary texts, such as meeting minutes. The research database thus showed the actual talk (see for instance column 8, row 2 in Table 3.8) and whether it was manifested in meeting minutes (see for instance column



8, row 3 in Table 3.8) in relation to a content change (see columns 4 and 5 in Tables 3.8 and 3.9).

In order to analyse the data in the most straight forward way, I hid the columns that showed the effect of the content change and the coding relationship (see Table 3.5). In Phase 3, the research database therefore only displayed relevant columns for this type of analysis. The first example (see Table 3.8) illustrates the talk of a participant during an away day in period II and the reflection of this talk in the meeting minutes of the respective meeting. The second example (see Table 3.9) shows the sequence of talk in relation to the identified content change. During Phase 3, I identified that 95 (of a total 169) content changes across the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Mission resulted from talk in meetings during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Furthermore, it illustrated that parts of the talk that led to content change were also captured in intermediary texts, such as meeting minutes. Remaining content changes could not be explained by drawing upon talk from observed meetings during strategic plan production cycle. Thus, I assume that they stemmed from private discussions or individual amendments made by the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who were able to make the content changes. I therefore excluded them from the following stages of analysis, which focused on the relationship between talk and text in the formal planning meetings that I observed.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 7	Column 8	Column 9
Version	Reference point for comparison (n-1)	Version	Content change in subsequent version (n)	Talk/text	Talk instance	Date
<b>Row 1</b>	- effectively disseminate research knowledge		- effective and accessible dissemination of research knowledge	Talk		
<b>Row 2</b>						DATE Period II
		Version 4				
		Version 5				
<b>Row 3</b>				text		

Table 3.8: Stage 3 – coding example – Research Mission



Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 7	Column 8	Column 9
Version	Reference point for comparison ( $n-1$ )	Version	Content change in subsequent version ( $n$ )	Talk/text	Talk instance	Date
Version 7	- Exploitation of Unico's Intellectual Property (IP) through knowledge transfer partnerships, licensing and spin outs	Version 8	- Exploitation of Unico's Intellectual Property (IP) through: -- knowledge transfer partnerships, licensing and spin outs -- undertaking of research consultancy	talk	Top management team: Departmental Head A: Consultancy should be here. Finance Director: Yeah. Departmental Head A: Is that part of our strategy, to encourage consultancy? VC: I'm not ... yes, I mean I think it depends what sort of consultancy it is, because obviously either it falls under research. And I would hope that a lot of it did fall under research because really ... it's either research consultancy or it's the kind of index type stuff where it's specifically about...	DATE, Period III

Table 3.9: Stage 3 – coding example – Third Stream Mission

#### 3.4.2.4 Phase 4

In the fourth phase of my data analysis, I shifted the level of analysis to the talk level. I conducted a talk analysis based on the passages of talk that led to content changes made to Unico's strategic plan. As illustrated in part 3.4.2.3 Phase 3, 95 content changes were identified stemming from talk at meetings during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. As this type of analysis required transcribed talk, I was only able to use 37 of these content changes across Unico's three Missions for in-depth analysis. While observational notes and meeting minutes provided evidence that talk triggered the remaining 58 content changes, at these meeting I was unable to use the tape recorder. Talk that led to content changes will henceforth be termed *talk instance*. Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of utterance informed this stage of analysis. A talk instance thus refers to a particular passage of talk that may consist of several utterances or it may even consist of only one utterance.

Phase 4 consisted of three parts. In the first part, I coded each talk instance according to an utterance's characteristics. These are referentiality; expressive aspect (Bakhtin 1986a) and subject of talk leading to a hierarchy of utterances. In the second part, I looked at situational characteristics that embedded talk instances. In the third part, I combined findings on three types of content changes (see 3.4.2.2 Phase 2) with results obtained from a fine-grained talk analysis.

In the first step of Phase 4, I conducted a fine-grained analysis of those utterances that constituted a talk instance leading to a content change in Unico's strategic plan. In doing so, I drew upon Bakhtin's (1986a) notion of an utterance's components, which consist of a referentially semantic content and its expressive aspect. For analytical purposes, I will address these individually. However they have to be seen as intertwined.

Firstly, I identified the topics that were enacted during a talk instance that resulted in a content change in the strategic plan. The research database (see Table 3.9) proved useful at this stage, as it illustrated the talk instance in relation to a particular content change. To reiterate, an utterance's subject of talk refers to: *What is the utterance about?*. The category *subject of talk* was developed to code semantic themes that were enacted in an utterance. It is similar to the conceptualisation of the common object X, in which the common object X captures individuals' behaviour towards something (Newcomb 1953). However, as referentiality and expressive aspect provide further detail on the enactment of a semantic theme (common object X), henceforth the term 'subject of talk' will be adopted as it refers solely to the topics that were enacted in utterances. Subjects of talk emerge from the data.



The following coding question was used to identify the subjects of talk that were conveyed in an utterance: *What is the utterance about?*. An utterance may consist of several subjects of talk. In order to keep track of the numerous subjects of talk that were enacted during a talk instance, I coded each with a numerical number such as S14. This provided a coherent coding structure and ensured transparent coding results.

Secondly, I looked at an utterance's referentially semantic content (Bakhtin 1986a), henceforth referentiality. It captures an utterance's relational / referential aspect or aspects. Thereby, an utterance may consist of several referential aspects. Due to the research focus, I was particularly interested in the role of Unico's strategic plan. Thus, I distinguished between i) referentiality to the strategic plan and ii) referentiality to another subject of talk. This distinction is reflected in the following coding tree (see Figure 3.3). In the first question, I would ask Q1 *Does an individual enact a particular goal's content?*. If an individual enacted the strategic plan's content that is expressed at the level of a goal, then I would code it as "goal". Otherwise, I would move to the second question Q2 *Does an individual enact a particular objective's content?*. If an individual enacted parts of, or the entire content of, an objective, I would code it as "objective". If not, I would proceed to the next question Q3 *Does an individual refer to a particular Mission in Unico's strategic plan?*. If an individual enacted a particular Mission, such as Teaching, then I would code it as "Mission". In the last coding question, I would ask (Q4) *Does an individual enact the planning document?*. A confirmative answer would then be coded as "entire document". In the case of all four coding questions being negative, an individual enacted another semantic theme, which was not manifested in Unico's plan. In order to keep track of enacted subjects of talk, each subject was numbered.

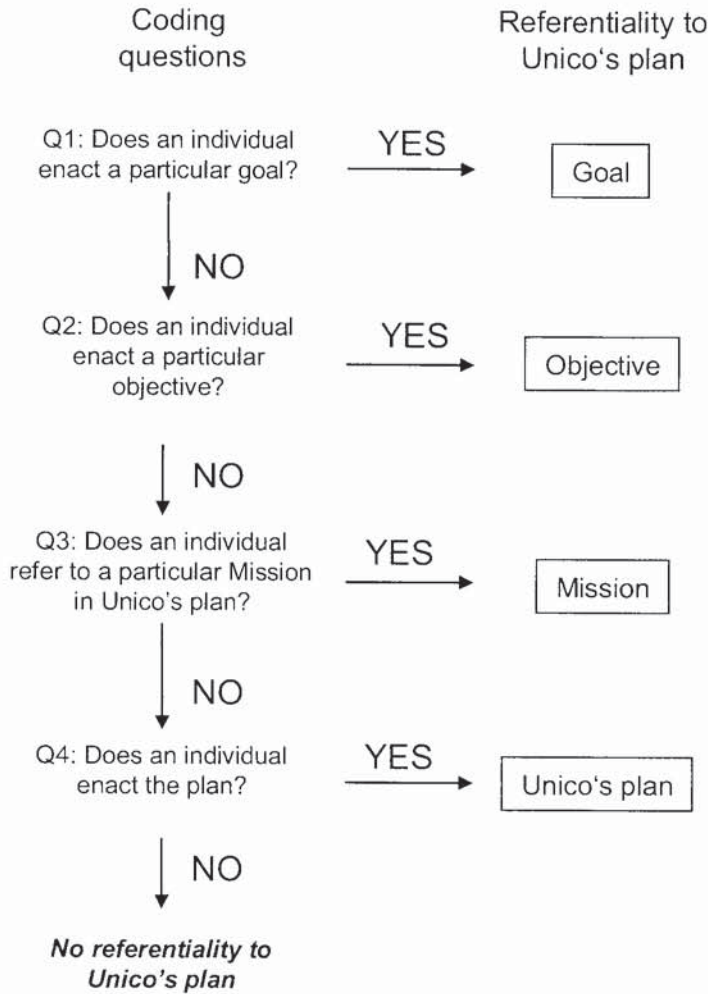


Figure 3.3: Decision tree of an utterance's referentiality to the strategic plan's content

Thirdly, I identified an expressive aspect or aspects of an utterance. An expressive aspect refers to 'the speaker's subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content of his utterance' (Bakhtin 1986a: 84). Thus, an utterance's expressive aspect is identified by looking at the subjective evaluation in relation to an utterance's referentiality. If an utterance has more than one referential aspect, it will also have several expressive aspects. Questions ensured coherent coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In relation to the enacted strategic plan's content, the following coding tree was developed (Miles and Huberman 1994). Coding was shaped by an overarching coding question Q0 *What does an individual express in relation to the enacted strategic plan's content?*. The coding tree consists of five questions (see Figure 3.4). The first questions look at whether (*Does*) *an individual suggest something in relation to the enacted strategic plan's content?*. If so, I code the relevant data as "suggesting". Otherwise, I would proceed to the next question Q2 *Does an individual disagree with the enacted strategic plan's content?*. If a person disagreed with the strategic plan's content, I would then code it as "disagreeing". If question Q1 and Q2 were negative, I



would proceed to Q3 *Does an individual question the enacted strategic plan's content?*. If an individual asked to clarify a particular strategic plan's content, then I coded it as "clarifying". If not, I move to the next question Q4 *Does an individual support the enacted strategic plan's content?*. In a confirmative case, I would code the data "supporting". If the person did also not *support* the enacted strategic plan's content, then I would ask the last question Q5 *Does an individual express something else in relation to the enacted strategic plan's content?*. I would then create a new code that captures a further expressive aspect that occurred in relation to the enacted strategic plan's content. This also ensures the inductiveness and closeness to the data. As already mentioned, more than one expressive aspect may occur as an utterance consisted of several referential aspects.

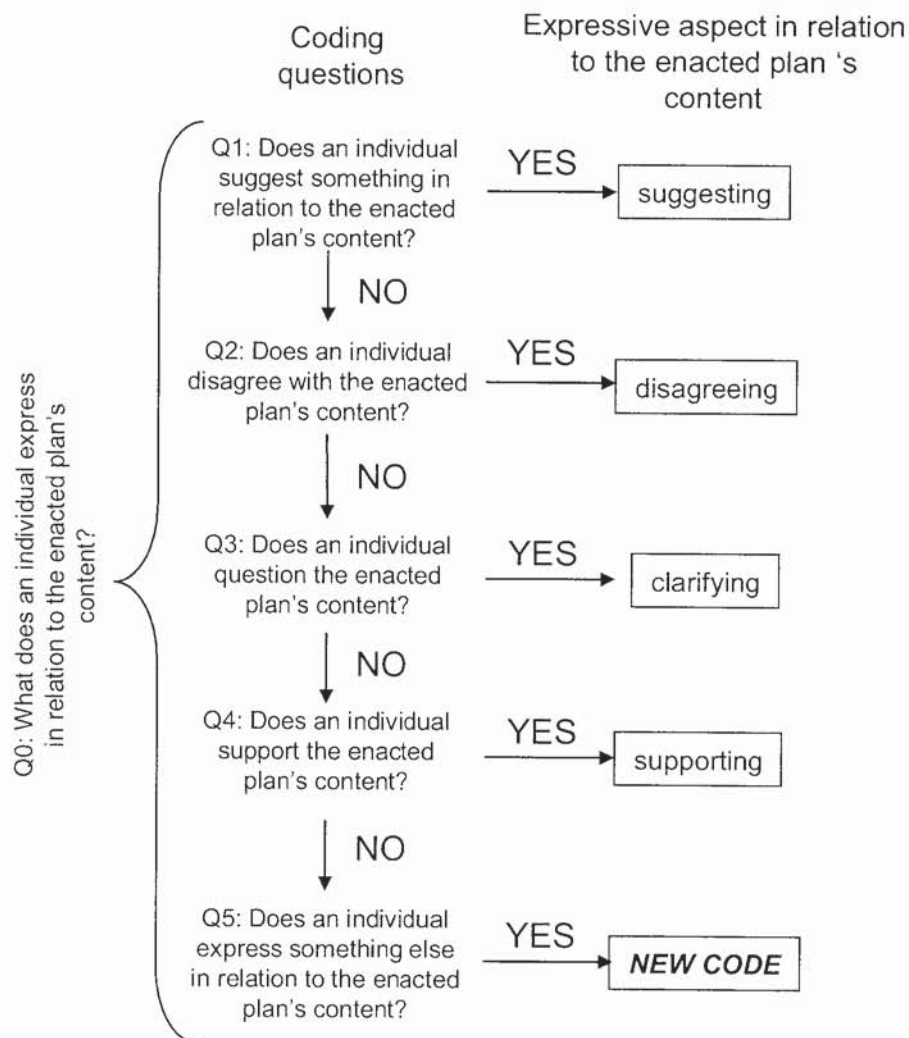


Figure 3.4: Decision tree for expressive aspects in relation to an enacted strategic plan's content

Fourthly, a hierarchy of utterances was developed depending on the number of components an utterance has. As an utterance may consist of more than one subject of talk, the number

of expressive aspects increases respectively. This is due to the interrelatedness of the concepts i) referentiality to strategic plan, ii) subject of talk and iii) expressive aspect. A rising number of subjects of talk per utterance, therefore, leads to an increasingly complex nature of utterance (see Figure 3.5). An utterance's complexity is also reflected in the enacted number of words. This will be illustrated in the following two examples i) a single feature utterance and ii) multiple features utterance.

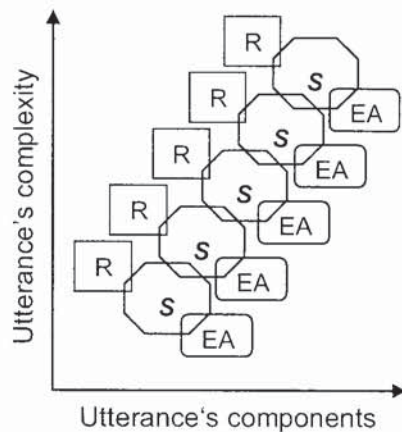


Figure 3.5: An utterance's complexity

- \* R: Referentiality
- \*\* S: Subject of talk
- \*\*\* EA: Expressive aspect

For illustrative purposes, I introduced coding symbols for each utterance's component (see Table 3.10). These were used coherently throughout Phase 4.


	Referentiality to strategic plan ( <i>vsn n</i> )	Expressive aspect in relation to referential strategic plan	Referentiality to guiding question	Referentiality to subject of talk	Expressive aspect in relation to subject of talk
Symbol	⊢	⊢⊢	⊢⊢	⊢⊢	⊢⊢

Table 3.10: Data analysis symbols

The first example illustrates a single feature utterance. A single feature utterance consists of only one subject of talk. Table 3.11 illustrates an example that was taken from the top management team meeting in period III. Departmental Head A set the strategic plan as referential aspect by enacting "there". As the discussion focused on the Third Stream Mission, Departmental Head A's suggestion occurred in relation to the content that expressed the Third Stream Mission in Version 7. The suggestion was triggered by the



meeting's guiding question *Do we need to re-formulate*. "Visibility in the local media" thereby provided the subject of talk.



Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
<b>Talk instance</b>	<b>Re-ferentiality (vsn n)</b>	<b>Expressive aspect (vsn n)</b>	<b>Re-ferentiality subject</b>	<b>Expressive aspect subject</b>
	⊢	⊢	⊢ / ⊢	⊢
Departmental Head A: $\frac{\text{⊢}}{\text{⊢}} \text{S1}$ What about visibility in the local media as a bullet point ⊢ there?	Mission	Suggest	S1	Suggest

Table 3.11: Single feature utterance

The second example shows a multiple features utterance. Utterances were very complex especially at strategy away days, when individuals got back from their break-out sessions and reported back to the all meeting delegates. At these events, utterances with several subjects of talk, spanning over 3000 words, were common, as the following example will show. Table 3.12 illustrates an extract of an utterance that was expressed by the Student Representative. The meeting occurred during the strategy away day with the Council in period II. Delegates tackled the question *What are the most significant challenges facing Unico over the next 5 – 10 years?*. The example shows that the Student Representative did not enact the strategic plan's content. In relation to the meeting's guiding question, three subjects of talk were enacted (*S1*; *S3*; *S4*). Subject *S1* was thereby already enacted during an earlier utterance as the reference "as already said" (line 3) stated. Moreover, the Student Representative suggested further subjects of talk (*S3* and *S4*) that were not enacted during a previous utterance. This talk instance occurred in relation to a new content that was added to the Teaching Mission as a goal: "flexible delivery of programmes".

line	Talk instance	Referen- tiality (vsn n)	Expres- siveness (vsn n)	Referen- tiality subject	Expressive aspect subject
1	Student Representative: ... Three priorities. $\perp$ S1 Expanding student numbers.			S1;	
2	$\perp$ S3 Modernising teaching techniques and $\perp$ S4 income generation. $\perp$ S1 Talking about			S3; S4;	
3	expanding student numbers. Obviously, as already said, this issue of the number of students				
4	aged 18 are decreasing in future. $\perp$ S1 So, we need to look at different ways of delivering			S1	suggest
5	programmes that would be suitable for people of different ages coming to university. Whilst at				
6	the same time changing the way that we deliver ... we want to make sure that not only ... at				
7	least maintain standards if not increase them. In the conundrum making sure that happens.				
8	$\perp$ S3 In terms of modernising teaching techniques. Students are already using virtual learning			S3	
9	environments. We are already behind in what is going on in the student body. $\perp$ S3 We need			S3	suggest
10	to catch up to match their actual expectations. $\perp$ S4 And in terms of income generation, we			S4	
11	thought there was enormous change in the teaching technique. $\perp$ S4 There was much more			S4	suggest
12	scope for income generation through vocational courses, short courses. $\perp$ S4 Massive scope			S4	suggest
13	between inter-disciplinary, where we could charge a premium rate for example for business				
14	orientated courses etc. ...				

Table 3.12: Multiple features utterance



In the second part of Phase 4, I looked at an utterance's responsiveness as well as the contextual characteristics that embedded a talk instance (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b). Responsiveness is seen as directly related to other utterances within the speech situation. Once subjects of talk within a talk instance were identified, I went back to the original meeting transcript (or if not transcribed, listened again to the tape) in order to examine whether one of these subjects had been enacted previously during the respective meeting. If a subject of talk had already been enacted at the same meeting, I would expand the talk instance and include the passage of talk with the same subject in the research database (for a full illustration of the research data base see Appendix C). After identifying subjects of talk within all talk instances, I cross-compared each subject of talk with the ones found in other meetings during Unico's strategic plan production cycle.

Following Bakhtin (1986a, 1986b), an utterance needs to be considered in its situational context. Embedding an utterance in a speech communication, such as a meeting, I looked at who, the 'speaking subject' (Bakhtin 1986a: 71), actually engaged in the act of uttering during a meeting. Thereby, I distinguished between two types of actors, a text producer and any other meeting delegate who was present during the respective meeting. Additionally, I looked at a strategic plan production cycle period's distinctive characteristics, such as a meeting's guiding question and whether it shaped an utterance's components.

In the third part of Phase 4, I combined findings on the three types of content changes with results obtained in the fine-grained analysis of talk instances that led to content changes. The research database thus provided a basis to look at differences and similarities of talk instance's characteristics that led to the amendment of an existing content (increasing specificity; reducing specificity) or triggered a new content to be added (new specificity).

#### 3.4.2.5 Summary of Analytical Method

My data analysis went through four Phases. Phase 1 showed that Unico's strategic plan production cycle consisted of five periods. Each period was distinct in terms of the discussed plan's content, a meeting's guiding question and participation. Differentiating Unico's plan production cycle in to five phases was integral to subsequent stages of data analyses. Phase 2 focused on the development of Unico's strategic plan. I therefore focused on the evolution of objectives and goals according to Unico's three Missions (Research, Teaching and Third Stream) manifested in its strategic plan. Overall, 169 content changes were made across these three Missions, throughout the plan's development. Three types of content changes were identified i) new specificity; ii) increasing specificity; and

iii) reducing specificity. Phase 3 looked at the relationship of talk and textual artefacts. Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation provided the theoretical framework to link passages of talk to content changes. Phase 4 built upon the relationship between passages of talk that led to content changes in Unico's strategic plan, as identified in Phase 3. Based on these talk instances, I conducted a fine-grained talk analysis, drawing upon Bakhtin's (1986a) notion of an utterance and its components. Thus, I analysed an utterance's subject of talk in relation to the anterior utterances' subjects. Concepts of referentiality and expressive aspect provided further detail on the talk analysis. Moreover, contextual characteristics were included in the analysis, as they embed any speech situation (Bakhtin 1986a).

### 3.5 Quality of research

This research followed those validity measures that are identified as appropriate for qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2003; Guba and Lincoln 1985; Lincoln and Guba 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1985) distinguished between trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness consists of i) credibility; ii) transferability; iii) dependability; and iv) confirmability. I will now explain the quality of research according to above mentioned criteria.

*Credibility* of the research was ensured in four ways. Firstly, collecting audio recorded non-participatory observations provided the basis to go back to and transcribe original conversations during my data analysis. Secondly, I explored participants' views on particular aspects and on the strategic plan production cycle through interviews. Common interpretations showed coherent views amongst participants, whereas diverging interpretations highlighted ambiguity and conflict. Thirdly, I triangulated multiple data sources to track changes in Unico's strategic plan in relation to strategy talk. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks consistently provided the basis to use pattern-matching (Miles and Huberman 1994). Fourthly, I verified findings with participants, which ensured member validation (Seale 1999). Feedback sessions took place in two stages. Half a year after completing data collection, I presented findings about the plan's development to the Vice-Chancellor. At another meeting, one year after completing data collection, I then presented extended research to the members of the top management team. My interpretations of events were confirmed by members' agreement with my findings.



To ensure *transferability*, I kept track of events and instances throughout the data collection period in the form of a case story. I up-dated Unico's case story continuously, which finally resulted in a thick description. I also created a table illustrating details of the strategic plan production cycle. *Dependability* was ensured in two ways. Firstly, I kept track of interview guides, transcripts, observational notes and verified my future courses of actions with my supervisory team (Professor Paula Jarzabkowski and Dr Efstathios Tapinos). Secondly, I kept track of choices made during my data analysis in the form of a twenty one paged analysis diary. During presentations of initial research findings, my supervisory team, as well as experts in the organisational communication field (Associate Professor Curtis LeBaron, Brigham Young University and Professor John Sillince, University of Strathclyde), acted as auditors to assess theoretical inferences.

As is normal, with qualitative data analysis (Jarzabkowski 2008; Langley 1999), my analyses went through recurrent deductive and inductive reasoning. While my theoretical framework provided pillars for data reduction and different angles to approach the data, *confirmability* was ensured through strong in vivo coding throughout the four phases of data analyses. Research findings emerged from, rather than being imposed on, the data. *Authenticity* was ensured by drawing upon various individuals across Unico and including varying participants' interpretations on the plan's content. Furthermore, feedback sessions with Unico's top management team provided ontological and educative authenticity (Lincoln and Guba 2003). Feedback sessions to Unico's entire top management team were given after completing my data analysis. In these sessions, I presented team members with the plan's development throughout different stages of its production cycle. Moreover, I pointed out varying interpretations of the plan's content by participants. By providing feedback after the data collection, I did not interfere in the actual strategic plan production cycle.

### **3.6 Summary to Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 illustrated the research methodology of this thesis in detail. It started with an outline of my ontological and epistemological stance, which in turn informed the data collection and data analyses. It then illustrated case selection criteria to follow a longitudinal, single case approach to investigate the construction of a strategic plan within a

communicative process. A case description, as well as information on the British university sector, was provided as this research was conducted within a British University. Data was collected using naturally occurring data in the form of meeting observations, which were audio recorded, and documents, as well as researcher provoked data, such as interviews with participants in Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Three distinct units of analysis provided the basis for the data analysis: Unico's strategic plan production cycle, strategy talk and textual artefacts. Data analysis went through four phases. In the first phase, I demonstrated that Unico's strategic plan production cycle went through five periods which differed according to key questions that were posed to participants in workshops, meetings and strategy away days. In the second phase, I identified three types of content change that determined the strategic plan's development throughout the plan production cycle. In the third phase, I looked at the interrelation of strategy talk and Unico's strategic plan, drawing upon Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. In the fourth phase, I built upon Bakhtin's (1986a) notions of an utterance's components and responsiveness to provide a detailed analysis of how talk shaped the content changes made to Unico's strategic plan. Chapter 3 closes with addressing the quality of this research using Guba and Lincoln's (1985) categories of trustworthiness and authenticity.



## CHAPTER 4

### The evolution of Unico's strategic plan

#### 4.1 Introduction

The evolution of Unico's strategic plan was constituted through changes made to its content. This chapter is based on the development of Unico's three Missions: 'Research', 'Teaching' and 'Third Stream'. As we shall see, an elaboration of the plan's content occurred through adding and removing statements and words from the plan. These changes had effects on its conveyed meaning. Over time, such elaborations resulted in increasing detail in the content that manifested a Mission's espoused strategic directions. This chapter will also illustrate how the plan's content became fixated as changes were made at two distinct content levels.

This chapter is structured in four sections. It shows the development of Unico's strategic plan based on Unico's 'Research', 'Teaching' and 'Third Stream' Mission across the strategic plan production cycle. The first section illustrates the strategic plan's evolution according to the strategic plan's level of content. Two distinct levels, objectives and goals, were identified at which the plan's content was expressed. The second section demonstrates that changes to the plan's conveyed meaning stemmed from three types of content change: new specificity, increasing specificity and reducing specificity. The third section looks at the occurrence of each type of content change in more detail. It compares the type of content change according to the production cycle's five periods and across Unico's three Missions. This provides the basis for contrasting the development of each Mission in terms of the strategic plan's level of content and the type of content changes. The fourth section shows that Unico's espoused strategic directions shifted during the production cycle. Foci are the type of content changes that occurred at the level of objectives. Five patterns are identified that capture the development of each Mission's espoused strategic direction.

## 4.2 The plan's development according to the content level

The first section illustrates the strategic plan's evolution in terms of its content level. This illustrates an overview of the plan's evolution with respect to its physical manifestation. Unico's strategic plan evolved over a 10-month period, which constituted the strategic plan production cycle. As we know from the work of Ackoff (1970) and Ansoff (1991), a Mission conveys several espoused strategic directions. I will now introduce two concepts which explain how Unico's espoused strategic directions were manifested in its strategic plan. Before showing an illustrative example, these will be defined. An *objective* articulates specific strategic content which constitutes a Mission's espoused strategic direction. An objective however may not be obtained within the planning period (Ackoff 1981). Objectives were manifested in form of bullet points. Further detail on how to achieve an objective is reflected in the form of *goals*. In comparison to objectives, goals 'are expected to be obtained within the period covered by a plan' (Ackoff 1981: 104). In Unico's plan, goals were expressed as sub bullet points and thus were listed beneath a respective objective. Let me now show a brief example based on the Teaching Mission, that demonstrates the concepts *objective* and *goal* (see Table 4.1). The first statement provides the espoused strategic direction "Remain focused on disciplines of professional and vocational relevance". Further information on this objective was manifested in each subsequent goal.

Teaching Mission (Version 7)	Research comment
- Remain focused on disciplines of professional and vocational relevance:	<i>Objective</i> expressed in form of bullet point
-- New programmes to be tested against relevance criteria as well as against academic quality and demand criteria	<i>Goal 1</i> expressed in form of sub bullet point
-- Maintain/ enhance professional accreditation for programmes	<i>Goal 2</i> expressed in form of sub bullet point
-- Continue to emphasise work placement experience as an integrated part of the curriculum	<i>Goal 3</i> expressed in form of sub bullet point

Table 4.1: Illustration of the concepts *objective* and *goal*

### 4.2.1 Objectives

With respect to the development of the objectives, Chart 4.1 shows that the number of objectives per Mission varied quite strongly per version. For instance, in Version 2 almost three times more objectives expressed the espoused strategic direction in the Research Mission than the Third Stream Mission (Research: 10; Third Stream: 3), whereas in Version 8, objectives listed in the Third Stream Mission exceeded the ones manifested in the



Research Mission (Research: 5; Third Stream: 9). The drop in objectives across Unico's three Missions between Version 6 and 7 was due to the introduction of goals. This occurred due to the shifting nature of discussions during the plan production cycle, which coincided with a change in communication technology. The first six versions were created in PowerPoint® as the plan was presented in front of large audiences during strategy away days. The last four versions were developed in MS Word®. Alongside the transition from Version 6 to Version 7, six objectives across the three Missions were listed in the form of goals. This aspect will be further explored in section 4.5. The number of objectives manifesting Unico's espoused strategic directions per Mission were similar in the plan's final version (Research: 8; Teaching: 9; Third Stream: 8).

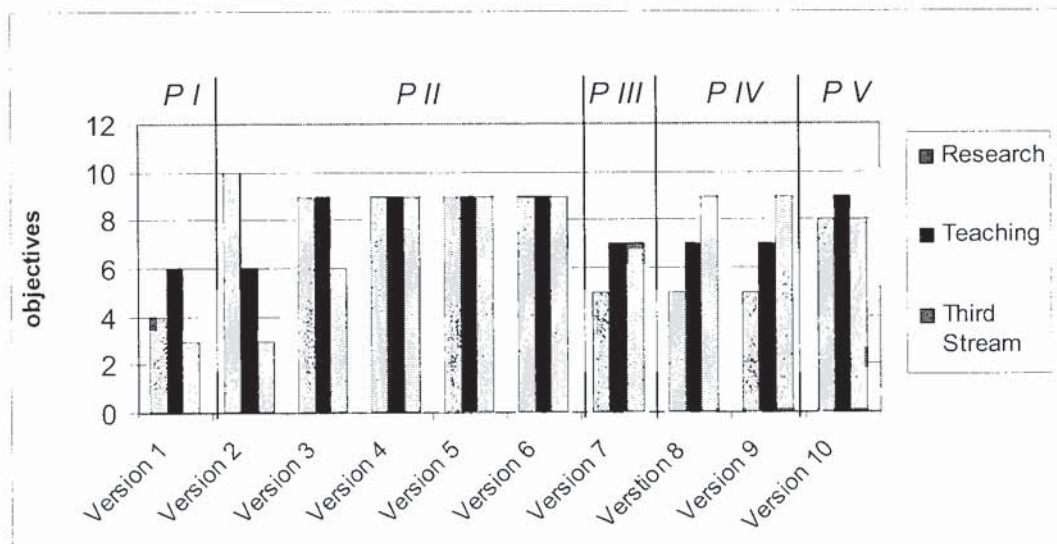


Chart 4.1: Number of objectives per Mission

#### 4.2.2 Goals

Based on Chart 4.2 we can see that goals were only introduced in Version 7. Overall, the number of goals grew as time progressed. This may be explained by the technology used and the stage in the plan production cycle. PowerPoint® restricts the space that is available to express a plan's content (Gabriel 2008; Kaplan 2006). As one PowerPoint® slide expressed a Mission's espoused strategic direction, a change to MS Word® offered to remove such restriction. The consequence of the space expansion to express content is also illustrated when looking at the sharp increase in the number of words per Mission (see also Chart 4.3). While it did not exceed 125 words per Mission until Version 6, starting with Version 7, the number of words shot up to 515, as in the Teaching Mission. Second, contextual characteristics varied across the stages in the plan production cycle. The first two periods were characterised by initial discussion of the espoused strategic direction and an

organisation-wide consultation. Period three was determined by including these comments in to the existing plan's content. In period four targets were agreed, with the plan being finalised in period five (cf., part 3.4.2.1).

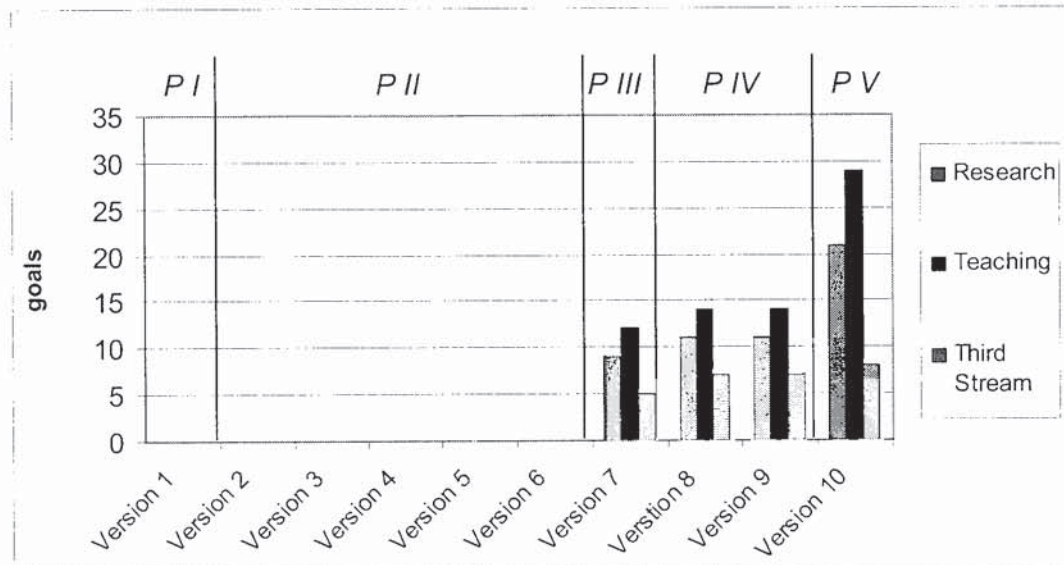


Chart 4.2: Number of goals per Mission

#### 4.2.3 Summary

The strategic plan's content is manifested at two levels: objectives and goals. According to these two concepts, Charts 4.1 and 4.2 provided an overview of the evolution of each Mission across the ten Versions of Unico's strategic plan, per period of the plan production cycle (cf., part 3.4.2.2). The number of objectives fluctuated during the production cycle whereas the number of goals steadily increased once they were introduced. While the number of objectives (see Chart 4.1) and goals (see Chart 4.2) varied across each of Unico's Mission during the strategic plan production cycle, Chart 4.3 shows similar numbers of words per Mission until Version 9. However, the large variation in goals (see Chart 4.2) between Research, Teaching and Third Stream in the last version (Version 10) accounted for the significant difference in the number of words used in the final content of Unico's strategic plan. Moreover, the plan's development coincided with the periods' contextual characteristics and a shift in communication technology.



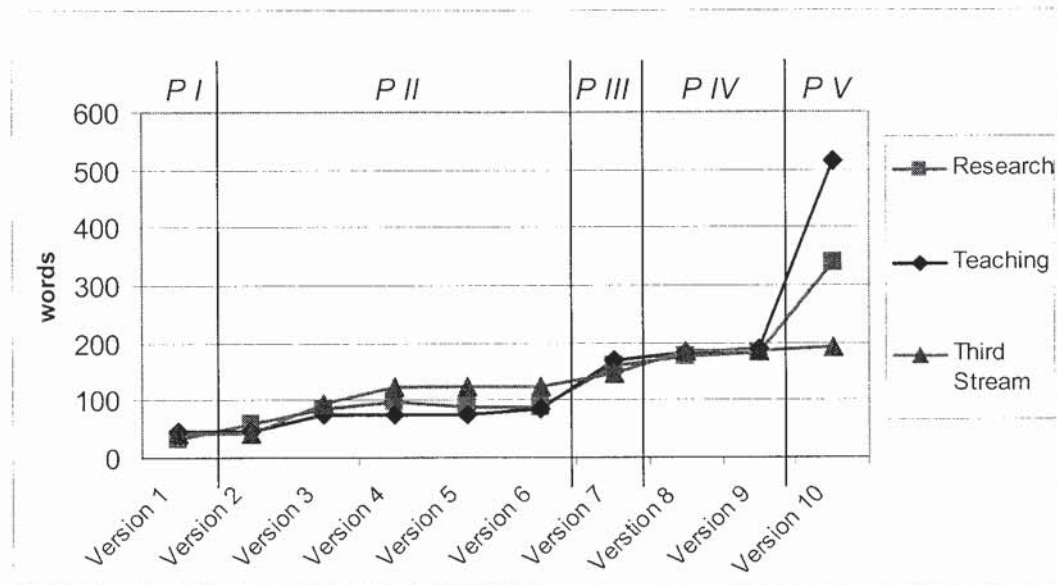


Chart 4.3: Number of words per Mission

### 4.3 Changes to the strategic plan's conveyed meaning

The second section examines what effect changes to wording between two versions of Unico's plan had on its conveyed meaning. A content change needed to be detected in order to examine its effect on the plan's conveyed meaning. To identify a content change, I looked at the same statement across two subsequent versions of the plan, version  $n$  and version  $n-1$ . Version  $n$  refers to the current plan, whereas version  $n-1$  refers to the plan's past version (for further details on the analytical reasoning see part 3.4.2.2). As Figure 4.1 illustrates, content amendments occurred at the level of an objective (relationships A; A\*; G1), goal (relationships C, B, G2) or at the intersection between objective and goal (relationships E, F). It also demonstrates graphically the alternatives for how a plan's content may have been amended. In order to detect a content change, reference points 3 and 4 were compared to reference points 1 and 2, which were manifested in the anterior version  $n-1$ .

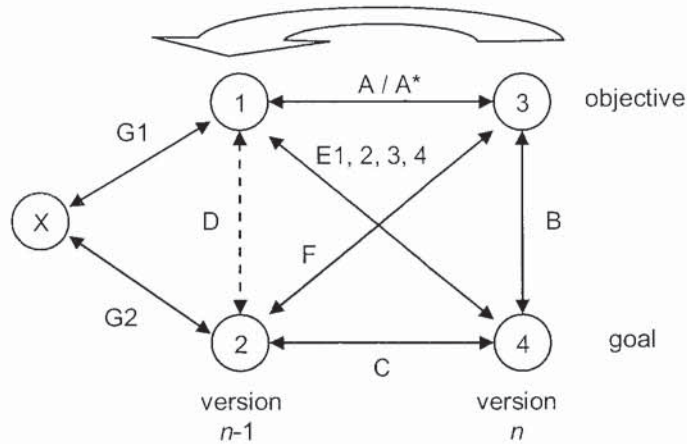


Figure 4.1: Coding relationship

Detecting the changes that were made between two versions of Unico's plan provided the basis to examine effects on the conveyed meaning. Emerging from the data analysis (cf., part 3.4.2.2), three types of content change captured such effects: i) *new specificity*; ii) *increasing specificity* and iii) *reducing specificity*.

- *new specificity*

New specificity only occurs when there has been no reference point in the previous *referential* version ( $n-1$ ) of Unico's strategic plan. As a new objective or goal is introduced, the outlined strategic direction per Mission becomes more specific.

- *increasing specificity*

Based on existing content in version  $n-1$ . It occurs as particular content becomes more specific in expressing an objective or goal when compared to the referential basis in version  $n-1$ .

- *reducing specificity*

Based on existing content in version  $n-1$ . It occurs as particular content becomes more ambiguous in expressing an objective or goal when compared to the referential basis in version  $n-1$ .

Based on the three distinct types of content change – *new specificity*; *increasing specificity* and *reducing specificity*; we can see that the effect of the content changes resulted from new content being added or existing content being amended. This may occur at the level of an objective or a goal. Overall, there were 182 content changes across Unico's three Missions. Applying the decision rules outlined in chapter 3 (see part 3.4.2.4), 169 of the 182 content changes led to one of the three categories for a semantic content change. The remaining



content changes either did not lead to any semantic change or were unidentifiable in terms of whether a change occurred (n = 9).

I will now draw upon two examples per category from the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Mission, in order to demonstrate how the actual content changes occurred and their effects on the conveyed meaning of Unico's strategic plan. While these examples (see Tables 4.2 to 4.7) stem from different periods, they are representative of the total of 169 content changes that occurred within Unico's three Missions during the strategic plan production cycle.

#### 4.3.1 New specificity

First, adding content that has not been in the document before enhances the detail that determines a Mission's espoused strategic directions. Table 4.2 shows an example of a statement that was added to the Third Stream Mission. Adding the statement "working in productive partnership with public services in the region" provided a statement that outlines an espoused strategic direction in the Third Stream Mission. Hence, the espoused strategic direction became more specific. Furthermore, it effectively illustrates the increase in number of objectives between Version 2 and 3 (see Chart 4.1). Thus, I suggest that the espoused strategic direction within a Mission becomes more specific when adding a new objective.

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content level
Version 2	- none	Version 3	- working in productive partnership with public services in the region	Objective

Table 4.2: Third Stream Mission - new specificity – coding relationship A\*

The next example illustrates the introduction of goals in Version 7 of Unico's strategic plan. While the first six versions of the strategic plan outlined Unico's espoused strategic direction in form of objectives, the next four versions expressed the strategic plan's content in the form of both objectives and goals. The relational aspect of goals to objectives becomes clearer when looking at an example. In Table 4.3, we can see that the goal provides more detail of the existing objective. It provides a specific angle on what needs to be done in order to "promote intellectual development and life long learning through". Hence, I suggest that a particular espoused strategic direction that is expressed in an objective becomes more specific when adding a / several new goal(s).

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content level
Version 6	- promoting intellectual development and life long learning -- none	Version 7	- promote intellectual development and life long learning through -- flexible delivery (part time, e-learning etc)	Objective Goal

Table 4.3: Teaching Mission - new specificity - coding relationship B

Both examples illustrate that new specificity is introduced to the conveyed meaning of the strategic plan's existing terminology, as there has been no prior reference point in the anterior version  $n-1$ . This occurs as entirely new objectives and goals are added. They then provide more precision, and thus specificity, about the espoused strategic direction that is outlined in the respective Mission.

#### 4.3.2 Increasing specificity

Second, the plan's content became more detailed through changes that led to increasing specificity. For increasing specificity to occur, there needs to be a basis for comparison with an existing statement in version  $n$ . Tables 4.4 and 4.5 showed that increasing specificity may occur both at the level of an objective (coding relationship A) or goal (coding relationship C). The first example shows the comparison of an objective's terminology, within the Third Stream Mission, that changed between Version 5 and 6. While both formulations mention "regeneration for [UK City] and the [UK region]"; the objective in Version 6 actually outlines how to take part in such regeneration efforts by introducing the [grammatical object] "through partnerships and knowledge transfer". Hence, it now states not only what to aim at but also how to achieve this particular espoused strategic direction.

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content level
Version 5	- At the heart of regeneration for [UK City] and the [UK region]	Version 6	- <u>driving</u> regeneration for [UK City] and the [UK region] <u>through partnerships and knowledge transfer</u>	Objective

Table 4.4: Third Stream Mission - increasing specificity - coding relationship A

The next example illustrates a content amendment that occurred at the level of a goal, whereas the formulation of the respective objective remained (see Table 4.5). The terminology "setting the international research agenda in areas of focus," (Version 8) was replaced by "establishing highly visible, international research centres in key areas which set the international research agenda and" (Version 9). In Version 9, the goal's conveyed meaning



thus becomes more specific as it expresses that the criteria for establishing new research centres.

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content level
	- Achieve international recognition for rigorous and relevant research through		- Achieve international recognition for rigorous and relevant research through	Objective
Version 8	-- setting the international research agenda in areas of focus, addressing important and significant issues	Version 9	-- establishing highly visible, international research centres in key areas which set the international research agenda and addressing important and significant issues	Goal

Table 4.5: Research Mission - increasing specificity – coding relationship C

#### 4.3.3 Reducing specificity

Third, content changes may also result in reducing specificity. For reducing specificity to occur, a statement that was already part of the document is amended. Reducing specificity occurs as a particular content becomes more ambiguous in expressing an objective or goal when compared to the referential basis in version  $n-1$ . The existing content may either be manifested at the level of an objective or a goal. Table 4.6 shows an example, within the Research Mission, whereby the formulation of an existing objective is amended. If we compare the statements that express the same objective across these two versions, we can see that its conveyed meaning has been altered. While in Version 4 of Unico's strategic plan the strategic direction on research was expressed as "*known for ... a small number of key areas*" [emphasis added]; in a subsequent version, its focus broadened as it stated "... *in key areas*" (Version 5). Such content change reduces specificity by ensuring that research cannot be confined in a specific small number of key areas, but rather retains the potential for a larger number of research areas being included in Unico's research focus.

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content level
Version 4	- known for our international research centres in <u>a small number of key areas</u>	Version 5	- known for international centres in key areas	Objective

Table 4.6: Research Mission - reducing specificity - coding relationship A

The second example on reducing specificity provides an account that stems from the Teaching Mission (see Table 4.7). As the formulation featured in Version 6 was not displayed in Version 7 of Unico's strategic plan; the conveyed meaning within the Teaching

Mission became less specific as the formulation "Where teaching excellence is developed and celebrated" was stripped off.

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content level
Version 6	- Where teaching excellence is developed and celebrated	Version 7	- none	Objective

Table 4.7: Teaching Mission - reducing specificity - coding relationship G

#### 4.3.4 Summary

Unico's strategic plan developed not only as objectives and goals were introduced (cf., section 4.2), but also as wording, within the plan, changed. As a particular statement, for instance, expressing an objective in the Third Stream Mission (see Table 4.2), was amended, its conveyed meaning differed between the current version  $n$  and the past version  $n-1$ . Three types of content change captured the effects on the conveyed meaning that was manifested in the current version  $n$ . As a result, the plan's conveyed meaning becomes either more specific or less specific. The plan became more detailed as new content was introduced (new specificity) or by amending an existing statement to increase its specificity (increasing specificity). Certain changes however resulted in the content being expressed more vaguely (reducing specificity).

#### 4.4 Sequential perspective on the types of content changes

The third section looks at the types of content change across Unico's strategic plan production cycle. The plan's production process consisted of five periods (see also part 3.4.2.1). Based on Version 1, the top management team had initial discussions about the plan's content in the first period (1 month). The second period was characterised by a university-wide consultation including Council (4 months). These discussions occurred in relation to five versions of the plan (cf., part 3.4.2.2). In the third period (2 months), the top management team met to discuss the content in Version 7, which integrated some of the comments voiced during period II. Based on these discussions Version 8 was created. During the fourth period (2 months), Version 8 was amended after another top management team meeting. Moreover, a selection of Unico's senior managers across academic and non-academic departments was invited to talk about specific actions to achieve the espoused strategic directions, documented in Version 9, at a three-day strategy away day. Unico's strategic plan was finalised and approved during the fifth period (1 month).



This section is structured in three sub-sections. The first sub-section shows the types of content change per content level across time. The second sub-section illustrates how the three types of content change occurred during the production cycle and the resulting effects on the plan's conveyed meaning. The third sub-section compares and contrasts the development of each Mission according to the types of content change. Content changes are illustrated in the period of version  $n-1$ . For example, content changes that appear in period III were made to Version 7 but manifested in Version 8. While Version 8 was the basis for identifying the type of content change, the actual amendment was made to Version 7's content. Version 7 was discussed at the top management team meeting in period III.

#### 4.4.1 The types of the content change per content level

The first sub-section looks at the occurrence of content changes, distinguishing between the level of objective and goal. This distinction was captured in the coding relationships that were illustrated in Figure 4.1. While seven coding relationships were identified, there has not been any content change where a goal became an objective (coding relationship F). Chart 4.4 illustrates three clusters of the six coding relationships (see Appendix D for supporting table). The first cluster accounts for changes at the level of an objective between version  $n$  and version  $n-1$  (coding relationship A and A\*). This also includes relationship G1, as it refers to an objective being removed from the respective Mission. The second cluster consists of relationships B, C and G2. Relationship B illustrates that a new goal was introduced without having had a reference point in version  $n-1$ ; whereas relationship C accounts for a content change at the level of a goal between version  $n$  and version  $n-1$ . Furthermore, G2 refers to an instance where a goal was removed from the respective Mission. Cluster three consists solely of relationship E which captured instances when an objective (version  $n-1$ ) became a goal (version  $n$ ).

In Chart 4.4, we can see then that there is a shift in the level at which the content changes occur during the strategic plan production cycle. While changes at the *objective* level dominate periods I and II; content changes occur mainly at the level of *goals* in subsequent periods III and IV (see pattern of Cluster 1). This indicates that changes to the objectives occur mainly in the first two production stages. Periods III and IV are thus characterised by amendments in relation to content that expresses how to achieve these objectives. We can also see that the plan's content was not amended in period V. Version 10 of Unico's strategic plan provided the basis to approve the plan by Senate and Council. The pattern of Cluster 3 shows that content changes at the intersection of objectives and goals mainly

occurred in period II. This is due to the introduction of goals which did not feature in earlier versions. This also substantiates that a change in communication technology enabled further expression of the plan's content, as the space restrictions of the PowerPoint® versions were eliminated when moving to MS Word® (cf., sub-section 4.2.2). After period III, the hierarchy of objectives and goals expressed in the plan hardly changed. Content that was once expressed as objectives remained at the objective level (see Cluster 3). Ways to achieve these objectives, expressed as goals, never became an objective in themselves.

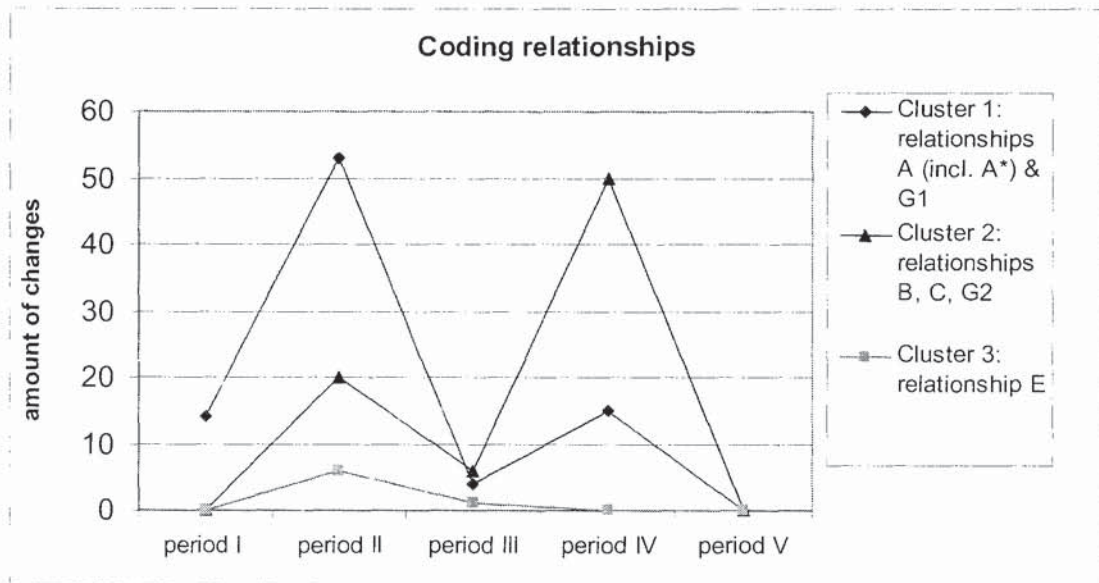


Chart 4.4: Content change per coding relationship

#### 4.4.2 The types of content change over time

The second sub-section illustrates the types of content change over time. It draws together findings on the type of content change and relates these to each period of the plan production cycle. Based on Table 4.8 we can see i) the total amount of content changes per period and ii) the type of content change across periods. Periods II and IV are characterised by a large number of content changes, as compared to periods I and III. There were no content amendments that occurred in period V. Periods I and III were characterised by less change to Unico's plan than period II and IV. Period IV was dominated by new content being added. Most alterations to existing statements were made to Versions 2 to 6 during period II. As differences in the type of content change are embedded in each Mission's development, they will be further explained in sub-section 4.4.3.

When comparing the occurrence of the three types of content change, Table 4.8 shows a striking picture. Just over half of all content changes stemmed from adding a new objective or goal (new specificity: 52%; n = 88). Changes made to existing content resulted mostly in



*increasing specificity* (59%; n = 48), with the fewest changes leading to *reducing specificity* (41%; n = 33). The difference between the number of content changes that led to *increasing specificity* and *reducing specificity* illustrates that content that had already been in the document becomes more specific rather than less specific. Furthermore, the vast amount of new specificity and the large number of increasing specificity shows that some 80% of all content changes resulted in an increasing level of detail that expressed Unico's espoused strategic direction. Hence, the conveyed meaning implicit in Unico's strategic plan became more specific over time. This is supported by findings in Chart 4.5 which indicate that content changes shifted from occurring mainly at the level of objectives between periods I to III to goals in period IV to V.

	period I	period II	period III	period IV	period V	TOTAL
new	12	31	7	38	0	88
increasing	2	24	4	18	0	48
reducing	0	24	0	9	0	33
TOTAL	14	79	11	65	0	169

Table 4.8: Types of content change across periods I to V

Chart 4.5 shows graphically how the three types of content change occurred per version of Unico's strategic plan over time. Changes that were made to Version (Vsn) 2 appear under the category Vsn 2-3 (see Appendix E for supporting table). Period V was ignored as there were no changes to Unico's Research, Teaching and Third Stream Mission. The dominance of changes leading to new specificity is reflected in Versions 1-2; 3-4; 6-7; 7-8 and 9-10. Drawing upon findings in sub-section 4.4.1 we can see that they occurred at differing levels. While new specificity was introduced at the objective level in the first two periods, they occurred mostly at the goal level during periods III and IV. Comparing content amendments to existing content also presents an interesting picture. While the total amount of *increasing specificity* exceeded the number of *reducing specificity*; in period II we can see that changes resulting in *reducing specificity* occurred more often than *increasing specificity*. This was due to the large number of content changes made to Version 6 (new specificity: 21; increasing ~: 11; reducing ~: 15). It illustrates that there was a big effort to change the plan's content, alongside a shift in communication technology from PowerPoint® to MS Word®. Overall, we can see that the plan's conveyed meaning became more detailed as a result of the constant introduction of novel objectives and goals, as well as by the dominance of content amendments resulting in increasing specificity. Further differences in the plan's evolution will be explained in subsequent sections. These address each Mission's development according to the type of content change per version.

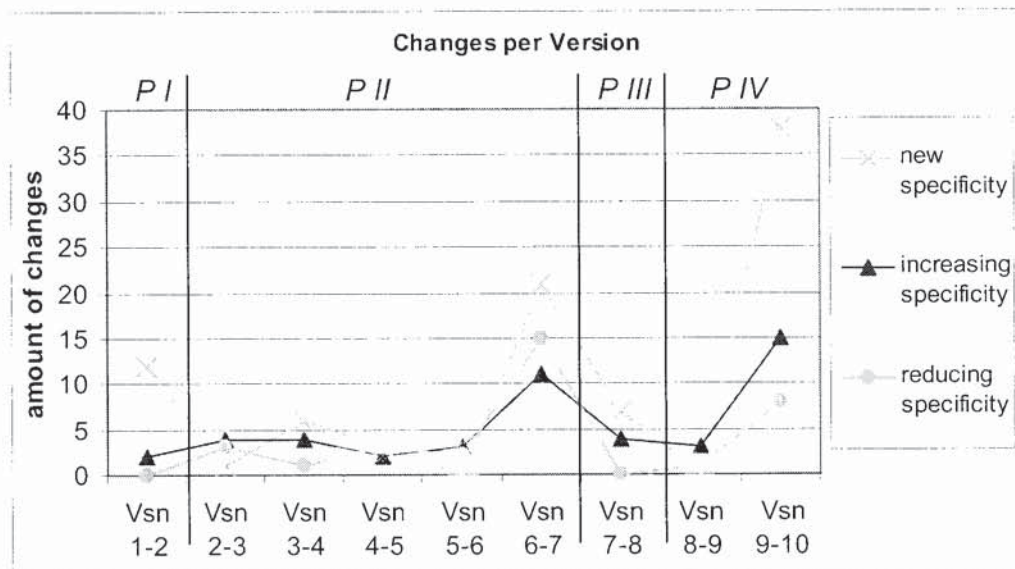


Chart 4.5: Types of content change per period

#### 4.4.3 Comparing the development of Unico's three Missions over time

The third sub-section outlines the evolution of Unico's three Missions during the plan production cycle. Patterns of the three types of content change illustrate how the content developed that finally constituted each Mission. Table 4.9 provides an outline of the type of content change of each Mission per period. Looking at the number of content changes across Unico's three Missions, we can see that most content changes occurred in the Teaching Mission (41%;  $n = 70$ ), closely followed by the Research Mission (39%;  $n = 65$ ). The fewest content changes were thus made in the Third Stream Mission (20%;  $n = 33$ ). Each Mission's development will now be illustrated in more detail. Their development will then be compared.



Type of content change per Mission	period I		period II				period III	period IV		TOTAL	
	Vsn 1-2	Vsn 2-3	Vsn 3-4	Vsn 4-5	Vsn 5-6	Vsn 6-7	Vsn 7-8	Vsn 8-9	Vsn 9-10		
Research	New specificity	6	1	0	0	0	6	2	0	14	29
	Increasing specificity	0	4	3	2	2	4	2	1	4	22
	Reducing specificity	0	3	0	2	1	5	0	1	2	14
	<i>total</i>	6	8	3	4	3	15	4	2	20	65
Teaching	New specificity	3	0	3	3	0	11	2	0	23	45
	Increasing specificity	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	8	13
	Reducing specificity	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	6	12
	<i>total</i>	4	0	3	3	1	18	2	2	37	70
Third Stream	New specificity	3	0	3	0	0	4	3	0	1	14
	Increasing specificity	1	0	1	0	1	5	2	0	3	13
	Reducing specificity	0	0	1	1	0	5	0	0	0	7
	<i>total</i>	4	0	5	1	1	14	5	0	4	34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>169</b>	

Table 4.9: Type of content change per Mission across Versions 1 to 10

Following, each Mission's development will be addressed in detail before comparing similarities and differences across patterns.

## 4.4.3.1 Research Mission

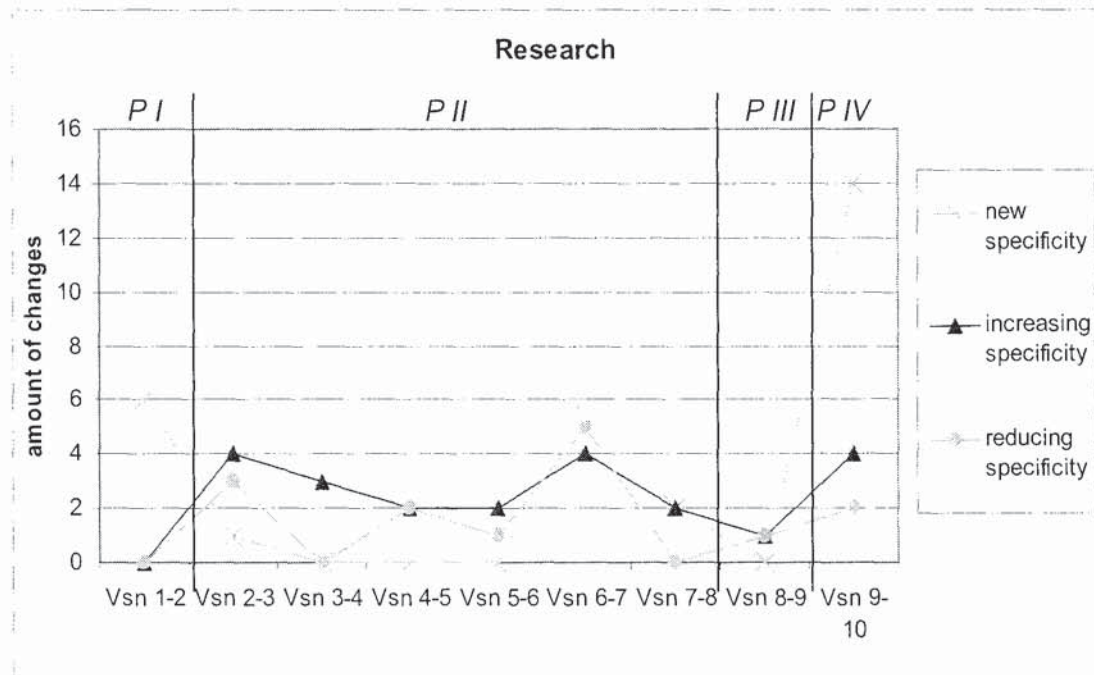


Chart 4.6: Research – types of content change over time

The plan's content that documented the Research Mission became more specific as time progressed. This is demonstrated by the dominating effect of content changes resulting in new specificity and increasing specificity (see Chart 4.6). Moreover, alterations made to existing content followed similar patterns in terms of increase and decline. For instance, changes to Version 6 (Vsn 6-7) were followed by a decreasing number of alterations resulting in both increasing specificity and reducing specificity (Vsn 7-8). Until Version 6 (Vsn 5-6), changes resulting in new specificity started atypically compared to amendments made to objectives that were already manifested in the plan. Thereafter, the development was in line with alterations made to existing content. Most content changes occurred during the university-wide consultation (period II). The greatest number of amendments was made to Version 9 (see Table 4.9), adding strategic content on how to achieve set objectives (see Chart 4.7; for supporting Table see Appendix F). Apart from content changes made to Version 6 (Vsn 6-7), content changes that resulted in *reducing specificity* scored lowest during the development of Unico's Research Mission. Until period II, content changes occurred exclusively at the objective level (see Chart 4.7). Thereafter, hardly any changes were made to elaborate content manifesting the Research Mission's objectives. This illustrates that Research objectives became increasingly fixated as time progressed. Following their introduction in period II, goals dominated the level of subsequent content alterations. The transition of objectives becoming listed as goals was only made from



Version 6 to 7 (see Chart 4.7). The majority of content amendments were then made at the goal level.

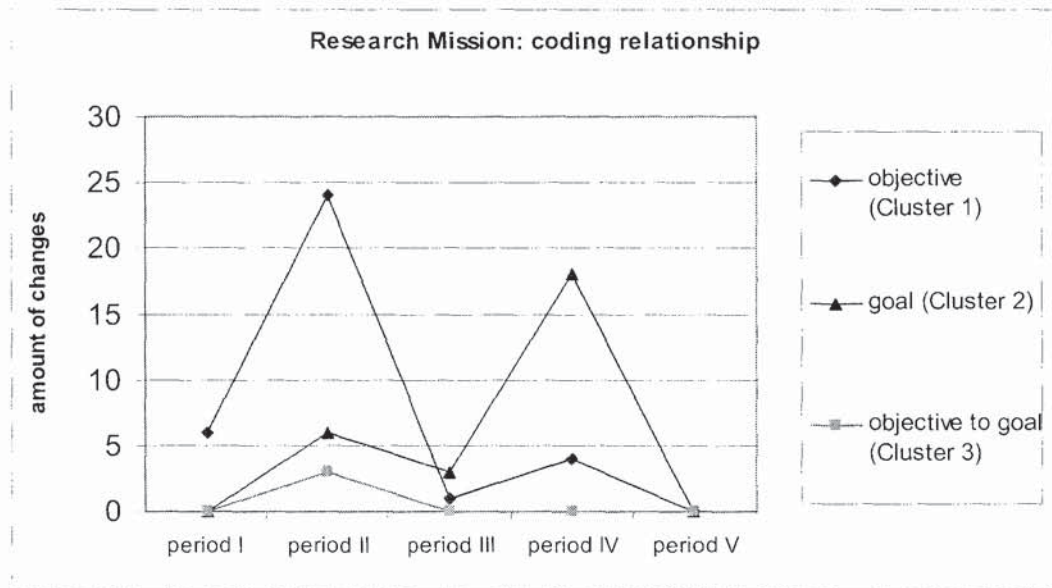


Chart 4.7: Research Mission: changes by content level across Unico's plan production cycle

4.4.3.2 Teaching Mission

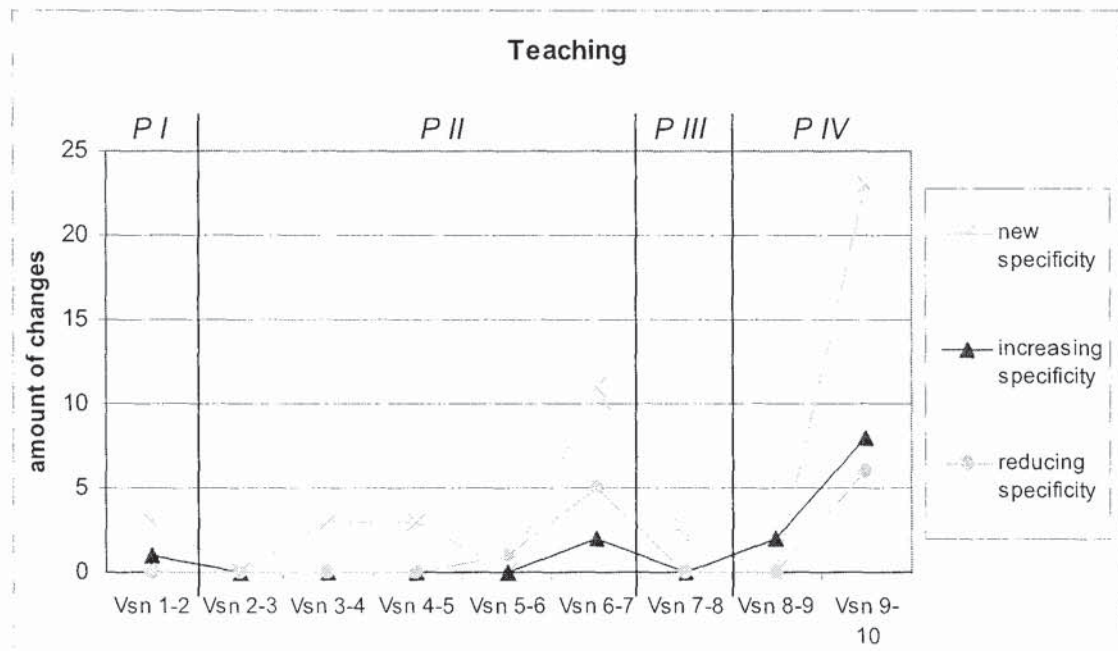


Chart 4.8: Teaching – types of content change over time

Until Version 6 (see Vsn 6-7), the three types of content change followed different patterns of development (see Chart 4.8). Thereafter, the amount of content changes decreased until the final version was created. Version 2 and 3 remained identical as changes only affected

the Research Mission as Version 2 was discussed at a dedicated research forum (cf., Table 3.2). Overall, more than half of all content changes stemmed from new content being added at both the objective and strategic level (see Table 4.9). Alterations made to existing content resulted mostly in increasing specificity, apart from changes made to Version 6 (Vsn 6-7). Such development illustrates that content documenting the Teaching Mission became increasingly detailed. Distinguishing between content levels shows that almost similar amount of changes were made in period II (see Chart 4.9; for supporting Table see Appendix F). While content amendments at the objective level slightly dominated the first two periods, they were outnumbered by content alterations at the goal level during the last two planning periods. This shows that whereas the Teaching Mission's content was constantly elaborated, its objectives were fixated as the end of the plan production cycle approached. Moreover, there was only one instance where an objective became listed as a goal (see Chart 4.9).

The highest number of content changes was manifested in the last version of the strategic plan (Version 10). These accounted for more than half of all alterations that occurred within the Teaching Mission. In period IV, a new Head leading the Teaching area was hired. There was no predecessor to have an influence in constituting the Teaching Mission's content as the post was not filled for the first eight months of the plan production cycle. While the Teaching area spans all academic departments, its Head is not part of the top management team. After having had two-days of round-table discussions with representatives of Unico's senior academics and administrators at a strategy away day in period IV, the new Head had the opportunity to give a personal touch to the Teaching Mission's content. These alterations were then reflected in Version 10 (Vsn 9-10). With respect to the content, the new Head pointed out that "*there's nothing there [in the plan] that I'm not comfortable with*" (Interview 62). However, changes to the Teaching area were co-constructed by the new Head of Teaching and the VC. While the Head of Teaching aimed at making the content "*really punchy*" (Interview 62) by combining objectives together; the VC kept existing objectives in addition to the ones added by the new Head of Teaching. As a result, the Teaching area was expressed using more words than the other two Mission areas (cf., Chart 4.3).



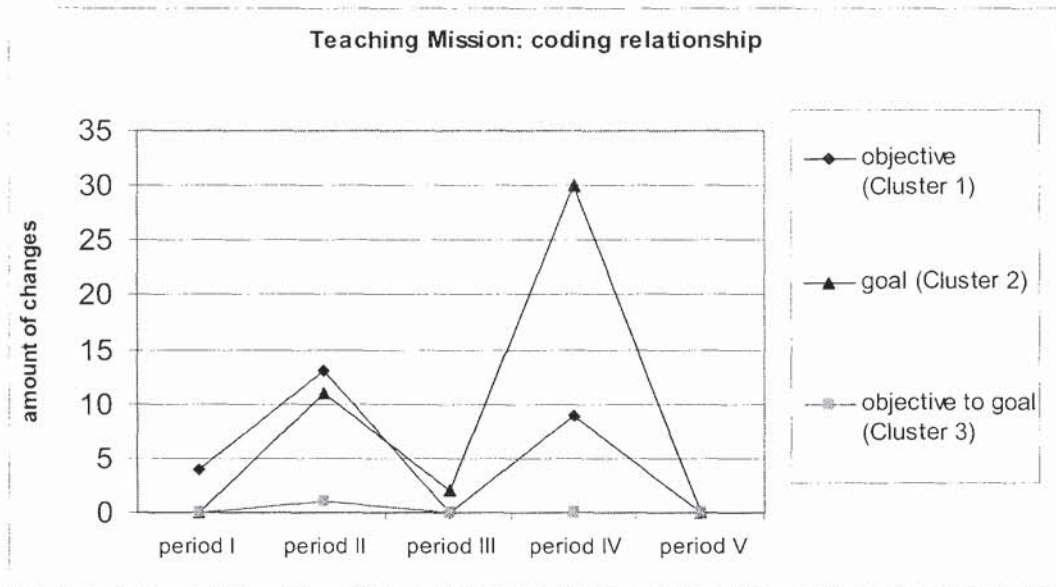


Chart 4.9: Teaching Mission: changes by content level across Unico's plan production cycle

4.4.3.3 Third Stream Mission

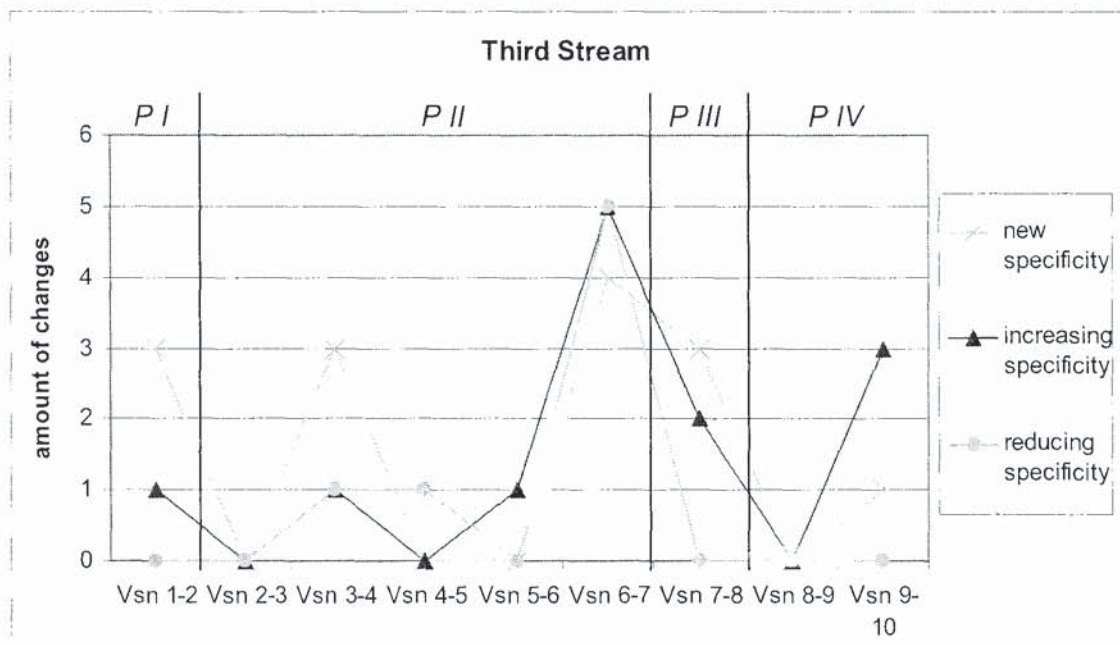


Chart 4.10: Third Stream – types of content change over time

The Third Stream Mission developed as each type of content change followed its distinct pattern (see Chart 4.10). Version 2 and 3 remained identical as changes only affected the Research Mission. As Version 2 was discussed at a dedicated research forum (cf., Table 3.2), changes were only made to the Research Mission. Most changes resulting in new specificity were manifested in Version 7 (Vsn 6-7). Alterations leading to increasing specificity peaked in Version 6 (Vsn 6-7) and 9 (Vsn 9-10). Content became more

ambiguously expressed in Version 5 (Vsn 4-5). In total, a similar number of new objectives and goals were added as the number of content amendments, leading to increasing specificity, indicating this ongoing ambiguity. Despite content becoming more ambiguous from Version 4 to 5, the Third Stream Mission's content became increasingly detailed (see Chart 4.9). Most content changes to a version occurred at the transition from PowerPoint® to MS Word® (Vsn 6-7). Similarly to the Teaching Mission, a new Head for the Third Mission was recruited in period IV. S/he already held a post responsible for developing the Third Mission prior to his/her appointment. Also, round-tables were held at the two-day strategy away day with senior academics and administrators. However, the new Head for Third Stream did not amend respective content in the strategic plan. While a reading of the quantitative illustration of content changes in the Third Stream Mission may suggest a straightforward development, the opposite was the case. The majority of content elaborations occurred continuously at the objective level (see Chart 4.11; for supporting Table see Appendix F). This illustrates that fixation of objectives was difficult. Furthermore, it shows that hardly any detail, in terms of goals, was added to the set objectives.

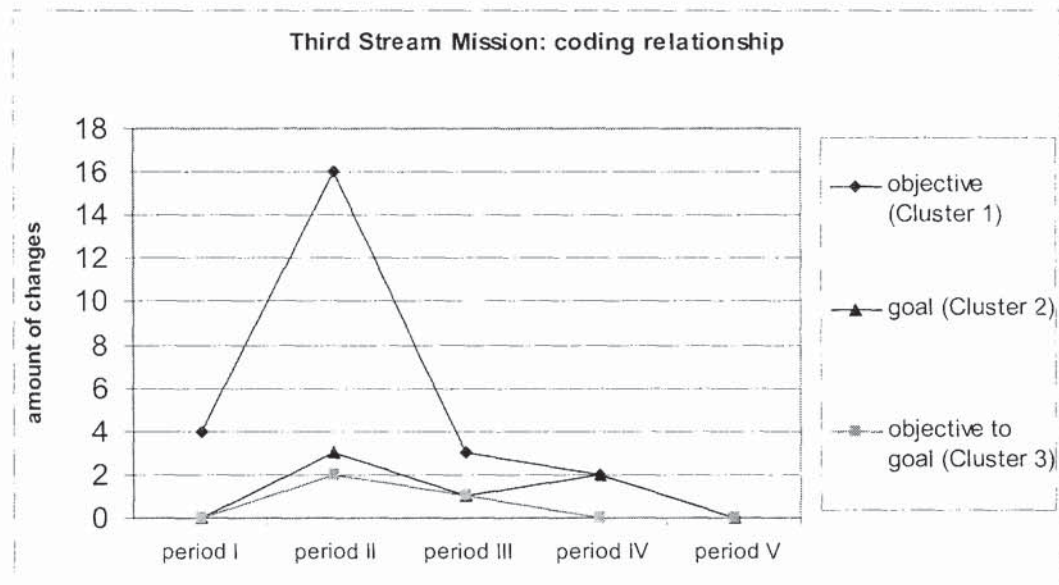


Chart 4.11: Third Stream Mission: changes by content level across Unico's plan production cycle

The following two parts illustrate similarities and difference across the three Missions' development.

#### 4.4.3.4 Similarities across Unico's three Missions

Based on the illustration of each Mission's development, similarities will be outlined. First, the majority of content changes made to existing statements in Version 6 resulted in



reducing specificity across the three Missions' evolution (see Charts 4.6, 4.8, 4.10). It occurred as statements were expressed more ambiguously or they were removed altogether from the Mission. It happened at the end of the university-wide consultation (period II) and also coincided with the shift in communication technology moving from PowerPoint® to MS Word®. Second, the Research and Teaching Missions' development was shaped by a steep increase in new content being added at the last round of content alterations (Vsn 9-10). The amount of changes in period IV exceeded the ones made after the university-wide consultation (period II). As changes made to Version 9 were manifested in the plan's last version, which provided the basis for approval by Senate and Council, they strongly shaped the conveyed meaning of Unico's final plan. For an illustration, the amount of content changes that were made to Teaching Mission (Vsn 9-10) was similar to the total number of amendments during the entire Third Stream's development (Vsn 1- to 10). Third, content elaborations manifesting the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Mission shifted according to its level. While content amendments occurred mainly at the objective level in periods I and II; periods III and IV were characterised by changes to the goals. Fourth, the content constituting the three Missions became increasingly detailed as time progressed during the plan production cycle. About 80% of all content changes resulted in detail being added either through new content (new specificity) or through amending an existing content (increasing specificity). Despite the large number of changes leading to reducing specificity in Version 6 (Vsn 6-7), they occurred least across the three Missions throughout the plan production cycle.

#### 4.4.3.5 Differences across Unico's three Missions

Due to the variation in the number of content changes per period, there were different waves during which content amendments were made. Following the first version of Unico's strategic plan, large numbers of content changes occurred in periods II and III within each Mission. The steep decrease of content changes in period IV was then followed by another upsurge of content amendments that were manifested in the last version of the strategic plan. The Third Stream Mission however was an exception in that there were hardly any content changes in period IV when compared to the development of the Research and Teaching Mission.

Despite overall similarities between the three Missions' developments, the Third Stream Mission proved to be an outlier in terms of its development. Overall, the least content amendments, including introducing new objectives or goals, were made in the Third Stream Mission (see Table 4.9). This shows that the least elaborations were made to Unico's Third

Stream Mission. No content amendments were made to Versions 7 to 9 that led to *reducing specificity* (see Chart 4.10). Content amendments made to existing statements led only to *increasing specificity* within these last two periods of Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Additionally, while, in the Research and Teaching Missions most content amendments were made in the last iteration of Unico's strategic plan, barely any content amendments were made in the Third Stream Mission. Not surprisingly, Unico's Third Stream Mission, as manifested in its final plan, contained the least strategic content compared to the Research and Teaching Mission. This development is substantiated when looking at the number of words, objectives and goals that articulated Unico's strategic content for the Third Stream Mission (see Charts 4.1 to 4.3). Aspects of the Third Stream's content development will be further explained in Chapter 5 (see sub-section 5.2.2).

#### 4.4.4 Summary

The third sub-section shows that the plan's content became more detailed as time progressed. Firstly, it was illustrated by the shift at the content level. The first two periods of the plan production cycle were characterised by changes at the level of objectives. Thereafter, content changes at the goal level dominated the production process. This illustrates that content expressing objectives across Unico's Mission became fixated as time progressed. In periods III and IV, content expressing how to achieve these objectives was elaborated. In period V, there were no content amendments made in any of Unico's three Missions. Secondly, looking at the types of content change shows that content expressing Unico's Mission became more detailed throughout the plan production cycle. This is illustrated by the constant introduction of new content (new specificity) and the dominance of changes to an existing statement to increase its specificity (increasing specificity).

While the fixation of the plan's content occurred across Unico's three Missions, each Mission had its distinct path of content development. The Research and Teaching Mission developed similarly with respect to the amount of elaborations and a shift in content level throughout the plan production cycle. The first two periods were characterised by content elaborations at the objective level followed by the development of goals. In the last round of content alterations (Vsn 9-10), there was a huge upsurge of content changes compared to any changes made to previous versions. In comparison, the Third Stream Mission provided an outlier in terms of its content evolution. The total number of content changes was almost half compared to those occurring at the Research and Teaching Mission. Thus, much less content elaboration constituted the Third Stream Mission's content development. Moreover, content changes at the objective level dominated content alterations.



## 4.5 Unico's espoused strategic directions

The fourth section illustrates that Unico's espoused strategic direction shifted during the production cycle. Based on the first section of Chapter 4, we have seen that a Mission's espoused strategic direction was fixated in the form of objectives. I will now introduce the notion of a *strategic theme*, which provides the basis for following the development of Unico's espoused strategic direction during the production cycle and across Unico's three Missions.

### 4.5.1 Strategic themes

In order to identify whether there were shifts to Unico's espoused strategic direction during the planning production cycle, I looked at the development of statements that were manifested at the objective level (cf., part 3.4.2.2). Thus, the actual formulations that constituted each individual objective became the focus of the analysis. One objective may thereby consist of several strategic contents. A distinct strategic content or aim is henceforth referred to as a *strategic theme*. Let me draw upon an example to illustrate the term of *strategic themes*. One of the objectives that was expressed in the Third Stream Mission (Version 1) stated “- spin-out and exploitation of Unico's research IP[Intellectual Property] in collaboration with Science Park” consisted of three *strategic themes*: “spin-out”; “exploitation of Unico's research IP” and “collaboration with Science Park”. As we have seen, an objective may therefore convey several *strategic themes*. Table 4.10 illustrates the number of *strategic themes* across the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Mission in Version 1 and Version 10. We can see that the number of strategic themes increased in each of Unico's three Missions. In the last version of the strategic plan (Version 10), the strategic direction in Teaching was expressed in nine themes, whereas it was expressed in eight themes within the Research and Third Stream Mission. This again illustrates that Unico's espoused strategic directions became elaborated as time progressed. Patterns of strategic themes' development across the Research, Teaching and Third Mission will be outlined.

	Research	Teaching	Third Stream
Version 1	4	6	6
Version 10	8	9	8

Table 4.10: Number of strategic themes in Version 1 and 10

### 4.5.2 Pattern development

In order to identify patterns for the development of *strategic themes*, I looked at the type of change that occurred at the level of objectives. Overall, 50 strategic themes were identified. These were introduced at the objective level during the strategic plan production cycle. Following the development of each *strategic theme* over time, there were five patterns that occurred across Unico's three Missions (see part 3.4.2.2). Looking at the occurrence of *strategic themes*, pattern 1 and 2 captured *strategic themes* that remained in the document once they were introduced. Pattern 3 refers to *strategic themes* that were introduced in the last version of Unico's strategic plan (Version 10). Patterns 4 and 5 captured *strategic themes* that were no longer articulated at the objective level. Due to this change, they did not manifest a Mission's espoused strategic direction anymore, but rather stated a goal or were rendered from the document altogether.

- pattern 1  
**added specificity**  
Specificity is only added to the strategic theme.
- pattern 2  
**amalgamation**  
At least one instance of increasing specificity and at least one instance of reducing specificity occurred during the strategic theme's development. Thereby, the meaning of the initial statement may not be manifested in the final version.
- pattern 3  
**new theme was introduced at last version**  
At the last iteration of Unico's strategic document a new theme is introduced.
- pattern 4  
**theme was degraded**  
A strategic theme, expressed at the objective level, becomes a goal within the same Mission.
- pattern 5  
**theme was removed**  
As a strategic theme disappears, its conveyed meaning does not express Unico's espoused strategic direction within the respective Mission.



Following, each pattern will be illustrated by drawing upon representative examples across Unico's three Missions.

#### 4.5.2.1 Pattern 1: Added specificity

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content change
Version 1 to 6	- In professionally/ vocationally focussed disciplines	Version 7	- Remain focused on disciplines of professional and vocational relevance:	Increasing specificity
Version 9	- Remain focused on disciplines of professional and vocational relevance:	Version 10	- To develop the curriculum, retaining our focus on disciplines of professional and vocational relevance, through:	Increasing specificity

Table 4.11: Teaching Mission – added specificity

Pattern 1 illustrates the development of strategic themes that remained in the plan, once added, manifesting part of a Mission's espoused strategic directions. The strategic theme's conveyed meaning thereafter constantly increased as specificity was added in one or several instance(s). Based on the account from the Teaching Mission (see Table 4.11), we can see that the strategic theme "professionally/vocationally focussed" was already part of the first version (Version 1). Looking at the theme's development, we can see that the level of detail increased, as specificity was added on two occasions. In the first instance, the statement became directive as it was expressed as "Remain focused on..." and adding the word "relevance" in relation to "professional and vocational". In the second instance "To develop the curriculum, retaining ..." was added. Most instances of *added specificity* occurred in the Third Stream Mission.

## 4.5.2.2 Pattern 2: Amalgamation

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content change
Version 1 to 2	- <u>excellent, relevant education for local students</u> – building on strong collaboration with MBC	Version 3	- <u>excellent, relevant education for local students</u> – building on success in WP and strong collaboration with MBC and other partners	Increasing specificity
Version 3	- <u>excellent, relevant education for local students</u> – building on success in WP and strong collaboration with MBC and other partners	Version 4	- <u>excellent, relevant education for local students</u> – building on success in WP and strong collaboration with MBC and other partners, supporting local schools	Increasing specificity
Version 4	- <u>excellent, relevant education for local students</u> - building on success in WP and strong collaboration with MBC and other partners, supporting local schools	Version 5	- <u>attractive for local students</u> - active in WP, strong collaboration with MBC and other partners, raising aspirations in local schools	Increasing specificity
Version 6	- <u>attractive for local students</u> - active in WP, strong collaboration with MBC and other partners, raising aspirations in local schools	Version 7	- <u>attracting local students and raising aspirations (FDs, PT mature students etc)</u>	Reducing specificity
Version 9	- <u>Attracting local students and raising aspirations (FDs, PT mature students etc)</u>	Version 10	- <u>Continuing to attract local students and raising aspirations (FDs, PT mature students etc), through</u>	Increasing specificity

Table 4.12: Third Stream Mission – amalgamation

While pattern 1 captured strategic themes where detail was consistently added, both increasing and reducing specificity occurred to strategic themes following pattern 2. Based on Table 4.12, I will illustrate how specificity is increased and reduced with respect to the same strategic theme. The objective (Version 1) consists of two strategic themes “building on strong collaboration with [local college]” and “excellent, relevant education for local students”. Thereafter, further strategic themes were added “and other partners” (Version 3) and “supporting local schools” (Version 4). In order to illustrate Pattern 2, this example focuses only on the strategic theme “excellent, relevant education for local students”. Based on Version 7, apart from “local students”, all other strategic themes were either dropped or moved in to another section within the Third Stream Mission. Once specificity was reduced from the strategic theme, further specificity was added in the last iteration (Version 10). Already, between Version 4 and Version 5 the nuances of the strategic theme have shifted, as it now states “attractive for ...” (Version 5) instead of “excellent, relevant education for ...” (Version 4). As a result of the iterations of reducing and increasing specificity, the conveyed meaning of the strategic theme shift over time. While the first statement expressed “excellent, relevant



education for local students"; the final statement manifested "Continuing to attract local students and raising aspirations (FDs, PT mature students etc)". Similar instances of *amalgamation* occur across Unico's three Missions.

#### 4.5.2.3 Pattern 3: New theme introduced at last iteration

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content change
Version 9	- none	Version 10	- Increase the national and international profile of Unico as a Centre of Excellence in[Teaching], through:	New specificity

Table 4.13: Teaching Mission –introduction of new theme in last version

Pattern 3 captured instances where new strategic themes were introduced in the last version of Unico's strategic plan. These changes thus occurred only between Version 9 and 10 (see Table 4.13). A novel espoused strategic direction is manifested in the respective Mission, as there has not been any content within the respective Mission that expresses this particular strategic direction. The example stems from the Teaching Mission and shows the introduction of a new strategic theme "- Increase the national and international profile of Unico". As Version 10 manifested Unico's finalised strategic plan, each strategic theme that was introduced at the last iteration did not change thereafter. While there were five instances where a strategic theme was introduced to Version 10, in the Research and Teaching Mission, there were none in the Third Stream Mission. Changes to the Research and Teaching Missions were due to discussions at the strategy away day in period IV.

#### 4.5.2.4 Pattern 4: Theme is degraded

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content change
Version 1 to 3	- interdisciplinary, collaborative	Version 4	- interdisciplinary, collaborative: across Schools, Universities, Countries	Increasing specificity
Version 4	- interdisciplinary, collaborative: across Schools, Universities, Countries	Version 5	- interdisciplinary and collaborative: across Schools, Universities, Nations	Un- identified
Version 6	- interdisciplinary and collaborative: across Schools, Universities, Nations	Version 7	[- Achieve international recognition for rigorous and relevant research through] -- Exploiting opportunities for interdisciplinary research (across schools, universities, nations)	Increasing specificity

Table 4.14: Research Mission – theme was degraded

Pattern 4 captures instances where a strategic theme, articulated as objective, became a goal within the same Mission. As a result, the *strategic theme* might be listed at the goal level beneath the same objective as formerly manifested, or beneath another objective. To illustrate how a *strategic theme* becomes degraded, I draw upon an example from the Research Mission (see Table 4.14). It shows that a strategic theme was listed as a goal whereas it had previously been expressed at the objective level. While specificity was added to increase the strategic theme's specificity, even in the statement manifested in Version 7, it became degraded. It was then expressed as a goal beneath another strategic theme within the Research Mission. Due to the shifting level, however, the strategic theme lost its significance in expressing Unico's espoused strategic direction. Thus, its prior development, with respect to previously occurring changes, was not considered. Most strategic themes were degraded in the Research Mission.

#### 4.5.2.5 Pattern 5: Theme is removed

There are two ways in which a *strategic theme* is removed i) a strategic theme was deleted entirely from Unico's strategic plan [pattern 5.A] or ii) a strategic theme was moved to another section within the strategic plan [pattern 5.B]. Both patterns will now be explained in more detail by drawing upon illustrative examples from the Teaching and Third Stream Missions. Most strategic themes were removed in the Third Stream Mission.



## 4.5.2.5.1 Pattern 5.A: Theme was deleted

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content change
Version 1 to 6	- Spin-out and exploitation of Unico's research IP - <u>collaboration with Science Park</u>	Version 7	[- Exploitation of Unico's Intellectual Property (IP) through knowledge transfer partnerships, licensing and spin outs]  deleted "collaboration with Science Park"	Reducing specificity

Table 4.15: Third Stream Mission – theme was deleted

Pattern 5.A captures instances in which a strategic theme is not only removed from the Mission but is deleted from the entire strategic plan (Table 4.15). The example shows that the strategic theme "collaboration with Science Park" (Version 6) did not feature in Version 7. Hence, it was no longer part of the Third Stream Mission's espoused strategic direction.

## 4.5.2.5.2 Pattern 5.B: Theme moved within plan

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content change
Version 1 to 3	- excellent, relevant education for local students – building on success in WP and strong collaboration with MBC and other partners	Version 4	- excellent, relevant education for local students – building on success in WP and strong collaboration with MBC and other partners, <u>supporting local schools</u>	Increasing specificity
Version 4	- excellent, relevant education for local students - building on success in WP and strong collaboration with MBC and other partners, <u>supporting local schools</u>	Version 5	- attractive for local students - active in WP, strong collaboration with MBC and other partners, raising <u>aspirations in local schools</u>	Increasing specificity
Version 6	- attractive for local students - active in WP, strong collaboration with MBC and other partners, <u>raising aspirations in local schools</u>	Version 7	[- attracting local students and raising aspirations (FDs, PT mature students etc)]  Annual Plan: - Mentoring of new City Academy at XXX school	Reducing specificity

Table 4.16: Third Stream Mission – theme moved within plan

Pattern 5.B captures instances where a strategic theme has been removed from the Mission only to be added to another section within Unico's strategic plan. The first instance is based on an example that was also shown in pattern 2. Focus here is on the strategic theme

“supporting local schools” introduced in Version 4 (see Table 4.16). It is then removed from the Third Stream Mission in Version 7. Its content is amended and then listed in the section of the strategic plan that manifested detailed actions for each planning year.

The second example is based on an example that occurred in the Teaching Mission (see Table 4.17). In this case, the strategic theme “where teaching excellence is celebrated”, which had been included since the first version of the strategic plan, was moved to the section that expressed detailed actions for each planning year. In both examples, a strategic theme stated a target instead of articulating an objective in Unico's final strategic plan.

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )	Content change
Version 1 to 2	- where teaching excellence is celebrated	Version 3	- where teaching excellence is supported and celebrated	Increasing specificity
Version 5	- where teaching excellence is supported and celebrated	Version 6	- where teaching excellence is developed and celebrated	Increasing specificity
Version 6	- Where teaching excellence is developed and celebrated		- none	Reducing specificity
		Version 7	Annual Plan: - Celebrate excellence in Teaching through awards, promotions etc.	

Table 4.17: Teaching Mission – theme was moved within plan

#### 4.5.3 Pattern development: a comparison

Table 4.18 provides a basis for comparison for the occurrence of the 50 identified strategic themes that were introduced at the objective level during the strategic plan production cycle. While each Mission has its distinct themes, three themes run across Unico's three Missions, “focus”; “partnerships” and “profile raising”. These feature in Version 10 across the three Missions. The final formulations manifested in Version 10 of Unico's strategic plan then provide the legitimate courses of action for the planning years to come.



Pattern	Theme development	Research	Teaching	Third Stream	TOTAL
1	Added specificity	1	2	5	8
2	Amalgamation	3	2	3	8
3	New theme(s) introduced at last iteration	5	5	0	10
4	Theme(s) was degraded	6	4	4	14
5	Theme was removed	3	2	5	10
5.A	Theme was deleted	(2)	(1)	(3)	(6)
5.B	Theme moved within plan	(1)	(1)	(2)	(4)
<b>TOTAL</b>		<i>18</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>50</i>

Table 4.18: Theme pattern development across Unico's three Missions

#### 4.5.3.1 Strategic themes across Unico's Missions

Based on the dominant patterns of how *strategic themes* developed, we have seen that there were shifts in the conveyed meaning that expressed the espoused strategic direction across the three Missions during the construction of Unico's strategic plan. These changes were reflected in several ways. Firstly, none of the strategic themes that featured in the first version of Unico's strategic plan remain totally unchanged. Additionally, there was no instance during which specificity was only reduced with respect to a strategic theme. It shows that content amendments to the terminology, articulating a strategic theme, became more detailed, rather than increasingly ambiguous. This is in line with the overall pattern of content amendments (see sub-section 4.4.2). Secondly, almost half of all strategic themes that were introduced during the production cycle were removed and hence were no longer part of manifesting a Mission's espoused direction (patterns 5.A and 5.B), or were considered as a sub-set of an objective (patterns 4). Thirdly, as new strategic themes were introduced in the last version (Version 10), the conveyed meaning of these objectives provided novel espoused strategic directions that did not feature in the Mission in any prior version of the strategic plan. Fourthly, iterations of increasing and reducing specificity in relation to the same *strategic themes* result in altering the theme's conveyed meaning (Pattern 3).

#### 4.5.3.2 Comparison across Unico's Missions

The shift in Unico's espoused strategic direction during the production cycle is also evident when looking at the evolving meaning that was constituted in the strategic themes. Even though the number of strategic themes increased (see Table 4.10), hardly any of the strategic themes that were in the first version were also manifested in the last version of Unico's strategic plan (Research: 0; Teaching: 2; Third Stream: 1).

While each Mission had its distinct development of content that was expressed in *strategic themes* (see Table 4.18), the Research and Teaching Mission also showed similarities. Due to the large amount of new specificity being added to the Research and Teaching Missions at the last iteration (see Table 4.9), it is not surprising that almost a third of the total *strategic themes* were introduced in Version 10 (see Table 4.18). The outlier position of the Third Stream Mission is substantiated when looking at the development of *strategic themes*. On the one hand, most *strategic themes* remained in the Mission, with its content being amended in light of increasing specificity. On the other hand, the same number of strategic themes disappeared. Overall, the number of *strategic themes* that were removed from the objective level exceeded the number of existing *strategic themes* that were amended. In line with previous findings, there were no instances where a new strategic theme was introduced at the last iteration of Unico's strategic plan. Hence, the Third Stream's espoused strategic direction remained similar during the last periods of the production cycle.

#### 4.5.4 Summary

Section four shows that Unico's espoused strategic directions shifted according to five patterns. These occurred across the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Missions. While the number of strategic themes increased (see Table 4.10), hardly any of the strategic themes that were part of the first version were also manifested in the last version of Unico's strategic plan. Almost half of all strategic themes that were introduced during the production cycle were removed and hence were no longer part of manifesting a Mission's espoused direction, or were considered as a sub-set of an objective. Moreover, a large number of strategic themes was introduced to Unico's final version. Findings in section four again substantiate that changes to the plan's content resulted in a shift in meaning, rather being symbolic without any effect on the conveyed meaning.

#### 4.6 Summary to Chapter 4

Findings in Chapter 4 illustrate that the strategic plan's evolution occurred as content was changed at the level of objectives and goals. These resulted in shifts to the strategic plan's conveyed meaning. The level of detail therefore increased during the strategic plan production cycle. Furthermore, there were shifts of Unico's espoused strategic direction.



Findings also showed that each Mission had its distinct development, whereas the Third Stream Mission provided an outlier position.

Looking at the types of content change across Unico's three Missions, findings shows i) how content became amended; ii) that effects to the strategic plan's conveyed meaning resulted from these content changes and iii) the occurrence of dominant patterns of content changes across periods. The development of Unico's strategic plan was determined by 182 content changes that occurred during its production cycle. Through a closer examination of each content change I identified that a content amendment not only altered the actual wording, but also had an effect on the strategic plan's conveyed meaning. In order to detect whether a content change resulted in a semantic change, I compared the objective or goal in version  $n - 1$  with the ones that were manifested in a subsequent version (version  $n$ ). Out of the total of 182 content changes, I identified that 169 of these resulted in a change to the strategic plan's conveyed meaning, which then provided the basis for my analysis. A content change could result from two sources, either a new content was added to version  $n$  or an existing statement (as per version  $n-1$ ) became amended. If a new content was added to the strategic plan, its conveyed meaning became more specific in terms of expressing Unico's strategic direction. Two types of change – *increasing specificity* and *reducing specificity* - could occur once an existing content was amended. Looking at the amount of each type of content change, showed that half of all content amendments stemmed from new content being added (*new specificity*). Amending existing content resulted mostly in increasing the level of detail. Hence, *new specificity* and *increasing specificity* were the two dominant types of content change that occurred across Unico's three Missions (see Table 4.8). Comparing their amount per period illustrated that the amount of content changes that were made to versions of the strategic plan in period II and III were similar. In period IV there was a steep decline in the number of content changes. Most content changes, however, were made to the last version of Unico's strategic plan (period V). Furthermore, the amount of *reducing specificity* exceeded *increasing specificity* in the version that appeared in period III. At all other periods, however, content changes leading to *increasing specificity* occurred more often than reducing specificity.

We have also seen that the strategic plan's conveyed meaning became more specific as time progressed. This is evident when looking at i) the content level of the evolving strategic plan and ii) the types of content changes that were made during the production cycle (see Table 4.19). An increase in the level of detail was reflected not only in the in the amount of words (see Chart 4.3) but also in objectives (see Chart 4.1) and goals (see Chart 4.2). Furthermore,

the large amount of increasing specificity, as compared to reducing specificity in conjunction with the large number of new specificity being introduced, especially during the last round of content alterations (period IV), showed that the conveyed meaning that is manifested in each version  $n$  became more specific compared to the content that was expressed in objectives and goals in version  $n-1$ . Additionally, findings on the level of content change substantiate that the strategic plan's conveyed meaning became more specific over time. In the section on the level of content changes' occurrence, we have seen that the level at which the content amendments occurred shifted during Unico's strategic plan production cycle (see Chart 4.4). The first two periods were characterised by content amendments made at the level of objectives. Periods III and IV were then dominated by content changes at the goal level. Hence, Unico's espoused strategic direction seemed to be fixated already, as less content changes occurred during the last two periods, compared to the first three periods. Most content changes in periods IV and V then occurred at the detailed level manifested in goals.

		Period I	Period II	Period III	Period IV	Period V
Content development	Description	Set parameters	Open parameters	Increase specificity of parameters	Beginning to close parameters	Only very precise content changes
	Dominant	Objective	Objective	Goal	Goal	None
	Effect	New specificity	Increasing specificity	New specificity	New specificity	None

Table 4.19: Characteristics of content amendments during Unico's production cycle

In the last section of my analysis, I illustrated that Unico's espoused strategic direction shifted between the initial and the final version of its strategic plan. Thus, I focused solely on changes that occurred at the objective level across the three Missions. Shifts in Unico's espoused strategic direction resulted from the several content changes that occurred during the planning production cycle. Thus, none of the strategic themes that featured in the first version of Unico's strategic plan remained totally unchanged. Furthermore, through the introduction of new *strategic themes* at the last iteration, novel strategic directions were added to the Research and Teaching Missions. Additionally, at least a third of all strategic themes that featured at one point at the objective level were either degraded as a goal or disappeared entirely from the respective Mission. While the number of strategic themes increased over time, the content may not be recognised when comparing the objectives that



featured in the first version with the ones that were manifested in Version 10 of Unico's strategic plan.

In order to look at the development of each Mission, I went beyond examining the content level by focusing on the types of content change. We have seen that while each Mission had its distinct development, there were also similarities across the three Missions with respect to i) the content changes; and ii) the shift at the content level. The dominant type of content change was new specificity being added, which occurred at any time during the strategic plan production cycle. Looking at content changes that were made to existing statements showed that specificity was added (increasing specificity) rather than reduced (reducing specificity). In particular, the development of the Research and Teaching Mission were very closely aligned in terms of the amount of content changes, as most were manifested in the last version of Unico's strategic plan. Furthermore, both Missions' strategic themes followed similar patterns. Comparing the three Missions showed that the total amount of content amendments that were made to existing statements exceeded the amount of new specificity being added in the Research and Third Stream Mission, whereas the opposite was the case during the Teaching Mission's development. A cross-comparison also highlighted the outlier position of the Third Stream Mission. Fewer content changes occurred, with hardly any amendments, being made during the last periods of the production cycle. This is substantiated when looking at the content level of the Third Stream Mission. While the number of objectives and the conveyed strategic themes in Version 10 were similar across Unico three Missions, the number of goals and the sum of words was far lower than in the Research and Teaching Mission. The development of strategic themes at the objective level also illustrated different patterns from the Research and Teaching Mission. While most *strategic themes* remained in the Mission, with its content being amended in light of increasing specificity, the same number of strategic themes disappeared.

## CHAPTER 5

### The relationship of talk and text

#### 5.1 Introduction

While findings in Chapter 4 were based on the text changes across Unico's strategic plan production cycle, in Chapter 5 the level of analysis shifts to the interrelation of talk and text. *Talk* is considered as any orally expressed discourse. It occurs in a current, immediate context-bound situation. Any discourse or ideas expressed in writing are referred to as *text* (Ricoeur 1981). A text may be based on anterior talk and/or an author's individual ideas which he/she may not have voiced before. Focal textual artefacts are meeting minutes and Unico's ten versions of the strategic plan.

Chapter 5 is structured in two sections. The first section illustrates the talk and text relationship in more detail. At a conceptual level I distinguish between the *text to talk* relation and the *talk to text* relation in order to illustrate the talk and text interplay. The *text to talk* relation provides the basis for showing the structuring effects of text on the enacted topics and when talk in relation to a particular strategic plan's content occurred. In order to demonstrate the *talk to text* relation, Ricoeur's (1981) notion of recontextualisation and decontextualisation will be introduced. The notion of recontextualisation provides the basis for showing how individuals enacted the strategic plan's content and how talk then unfolded. The notion of decontextualisation (Ricoeur 1981) shows how talk has the ability to shape the future strategic plan's content.

The second section presents a sequential view of the inter-relation of talk and text. It illustrates that decontextualisation occurs as a staged process, which is termed 'filtering'. This highlights the dominant position of the text producers, as they control the strategic plan production. Furthermore, it outlines the implications for the plan's evolving content, which elaborates on findings obtained in Chapter 4. Additionally, it demonstrates the implications of the recurring interplay of talk and text for the plan production cycle. In order to demonstrate the longitudinal and comparative basis for my analysis, talk extracts from the first section of my analysis will be drawn upon. Selected examples represent different stages



within Unico's strategic plan production cycle (see Table 3.1 in part 3.4.2.1) and, taken together, also show the evolving nature of the text/talk relationship over time.

## 5.2 Interplay of talk and text

The first section illustrates the interplay of talk and text by analytically differentiating between i) a *text to talk* relation and ii) a *talk to text* relation. Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation provide the basis for demonstrating the talk to text relation. These findings give a detailed analysis of how strategic planning activities are constituted in a communicative process.

### 5.2.1 Text to talk relation

Unico's strategic plan, in the form of documents and PowerPoints®, provided the basis for discussion of strategic content in meetings. Focusing on the *text to talk* relation demonstrates the role of Unico's strategic plan and its content in relation to the occurrence of talk. How the order and content of a text structure the sequence and the topics being enacted in talk, is then illustrated. This relationship however has to be seen as being embedded in the above mentioned contextual characteristics.

In order to provide illustrative examples of the text to talk relation, I have drawn upon three extracts from one meeting transcript. In the example, I present talk extracts which occurred during a top management team meeting during period III. Unico's top management team consisted of eight members representing senior academics and administrators. The meeting was dedicated to discussing the current state of the strategic plan's content, which had been amended in light of comments that were voiced during university-wide consultations in period II. At the meeting in period III, guiding questions in relation to the text's content were *Is there anything missing?* or *Do we need to reformulate?*. Hence, based on the talk during this meeting, some parts of the strategy text were changed. During this meeting in period III, the top management team discussed the formulation of the plan, which consisted of various objectives, such as the Research Mission, or the Teaching Mission. Let us recap from Chapter 4, each Mission consists of several objectives, which in turn may be followed by goals. Objectives and goals thus expressed the strategic direction in more detail.

Extract 1 {meeting minute 52.00}

... Can we move on to five [the Research Mission] ... (Director of Research/Deputy VC)

Extract 2 {meeting minute 54.28}

... where it says "where appropriate commercialise the results", is it ... (Finance Director)

Extract 3 {meeting minute 65.00}

... Right, let's go onto [the Teaching Mission] ... (Director of Research/Deputy VC)

Extracts 1 to 3 illustrate in detail how a text is enacted in talk. A text's enactment occurs as a speaker refers to a particular objective or goal in the text. Through this enactment, a particular content becomes the subject of the present discussion. It thus shapes, and at the same time restricts, the current talk by setting the specific content of the immediate discussion. There are several ways that a text may be enacted. Extracts 1 and 3 show how the Director of Research/Deputy VC enacts the content of a Mission. In Extract 1, the Deputy VC does not refer to the name of the objective as Research Mission but only mentions the number of the particular objective. The subsequent talk then focuses on specific objectives and goals as expressed in the Research Mission (for example see extract 2). The discussion on specific content listed in Unico's Research Mission continues until the Deputy VC invokes another objective (see Extract 3). Furthermore, Extract 2 illustrates how the Finance Director invokes a particular objective, which was expressed in the Research Mission. The Finance Director cites Unico's strategy text verbatim ("where appropriate commercialise results through"), thus creating a specific reference to the objective under discussion. Following each enactment, the talk by other participants then focuses on this specific goal until another goal or objective is invoked.

Extracts 1 to 3 also illustrate how the talk is shaped by the structure and sequence of the strategy text's content. While there was no specific agenda for this particular meeting in period III, the order of the objectives in the document had a structuring effect on the discussions. The meeting started by discussing the Vision and finished once there were no further comments on any goal of the last objective. The structuring effect of the strategic plan was not exceptional in this meeting. During meetings in other periods, the order of the objectives in the document also structured the order of discussion, even to the extent of creating the sequence for specific break-out sessions and the topics to be discussed during



break-outs. For instance at the senior management and recently appointed staff away day in period II, the sequence of break-out sessions was arranged according to the order of the Missions that were manifested in Version 4. Thus, it started with forty minutes of group discussions on Research, followed by forty minutes on Teaching and lastly addressing the Third Stream Mission. At other away days, round-table discussions per Mission occurred at the same time, whereby participants were arranged to the relevant tables.

### **5.2.2 Talk to text relation: recontextualisation**

Attention is now drawn to the *talk to text* relation, based upon Ricoeur's (1981) notion of recontextualisation. Recontextualisation occurs as individuals enact the strategic plan's content in their talk. The strategy text's content provides the basis for recontextualisation, as an individual makes explicit his/her interpretation of the current strategy text in the present situation. This present situation involves recontextualising because it differs from the context that led to the preceding construction of the text's content. In this section, I will show how talk unfolds as individuals recontextualise a particular plan's content. This may then result in competing interpretations, or individuals may reveal difficulties to recontextualise Unico's plan. In order to illustrate recontextualisation, I provide illustrative examples where individuals enact a particular strategic plan's content from one of the three Missions.

The first example shows that talk may unfold in any direction once a particular content is enacted in talk. It is based on the top management team meeting during period III and extends the talk illustrated in Extract 2. This example shows a discussion that focuses on one particular objective (" - where appropriate commercialise results") as manifested in Unico's Research Mission. The strategic plan's content is enacted by the Finance Director and is then followed by utterances from Departmental Head C and the Deputy VC. When the Finance Director enacts the objective's content example, we can see that the enactment is shaped by the meeting's guiding question *Is there anything missing?/ Do we need to re-formulate?*

Extract 4

- 1 Finance Director: ... where it says "*where appropriate commercialise the results*",  
 2 is it just where appropriate or should we be encouraging people  
 3 to focus their research into areas that can be commercialised?  
 4 Departmental Head C: Well that's why I put down foster entrepreneurship.  
 5 Finance Director: Rather than just doing blue sky stuff that ...  
 6 Departmental Head C: Yeah, fostering entrepreneurship whether it's the  
 7 perspective ... because to me, "*understanding and responding*  
 8 *to the needs of user communities*" is just consultancy. We want  
 9 more than that you know, we want people to recognise that they  
 10 may have potential to commercialise.  
 11 Deputy VC: I would not want to stop people doing blue-skies research, if they  
 12 can get the funding from the research councils or wherever to  
 13 actually do that.  
 14 Departmental Head C: Yeah, but blue-sky research often does result in  
 15 commercial application. The only trouble is, other academics  
 16 don't recognise it most of the time unless they're quite astute. To  
 17 my knowledge it was never really ... you know, the research I  
 18 can gather was obviously to look at new types of drugs, but it  
 19 was only somebody saying 'We've got a good idea here, let's  
 20 patent it first before we go any further' ...  
 21 Deputy VC: But when you develop a new intervention like that, I would have  
 22 thought all the time you'd got the view that you actually want to  
 23 do some good for society, you want to be able to help people  
 23 who've got cancer and therefore you're developing something,  
 24 you're doing research in something that's going to have some  
 25 sort of benefit.  
 26 Departmental Head C: You know, the key phrase ... patent lawyers, is when they  
 27 look at their workers' papers when they publish it, before or after  
 28 patenting, is that giveaway sentence at the end of the paper  
 29 which ruins the patent, and academics are often not aware of  
 30 that and publish things. All I'm really saying is that fostering  
 31 entrepreneurship ... blue-sky research is fine ...  
 32 Deputy VC: Well let's put another bullet point in there, yeah. But I really do  
 33 think it's "*where appropriate*", because in some instances it may  
 34 not be appropriate. In some of [Department D's] research which  
 35 is going on there may just not be commercial applications for it.  
 36 Some of the things that are going on in [sub group of  
 37 Department D], there may not be commercial applications.  
 38 Departmental Head C: They're limited areas though.  
 39 Departmental Head A: Anyway, we're agreed, foster entrepreneurship and where  
 40 appropriate commercialise.  
 41 Deputy VC: Yeah. So any other ...

I will now explain Extract 4, showing how three top management team members recontextualised this particular content, expressed in the Research Mission. The objective had already been in the document for six months. It is invoked by the Finance Director (see line 1), who suggests amending the current formulation of Unico's strategic direction (in Version 7) so that it expresses a focus on all research being commercially viable and avoiding 'blue skies research' (line 5), which might not result in commercial benefits. Departmental Head C then takes the initiative, suggesting adding 'foster entrepreneurship'. The Deputy VC then reveals his intentions that Unico's strategic direction should not



neglect ‘blue skies research’ (lines 11 to 13), countering the Finance Director’s suggestion. Furthermore, Departmental Head C asserts ‘but blue-sky research often does result in commercial application’ (lines 14 to 15) supported by examples from his/her own research area (lines 17 to 19). As the commercialising aspect may not be applicable to all of Unico’s research activities (see lines 31 to 36), the Deputy VC expresses a strong notion to retain “where appropriate”. Departmental Head A then enters the talk summing up the various statements made by Departmental Head C and the Deputy VC (lines 38 to 39), which do not feature any of the Finance Director’s suggestions about providing a specific commercial focus to research.

Based on the talk illustrated in Extract 4, we have seen that there are multiple interpretations of a particular strategic plan’s content; in this case in form of an objective. As individuals expressed their views, they revealed their intentions in relation to the current text, which results in suggestions to make content amendments to the next version of strategic plan. In relation to the meeting’s guiding question, the example shows three potential suggestions for how the objective could be amended a) a sole focus on research, which is commercially viable (Finance Director); b) a slight amendment to the goal by introducing the notion of entrepreneurship (Departmental Head C); and c) an increasing recognition for blue skies research (Deputy VC). Not to alter the text would also be another alternative.

While the first example illustrates how recontextualisation occurs, it also shows that individuals had difficulties recontextualising the strategic plan’s content. For illustrative purposes, both extracts of meetings and interview data will be used. This will demonstrate that individuals may also face difficulties in recontextualising, which may stem from ambiguity/lack of specificity of the plan’s content. It also demonstrates how individuals recontextualise the same strategic plan’s content at different points in time during the production cycle. The example is based on the Third Stream Mission’s title statement. As we have seen in Chapter 4, the strategic plan’s content, describing the espoused strategic direction, was listed in several objectives. The title statement, however, outlined the general espoused strategic direction of the respective Mission. Let us also recall that the Third Stream Mission had been Consultancy in past strategic plans, hence it formed a novel strategic direction.

In the first three versions, during Unico’s strategic plan production cycle, the title stated “At the heart of regeneration for [UK City] and [UK region]”. It then changed and a new statement was introduced in Version 4. I will use the VC’s words, which were used

to announce a new title for the Third Stream Mission. The example stems from a strategy away day in period II. During the restricted meeting mode, the VC gave a presentation on the Third Stream Mission. It starts with '*The final of the three areas was this issue of ... this not very useful term but I coined this 'Community Engagement' but probably 'Engagement' is a better term*'. After the VC's short presentation of the Third Stream Mission, meeting delegates went in to break-out groups to discuss the strategic plan's content in relation to the key questions that were posed and emphasised during the presentation.

Using Extract 5, I will show the difficulty in recontextualising the Third Stream Mission's espoused strategic direction. It came out of a top management team meeting in period III, which gave each team member the opportunity to outline their recontextualisations on *Do we need to reformulate?* the current formulations of the strategic plan. As we have seen in the section on the *text to talk* relation, during the top management team meeting in period III, the sequence of the strategic plan's content allowed the structure of the talk to unfold at the meeting.



Extract 5

- 1 Deputy VC: Okay. Move onto the third element of the missing, a centre of  
 2 excellence [in Third Stream]. ... are there any major issues ...
- 3 Departmental Head A: Just a comment about the strategy, this is the area that I  
 4 find most amorphous always and that I have most difficulty  
 5 translating into well what would we do in our department. I mean  
 6 of course we're doing things, but I have most difficulty translating  
 7 this one of the three into what we need to be doing.
- 8 Departmental Head D: I also have to come back to the ... which I just raised, ...  
 9 which was about responding to government agendas in areas  
 10 other than research. And I wonder whether things like [recent  
 11 project in Department D], which is not just necessarily [UK City]  
 12 and [UK region] but the translation network is a national one, work  
 13 on Islam would be a national agenda. How are we going to fill that  
 14 in here? It's community engagement, not just in the [UK region].
- 15 Deputy VC: Yes, yes.
- 16 Departmental Head C: Yeah, I mean the other thing I don't see in there is that  
 17 the community also involves other universities within the [UK  
 18 region] and the other thing that it's important is obviously the  
 19 health sector in the [UK region], and somehow we haven't got that.
- 20 Deputy VC: I think this is another area where [the Head of Third Stream] would  
 21 value a breakout session with some brainstorming as to how do  
 22 we actively become more engaged in the community and what do  
 23 we mean by the community, is it restricted to local or is it national,  
 24 international?
- 25 VC: Well this definitely means the sort of city regional community, this  
 26 is about engaging with where we are.
- 27 Deputy VC: That's where we start from, yeah.
- 28 VC: This is not about engaging internationally, although there may well  
 29 be an engaging internationally element to all three of these in  
 30 terms of engaging internationally in comparing what's happening  
 31 in the city region here with what's happening in Sweden and  
 32 things. But if this gets extended to being international  
 33 engagement it's not the subject that we meant it to be.

The Deputy VC's enactment of the Third Stream Mission, followed by the question 'are there any major issues?' (line 2) demonstrates how the talk at the top management meeting was shaped by the meeting's guiding question. Departmental Head A was then the first top management team member to respond. Departmental Head A claimed to 'have most difficulty translating this one of the three {Missions} into what we {as Department A} need to be doing' (lines 6 to 7). Problems with the espoused strategic intentions were thereafter also reflected in the ensuing utterances by Departmental Head D, the Deputy VC and the VC. However, no-one, apart from Departmental Head A, directly raised concerns about the term Community Engagement that stated the espoused strategic direction of the Third Stream Mission. Departmental Head D reveals difficulties in recontextualising as s/he asks whether one of the recent projects would be considered as contributing to the espoused strategic direction or not. In response to Departmental Head D's query, the VC gives his/her

interpretation of the situation as ‘this definitely means the sort of city regional community’ (line 25). The Deputy VC then suggests hosting a break-out session at an up-coming strategy away that can look at ‘what do we mean by the community, is it restricted to local or is it national, international?’ (lines 22 to 24). This highlights the difficulty of capturing the boundaries of the espoused strategic direction, which is also discernable in subsequent utterances. While the Deputy VC states that the regional community is ‘where we start from’ (lines 27), the VC tries to set boundaries in stating that that it ‘is not about engaging internationally ... if this gets extended to being international engagement it’s not the subject that we meant it to be’ (lines 28 to 33).

Department Head A’s statement however illustrates the difficulty of recontextualising the Third Stream Mission’s espoused strategic direction. The difficulty of recontextualising surfaces again during a meeting of the Council in period V. The purpose of the meeting here was to endorse Unico’s strategic plan. Each member of the governing body thus received Version 10 of Unico’s strategic plan in advance of the event. On the day, the VC gave a short overview of the strategic plan’s content. The governing body’s chairman then gave members the opportunity to comment on the document’s content.

#### Extract 6

- 1 non-executive member A: What is the definition of ‘community’ in  
 2 community engagement? I would prefer to have the in  
 3 word regional there ...  
 4 VC: Community starts from engaging with primary schools to  
 5 colleges and everything in between  
 6 non-executive member A: Is community geographical?  
 7 VC: Yes, the City and around  
 8 non-executive member A: Could you add City region?

Extract 6 illustrates Member A’s difficulty in recontextualising the term Community Engagement. Thus s/he asked for a definition of the term “community”. It seems that Member A still has difficulties with the term, even after the VC provides a definition (lines 4 to 5). Hence, Member A asked further ‘Is community geographical?’ (line 6). Following the VC’s response s/he then suggests adding ‘City region’ (line 8) to the existing statement. Member A’s last statement is not followed by any response. The Chairman then calls another non-executive team member, which leads to the conversation shifting to another strategic plan’s content. Once, there have been no further questions, the strategic plan is endorsed, without any change to its content.



Extracts 5 and 6 highlight the difficulty of recontextualising the espoused strategic direction of the Third Stream Mission. I will now draw upon interview data to substantiate the difficulty members of Unico had in recontextualising the Third Stream Mission's espoused strategic direction. Top management team members' interpretations of the term Community Engagement are captured in the below mentioned verbatim statements.

*'...my view is it incorporates everything we do from engaging with children in local schools ... it's one part of community engagement. I think it also covers volunteering by students and staff ... I then see it as engaging with small companies locally ... Through things like the knowledge transfer partnerships, industrial case awards with local companies ... . I see it as engaging with local companies to provide continuing professional development ... And then of course there are all the things we do with Regional Development Agency .... So it's a very complicated jam jar if you know what I mean, full of ... you know, full of things ... '* [VC, Interview 37, period III]

*'I think community engagement was a phrase that perhaps people didn't fully appreciate what it meant. And we've got to be absolutely clear when we talk about third stream community engagement business participation, commercialisation, whatever and we've got to get that more clearly articulated inside the university, in terms of a set of strategic objectives going forward that tells people exactly what we're going to be doing and how we're going to be doing it'* [Director for Third Stream area, Interview 60, period V]

*'I don't feel that we're clear enough yet, as a university or as a department, on what that means ... It still seems to me to mean lots of different things to lots of different people and it still seems to me that there are not clear targets yet in that area'* [Departmental Head A, Interview 56, period V]

*'Because it can mean so many different things, community engagement. It can be research, it can be recruitment, it can be support, widening participation. It can be all sorts of things. So that's the difficulty really'* [Departmental Head D, Interview 67, period V]

The first quote demonstrates the broadness of Unico's espoused strategic direction, with the VC describing it as *'a very complicated jam jar'*. The following three quotes then illustrate individuals' difficulties in recontextualising the term Community Engagement. Following the Deputy VC's suggestion (see lines 20 to 24 in Extract 5) there was a break-out group during the away day in period IV that looked at key questions such as *How can we have a greater impact in the region?* or *What new assets/resources do we need to develop to improve our impact?*. At an interview during period V, the Head of the Third Stream area, however, recognised that *'we've got to be absolutely clear when we talk about ... third stream ... what we're going to be doing and how we're going to be doing it'*. Quotes by Departmental Heads A and D further illustrate that the difficulties to recontextualise still remained, even at the time when the plan became endorsed, because of the term's broadness.

These difficulties then resulted in problems setting targets and measuring the espoused strategic direction in the Third Stream Mission. As Departmental Head A outlined. During an interview conducted during period V, the Deputy VC confirmed that '*It's much more difficult to measure, yes, it's much more difficult to measure*' (Interview 54). Hence, difficulties in recontextualising the espoused strategic direction during the strategic plan production cycle were then reflected in problems identifying appropriate measures and thus monitoring the Third Stream's Mission, once it was endorsed.

### **5.2.3 Talk to text relation: decontextualisation**

In the previous sections we have seen how talk unfolds in relation to the plan's content and the meeting's guiding question; this sub-section will now show that talk has the ability to shape the strategic plan's future content. Ricoeur's (1981) concept of decontextualisation, illustrates how talk leads to content changes manifested in Unico's strategic plan. As outlined in Chapter 2, decontextualisation refers to talk becoming materialised in written text. Thus, the meaning of a verbal statement is detached from the speaker's mental intentions. Additionally, the text expresses meaning without reference to the situation and context during which the talk occurred. Text thus becomes an atemporal object (Ricoeur 1981). In order to demonstrate how decontextualisation occurs, four examples have been selected. These are representative of talk that resulted in i) the introduction of a new content (new specificity); and a content amendment of an existing statement resulting in ii) increasing specificity as well as iii) reducing specificity. In order to enhance the validity, these examples are embedded within different periods across Unico's strategic plan production cycle.

#### 5.2.3.1 Decontextualisation: increasing specificity

First, it will be demonstrated how a Third Stream Mission's objective becomes amended, resulting in *increasing specificity*. The example is based on the top management meeting during period III and continues the talk that was illustrated in Extracts 5. Hence, it is shaped by the guiding questions *Do we need to re-formulate?* and *Is there anything missing?*. As illustrated above, the talk's subject focuses on the strategic plan's content that outlines the Third Stream Mission in form of objectives and goals.



## Extract 7

- 1 Departmental Head C: ... the other thing that it's important is obviously the  
 2 health sector in the [UK region], and somehow we haven't got that.  
 3 Deputy VC: We've got the "HEIs", that's "WMHEA" isn't it. But you're right,  
 4 about the service.  
 5 Departmental Head C: It's being in a strategic health authority isn't it, basically?  
 6 Deputy VC: Yeah, yeah.  
 7 Departmental Head C: I mean we just don't have any connections with any ... we  
 8 don't have any say there.  
 9 VC: So I think that's clearly one of the things ... that should be one of  
 10 our actions in this, is building our relationship; strengthening our  
 11 relationship with them.  
 12 Deputy VC: Okay.  
 ...  
 13 Departmental Head C: We've got engaging but we haven't got developing  
 14 strategic partnerships have we, which I ...  
 15 Departmental Head A: We've got partnerships.  
 16 Departmental Head C: Have we got partnerships? Where's that? Not as a bullet  
 17 point. I think that's where it should stand. Strategic partnerships  
 18 within the [UK region] I think is going to be key to ...  
 19 VC: Well where it says "*engaging with*", we should change that into  
 20 strategic partnerships I think, you're right, yes.  
 ...  
 21 VC: ... But I think your point about our engagement after the  
 22 strategic partnership with the local health authority and the local  
 23 hospitals is crucial.

The example shows that talk occurred in light of the top management team meeting's purpose. Departmental Head C's initial suggestion's finishing line 'somehow we haven't got that' (line 2) was triggered by the meeting's guiding question *Is there anything missing?*. The concepts of fixation and distanciation show how decontextualisation occurs in more detail. Based on the talk sequence (see Extract 7), the objective was amended (see Table 5.1). For instance, Departmental Head C's suggestion 'we haven't got developing strategic partnerships have we' (lines 13 to 14) was then manifested in Version 8. The talk's content became fixated as the words "... strengthening existing relationships and forging strategic partnerships with such bodies as ... Regional Strategic Health Authority and local hospitals" (Version 8) were added to the existing goal "- *engaging closely with* ..." (Version 7). Distanciation occurred as the meaning of the written statement was detached from the speakers' mental intentions (Departmental Head C; VC). Hence, in the strategic plan there is no reference to who made the actual suggestion (Departmental Head C in lines 4 and 16 to 18) or the responsive statements that then led to the actual content change (VC in lines 9 to 11; 19 to 20 and 22 to 23). The materialised objective then appeared in its decontextualised form, as the subsequent version of Unico's plan (Version 8) provided the basis for discussion during future situation(s), which involved different individuals from those who made the comment that led to the content change. There is no reference to the context-

bound and situation-based talk, upon which the content change is based. These findings about how text becomes fixated, inscribing particular courses of action that are distanced from the discussion in which they were developed, are important. Once the plan production cycle was completed, Unico's strategic plan provided the basis for legitimising courses of action, without reference to the talk which led to the manifestation of its content. Hence, textual changes such as "... forging strategic partnerships with such bodies as ... Regional Strategic Health Authority ..." (Version 8) can be seen as very important in terms of the future research directions that will be legitimate at Unico.

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version $n-1$ )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version $n$ )
Version 7	- Engaging closely with the Unico Science Park, the Regional Development Agency (AWM), The [UK City] Council, [UK City] Chamber of Commerce and Industry, The Regional Skills Partnership, Confederation of British Industry, other local HEIs (WMHEA).	Version 8	- Engaging closely, <u>strengthening existing relationships and forging strategic partnerships with such bodies as the Unico Science Park, the Regional Development Agency (AWM), The [UK City] Council, [UK City] Chamber of Commerce and Industry, The Regional Skills Partnership, Confederation of British Industry, the Regional Strategic Health Authority and local hospitals</u> , other local HEIs (WMHEA)

Table 5.1: Decontextualisation – increasing specificity - Third Stream

The example from Extract 7 further reveals the strong role of the VC and Deputy VC. While Departmental Head C suggested mentioning 'the health sector in the [UK region]' (lines 1 to 3) and including 'strategic partnerships' (lines 13 to 14), it was the VC's words (see lines 19 and 20 and 21 to 23) that were manifested in the amended objective in Version 8 (see Table 5.1). This may not be surprising, knowing that the VC and the Deputy VC had the authority to make the actual amendments to the strategic plan's content. Furthermore, the sequence of the conversation shows that either the Deputy VC or the VC actively engaged in the conversation once a comment was made. Based on Extract 7, we see that their engagement signalled agreement with Departmental Head C's suggestion. For instance by voicing 'that should be ... in this' (VC, line 9) and 'you're right, yes' (VC, line 20).

### 5.2.3.2 Decontextualisation: reducing specificity

Second, it will be shown that talk led to a content change that resulted in reducing specificity of an objective in the Research Mission. Talk illustrated in Extract 8 has been taken from one meeting in period II. During this period several meetings were held to consult on Unico's strategic plan with staff and governing bodies. This period was characterised by questions *What else should we do (or not do)?* and *How do we*



*deliver (specific actions)*? (see Table 3.1 in part 3.4.2.1), which were posed to the meetings' participants. Unico's strategic plan was thus open for amendments. The talk extract I will now draw upon occurred at a meeting with a selection of recently appointed staff. During several sessions on the day, break-out groups debated various parts of this draft plan. After each session, one or two representatives from each group relayed the discussions held within the respective break-out group. Extract 8 illustrates talk that occurred in relation to Unico's Research objective. The two Delegates enacted the following objective from the strategic plan: "- known for our international research centres in a small number of key areas" (Version 5).

#### Extract 8

A1 Delegate A: ... We also tried to discuss the ... trying to focus research into  
 A2                particular areas. We had a worry that certain small research projects  
 A3                would become very marginalised and maybe not get done even  
 A4                though they could be good earners for the university in years to come  
 A5                ...  
 .....  
 ...  
 B1 Delegate B: ... We had issues over how the university would choose its area for  
 B2                focus or its areas for focus of the research and whether that would be  
 B3                driven by the expertise that it currently has within the university which  
 B4                would generate the focus. Which may or may not be a need in the  
 B5                marketplace or it may be something worth researching which we  
 B6                could then go out to the marketplace and convince them it's  
 B7                something they should be interested in. However, as one of the other  
 B8                groups has suggested, we sought the benefit of some thematic areas  
 B9                where ... maybe for example in [Delegate B's research area], which  
 B10               would be my area, which has implications for infectious disease and  
 B11               cancer and naturally would bring together or should bring together  
 B12               interdisciplinary research with the engineers and other experts, into  
 B13               preferably not a virtual institute but a real institute where these people  
 B14               are together. ...

As a result of their comments, the objective was amended and was expressed in a new version of the strategic plan as "- known for international centres in key areas" (Version 5). I will now demonstrate the implications of this particular content change for Unico's strategic plan. If we compare the statements that expressed the same goal across these two versions, we can see that its meaning was altered. While in Version 4 of Unico's strategic plan the strategic direction on research was expressed as "- known for ... a small number of key areas" [emphasis added], in a subsequent version its focus broadened as it stated "... in key areas" (Version 5). Such content change resulted in a larger number of research areas being included in Unico's research focus. Hence, its specificity was reduced.

These textual changes were important for the participants, as the strategic plan is an authoritative text that legitimates courses of action. Both delegates expressed concerns about the anticipated strategic direction, which manifested that Unico's research would only focus on "... a small number of key areas" (Version 4). While Delegate A expressed concern without drawing upon a concrete example, Delegate B revealed reasons for concern, especially in line B9, by referring to their own research, which might not be considered as a key area and would thus imply a marginal role in Unico's research portfolio. By recontextualising the text in ways that allowed them to imbue it with meaning from their own areas of research, which might otherwise be neglected, participants could ensure that their research was included in the strategic plan and hence, imply that Unico would continue to support and provide resources to these areas. We can thus see how the specific content of Unico's strategic plan was shaped by individuals' intentions, as they were articulated in talk.

The next example (see Extract 9) also stems from the recently appointed staff strategy meeting during period II. The guiding questions thus remained. While talk illustrated in Extract 8 occurred in relation to an objective in the Research Mission, Extract 9 resulted from talk is based on an objective manifested in the Teaching Mission. Delegate C enacted the objective "- Where teaching excellence is developed and celebrated" (Version 4) in line 3. Delegate C's statement 'but wouldn't everywhere say that? I don't know if it's a very differentiating point.' (lines 3 to 4) occurred in response to the second key question that was posed in relation to each Missions' content expressed in Version 4. Being new to Unico, the VC interrupted Delegate C and asked 'Would you say that ... we supported and celebrated teaching excellence at the moment?' (lines 6 to 7). The VC again enacts the objective's content. Delegate C then reveals his/her personal recontextualisation of the objective's content in quite an illustrative way 'I mean I'm not going down the pub every night and you know, celebrating' (lines 12 to 13).

#### Key Question

1. *Is there anything here which we should not be aiming to do? If so, what and why not?*
2. *What else differentiates Unico with regard to Teaching currently?*
3. *What should we focus on to develop further our offerings in this area?*
4. *How can we profitably grow our learning and teaching activities?*
5. *What actions are needed in the next year?*
6. *Actions for the long term?*



Extract 9

- 1 Delegate: ... As we went down the list we just ... we didn't have any issue with  
 2 C any of this but we thought some of them were a bit bland you know,  
 3 "teaching excellence", yeah we agree with that but wouldn't everywhere  
 4 say that? I don't know if it's a very differentiating point. So no  
 5 problem with that. This one caused a fair ...  
 6 VC: Would you say that we had ... that we supported and celebrated  
 7 teaching excellence at the moment?  
 8 Delegate: I find it very difficult to measure it really, it sounds like you know ... yes  
 9 C and no. I mean it's ... how do you answer a question like that? I just  
 10 find it very difficult to get a handle on. You'd have to compare it to  
 11 other places I suppose and come up with some realistic measures.  
 12 But to measure how much we celebrate, I mean I'm not going down  
 13 the pub every night and you know, celebrating ...  
 (all laugh)  
 14 VC: You're a group who are doing a lot of the teaching; do you feel it's  
 15 recognised in positive ways?  
 16 Delegate: Hard to tell. I mean it's the right question to ask, I just ... you know, is  
 17 C it ... you know, as I say, no problem with it, just that my personal view  
 18 is it's just a bit bland, ...

As a result of the talk illustrated in Extract 9, the objective “- Where teaching excellence is developed and celebrated” (Version 4) was removed from the Teaching Mission and was put in to the section that outlines the specific actions for each planning year. This occurred in response to Delegate C’s comment ‘I don’t know if it’s a very differentiating point’ (line 4). Furthermore, the former objective’s content was amended to “- Celebrate excellence in Teaching through awards, promotions etc” (Version 7).

5.2.3.3 Decontextualisation: new specificity

Third, it will be illustrated how a novel goal was introduced, resulting in new specificity. The account stems from a meeting during period IV. At this meeting, a selection of more than thirty senior managers went away to discuss several objectives over three days. As with previous away days, break-out sessions were arranged in order to discuss specific issues, which were reflected in the period’s guiding questions, which were *What are the specific actions to achieve the strategic direction?* and *How do we measure it?* The following quote was taken from the reporting-back speech of the Director of Marketing & Communication, who led two forty-five minutes break-out sessions with groups of staff. It focused on *Improving Internal and External Communication* with key questions addressing the following:

Key Question

1. *How can we further improve internal communications?*
2. *How can we get the best Research stories out of the Departments?*
3. *How can we raise our profile in the Region?*

These questions were manifested in a set of slides that were presented prior to the session's start. Based on this short quote we can see how, in particular, the second key question *How can we get the best Research stories out of the Departments?* shaped the content of the discussions that were held within the break-out groups, which was then reported back in front of all delegates by the Director of Director of Marketing and Communication.

#### Extract 10

- 1 Director of Marketing ... It is felt that it would be very good practice, and again
- 2 & Communication: my department needs to pick this up, to highlight the award
- 3 winning grants because that way you get the publicity more
- 4 than once. And I think a very good example of that has been
- 5 the Index project where there has been tremendous publicity
- 6 upfront, as it's obviously a very big thing, tremendous upfront
- 7 publicity, but there'll be good publicity again whether it's as
- 8 the companies come on board and as the projects take off.
- 9 So let's announce when we get a grant. ...

The Director of Marketing & Communication's talk then resulted in a new goal that was manifested in the Research Mission in Version 10 as "-- highlighting significant grants, awards, sponsorships, prizes, fellowships etc". It was added below a novel objective "- Raise Unico's research profile in the UK, through:". The Director of Marketing & Communication did not enact an existing text's content, as there had not been an objective manifested in the Research Mission. Furthermore, the goal occurred in relation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> key questions that guided talk at the away day during period IV. Additionally, we can see that the 3<sup>rd</sup> key question on *Improving Internal and External Communication* resulted in a novel objective, that thereafter expressed another espoused strategic direction.

#### **5.2.4 Summary**

The first section of Chapter 5 shows that the strategic plan shaped both the order and topics that were enacted in talk. This occurred as individuals recontextualised the plan's content during a meeting. Recontextualisation occurred as participants in the plan production process enacted parts of the plan. Findings illustrated that recontextualisation was shaped by the situational context, such as a meeting's guiding question. Ricoeur's (1981) notion of decontextualisation provided grounds for showing that talk has the ability to shape the strategic plan's future content. However, through decontextualisation, the original speakers' intentions cannot be traced. As talk becomes materialised in text, contextual nuances embedding the talk situations are rendered. Based on these findings, we have seen that while



talked is structured by the plan, it has the ability to shape the plan's content, which is manifested in a future version.

### **5.3 Recurrent interplay between talk and text: constituting the strategic plan production cycle**

In order to fully understand how Unico's strategic plan's content evolved, we need to embed the notion of recontextualisation and decontextualisation in the production cycle. The second section of Chapter 5 demonstrates that decontextualisation occurs in a staged process. Furthermore, it illustrates implications for the strategic plan's content and implications for the strategic plan production cycle. In order to demonstrate the longitudinal and comparative basis for my analysis, I drew upon talk extracts from three periods, period II, III and V. I selected these periods as they represent different stages within the strategic plan production cycle (see Table 3.1 in part 3.4.2.1) and, taken together, also show the evolving nature of the talk and text relationship over time.

#### **5.3.1 Staged process of recontextualising and decontextualising**

Taking a sequential perspective on the notions of recontextualising and decontextualising, advances findings gained in the first section of Chapter 5. As we have seen, individuals' recontextualisations led to amendments of the strategic plan's content. The altered version then provided the basis for discussion at a subsequent meeting. I thus argue that Unico's strategic plan production cycle was constructed through iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. I will now draw upon an interview with the Deputy VC to illustrate the iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation in more detail. The interview was conducted after the senior management and recently appointed staff away day (period II).

The Deputy VC met with the VC three weeks after the two away days actually happened, in order to amend '*the slides to take into account the comments that we've had so far*' (Deputy VC, Interview 26). The Deputy VC then described this version as '*an update of the slides*'. Recontextualisation of the decontextualised version of Unico's strategic plan then occurred at a subsequent meeting: the governing body's strategy away day (period II). The Deputy VC anticipated getting '*[the governing bodies] input and comments on that [new version of Unico's strategic plan]*'. The iteration of recontextualisation and decontextualisation is further

highlighted in the Deputy VC's following statement '*Well the [governing body] will make their comments; there may then be a need to make some further revisions*'.

Illustrating the iterative relationship between recontextualisation and decontextualisation, the interview with the Deputy VC also highlighted that there is a time lag between recontextualisation and decontextualisation. While recontextualisation happens immediately at the event of talk, decontextualisation occurs at a different point in time, often physically distant from the actual event of talk. I will now draw upon an e-mail exchange between the Deputy Secretary and the Deputy VC to further illustrate the temporally distant occurrence of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. The e-mail exchange occurred after the top management team meeting in period III. Thereafter, the Deputy Secretary amended Unico's strategic plan. Four days after the actual event it was then sent to the Deputy VC, who made some further amendments to the document's content (see e-mail 2). The Deputy VC then sent the amended, and now decontextualised strategic plan, to top management team members for further comments (see e-mail 3). The sequence of e-mails illustrates that there were twenty one days in between the team members recontextualising the plan's content and receiving the up-dated version of the strategic plan.



## E-mail 1 / Deputy Secretary to Deputy VC / EVENT+4

Deputy VC,  
... Herewith my re-draft of the strategy document, incorporating comments made by [top management team] members last Friday. Comments welcome! Presumably, the next step will be for us to circulate this updated version to the others for further comment? ...  
Best  
Deputy Secretary

## E-mail 2 / Deputy VC to Deputy Secretary / EVENT+20

I have gone through the revised set of notes and made a couple of further changes (using track changes). Could you now please circulate to members of [the top management team] asking for any further suggestions. In the meantime I will discuss with the VC what s/he wants to go as material for the [away day in period IV] (it may not be the whole document).  
Best wishes  
Deputy VC

## E-mail 3 / Deputy Secretary to top management team members / EVENT+21

Dear Colleagues,  
Following the Executive Meeting held on date of EVENT, [Deputy VC] and I have made a number of amendments to the draft outline University Strategy to take account of the various points raised in discussion. A revised version, showing 'tracked' changes, is now attached.  
Could I please take this opportunity to remind other members of the invitation to let me have any additional comments on the document that they might wish to make. It would be most helpful, if at all possible, to have these in advance of the next [top management team] Meeting (on DATE, period IV) and, ideally (holidays permitting!), by the end of next week.  
With best wishes,  
Deputy Secretary

E-mails 1 to 3 and the extracts of an interview with the Deputy VC highlight the dominant role of the *text producers*, as they are able to control what and how to amend a strategic plan's content (decontextualisation). Furthermore, we have seen that decontextualisation occurs at a different point in time than the recontextualising of the strategic plan's content during a meeting. Figure 5.1 thus illustrates the time distance between recontextualisation and decontextualisation. It shows two meetings, Meeting A and Meeting B. Both meetings were dedicated to discuss the strategic plan's content. The talk thereby occurs in the talk space. Talk space has several characteristics that embed the actual talk that occur at an event. It refers to the talk time of a meeting that is dedicated to talk about certain issues. These may be manifested in a formal meeting's agenda. Similar to the text's content, they shape the sequence of talk. Furthermore, a meeting, for instance, may be dedicated for one hour or seven hours, which in turn limits the time available for talk to unfold. The meeting's context consists of intertwined characteristics, such as a meeting's purpose and its key question(s). Additionally, the meeting context refers to the physical location of a meeting, whether it is in-house or literally away from the organisation's premises. Talk then unfolds as individuals recontextualise the strategic plan's content shaped by the talk space and the

meeting context. Talk may then be manifested in an intermediary text, such as a meeting summary.

The temporally distant space where individuals may enact intermediary text is termed 'in-between'. Intermediary texts are, for instance, meeting minutes or personal notes. From these, it was decided which specific amendments would actually be made to the strategic plan's content. I term individuals, who are able to exercise the power over what content will actually be amended and how it will be amended, *text producers*. Decontextualisation occurs across not only physically distant, but also temporally distant space, as the interview with the Deputy VC illustrated. It may stretch over a week or even a month (see also e-mail 3). Participation in the 'in-between' space was restricted to the *text producers* or an assistant to the text producers, such as the secretary to the top management team. While the Deputy Secretary may up-date the strategic plan's content (see e-mail 1), the final content changes still needed to be approved by the Deputy VC or the VC. This is best highlighted in following quote by the Deputy Secretary:

*'after each detailed discussion, which would normally be in the top management team meeting, I was involved in making changes. I mean it was something of a joint effort initially really between myself and the Deputy VC. S/He did some, I did some, we brought them together and then they went to the Vice Chancellor.'* (Interview 71)

An amended version of the strategic plan then became basis for discussion at a subsequent meeting. Figure 5.1 shows the sequential process of how individuals' recontextualisations led to a content change. Firstly, recontextualisations were uttered at a dedicated meeting to discuss the plan's content, illustrated as Meeting A. These discussions are then manifested in intermediary texts such as meeting minutes and personal notes. In the in-between space, text producers recontextualised intermediary texts, which provided the basis for the actual alterations to be made to the strategic plan's content. The amended version of Unico's strategic plan was then discussed at a subsequent meeting, illustrated as Meeting B. This iterative process of recontextualisation and decontextualisation occurs until the strategic plan production cycle was completed.



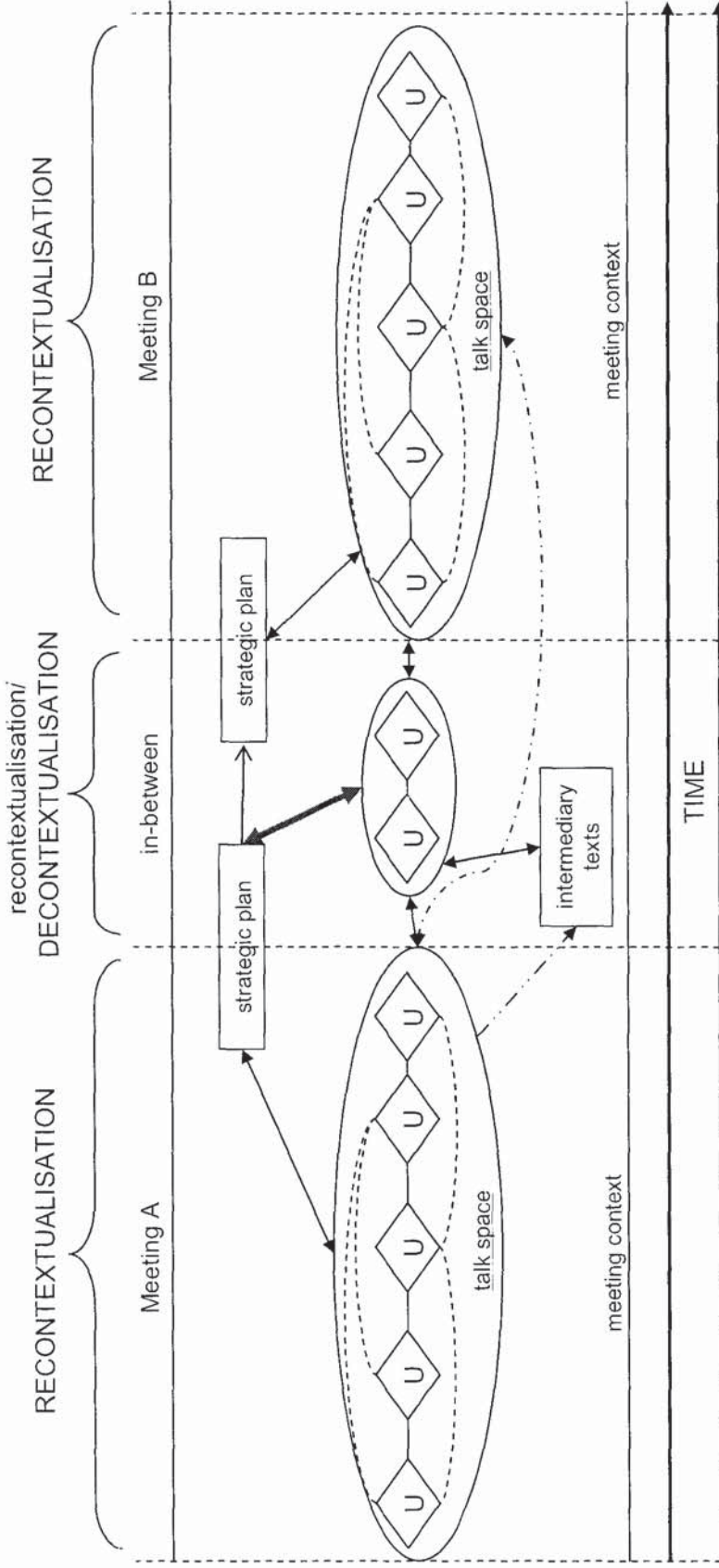


Figure 5.1: Time distance of recontextualisation and decontextualisation

As a result of the time distance between recontextualisation and decontextualisation, I suggest that decontextualisation occurs in a staged process which I call filtering. In filtering, talk becomes fixated in intermediary texts such as meeting minutes. These meeting minutes are then enacted by the *text producers* who decide upon which specific amendments will actually be made. So, *text producers* recontextualise meeting minutes to then decide upon the specific content changes, which will be made to the current plan's content. Such content amendment then leads to a new version of the strategic plan being created. Through this filtering, talk becomes materialised in the actual strategic plan through a staged process. In other words, the initial talk becomes fixated in the meeting minutes, which then provide the basis for the *text producers* to decide upon which content to amend in the actual planning document.

Based on Extract 11 and Table 5.2, I will illustrate how filtering occurs as a goal is added to an existing objective within the Teaching Mission. The example stems from an away day in period II at which members of the governing body were invited to discuss parts of the strategic plan. As with other away days, Delegates were grouped in break-out sessions that looked at particular issues. Extract 11 captured the reporting back of the break-out group that looked at three key questions:

1. *How do we continue to build an inspirational place where you can't wait to come back?*
2. *What should the Unico experience be for: students; staff; alumni; research sponsors; users of our facilities?*
3. *What are the priorities for Research, Teaching, Administration and Infrastructure?*

#### Extract 11

1 Student ... Sometimes we see that Unico is a very segregated and divided  
 2 Repre- place, and often people don't feel value, people don't feel connected,  
 3 sentative: people don't feel communicated to. And I think it's a real problem and  
 4 it's one of the things that really puts up barriers, is that there isn't  
 5 enough value and that like you put into each individual member of the  
 6 community here ... and we need to make sure that each person feels  
 7 that they're looked after. So moving on, just to kind of look at each sort  
 8 of individual grouping in itself. Unico as a community is very disparate,  
 9 it's got lots of different ... certainly the student population, there's all  
 10 sorts of Unico students, it's not a very one-size-fits-all kind of campus.  
 11 So we felt that our approach should be tailored, students should feel  
 12 connected, they should feel respected and they should feel supported....

The Student Representative, who is a member of both Senate and Council, reported back on the issues that were discussed in relation to the break-out group's key questions. Each



break-out groups' talk was then summarised in the official meeting minutes. Table 5.2 shows the item of the Student Representative's talk that occurred in relation to the second key question. The Student Representative thereby stated 'So, we felt that our approach should be tailored, students should feel connected, they should feel respected and they should feel supported.' (lines 10 to 12). It was then reflected in the meeting minutes as "-- Teaching should be tailored to individual student needs.". As a result a new content in the form of a goal was then added and manifested in Version 7. It stated "-- tailored to the needs of learners" and belonged to the objective "-- develop innovative approaches to learning and teaching". From this example, we can see the sequence of talk, which then becomes reflected in official meeting minutes. Based on these meeting minutes, the strategic plan's content was amended.

Period II	<u>Minutes of the governing bodies Strategy meeting: section on Teaching:</u> - Teaching should be tailored to individual student needs. ...
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Table 5.2: Official meeting summary of the governing body's strategy away day (period II)

Through this staged process of decontextualisation, the original talk went through another cycle of recontextualisation – decontextualisation before it became materialised in the actual plan. Hence, any trace of the initial intention of the speaker, in this example the Student Representative, was distanced as the talk's content was interpreted at least twice, once when the meeting minutes were generated and a second time when the meeting minutes were taken up to make a decision about content amendments. *Text producers* have the opportunity to intentionally filter / select the content and thus make the amendments according to their assumptions. During Unico's strategic plan production cycle there were no instances where the text was amended immediately once it had been recontextualised.

### 5.3.2 The nature of Unico's evolving strategic plan

This sub-section of Chapter 5 addresses the nature of Unico's evolving strategic plan as a result of iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. It offers explanations of how and why the strategic plan's content became more specific as well as of differences in the development of Unico's three Missions. This complements findings in Chapter 4 on the evolution of Unico's strategic plan. This sub-section also addresses implications for the plan's content as result of iterative recontextualisations and decontextualisations.

The strategic plan's content became more specific as a result of multiple decontextualisations. Each successive decontextualisation was based on a

recontextualisation of Unico's strategic plan, as it was voiced at meetings during the plan production cycle. As Chapter 4's findings showed, Unico's strategic plan evolved as its content was continuously amended. Its content became more detailed as a result of new content being added and the alteration of existing statements. Distinguishing each of Unico's three Missions, Table 5.3 shows instances of talk that led to a content change. These were then mapped to the total number of content changes that were made per version. The total number of content amendments are illustrated in brackets (see Table 5.3). Looking at the identified instances of talk leading to a content change (see part 3.4.2.3) showed that over fifty percent ( $n = 95$  instances) of all content changes ( $n = 169$ ) resulted from participants' talk in the plan production cycle (see Table 5.3). Extracts illustrated in the first section of Chapter 5 provided reasons for the plan's content being amended. For instance, reasons for content alterations stemmed from individuals holding competing interpretations with respect to an objective (see Extract 4). Based on the findings from sub-sections 5.2.2 and 5.2.3, we have also seen that content changes were triggered by individuals' recontextualisations, which were shaped by a meeting's guiding question(s).

	period I		period II			period III		period IV		
	Vsn 1-2	Vsn 2-3	Vsn 3-4	Vsn 4-5	Vsn 5-6	Vsn 6-7	Vsn 7-8	Vsn 8-9	Vsn 9-10	TOTAL
Re- search	6 (6)	3 (8)	3 (3)	1 (4)	0 (3)	4 (15)	4 (4)	0 (2)	12 (20)	33 (65)
Tea- ching	3 (4)	0 (0)	1 (3)	0 (3)	0 (1)	15 (18)	2 (2)	0 (2)	21 (37)	42 (70)
Third Stream	4 (4)	0 (0)	4 (5)	0 (1)	1 (1)	6 (14)	5 (5)	0 (0)	0 (4)	20 (33)
Su m	14 (14)	3 (8)	8 (11)	1 (8)	1 (5)	25 (47)	11 (11)	0 (4)	31 (61)	<b>95 (169)</b>

Table 5.3: Talk instances leading to a content change

In Table 5.3, instances of talk that led to a content change are captured in the same column as those versions of the plan that were changed. For example, six instances of talk that accounted for content changes made to Version 1 are listed in the column Vsn 1-2 (see Table 5.3). In this case, talk was voiced during the top management team meeting in period I. While talk that occurred, for example, in relation to Version 4, did not account for a content change to that respective version, it may have led to a content alteration to Version 5. As talk was captured in intermediary texts, it enabled text producers to amend the plan's content in relation to a comment that was made in meetings prior to the current meeting.



Hence, a content change made to Version  $n$  may have been uttered in a meeting that was discussed in Version  $n-1$  or  $n-2$ . This aspect will be further explored in Chapter 6. Moreover, there were also several content changes that could not be related to talk that occurred at meetings. For instance, words were switched from “training...” (Version 3) to “developing...” (Version 4) within an objective that was part of the Teaching Mission. Interviews held with text producers revealed that they personally altered some of the plan’s terminology in an attempt to better convey their intended meanings. For instance, the Deputy VC stated ‘...so there was quite a lot of discussion in the early days, and particularly actually between the VC and myself about terminology...’ (Interview 68).

This type of analysis also allowed comparison of the talk that led to content changes for each of the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Missions (see Table 5.3). Overall, talk that occurred at meetings during the plan production cycle accounted for over half of all content changes that were made to each of the three Missions. In order to explore the talk that occurred in relation to the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Mission, I looked at the guiding questions and the talk time dedicated to discussing each Mission’s content. As we have seen in the previous sections in this chapter, these characteristics shaped the unfolding talk during meetings. In terms of the guiding questions, each Mission was treated equally. However, while the Research and Teaching Mission are the core business of any university (Hardy et al. 1984), the Third Stream Mission provided a novel espoused strategic direction for Unico. Its ambiguity was apparent (see Extract 5) but it did not become specific, as the question of a member of Council illustrated (see Extract 6). Furthermore, the least time was dedicated to talk about the Third Stream Mission during meetings, especially during the first phases of Unico’s strategic plan production cycle. For instance, while there were break-out groups of forty-five minutes and thirty minutes to report back with regards to the Research and Teaching Mission, talk time to discuss the Third Stream Mission was only twenty minutes, and ten minutes to report back, during the senior management and recently appointed staff away day. Similarly, talk on the Third Stream Mission’s content occurred only half of the time compared to the Research and Teaching Mission at the top management team meeting during period III. Hence, both unfamiliarity with the Third Stream Mission as a core business of the University, as well as ambiguity over its meaning, were associated with different talk-text relationships and difference in the evolution of Third Stream Mission, compared to the Research and Teaching Missions. This finding complements results on the comparison of patterns discussed in the previous chapter (see sub-section 4.4.3).

This sub-section also addresses implications for the plan's content as a result of iterative recontextualisation and decontextualisations. Recurring recontextualisations followed by changes to Unico's plan (decontextualisations) led to its content being expressed in an agreed terminology. The first section of Chapter 5 showed that the plan's content was changed, as individuals across Unico had difficulties in recontextualising (see sub-section 5.2.2 for Extracts 5 and 6); for example because they were concerned about a particular objective (see part 5.2.3.2 for Extracts 8 and 9), or because certain aspects were missing (see part 5.2.3.1 for Extract 7). Changes to Unico's strategic plan occurred in light of multiple individuals' recontextualisations, which resulted in a terminology that was contributed to and agreed by participants in the plan production cycle. Previously illustrated talk extracts showed that amendments to the plan were made as a result of comments, for instance, by the Student Representative (see sub-section 5.3.1 for Extract 11) and the Director of Marketing and Communication (see part 5.2.3.3 for Extract 10). As shown in Table 5.4, interviews with text producers and top managers, as well as in vivo quotes by the VC, further support the claim that terminology was changed in light of recontextualisations aimed at agreeing a terminology.

recontextualisations leading to changes in the plan's terminology	changes to the plan's content resulting in agreed terminology
<i>'There was clearly a lot of concern about some of the terminology that we were using...'</i> (Deputy VC, Interview 26)	<i>'... so I think you know, we've got sort of buy-in but also we've tested some of the strategy to make sure that at the senior level across the heads and you know, the top level of the school, the top level of ... we have a reasonably common understanding of what we mean by some of the phrases.'</i> (VC, Interview 58)
<i>'well again, terminology is really difficult, because at one stage we had the word exploitation, and academics don't like the word exploitation...'</i> (Deputy VC, Interview 68)	<i>'... it's just that we didn't get the right terminology. And I think that's been ... it's been changing in terminology but the meaning really to us [as top management team] hasn't really changed'</i> (Departmental Head C, Interview 69)
<i>'Well the PowerPoints were intended as discussion stimuli, so they were used during the away days, .... Then from those, the documents, the more detailed documents started to emerge. So it was you know, the PowerPoints to stimulate, and then we tried to take on board comments that people had made and contributions of colleagues to develop a more detailed document.'</i> (Deputy VC, Interview 68)	<i>'we've actually been going through taking out some of the slightly wishy-washy words because there were a lot of words that didn't mean anything but had lots of buzzwords in'</i> (VC during a top management meeting, period V)

Table 5.4: Multiple recontextualisations leading to changing and ultimately to agreed terminology

While the plan reflected terminology based on individuals' recontextualisations, it also became fixated. Through recurrent decontextualisations the plan's content became increasingly fixated during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Fixation occurs as talk



becomes manifested in written form. Thereby, the meaning that was conveyed in talk becomes decontextualised. In the fixated statement, there is no reference to the context-bound and situation-based talk, upon which the content change is based (Ricoeur 1981). Fixation also led to the alteration of the plan, as the Deputy Secretary noted, once the plan was finalised *'some of the ideas that were coming up at the away days in period II have ... you know, even if they don't appear quite in the textual form that they were put in at the time'* (Interview 71). Despite increasing fixation of the plan and its decontextualised content, the Deputy Secretary stated that *'the wider university staff feel that they have a stake in'* the creation of Unico's strategic plan (Interview 71).

Increasing fixation of the plan is also illustrated with regards to the Teaching Mission's development which was constituted by a large number of content changes across objectives and goals in the last iteration (Version 9 to 10). As a new Head of Teaching started in period IV, s/he was offered to incorporate his/her ideas in to the Teaching area. Based on Version 9, s/he amalgamated existing objectives *'to these three'* (Interview 62) with the aim at the plan consisting of *'fewer words'* (Interview 75). Due to plan's authoritativeness and its reflection of agreed wordings, the VC reinserted previous objectives which were deleted by the new Head of Teaching. Despite the VC *'dropping the originals [objectives] back in'* (Interview 62), the new Head of Teaching felt *'completely involved in that process [as] there is a lot of my own phrases'* (Interview 75). This example illustrates that the Teaching Mission's content became fixated in order to reflect both the new Head's view forward, manifested in the Teaching Mission, and the wording that resulted from Unico's consultative plan production.

Sub-section 5.3.2 illustrates that Unico's strategic plan evolved as a result of iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. Firstly, it shows that almost half of all content changes stemmed from talk uttered at meetings across Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Secondly, it shows that Unico's three Missions developed differently due to the unfamiliarity with the Third Stream Mission, as a core business, and ambiguity over its meaning, when compared to the Research and Teaching Missions. Thirdly, it illustrates that recurring recontextualisations and decontextualisations of Unico's plan led to its content being expressed in an agreed terminology. Fourthly, through recurrent decontextualisations, the plan's content became increasingly fixated during Unico's strategic plan production cycle.

### 5.3.3 The nature of Unico's strategic plan production cycle

The last sub-section of Chapter 5 looks at Unico's strategic plan production cycle. This sub-section is structured in two parts. Firstly, it shows that the production process provided a platform for participants to voice their recontextualisations. Secondly, it illustrates that the talk to text relationship shifted during later stages of the plan production cycle.

Firstly, the strategic plan production cycle provided a platform for individuals across Unico to air their views about the plan's content. Strategy meetings in the form of top management team meetings and away days set the scene for individuals to recontextualise the plan and thus to contribute to the plan's terminology. The plan production included members holding both academic and administrative roles. The Deputy Secretary described the process by stating that *'there's been a genuine and a successful attempt I think to engage as many people as possible in the discussions that have led to the production of the strategy.'* (Interview 71). At all stages of the plan production cycle, representatives of these two groups were part of the discussions, including various strategy away days in periods II and IV. Unico's plan production was thus constituted by the consultation of academic and administrative viewpoints. This quote by a senior administrator, who is also a member of Unico's top management team, summarises the purpose and process of involving academic and administrative representatives in the plan production cycle.

*'I had a meeting with [Heads of administrative sub-departments] to summarise to me what their comments were. They brought some comments and views from their departments. So that was the purpose of that meeting. And then I could, as necessary, feed those in to the away day, the breakout groups and so on. So that was basically what we did within the department'* (senior-administrator, Interview 25)

Secondly, section 5.3.3 illustrates that the talk to text relationship shifted during later stages of the plan production cycle. In order to illustrate how iterative cycles of the text-talk relationship shaped the plan production cycle, I draw upon an example from the final period. At this stage, Unico's strategic plan had gone through several iterations over the previous four periods, resulting in multiple content changes. This example from the top management team meeting provided a final opportunity to discuss whether last tweaks should be made to the plan. In this extract, Departmental Head C has suggested another content amendment to the Teaching Mission of Unico's strategic plan. At this point, the Teaching Mission was expressed in eight objectives.



Extract 12

- 1 Departmental Head C: Last time we also mentioned the growth through  
 2 partnership didn't we? And I read it and I didn't ...
- 3 VC: Some really specific suggestions would help at this stage, you  
 4 know, some ideas of what words should be in there.
- 5 Departmental Head C: Organic growth through partnership with both  
 6 international and national, regional, whatever.
- 7 VC: And then you know, how do you measure that, what do you mean by it? I  
 8 mean we've actually been going through taking out some of the slightly  
 9 wishy-washy words because there were a lot of words that didn't mean  
 10 anything but had lots of buzzwords in.
- 11 Departmental Head C: Well I guess growth to us is quite important and if we're  
 12 going to grow, we have to have a strategy how we're going to grow.  
 [VC only makes only a sound of 'mmmmh' followed by 10 seconds of silence until  
 another team member posed a question. However, the VC did not comment  
 further on Departmental Head C's suggestion.]

In this example, Departmental Head C did not index a specific item in the strategic plan but, rather, referred generically to a whole section of the plan. This triggers the VC to ask 'what words should be in there [Unico's strategic plan]' (line 4). In response to the VC's comment, Departmental Head C tries to work out a specific proposition (lines 5 to 6). However, the VC again counters Departmental Head C's suggestion (line 7) by asking 'how do you measure that, what do you mean by it?'. While Departmental Head C responds to the latter part of the VC's question explaining that 'I guess growth to us is quite important' (line 11), the first part of the VC's comment about measurement is not addressed. The VC's question about measuring was triggered by period's 4 guiding question, which had already resulted in respective amendments to Unico's strategic plan. As Departmental Head C could not provide an immediate answer, the VC blocked the suggestion, which did not lead to a content change in Unico's strategic plan.

This last extract illustrates that the opportunity for talk to trigger a textual change in Unico's strategic plan was reduced during the last stage of the strategic plan production cycle. As the strategic plan's content became more reified over time (see sub-section 5.3.2), it seems that individuals needed to specifically index the particular textual item they would like to amend and to articulate the envisaged textual change very precisely. By this final period, the text had become so fixated that it was difficult for talk to construct changes to the text, both because the text was assumed to already represent a consensus of preceding talk, and because the text itself had become authoritative, as it was seen to represent a sum of communicative activities. Hence, the strategic plan is both a medium and an outcome of the communication process.

Increasing fixation of the plan is also illustrated with regards to the Teaching Mission's development which was constituted by a large number of content changes across objectives and goals in the last iteration (Version 9 to 10). As a new Head of Teaching started in period IV, s/he was offered to incorporate his/her ideas in to the Teaching area. Based on Version 9, s/he amalgamated existing objectives '*to these three*' (Interview 62) with the aim at the plan consisting of '*fewer words*' (Interview 75). Due to plan's authoritativeness and its reflection of agreed wordings, the VC reinserted previous objectives which were deleted by the new Head of Teaching. Despite the VC '*dropping the originals [objectives] back in*' (Interview 62), the new Head of Teaching felt '*completely involved in that process [as] there is a lot of my own phrases*' (Interview 75). This example illustrates that the Teaching Mission's content became fixated in order to reflect both the new Head's view forward, manifested in the Teaching Mission, and the wording that resulted from Unico's consultative plan production.

Sub-section 5.3.3 shows that strategy meetings provided the platform for individuals to recontextualise the plan's content. Moreover, it shows that in later stages it became more difficult to trigger content changes. This was due to the increasingly authoritative nature of the plan.

#### **5.3.4 Summary**

The second section of Chapter 5 presented a sequential view of the occurrence of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. The first sub-section shows that a time lag between recontextualisation and decontextualisation enabled the text producers to selectively make amendments to the plan's content. The second sub-section illustrates that Unico's strategic plan became more specific and fixated over time due to recurring decontextualisations that were based on individual's revealing their interpretations of the plan (recontextualisation). Reasons for changes to the plan were participants' difficulties in recontextualising, or concerns about particular strategic contents. As a result of the iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation, the plan's content came to represent an agreed terminology. The third sub-section demonstrates that the plan production process provided the platform for participants to voice their recontextualisations and thus to contribute to the plan's terminology. Moreover, it shows that, at later stages, it became more difficult to trigger content changes, as the plan was increasingly fixated.



## 5.4 Summary to Chapter 5

The concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation (Ricoeur 1981) provided the basis for Chapter 5. As we have seen, the content of Unico's strategic plan provided the basis for discussion during the strategic plan production cycle. It shaped the talk as individuals enacted a particular content in their utterance. Through enacting the strategic plan, talk unfolded in various directions as individuals recontextualised the plan's inscribed meaning by revealing their interpretation of its content (see Extracts 4 and 7). Recontextualisation is thus situated in the current context embedding the talk, whereas the strategic plan inscribes meaning, which is decontextualised from the situation in which it originated. While decontextualisation enables the strategic plan to provide a basis for interpretation across time periods and actors, I have illustrated that individuals held multiple, even competing interpretations of a particular item of the plan's content (see Extracts 5 and 6). In order to bridge interpretations and to resolve potential difficulties in recontextualising, the strategic plan was amended in light of individuals' intentions. As talk became materialised in a new version of the strategic plan, its meaning became decontextualised. Thus, in each version of the amended strategic plan, the original speakers and their intentions cannot be traced.

In order to shed light on the interplay between talk and text, a distinction was made between the *text to talk* and *talk to text* relation. In sub-section 5.2.1 (*text to talk* relation), we have seen that the order of the strategic plan's semantic content shapes the sequence for talk to unfold, as the content is enacted in talk. Furthermore, it showed that the strategic plan's content shaped the topic that was enacted in talk. The strategic plan thus, not only pre-determines when talk about a particular content occurs, but also shapes the enacted topics at an immediate event. The structuring role of Unico's strategic plan illustrates the authoritative nature of the strategic plan, as it inscribes both what may be talked about and in what order the talk should occur.

Turning attention to the *talk to text* relation, sub-section 5.2.2 shows that talk may unfold in any direction once a strategic plan's content is enacted in talk. Individuals recontextualise the strategic plan's content as they enact specific content in their talk. Thereby, they reveal their interpretations in relation to plan's content. Additionally, we have seen that there may be various interpretations in relation to a particular strategic plan's content (see Extract 4). Individuals may also have difficulties recontextualising a particular plan's content, as

demonstrated in the example of the formulation that expresses the Third Stream Mission's espoused strategic direction. As we have seen in Extracts 9 and 10, an individual's recontextualisation is also shaped by guiding question(s) that embed(s) talk at an event. Additionally, the notion of recontextualisation highlighted an individual's intentions in relation to the strategic plan's content. For instance, Extract 4 illustrated that individuals may hold varying intentions regarding how to formulate the strategic plan's future content. While the Finance Director pushed for a stronger focus on the commercial benefit of research, members from the academic departments, including the Deputy VC, counter-argued for the inclusion of blue-skies research.

Based upon Ricoeur's (1981) notion of decontextualisation, sub-section 5.2.3 showed that talk has the ability to shape the future strategic plan's content. Individuals thus had the opportunity to amend existing content (see Extracts 7 to 9) or to introduce new content to be added (see Extract 10). Thus, we have seen that existing content, expressed as objective or goal, needs to be enacted in talk in order to be amended. Extract 7 shows, however, that the person who suggests an amendment does not necessarily have to enact the strategic plan's content, it may be another delegate. Based on the four extracts (see Extracts 7 to 10), we have seen that recontextualisation provided the basis for content to become amended. Content amendments are thus due to individuals' intentions in relation to the strategic plan's content. Talk illustrated in Extract 8, for instance, shows two recently appointed staff members, who revealed their concerns in relation to the espoused strategic direction expressed in the Research Mission. They were afraid of their personal research area no longer being focal to Unico, which would imply that these research areas would not receive any internal funding or support. Furthermore, Extracts 4 to 10 demonstrate that the period's guiding question(s), often expressed in key questions posed at a meeting, shaped recontextualisation and thus the future strategic plan's content. It plays a strong role, as it shapes individual's responses in relation to the strategic plan's content. Looking at the last version of Unico's strategic plan, however, does not indicate any relation to the talk that occurred during the strategic plan production cycle.

The third section of Chapter 5 provides a sequential view that shows that there is a time lag between recontextualisation and decontextualisation. Sub-section 5.3.1 illustrates that text producers amended the plan selectively by filtering participants' comments that were made during recontextualisations at meetings. This resulted in implications for the plan and its production process. Sub-section 5.3.2 shows the implications of recurrent iterations of talk and text for the final terminology of the plan, as it was constructed through several content



amendments. As we have seen, these content changes resulted from multiple, often competing interpretations of a particular textual item, for instance an academic view point versus an administrator's perspective (see Extract 4), or buzzwords, which were meaningless to participants in the plan production cycle (see Extract 12 for the VC's comment in lines 8 to 10). Due to the time lag between recontextualisation and decontextualisation, we can see that the content changes that occurred in version  $n$  resulted from talk that occurred in relation to version  $n-1$ . Thus, one needs to consider the text's content changes, in relation to the meeting's context, that embedded individuals' recontextualisation of the plan's content manifested in version  $n-1$ . As a result of the multiple iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation, the final plan's content resulted in agreed terminology. These reflected participants' recontextualisations, which had been expressed during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Hence, Unico's strategic plan's content became reified as time progressed, because it was increasingly assumed to represent the views of participants. Thus, Unico's strategic plan became increasingly authoritative, due to the reification of its content over successive cycles of textual amendment.

Sub-section 5.3.3 illustrates that the plan became less subject to change, in particular in the last stage of the production cycle, as its parameters were already seen to convey agreed strategic directions. Presumptions of agreement resulted from the various opportunities of top management team members and other members within Unico to articulate views on the plan's content. At later stages of the production cycle, in particular period V, it was more difficult for participants to trigger content changes, as the plan was already considered to carry meaningful statements, that provided legitimate courses of action, constituting Unico's espoused strategic direction. Hence, we are able to show the implications of the communicative process for the plan and the planning production cycle. Over the duration of a communicative process, a plan will become more authoritative as elements of the text become increasingly fixated and distanced from the discussions in which changes to the text take place. Thus, successive cycles of decontextualisation are associated with the production of an increasingly authoritative text.

## CHAPTER 6

### Talk constructing changes to Unico's strategic plan

#### 6.1 Introduction

Having outlined how Unico's strategic plan evolved (see Chapter 4) and the recursive relationship of text and talk (see Chapter 5), Chapter 6 focuses only on passages of talk that resulted in changes to Unico's strategic plan. It takes into account those situational and contextual features that embed talk during meetings, which have been neglected in many organisational discourse analyses (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Sillince 2007).

Chapter 6 is structured in four parts, each of which cumulatively explains particular features of talk determined changes to Unico's plans. Henceforth, passages of talk that lead to a text change are termed 'talk instances'. The first section introduces concepts that give a detailed view of the talk instances that led to a change to Unico's strategic plan. It is distinguished between an utterance, key element of a talk instance, and contextual factors that embed an utterance. An utterance consists of three inter-related components; referentiality, subject of talk, and expressive aspects. Tracing the subjects of talk during a meeting showed that a subject of talk may occur in three alternative ways. It may be enacted i) only once; ii) several times in immediate subsequent utterances and/or iii) its re-enactment may be delayed. Concepts introduced in section one will provide the building blocks for the following three sections of Chapter 6.

The second section demonstrates that the talk instances that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan consisted of an *initiation* and a *response*. An initiation refers to the initial enactment of a subject of talk during a meeting. It may then be followed by a response. A response occurs in relation to the same subject of talk that had been enacted during the initiating utterance. Text changes resulted from two initiating patterns and four responsive acts, which will be explained in more detail.

Building upon the initiation–response framework, the third section illustrates eight conversational patterns of talk instances that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan. These resulted from the two initiating patterns and the four responsive acts. Comparing instances



of conversational patterns that were triggered by a single initiation with cases of recurrent initiations showed that there were similarities in the occurrence of responsive acts. The dominance of recurrent initiations and non-responses across both initiation patterns will be explained by drawing upon contextual features. Furthermore, findings highlighted the crucial role of text producers during responsive acts.

The fourth section combines findings on the conversational patterns with the types of content changes that were identified in Chapter 4. The first part looks at conversational patterns in relation to the type of content change. The second part focuses on the type of content changes per initiation pattern and the plan's content level. A detailed analysis shows that contextual characteristics, utterances' referentiality to the strategic plan and a subject's contentiousness determined the type of content change and the level at which a change was made.

## 6.2 An utterance and its embeddedness

The first section of Chapter 6 provides the starting point to shedding light on talk instances that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan (see part 3.4.2.4). A talk instance refers to a particular passage of talk that may consist of several utterances or it may even consist of only one utterance. An utterance is a unit of analysis that captures the oral realisation of language. It starts as an individual orally expresses something by drawing upon words. It may consist of several sentences or just a single word, such as *STOP*. An utterance ends as the individual finishes talking. As another individual may start speaking, a new utterance begins.

Drawing upon Bakhtin (1986a, 1986b), the meaning conveyed in an utterance is determined by the immediate situation. Therefore, any utterance has to be seen in relation to the context of its occurrence. A talk instance, consisting of several utterances, is thus embedded in a speech communication (see Figure 6.1), which refers to situational and contextual features that embed talk, for example, during a meeting. To provide a detailed analysis of a talk instance, the first part of section one introduces an utterance's components. The second part outlines features that arise from an utterance or utterances' embeddedness in a particular meeting context. Concepts introduced in section one provide the building block for the following three sections of Chapter 6.

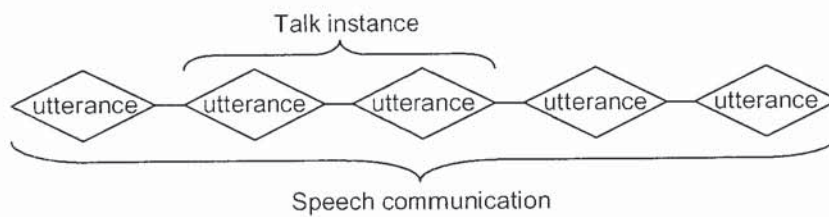


Figure 6.1: Illustration of a talk instance embedded in the speech communication

### 6.2.1 An utterance's components

An utterance is characterised by three inter-related components i) its referentiality, ii) a subject of talk and iii) an expressive aspect (Bakhtin 1986a). A detailed explanation of these three concepts (see also Figure 6.2) is followed by a representative example, taken from a top management team meeting in period III, which illustrates how these concepts play out in context.

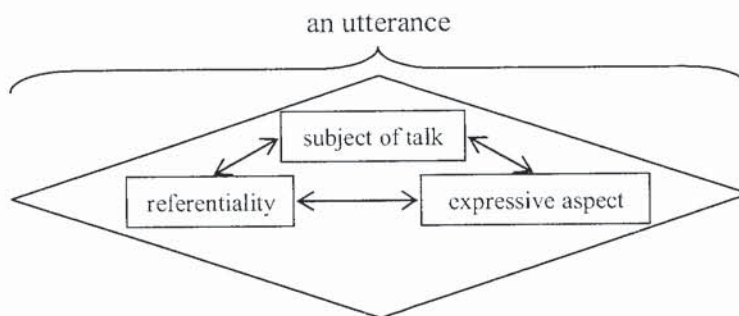


Figure 6.2: Utterance's components

#### 6.2.1.1 Referentiality

The notion of *referentiality* captures the relational / referential aspect(s) of an utterance (Bakhtin 1986a). It may refer to something that had already been said during the meeting. Another referential aspect provided the strategic plan. Chapter 5's findings have already illustrated that recontextualisation occurred as meeting delegates enacted Unico's strategic plan in their talk. By referencing specific aspects of the strategic plan, individuals brought it into the communication episode for discussion. The strategic plan may be referenced at several levels, for instance by enacting a particular goal (see Table 6.1).



Content level	Coding question	Examples of referencing text
Goal	<i>Does an individual enact a particular goal?</i>	Deputy VC: These were meant as examples ... Departmental Head B: under "maintain and enhance graduate employability" through ...
Objective	<i>Does an individual enact a particular objective?</i>	Delegate A: We had a real sticking issue with the first point ... Delegate B: a final point was on "conference facilities"
Mission	<i>Does an individual refer to a particular Mission in Unico's strategic plan?</i>	Delegate C: In terms of research ... VC: ... So there are things that you might put in research that you might also put in here for example.
Entire document	<i>Does an individual enact the plan?</i>	Deputy VC: ... our focus today should really be getting this [document] right and then from that we can create the spin document if you like ... Departmental Head A: ... What we're talking about here is a document, the aim of which is to affect behaviour, ...

Table 6.1: Levels of referentiality with respect to Unico's strategic plan

### 6.2.1.2 Subject of talk

While referentiality provides the referential aspect of an utterance, an utterance's *subject of talk* (*S*) captures *what the utterance is about* in its entirety (Bakhtin 1986a). It is distinct from the common object *X* (Newcomb 1953; Taylor 2003), as it solely refers to the topic(s) enacted in an utterance. For example, someone may enact a new topic, such as a merger, which had not been brought up before during the same meeting. An utterance's subject of talk may provide a potential referential aspect that becomes enacted in a future utterance. Moreover, an utterance may consist of several subjects of talk. The more subjects of talk there are per utterance, the more complex that utterance becomes. After explaining an utterance's expressiveness, the inter-relatedness between an utterance's three inter-related components will be demonstrated by drawing upon an example.

### 6.2.1.3 Expressive aspects

An utterance's *expressive aspects*, then, capture *what does the talk do?* (Bakhtin 1986a). In order to identify an utterance's expressiveness, one needs to look at an utterance's expressive aspect(s) in relation to the referential aspect of that same utterance. The more referential aspects within an utterance, the more expressive aspects. Most common expressive aspects of talk instances that led to changes to Unico's plans were clarifying, disagreeing, suggesting and supporting, as shown in Table 6.2.

Expressive aspect	Coding question	Examples
Clarifying	<i>Does an individual question, for purposes of clarification, the enacted strategic plan or a previous utterance's subject of talk?</i>	What do you mean by; do you think there is;
Disagreeing	<i>Does an individual disagree with the enacted strategic plan or a previous utterance's subject of talk?</i>	I don't think; that wasn't meant to; it is not what Unico should be associated with; we can't necessarily; there was a concern;
Suggesting	<i>Does an individual suggest something in relation to the enacted strategic plan or a previous utterance's subject of talk?</i>	I suggest; we have to; we need to; we should really be; there must be some;
Supporting	<i>Does an individual support the enacted strategic plan or a previous utterance's subject of talk?</i>	yes; that's a good point; it is possible; ... would be a good thing;

Table 6.2: Most common expressive aspects

#### 6.2.1.4 Representative example of the inter-relationship of an utterance's components

I will now draw upon an illustrative talk instance in order to explain an utterance's three inter-related components in more detail (see Table 6.3).

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
	Talk instance	Referentiality text	Expressive aspect text	Referentiality subject	Expressive aspect subject
1	Departmental Head B:				
2	I think under "maintain				
3	and enhance graduate				
4	employability" <b>S1</b> through	Objective	suggest	S1	suggest
5	sandwich placement,				
6	that is a very important				
7	there?				
8	Deputy VC:				
9	<b>S1</b> Okay, that's fine,			S1	support
10	that's one of the ways				
11	through work				
	experience, so that's ...				
	yeah.				

Table 6.3: Illustrative example of an utterance's components

The actual talk instance is illustrated in Column 2 of Table 6.3. For illustrative purposes each line is numbered (Column 1). As the construction of the strategic plan is the particular focus of Chapter 6, Column 3 captures the referentiality to the strategic plan. Thereby, it is distinguished between several strategic plan levels, such as the Research Mission or a particular objective (see Table 6.1). Column 4 then shows the expressive aspect that



occurred in relation to the enacted strategic plan (see Table 6.2). Column 5 illustrates the *subject(s) of talk* per utterance as each *subject of talk* has been allocated a number for illustrative purposes (see part 3.4.2.4). The last column (Column 6) illustrates the expressive aspect(s) that occurred in relation to the utterance's subject of talk as shown in Column 5. Columns 5 and 6 are vital as there were talk instances that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan without referencing the strategic plan.

The example occurred during a top management team meeting in period III. The meeting's guiding question was *Do we need to reformulate?*. Hence, Unico's top managers went through the strategic plan page by page in order to discuss the terminology. The discussion focused on the Teaching Mission's objectives and goals. The first utterance thus provides the first unit of analysis. Departmental Head B's utterance occurred in response to the guiding question. Departmental Head B *referenced* a particular objective of Version 7. In relation to the strategic plan Departmental Head B suggested adding new content to an existing objective. The *expressive* aspect in relation to the strategic plan is thus coded as *suggesting* (Column 4). The suggestion 'through sandwich placement' (Table 6.3: lines 4 to 5) provided a new subject of talk as compared to any previous utterance's subject of talk. It is thus labelled as *SI* (Column 5). Looking at the second utterance (Table 6.3: lines 8 to 13), we can see that it occurred in response to Departmental Head B's suggestion. The Deputy VC then referenced subject *SI* (Column 5) again. The Deputy VC responded by supporting Departmental Head B's suggestion (Column 6). Hence, the first and second utterance had the same *subject of talk*. Departmental Head B's *subject of talk (SI)* was then adopted and became fixated in the subsequent version of Unico's strategic plan. It then stated "-- work experience on placements" as a new goal in the Teaching Mission.

### 6.2.2 Embeddedness of an utterance in a meeting's speech communication

An utterance has to be embedded in its context and situation, in addition to its three components: referentiality, subject of talk and expressiveness. Due to hierarchical power differences, two types of actors engaged in a meeting's speech communication are distinguished. As per Chapter 5, I distinguish between i) a text producer (TxtP) and ii) a meeting Delegate (A). Tracing subjects of talk shows that they may occur on three alternative paths during a meeting's speech communication.

In order to determine a subject of talk's occurrence during a meeting, we need to look at preceding and subsequent utterances' subjects of talk. The subject of talk may thereby be enacted by any actor. A subject's enactment may occur in three ways during talk instances

that lead to a change in the strategic plan. Firstly, once uttered, a subject of talk may not be referred to during the same meeting. Hence, it does not provide a referential aspect during that meeting's speech communication. This is illustrated in Figure 6.3, where either a meeting Delegate (A) or a text producer (TxtP) enacted a subject (S1) but, because it is not referenced by any other actor thereafter, does not become part of further utterances during the meeting. Rather, following that utterance, future utterances move on to different subjects (S2).

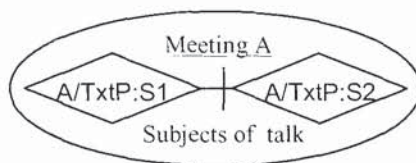


Figure 6.3: A subject of talk's single occurrence

Secondly, immediately subsequent utterances have the same subject of talk, so that a passage of the meeting refers to and enacts that particular subject of talk in the immediate flow of utterances. However, once that subject has been discussed, it is concluded and does not recur within that meeting (see Figure 6.4). The talk instance in Table 6.3 already provides an example of where two successive utterances reference the same subject of talk. Thereafter, it was not uttered again during the top management team meeting.

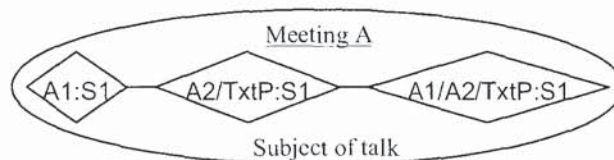


Figure 6.4: A subject of talk's multiple occurrences

Thirdly, there is a gap between a subject of talk's initial and subsequent enactment during a meeting. After enacting S1, subsequent utterances are about S2 until S1 is enacted again during the same meeting. In a subject of talk's delayed occurrence, subsequent utterances are about further *subjects of talk* until someone again references the subject of talk previously brought up in an anterior utterance (see Figure 6.5).



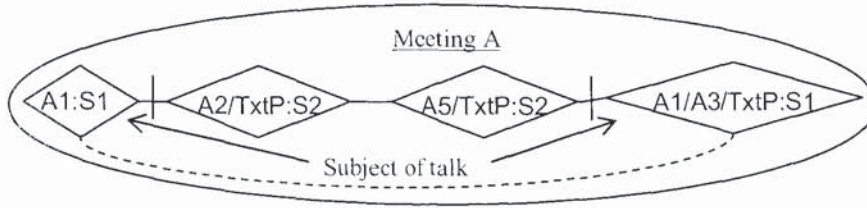


Figure 6.5: A subject of talk's delayed occurrence

Table 6.4 provides an illustration of the delayed occurrence of a subject of talk. It stems from period III's top management team, guided by the question *Do we need to reformulate?*. Departmental Head D's initial enactment of subject *SI* occurs during a discussion on the Research Mission. While suggesting additional content to be added, Departmental Head D acknowledges that the input interrupts talk in relation to another subject of talk; 'sorry, I know it's taking you away' (line 14). Hence, Departmental Head D comes back to the previous comment and enacts subject *SI* again 'I also have to come back to the ... which I just raised' (line 100), during the discussion on the Third Stream Mission. Thereafter, subject *SI* is not referenced again during the top management team meeting.

	Talk instance	Referen- tiality text	Expressive aspect text	Referen- tiality subject	Expressive aspect subject
1	<u>Departmental Head D</u> : Can I just broaden this discussion a little bit to other areas? ...				
2	<b>S1</b> But I think that there are increasingly going to be opportunities for things like routes			S1	suggest
3	into languages which is public sector money going into areas that the government				
4	wishes to promote. So okay, this particular bit of money is for languages, there'll be				
5	money for education, you know there's this stuff about Islam at the moment, the				
6	government's going to send money towards courses which teach that sort of thing. <b>S1</b>				
7	Where does that fit into this statement? <b>S1</b> It's responsiveness to government's	Mission x2	clarify / suggest	S1	suggest x2
8	agendas maybe? Because it is in terms of funding opportunities <b>S1</b> but it doesn't				
9	appear anywhere and <b>S1</b> I think that those ... I mean the money we're getting for this,	Mission	suggest	S1	suggest
10	okay it's not for research but it's far more than our department's ever got for anything				
11	before. And therefore it is an important part of our strategy because there will be other				
12	opportunities.				
13	<u>Departmental Head A</u> : Can I say two things?				clarify
14	<u>Departmental Head D</u> : Sorry, I know it's taking you away ...				apologise
	... [53.10 - 1.15.50]				
100	<u>Departmental Head D</u> : I also have to come back to the ... which I just raised, <b>S1</b> which			S1	suggest
101	was about responding to government agendas in areas other than research. <b>S1</b> And I			S1	clarify
102	wonder whether things like routes into languages, which is not just necessarily [UK City]				
103	and [UK region] but the translation network is a national one, work on Islam would be a				
104	national agenda. <b>S1</b> How are we going to fill that in here? It's Third Stream, not just in	Mission	clarify	S1	suggest
105	the [UK region].				
106	<u>Deputy VC</u> : <b>S1</b> Yes, yes.	Mission		S1	support

Table 6.4: A subject of talk's delayed occurrence



### 6.2.3 Summary

The first section sheds light on the talk instances that led to a change to Unico's strategic plan. It showed that an utterance, the key element of a talk instance, consists of three inter-related components: its i) referentiality ii) subject of talk; and iii) expressiveness. Furthermore, an utterance may consist of several referential aspects, subjects of talk and expressive aspects that in turn increase an utterance's complexity. Tracing subjects of talk during a meeting revealed that a subject of talk may occur in three alternative paths. It may be enacted i) only once; ii) several times in immediate subsequent utterances; and/or iii) its re-enactment may be delayed.

## 6.3 Initiation and response

The second section demonstrates that talk instances that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan consisted of an *initiation* and a *response*. An initiation refers to the initial enactment of a subject of talk during a meeting. Furthermore, the same subject of talk may be initiated several times during a meeting. Additionally, it may be initiated again in a separate meeting before leading to a change to Unico's strategic plan. Changes to Unico's plan thus resulted from two initiation patterns. Firstly, a subject of talk was initiated once at a meeting. Secondly, a subject of talk was initiated recurrently. Recurrence refers to multiple initiations at a meeting and/or initiations of the same subject of talk at separate meetings. An initiation is followed by a response. A response occurs in relation to the same subject of talk that had been enacted during the initiating utterance. While an initiation may not be followed by a response at all, there are three further responsive acts that may occur with respect to an initiated subject of talk. A response might only occur at an immediately subsequent utterance without further mention thereafter. It might also occur in several immediately subsequent utterances. Lastly, a delayed response may occur where the subject of talk had already been enacted at a prior utterance, without any connection to the immediately preceding utterance. Each initiation pattern and responsive act will be explained in detail by drawing upon representative examples.

### 6.3.1 Initiation

An initiation refers to the initial enactment of a subject of talk during a meeting. A subject of talk's initiation, however, must not be confused with a subject of talk's occurrence. While an initiation refers solely to the initial instance of a subject of talk's enactment during a

meeting, a subject of talk's occurrence refers to any enactment of the respective subject (e.g. single or repeated) during a meeting. Content changes resulted from two initiating patterns:

- *single initiation*  
A subject of talk was initiated once during a meeting.
- *recurrent initiations*  
A subject of talk that was enacted more than once, during the same meeting or across meetings, so that the same subject of talk was enacted on two or more separate occasions, before Unico's strategic plan was amended.

#### 6.3.1.1 Single initiation

The first initiating pattern refers to a subject of talk being initiated only once during a meeting. This initiation then triggered a change to Unico's plan. In order to illustrate a single initiation, let us go back to the example shown in Table 6.3. Departmental Head B initiates the subject of talk 'sandwich placements' (line 4) to suggest additional content for an existing objective in the Teaching Mission. The subject of talk had not been enacted previously during the top management team meeting in period III. Departmental Head B's initiation was triggered by the meeting's guiding question *Do we need to reformulate?*. Thereafter, the subject of talk had not been initiated again during period III's top management team meeting. The subsequent version of Unico's strategic plan then stated "-- work experience on placements" in the Teaching Mission.

#### 6.3.1.2 Recurrent initiation

The second initiating pattern refers to a subject of talk that is initiated recurrently. Recurrence refers to multiple initiations at a meeting and/or initiations of the same subject of talk at separate meetings. Unico's strategic plan was only changed after a subject of talk's recurrent initiation. In order to explain a recurrent initiation in more detail, let us first look at a subject of talk's recurrent initiation at a single meeting, before illustrating a recurrent initiation that occurred across separate meetings. Table 6.4 provides an example of a recurrent initiation at the same meeting. During the top management team meeting in period III, Departmental Head D initiated subject *SI* at two occasions. At the first instance s/he suggested adding 'responsiveness to government's agenda' (Table 6.4: line 7 to 8). This utterance occurred during the discussion of the terminology manifested in Unico's Research Mission. The second initiation occurred eighteen minutes later. The discussion moved on to the next section of Unico's strategic plan, the Third Stream Mission. Departmental Head D



then initiated subject *SI* again while referring to his/her earlier initiation 'which I just raised, which was about responding to government agendas in areas other than research' (lines 100 to 101). Departmental Head D's recurrent initiation resulted in a new objective "- Responding to the Government agenda" being added to the Third Stream Mission.

Let us turn now to an example of a subject of talk's recurrent initiation that occurred at two separate meetings. Figure 6.6 illustrates subject *SI*'s recurrent initiation at two separate meetings. While *SI* was initiated by the individual A1 during meeting A, its recurrent initiation during meeting B might be uttered by the same individual, A1, if present at meeting B, or another individual A2.

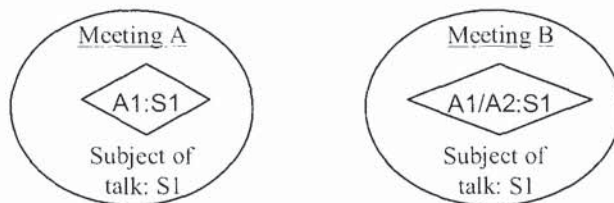


Figure 6.6: A subject of talk's recurrent initiation at two separate meetings

Table 6.5 provides an account of Departmental Head C initiating the same subject of talk at two separate meetings. The first meeting refers to a strategy away day held with Council that took place in period II. Departmental Head C was involved in the group that tackled *how to marketing Unico more effectively?*. The second meeting refers to period III's top management team meeting that looked at Version 7 of Unico's strategic plan. At both meetings, Departmental Head C highlighted the significance of having links with the 'health community' (Meeting A: lines 9 to 10) / 'health sector' (Meeting B: lines 6 to 7). However, only after the second initiation did his/her suggestion result in a change to Unico's strategic plan. This was due to the different referential aspects of Departmental Head C's two utterances. At the Council's strategy away day, his/her suggestion was embedded in the discussion regarding the restructuring of the Council. The suggestion 'we need to make a big impact in the health community here, and there's that lack of expertise' (lines 7 to 10) was thus interpreted by the Deputy VC in relation to recruiting a new member for the newly structured Council (lines 12 to 14). The focus of the top management team meeting in period III was to look at the strategic plan's content and decide whether to re-formulate or to add aspects, in case it was felt some were missing. Prior to suggesting adding strategic content on the health sector, Department Head C made reference to the plan, stating 'the other thing I don't see in there [Unico's strategic plan] is...' (lines 1 to 2). Differing

contextual meanings of Departmental Head C's two utterances resulted in a content change only after the top management team meeting.

	Talk	Referentiality <i>text</i>	Expressive aspect <i>text</i>	Referentiality <i>subject</i>	Expressive aspect <i>subject</i>
<u>Council strategy away day; period II</u>					
1	Departmental Head C: ...	<b>S9</b>	Overall I	S9	suggest
2	think the point that had been made				
3	was about getting people on Council				
4	who had expertise across the				
5	departments, particularly in our area				
6	of health we don't have anybody in				
7	the health area. And we're really				
8	lacking in that area and we need to				
9	make a big impact in the health				
10	community here, and there's that lack				
11	of expertise.				
12	Deputy VC: <b>S9</b> That's very timely as			S9	agree
13	well of course, thinking about the				
14	restructuring of Council. Very helpful.				
15	...				
<u>Top management team; period III</u>					
1	Departmental Head C: ..., I mean the				
2	other thing I don't see in there is that				
3	<b>S12</b> the community also involves	Mission	suggest	S12	suggest
4	there universities within the [UK				
5	region] and <b>S9</b> the other thing that it's	Mission	suggest	S9	suggest
6	important is obviously the health				
7	sector in the [UK region], and				
8	somehow we haven't got				
9	that.				

Table 6.5: Recurrent initiations across meetings

While both these examples of a subject of talk's recurrent initiation were uttered by the same individual (Departmental Head D in Table 6.4; Departmental Head B in Table 6.5), a subject of talk may also be initiated again by another individual, either during a meeting and/or across meetings. Figure 6.7 illustrates four alternatives for a recurrent initiation, according to the individual and meeting. Departmental Head D's recurrent initiation provided an account of domain A, as the same subject of talk was initiated by the same individual during the same meeting. The last example, from Departmental Head C shows



that the same individual initiated the same subject of talk at two separate meetings (domain C).

individual	different	B	D
	same	A	C
		same	subsequent
		meeting	

Figure 6.7: Recurrent initiation according to the meeting and uttering individual

Recurrent initiations by different individuals, at the same meeting (domain B), and by different individuals at separate meetings (domain D) will be explained through an example that resulted in a new goal “-- Continue to emphasise work placement experience as an integrated part of the curriculum” manifested in the Teaching Mission of Version 7. Talk stemmed from two strategy away days that were held in period II. The first away day was held with senior managers in academic and administrative roles. The second away day took place with newly appointed staff across hierarchies. At both away days, delegates were invited to discuss, in groups, the following questions in relation the Teaching Mission:

#### Key Questions

1. *What else should we do?*
2. *What should we not do?*
3. *How do we deliver (specific actions)?*

Reporting back on these tasks was done by one person per group and lasted between 5 and 10 minutes. It thus had numerous referential aspects, subjects of talk and expressive aspects. During the senior management away day, several delegates recurrently initiated the subject *placements* during the reporting back session for these specific questions. For instance, Departmental Head B suggested

‘... We should do further development for the sandwich programmes ...’

and another delegate stated

‘... placement is something that is clearly something we are very strong at, and we want to widen that because obviously placement is something we should be aiming at full-time students ...’.

During the strategy away day held with newly appointed staff, the subject *placements* was also recurrently initiated, as here, by Delegate A

'... And the placement opportunities are obviously absolutely fantastic and we need to continue to promote those and to make sure that most students have the opportunity to do a placement if they want to ...'

and Delegate B

'... We thought placements were very important, we could have more investment in placements, the support of them, the staff that arrange them ...'.

These examples, based on the subject *placements*, show that the changes to Unico's plan resulted from a recurrent initiation by different individuals both at a single meeting (domain B) and across meetings (domain D).

### 6.3 1.3 Summary of initiating utterances' characteristics

There were two initiation patterns of a talk instance that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan. The first initiation pattern refers to a subject of talk that was initiated once during a meeting and then led to a changes to Unico's plan. The second initiation pattern refers to a subject of talk that was recurrently initiated. Recurrence refers to multiple initiations at a meeting and/or initiations of the same subject of talk at separate meetings. An utterance's referentiality; subject of talk and expressiveness, provide further insights in to a subject of talk's initiation. Unico's strategic plan provided a strong referential aspect to an initiating utterance. For instance, Departmental Head D referenced the strategic plan 'Where does that fit into this statement?' (Table 6.4: line 7) during his/her initiation at period III's top management team meeting. Furthermore, initiations were shaped by the meeting's guiding questions that varied according to the period in Unico's strategic plan production cycle. The initiating subject was embedded, both in a simple utterance that had only the initiating subject of talk (see *sandwich placement* in Table 6.3) and in a more complex utterance with several subjects of talk (*S12*: other universities in the [UK region]; *S9*: the health sector in the [UK region]). Complex utterances occurred especially during strategy away days, as individuals enacted numerous subjects of talk when reporting back from break-out sessions. The most common expressive aspects of an initiating utterance, in relation to its subject(s) and referentiality, were *suggesting*, *clarifying* and *disagreeing*. In terms of the types of



actors identified in the first section, initiations were uttered by actors other than a text producer. This reflected the consultative process of Unico's strategic plan production cycle.

### 6.3.2 Response

An initiation is followed by a response. A response occurs in relation to the same subject of talk that had been enacted during the initiating utterance. Thus both initiation and response occur at the same meeting. There were four responsive acts:

- *No response*  
During a meeting, there was no response to an initiated subject of talk.
- *Single immediate response*  
A single response was uttered immediately subsequent to an initiated subject of talk during a meeting.
- *Multiple immediate responses*  
Multiple responses occurred immediately subsequent to an initiated subject of talk during a meeting.
- *Delayed response*  
There is an interruption in the subject of talk's occurrence between the initiating utterance and its response.

#### 6.3.2.1 No response

The first responsive act refers to a subject of talk that was only initiated during a meeting but was not followed by a response. All non-responses to an initiating utterance occurred at strategy away days during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. These initiations occurred in complex utterances that enacted numerous subjects of talk and, by the nature of the utterances, which were typically feedback sessions from break-out groups, did not necessarily expect or occasion a response. In sections three and four of Chapter 6 the notion of non-responses will be explained in more detail.

#### 6.3.2.2 Single immediate response

The second responsive act occurs as a single response following the immediately preceding initiation utterance. The example in Table 6.3 has already shown a single response uttered immediately after an initiation. The Deputy VC supported Departmental Head B's

suggestion 'Okay, that's fine ...' (Table 6.3: line 9). Thereafter, there had not been a response to the subject 'sandwich placement'. While a single response may be enacted by any type of actor, single immediate responses that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan were uttered solely by a text producer. Its referential aspects were the strategic plan and the preceding utterance's subject. The dominating expressive aspect was *supporting*.

#### 6.3.2.3 Multiple immediate responses

The third responsive act refers to multiple subsequent responses that followed the immediately preceding initiation utterance. The response consists of several (more than one) successive utterances. Lines 1 to 17 in Table 6.6 provide an example of multiple immediate responses. The account stems from period III's top management team meeting that was shaped by the question *Do we need to re-formulate?*. At that moment, the Third Stream Mission's terminology was being discussed based on Version 7. Responses occurred in relation to Departmental Head C's initiation of subject *S5 developing strategic partnerships*. The first response was uttered by Departmental Head A, who referred to an existing goal in the Third Stream Mission, to disagree with Departmental Head C's suggestion to add a new content (line 6). Referring to Departmental Head A's response Departmental Head C re-emphasises that '... Strategic partnerships within the [UK region] I think is going to be key ...' (lines 11 to 13). Supporting Departmental Head C's initiation, the VC enacted an existing objective within the Third Stream Mission and suggested 'where it says "engaging with", we should change that into strategic partnerships' (lines 14 to 17). The existing objective was amended and "forging strategic partnerships" was added to Version 8. During instances of multiple immediate responses, both types of actors engaged in the speech communication.



	Talk instance	Referentiality <i>text</i>	Expressive aspect <i>text</i>	Referentiality <i>subject</i>	Expressive aspect <i>subject</i>
	<u>Departmental Head C:</u>				
1	<b>S4</b> We've got engaging	Mission	support	S4	support
2	<b>S5</b> but we haven't got developing	Mission	suggest	S5	suggest
3	strategic partnerships have we,				
4	which I ...				
5	<u>Departmental Head A:</u>				
6	<b>S5</b> We've got partnerships.	Goal		S5	disagree
7	<u>Departmental Head C:</u>				
8	<b>S5</b> Have we got partnerships?	Mission	clarify	S5	clarify
9	Where's that? Not as a bullet point.		clarify		clarify
10	I think that's where it should stand.		suggest		suggest
11	Strategic partnerships within the				suggest
12	[UK region] I think is going to be key				
13	to ...				
14	<u>VC:</u> <b>S5</b> Well where it says "engaging	Objective		S5	suggest
15	with", we should change that into		suggest		
16	strategic partnerships I think, you're				support
17	right, yes.				
18	...				
	[FEW MINUTES DIFFERENCE]				
30	<u>VC:</u> .... But I think your point about				
31	our engagement after <b>S5</b> the			S5	support
32	strategic partnership with the <b>S2</b>			S2	support
33	local health authority and <b>S6</b> the			S6	suggest
34	local hospitals is crucial				

Table 6.6: Multiple immediate responses and a delayed response

#### 6.3.2.4 Delayed response

A delayed response provides the fourth responsive act. The responsive utterance's subject of talk does NOT occur subsequent to its initiating utterance. Thus, there is an interruption in the subject of talk's occurrence, as previously illustrated in Figure 6.5. A delayed response should, however, not be confused with a recurrent initiation that occurs during a meeting. Hence, a delayed response cannot be uttered by the same individual who enacted the initiating utterance. Lines 30 to 34 in Table 6.6 provide two examples of a delayed response. The first delayed response occurs in relation to subject **S5** *strategic partnerships*. The VC again supported, as in a previous utterance (Table 6.6: lines 15 to 18), Departmental Head C's initiation to add 'developing strategic partnerships' (Table 6.6: lines 2 to 3). The second delayed response occurs in relation to Departmental Head C's initiation of subject **S2** 'the

health sector in the [UK region]' (Table 6.6: lines 7 to 8). The VC also supported the initiation of *S2* and the addition of 'the local health authority' (Table 6.6: line 33) to the same objective. Furthermore, the VC enacted another subject (*S6 local hospitals*) during his/her delayed response. As a result, not only "forging strategic partnerships" but also "the Regional Strategic Health Authority and local hospitals" were added to an existing objective in the Third Stream Mission (see Table 6.7). While the delayed response in Table 6.6 occurred in form of a single utterance, it may also occur in form of multiple responses. Another delayed response was uttered during a strategy away day and a top management team meeting. It spanned numerous subjects that had been initiated when reporting back utterances.

Version	Reference points 1 or 2 (version <i>n-1</i> )	Version	Reference points 3 or 4 (version <i>n</i> )
Version 7	- Engaging closely with the Unico Science Park, the Regional Development Agency (AWM), The [UK City] Council, [UK City] Chamber of Commerce and Industry, The Regional Skills Partnership, Confederation of British Industry, other local HEIs (WMHEA).	Version 8	- Engaging closely, <u>strengthening existing relationships and forging strategic partnerships with such bodies as the Unico Science Park, the Regional Development Agency (AWM), The [UK City] Council, [UK City] Chamber of Commerce and Industry, The Regional Skills Partnership, Confederation of British Industry, the Regional Strategic Health Authority and local hospitals, other local HEIs (WMHEA)</u>

Table 6.7: Content change after a delayed response

#### 6.3.2.5 Summary of features and characteristics of responsive acts

As we have seen, an initiation is followed by a response. There were four responsive acts: i) a non-response, ii) a single immediate response, iii) multiple immediate responses, and iv) a delayed response. The first responsive act may be seen as a passive response, whereas the remaining acts were active responses that referenced an initiated subject of talk during the same meeting. Differences in responsive utterances' components and contextual as well as situational features are illustrated in Table 6.8. This first responsive act, a non-response, however provided an outlier and is thus excluded from following comparison. A meeting's guiding questions and the strategic plan provided strong referential aspects across the active responsive acts. While a single response and multiple responses referred to the immediately preceding utterance's subject of talk, a delayed response referenced *a* preceding utterance's subject of talk. Utterances during responsive acts differed in their expressive aspects. Single responses only supported an initiated subject. During multiple responses there was a larger variety of expressive aspects, including *clarifying* and *disagreeing*. These two expressive aspects, by their very nature, are more inclined to be followed by further utterances, as they



challenge an uttered point of view. Delayed responses were uttered as *supporting* an initiated subject of talk and *suggesting* further subjects. The dominant expressive aspects of a single response and a delayed response were *supporting* and *suggesting*. As already outlined, expressive aspects occurred in relation to the initiating utterance's subject of talk.

	Responsive act			
	Non-response	Single response	Multiple responses	Delayed response
<b>Referential aspect</b>	- None	- Immediately preceding utterance's subject of talk - Strategic plan - Meeting's guiding question	- Immediately preceding utterance's subject of talk - Strategic plan - Meeting's guiding question	- A preceding utterance's subject of talk - Strategic plan - Meeting's guiding question
<b>Expressive aspect</b>	- None	- Supporting	- Clarifying - Disagreeing - Suggesting - Supporting	- Supporting - Suggesting
<b>Utterance's complexity</b>	- None	- Simple	- Simple - (Complex)	- Simple - Complex
<b>Type of actor</b>	- None	- Text producer	- Text producer - Meeting Delegate	- Text producer - Meeting Delegate

Table 6.8: Responsive acts in relation to an utterance's components and contextual, as well as situational, features

Utterances of responsive acts varied in their complexity. Single responses were only uttered in simple utterances that referred to the initiated subject of talk and, at times, the strategic plan. Multiple responses were mostly uttered in simple utterances that had one to three subjects of talk. In a delayed response the initiated subject of talk was embedded in both a simple and a complex utterance. Complex utterances thus occurred at strategy away days, as they referred to several subjects that were initiated during the reporting back session. There were also differences in terms of the type of actor who engaged in the three active responsive acts. Single immediate responses were uttered solely by text producers. They thereby voiced their agreement to an initiated subject of talk. Both types of actor engaged in multiple immediate responses. Instances of delayed responses were only uttered by text producers.

### 6.3.3 Summary

The second section of Chapter 6 illustrates that talk instances resulting in changes to Unico's strategic plan consisted of an initiation and a response (see Figure 6.8). An initiation refers to the initial enactment of a subject of talk during a meeting. A subject of

talk was initiated according to two patterns: i) a single initiation; and ii) a recurrent initiation. The first pattern refers to changes to Unico's plans that stemmed from a subject of talk's single initiation. A subject of talk's recurrent initiation occurs as the same subject of talk is initiated several times during the same meeting. Moreover, the same subject of talk may be initiated at separate meetings before leading to a change to Unico's plan, as in the example 'placements'. While different individuals initiated subjects of talk, each initiation was enacted by a meeting delegate other than a text producer. This reflected the consultative process of Unico's strategic plan production cycle.

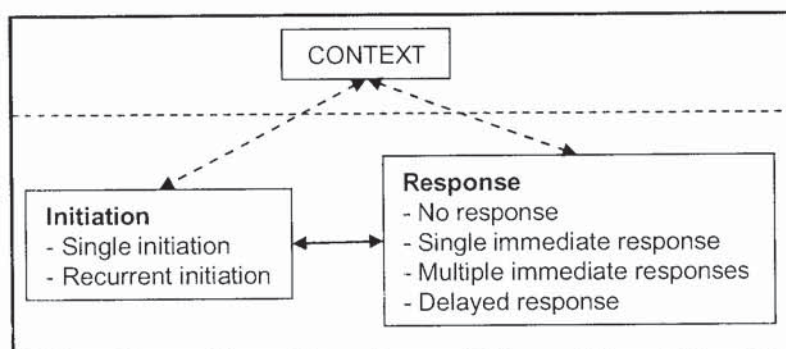


Figure 6.8: *Initiation - responsive act* framework

An initiation was then followed by a response. A response occurred in relation to the same subject of talk that had been enacted during the initiating utterance. There were four responsive acts: i) no response; ii) a single immediate response; iii) multiple immediate responses; and iv) a delayed response. There were similarities and differences according to the utterance's components and contextual features of the three responsive acts, whereas the non-response provided an outlier. Expressive aspects *clarifying* and *disagreeing* occurred only during multiple immediate responses. While an initiation was always enacted by any actor, other than a text producer, both types of actors were involved in the various responsive acts.

## 6.4 Conversational patterns

The third section illustrates eight conversational patterns (see Figure 6.9) that result from the various alternatives based on the *initiation – responsive act* framework (see Figure 6.8). These conversational patterns provide a detailed understanding of eight changes to Unico's plans across the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Mission. After explaining each conversational pattern in more detail, insights will be gained by comparing the



conversational patterns that were triggered by a single initiation, with patterns that resulted from a recurrent initiation.

**6.4.1 A model**

Figure 6.9 illustrates eight conversational patterns that are based on the two initiation patterns and four responsive acts that were identified in section 6.3 (for a summary see Figure 6.8). A subject of talk's initiation was always uttered by a meeting delegate (A1 or A2). Both types of actors engaged in responsive acts. In Figure 6.9 conversational patterns that resulted from a single initiation are referred to as SI, whereas patterns based on recurrent initiations are labelled as RIs.

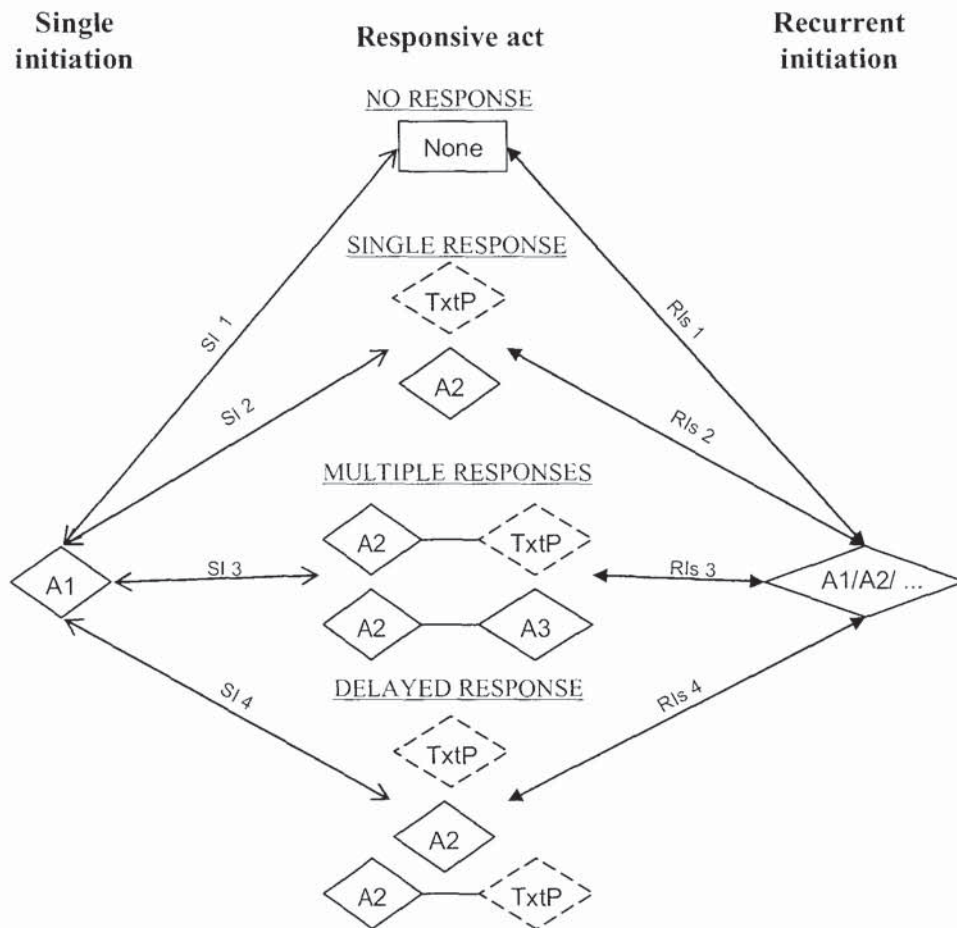


Figure 6.9: Conversational patterns according to the *initiation -- responsive act* framework

Each conversational pattern (SI 1 to SI 4 and RIs 1 to RIs 4) will now be explained in more detail. Thereafter, insights will be gained by comparing findings on conversational patterns that were triggered by single initiations with patterns that resulted from recurrent initiations.

## 6.4.2 Single initiation

Four conversational patterns (SI 1 to SI 4 in Figure 6.9) were identified, when looking at the changes to Unico's plans, that were triggered by a single initiation. Even though a subject of talk was initiated only once during a meeting, there might be several responsive acts that occur in relation to the same initiated subject of talk. While fifteen single initiated subjects of talk led to one responsive act, there was one subject of talk that resulted in two responsive acts. Two separate responsive acts were triggered by Departmental Head C's initiation of 'developing strategic partnerships' (Table 6.6: lines 2 to 3). Firstly, it led to multiple immediate responses (Table 6.6: lines 5 to 17). Secondly, the VC uttered a delayed response referencing Departmental Head C's initiation (Table 6.6: lines 30 to 34). Each conversational pattern that was triggered by a single initiation will now be explained in more detail.

### 6.4.2.1 SI 1

The first conversational pattern refers to a single initiation without any response to the initiated subject of talk during the meeting (see Figure 6.9). A change to Unico's plan was triggered by a subject of talk that was enacted just once at a meeting. In total, there were five talk instances that occurred during a strategy away day type of meeting. Hence, the initiating subject of talk was embedded in a complex utterance that consisted of numerous subjects of talk. None of these initiations was expressed as *clarifying* or *disagreeing*. They were all phrased as *suggesting* in relation to the respective meeting's guiding question.

### 6.4.2.2 SI 2

The second conversational pattern was triggered by a single initiation and was followed by a single response (see Figure 6.9). The response was uttered immediately after the subject of talk's initiation. A representative example is provided by the talk instance that was initiated by Departmental Head B's suggestion to add 'through sandwich placement' (Table 6.3: lines 4 to 5) to an existing objective in the Teaching Mission. In the three talk instances of SI 2 only a text producer uttered the single immediate responses. They occurred during strategy away days in period II and a top management team meeting in period III.

### 6.4.2.3 SI 3

The third conversational pattern consists of multiple responses that were uttered immediately after a subject of talk's single initiation (see Figure 6.9). These responses occurred successively. There were seven instances of multiple responses that happened immediately after the initiating subject of talk was uttered. These occurred at strategy away



days and top management team meetings. The first responsive utterance was uttered either by a text producer or by any meeting delegate. Moreover, both text producers and non-text producers engaged in the multiple responses. Hence, there are no instances of only one type of actor engaging in a multiple response.

#### 6.4.2.4 SI 4

The fourth conversational pattern consists of a delayed response to a single initiated subject of talk (see Figure 6.9). Initiation and response occur at the same meeting. There was only one instance of conversational pattern SI 4 which occurred at a top management team meeting in period III. An existing objective was amended after Departmental Head C's single initiation of *S5* 'developing strategic partnerships' (Table 6.6: lines 2 to 3). The delayed response was uttered by the VC, who executed the role of a text producer.

### **6.4.3 Recurrent initiation**

There were four conversational patterns that resulted from a recurrent initiation of a subject of talk (RIs 1 to RIs 4). Recurrence refers to multiple initiations at a meeting and/or initiations of the same subject of talk at separate meetings. Unico's strategic plan was changed after a subject of talk's recurrent initiation. Due to a subject's recurrent initiation at a meeting and/or across meetings, there were several responsive acts in relation to the same subject of talk. There were twenty three subjects of talk that were initiated recurrently before leading to a change to Unico's plan. While most of these subjects' recurrent initiations resulted in the same responsive act after each initiation, in relation to six subjects there were several distinctive responsive acts. Five of those subjects had the same two responsive acts. While the recurrent initiation at one meeting resulted in a non-response (RIs 1), their recurrent initiation at a subsequent meeting led to multiple immediate responses (RIs 3). The sixth instance refers to Departmental Head C's recurrent initiation of the subject *health community*. It resulted in three distinctive responsive acts. While the first initiation resulted in a single immediate response (RIs 2), his/her recurrent initiation at a subsequent meeting led to two responsive acts: multiple immediate responses (RIs 3) and a delayed response (RIs 4). Each conversational pattern that was triggered by a recurrent initiation will now be explained in more detail. The several responsive acts that occurred in relation to a subject's recurrent initiation are included in the conversational pattern's occurrence.

#### 6.4.3.1 RIs 1

The first conversational pattern refers to a subject of talk being initiated recurrently without any response in relation to the initiated subject of talk (see Figure 6.9). In total, there were eighteen subjects that were recurrently initiated. Seven of these were initiated across two meetings and one subject across three separate meetings. RIs 1 occurred forty times, as most of these subjects were initiated more than once during the same meeting or even at separate meetings. All of these instances stemmed from strategy away days held in periods II and IV of Unico's strategic plan production cycle.

#### 6.4.3.2 RIs 2

The second conversational pattern resulted from a subject of talk's recurrent initiation that was followed by a single response. The single response occurred in the immediately subsequent utterance to the one that carried the initiating subject of talk (see Figure 6.9). There were three instances of RIs 2. In both cases, the response occurred after the subject was initiated for a second time during the same meeting. The first example occurred during the newly appointed strategy away day in period II, whereas the second example took place during the top management team meeting in period III. The second example has already been illustrated in Table 6.4. Departmental Head D initiated the subject *responding to government's agenda* twice during the top management team meeting before a response was uttered. The single response in both cases was uttered by a text producer.

#### 6.4.3.3 RIs 3

The third conversational pattern stemmed from a subject's recurrent initiation that was followed by multiple responses. These multiple responses occurred immediately subsequent to the initiating utterance (see Figure 6.9). Fourteen instances of RIs 3 occurred in relation to nine subjects of talk. Six of those subjects also led to other responsive acts, as they were initiated at separate meetings. During multiple immediate responses, individuals asked for clarification in relation to the initiated subject or disagreed with the initiating utterance's author, as when Departmental Head A disagreed with Departmental Head C's suggestion to add 'developing strategic partnerships' (Table 6.6: line 2 to 3). Both types of actors were engaged during the responses that spanned over several successive utterances. Moreover, twelve of the fourteen recurrent initiations occurred during strategy away days in period II with the remaining stemming from the top management team meeting in period III.



#### 6.4.3.4 RIs 4

The fourth conversational pattern consists of a delayed response to a recurrently initiated subject of talk (see Figure 6.9). A delayed response in relation to the recurrent initiation of two subjects occurred in the form of a single utterance. Two instances occurred during a strategy away day with the Council, period II. The subjects *flexible delivery of programmes* (Teaching) and *research centres* (Research) were initiated three times during the respective reporting back session. Text producers then responded to these recurrent initiations during their wrapping up speech. The third example refers to Departmental Head C's recurrent initiation of the subject *health community* during two separate meetings (see also Table 6.5). In a single response, the Deputy VC responded to his/her first initiation with respect to a guiding question of the Council's away day *How to marketing Unico more effectively?*. Departmental Head C's second initiation occurred during the top management team meeting that looked at *Do we need to re-formulate?*. This recurrent initiation then resulted in multiple immediate responses (RIs 3) and a delayed response by the VC 'I think your point about our engagement after the strategic partnership with the local health authority and the local hospitals is crucial' (Table 6.6: lines 30 to 34). The fourth instance of a delayed response occurred in relation to the subject *placement*. A delayed response spanned multiple utterances at two separate strategy away days held in period II. In both cases, the subject had been initiated more than twice before the delayed response was enacted. The first response was thereby uttered by another meeting delegate. During the course of the talk instance, at least one text producer also engaged in the discussion on the subject *placement*.

#### 6.4.4 Comparison of conversational patterns

This part offers a comparison of conversational patterns that were triggered by single initiated to recurrently initiated subjects of talk (see Table 6.9). Thirty eight changes to Unico's strategic plan were triggered by fifteen single initiated subjects and twenty three recurrently initiated subjects. While all but one single initiated subject of talk resulted in only one responsive act, there were several responsive acts in relation to a recurrently initiated subject of talk. For instance, the first initiation of the subject *health community* led to a single immediate response during the Council's strategy away day (period II); whereas a second initiation at a top management team meeting in period III was followed by multiple immediate responses. Comparing instances of conversational patterns that were triggered by a single initiation with subjects stemming from a recurrent initiation, showed that there were similarities and differences in the occurrences of responsive acts (see Table 6.9). As already mentioned above, all but one single initiated subject of talk resulted solely in one responsive

act. Non-responses and multiple immediate responses occurred most across both initiation patterns. Forty non-responses to recurrent initiations occurred in relation to fifteen subjects of talk. These subjects of talk were thus initiated at least twice at a meeting or at separate meetings before triggering a change to Unico's plan. Three subjects of talk needed to be recurrently initiated before resulting in a single immediate response, whereas four subjects led to a delayed response after being recurrently initiated. Fourteen instances of multiple immediate responses occurred in relation to eight subjects of talk. While every initiation was enacted by a meeting Delegate; the role of text producers appeared to be crucial during responsive acts. If there had been an active response (SI 2 to SI 4 and RIs 2 to RIs 4) to an initiation, a text producer was actively involved which is shown in the column next to each responsive act (see Table 6.9). Following, the dominance of recurrent initiations and non-responses as well as the role of text producers during responsive acts will be explained by drawing upon contextual information.

INITIATION		RESPONSE	Conversational pattern		
	<i>Subjects</i>		TxtP		<i>n</i>
Single	15	No response	0	<b>SI 1</b>	<b>5</b>
		Single immediate response	3	<b>SI 2</b>	<b>3</b>
		Multiple immediate responses	7	<b>SI 3</b>	<b>7</b>
		Delayed response	1	<b>SI 4</b>	<b>1</b>
Recurrent	23	No response	0	<b>RIs 1</b>	<b>40</b>
		Single immediate response	3	<b>RIs 2</b>	<b>3</b>
		Multiple immediate responses	13	<b>RIs 3</b>	<b>14</b>
		Delayed response	4	<b>RIs 4</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 6.9: Overview of conversational patterns

#### 6.4.4.1 Recurrently initiated subjects of talk

Recurrently initiated subjects of talk provided the strongest initiation pattern that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan. A recurrently initiated subject of talk has a greater opportunity to trigger a change to Unico's plan as i) it may result in a different responsive act after each initiation and ii) it may illustrate a commonly shared point of view amongst meeting delegates. Drawing upon Departmental Head C's recurrent initiation of the subject *health community* enables us to demonstrate the greater opportunity for a recurrently initiated subject to trigger a change to Unico's plan. Each new initiation of the subject of talk has a different initiating point in time, during the same meeting or at a separate meeting. Therefore, the same subject of talk occurs in light of a different situation, as each subject's



initiation is embedded in a novel utterance with a distinct referentiality (Bakhtin 1986a). At the away day with the Council (period II), Departmental Head C's suggestion 'we need to make a big impact in the health community here, and there's that lack of expertise.' (Table 6.5: lines 7 to 11) occurred during the reporting back of the group that looked at Unico's future marketing activities. The Deputy VC thus responded 'that's very timely as well of course, thinking about [Marketing Activity A]. Very helpful.' (Table 6.5: lines 12 to 15). At a subsequent meeting, the top management team meeting in period III, Departmental Head C initiated again 'the other thing that it's important is obviously the health sector in the [UK region], and somehow we haven't got that. [emphasis added]' (Table 6.5: lines 5 to 8). This time, the suggestion occurred during the discussion of the Third Stream Mission's content. During the multiple immediate responses, Departmental Head C re-emphasised that 'I mean we just don't have any connections with any ... we don't have any say there [pointing at a hard copy of Unico's strategic plan]' showing that a link with the *health sector* is missing in Unico's strategic plan. The VC then responded '... that's clearly one of the things ... that should be one of our actions in this [Unico's strategic plan]'. As a result, an existing objective in Unico's strategic plan was amended and "the Regional Strategic Health Authority" was added to Version 7. As we have seen in this example, a recurrently initiated subject of talk may result in different responsive acts as it occurs in light of a different situation. Both meetings and thus Departmental Head C's utterance were shaped by distinctive referential aspects, such as a meeting's guiding questions. Furthermore, the referential aspects differed as Unico's strategic plan was enacted during Departmental Head C's second initiation at the top management team meeting. A subject's initiation point in time thus has a strong influence on triggering changes to Unico's plan.

A recurrently initiated subject may also lead to a change to Unico's plan as it reflects a commonly shared point of view amongst meeting delegates. The adoption of recurrently initiated subjects occurred particularly in meetings in period II of Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Three strategy away days were designed to get the input of senior managers, newly appointed staff and members of Council. The purpose of each meeting was reflected in the respective meeting's guiding questions. These guided delegates' tasks and thus shaped their utterances' referential aspects, subjects of talk, and expressive aspects. While delegates were split in to groups, they followed the same questions. During a strategy away day, a recurrently initiated subject was thus mostly uttered by different delegates. A delegate's reporting back thus reflected the respective group's discussion. The subject *placements* provides an illustrative example of a recurrently initiated subject that led to changes to Unico's plan as it reflected a commonly shared point of view amongst meeting

delegates. Its initiation was triggered by the guiding question *How do we deliver (specific actions)?*. This question was posed during the discussion session on the Teaching Mission at both the senior management strategy away day and the recently appointed staff strategy away day. Out of ten groups across the two strategy away days, the subject *placement* was initiated nine times by different delegates who reported back on their group's discussion. As a result, a new goal was added to the Teaching Mission of Version 7 "-- Continue to emphasise work placement experience as an integrated part of the curriculum".

#### 6.4.4.2 Non-response to initiated subjects of talk

Non-responses were the dominant responsive act stemming from both initiation patterns (see SI 1 and RIs 1 in Table 6.9). Non-responses to an initiated subject occurred only during strategy away days that were held in periods II and IV of Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Contextual features of strategy away day-type meetings reflected in a meeting's guiding questions and a meeting's set-up provide further evidence of the strong occurrence of non-responses. A meeting's guiding questions reflected the purpose of each away day. On the one hand, these questions reflected the receptiveness of the text producers to receive delegates' views on the current strategic plan. On the other hand, these questions shaped the subjects of talk during these discussions. Hence, any initiation of a subject of talk during a strategy away day was guided by the meeting's specific questions. During a strategy away day an active responsive act was therefore not necessary, as a subject's initiation occurred as an answer to the respective meeting's guiding question. This explanation is complementary to the above mentioned argument that a recurrently initiated subject provided a shared answer amongst delegates during strategy away day-type meetings. Another explanation of the dominant occurrence of non-responses during strategy away days stems from a meeting's set-up (i.e. Chapter 5: talk space and meeting space). A meeting's set-up determined the talk space available for both initiating and responsive utterances. The amount of time available to report back was between five and ten minutes during strategy away days. Unico's strategy away days followed a detailed agenda in order to enable each group to reveal their answers to the meeting's guiding questions at equal length. After groups finished reporting back, there was very limited talk time available for meeting delegates and text producers to engage in subjects of talk that were initiated during the reporting back sessions.



#### 6.4.4.3 Role of text producers engaging in conversational patterns

While meeting delegates initiated subjects of talk that led to a change to Unico's plan, text producers were crucial as they shaped conversational patterns in an active and hidden role. The text producers' active role is apparent as they engaged in all but one instance of the responsive acts single immediate responses (SI 2; RIs 2), multiple immediate responses (SI 3; RIs 3) and delayed responses (SI 4; RIs 4). They therefore engaged in various ways during responsive acts. For instance, the Deputy VC supported Departmental Head B's initiated subject *sandwich placement* by responding 'Okay, that's fine' (see Table 6.3: line 9). The next table provides an example of a text producer asking for clarification in response to an initiated subject. The talk instance stems from the discussion of the Teaching Mission at the recently appointed staff strategy away day held in period II. Table 6.10 however only illustrates the talk that occurred in relation to the strategic plan's terminology "where teaching excellence is supported and celebrated" (Version 4). Moreover, Meeting Delegate A's referentiality to the strategic plan was shaped by the guiding question *What else differentiates Unico with regard to Teaching currently?*. Once Meeting Delegate A disagreed with the initiated subject *teaching excellence* being a differentiating point of Unico, the VC interrupted his/her reporting back utterance to enquire 'Would you say that we had ... that we "supported and celebrated teaching excellence" at the moment?' (Table 6.10: lines 66 to 67) and 'do you feel it's recognised in positive ways?' (Table 6.10: lines 74 to 75). As a result of the VC's immediate response to Meeting Delegate A's initiation, the statement was removed from this section of Unico's strategic plan.

Text producers also had a hidden role during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Their hidden influence came to bearing through the meeting's guiding questions. These were developed by the text producers prior to each meeting. As we have already seen, a meeting's guiding question shapes the nature and occurrence of initiating subjects. Thus, text producers shaped the initiating subjects as they set the stage for talk to occur by developing specific questions. While these questions re-enforced the institutional strategic planning activities, they framed the subjects and talk that occurred during strategy meetings.

Talk instance		Referen- tiality <i>text</i>	Expressive aspect <i>text</i>	Referen- tiality <i>subject</i>	Expressive aspect <i>subject</i>
62	<u>Meeting Delegate A:</u> ... As we went down the list we just ... we didn't have any issue with				
63	any of this but we thought some of them were a bit bland you know, <b>S1</b> "teaching	Objective	Clarify	S1	
64	excellence", yeah we agree with that but wouldn't everywhere say that? I don't know if it's				
65	a very differentiating point. ...				
66	<u>VC:</u> Would you say that we had ... <b>S1</b> that we "supported and celebrated teaching excellence"	Objective	Clarify	S1	Clarify
67	at the moment?				
68	<u>Meeting Delegate A:</u> <b>S1</b> I find it very difficult to measure it really, it sounds like you know ...			S1	
69	yes and no. I mean it's ... how do you answer a question like that? I just find it very				Suggest
70	difficult to get a handle on. You'd have to compare it to other places I suppose and come				
71	up with some realistic measures. But to measure how much we celebrate, I mean I'm not				
72	going down the pub every night and you know, celebrating ...				
73	(all laugh)				
74	<u>VC:</u> <b>S1</b> You're a group who are doing a lot of the teaching; do you feel it's recognised in			S1	Clarify
75	positive ways?				
76	<u>Meeting Delegate A:</u> <b>S1</b> Hard to tell. I mean it's the right question to ask, I just ... you know,	Objective	Clarify	S1	
77	is it ... you know, as I say, no problem with it, just that my personal view is it's just a bit				
78	bland, ...				

Table 6.10: Text producer's engagement



### 6.4.5 Summary

The third section shows eight conversational patterns resulting from the initiation – response framework. Comparing instances of conversational patterns showed that recurrently initiated subjects of talk exceeded the amount of single initiated subjects of talk. Furthermore, it showed that non-responses were the dominant responsive act in relation to both initiating patterns. In terms of the type of actor, every initiation was enacted by a meeting delegate. The role of text producers appears to be crucial, as at least one text producer engaged in a responsive act. Looking at findings of each conversational pattern provided clues about the construction of Unico's strategic plan. The relation to a meeting's guiding question, the initiating point in time and the engagement of text producers determined a subject of talk triggering a change to Unico's strategic plan. Additionally, there was no indication that it depended on an individual, for instance his/her status or role, whether an initiation resulted in a change to Unico's plan. Rather, contextual issues such as a meeting's purpose and the type of responsive act seemed to shape when a subject's initiation led to a text change.

## 6.5 Talk instances in relation to the type of content change

The fourth section of Chapter 6 links findings on the eight conversational patterns with the types of content change that were identified in Chapter 4 (new specificity, reducing specificity, increasing specificity). The first part looks at conversational patterns in relation to the type of content change. The second part focuses on the type of content changes per initiation pattern and the plan's content level. A detailed analysis showed that contextual characteristics, utterances' referentiality to the strategic plan and a subject's contentiousness determined the type of content change and the level at which a change was made.

### 6.5.1 Conversational patterns to type of content change

The first part links each conversational pattern with the three types of content change that were identified in Chapter 4. *New specificity* refers to a new objective or goal being added to the plan. The strategic content documented within a Mission thus becomes more specific. *Increasing specificity* occurs as an existing objective or goal becomes more specific when compared to the referential basis in the previous version (version  $n-1$ ). *Reducing specificity* occurs as an existing statement becomes more ambiguous in expressing an objective or goal when compared to the referential basis in the previous version (version  $n-1$ ).

Table 6.11 provides an overview of the types of content change that occurred in relation to each conversational pattern. While each conversational pattern resulted in at least one instance of new specificity, there were differences in the text changes to existing terminology, when comparing single initiated subjects to recurrently initiated subjects. Based on single initiated subjects, *increasing specificity* only resulted from conversational pattern SI 3 and SI 4. Reducing specificity was solely triggered by conversational pattern SI 3. Patterns SI 1 and SI 2 resulted only in *new specificity*. There was a larger variety of the type of content change triggered by conversational patterns stemming from recurrently initiated subjects. All three types of changes to Unico's plans resulted from conversational patterns RIs 1 and RIs 4, whereas RIs 2 and RIs 3 led to instances of *new specificity* and *increasing specificity*. In order to shed more light on the conversational pattern triggering a particular type of content change, the next part looks at the occurrence of each initiation pattern in relation to each plan's content change, by drawing upon utterances' components and situational factors.

Pattern	Initiation	Responsive act	Type of content change
SI 1	Single	No response	New specificity
SI 2		Single immediate response	New specificity
SI 3		Multiple immediate responses	New specificity; increasing specificity; reducing specificity
SI 4		Delayed single response	Increasing specificity
RIs 1	Recurrent	No response	New specificity; increasing specificity; reducing specificity
RIs 2		Single response	New specificity; increasing specificity
RIs 3		Multiple immediate responses	New specificity; increasing specificity
RIs 4		Delayed single response	New specificity; increasing specificity; reducing specificity

Table 6.11: Overview of type of content change per conversational pattern

### 6.5.2 Type of content change to initiation pattern and content level

Table 6.12 provides an overview of the type of content change per initiation pattern and the level at which these changes were made (content level). Let us first focus on a subject's initiation pattern in relation to the occurrence of the type of content change. Both single and recurrent initiation patterns show similar results, as the number of instances leading to new content being added (*new specificity*) exceeded changes to an existing strategic plan (*increasing specificity* and *reducing specificity*). In total, the smallest number of text changes resulted in *reducing specificity*. Across the two initiation patterns, subjects of talk



resulted in only three instances of reducing specificity, whereas there were nine cases of increasing specificity. Most content changes led to *new specificity*, with twenty six instances. The occurrence of the type of content change across both initiation patterns reflects the distribution of the total number of text changes illustrated in Chapter 4. Overall, exactly half of all changes resulted from new objectives or goals being added (new specificity). Thus, the remaining half of the text changes occurred in relation to already existing statements (increasing specificity; reducing specificity).

Initiation	Type of content change	Content level		Total
		Objective	Goal	
Single	New specificity	0	8	<i>8</i>
	Increasing specificity	4	1	<i>5</i>
	Reducing specificity	1	0	<i>1</i>
Recurrent	New specificity	3	14	<i>17</i>
	Increasing specificity	4	0	<i>4</i>
	Reducing specificity	2	0	<i>2</i>

Table 6.12: Type of content change per initiation pattern and content level

Recurrently initiated subjects leading to *new specificity* provided the dominant link between type of content change and initiation pattern. Most of these initiations occurred at strategy away days during periods II and IV of Unico's strategic plan production cycle. As we have already seen in section 3 of Chapter 6, during strategy away day meetings recurrently initiated subjects demonstrated commonly shared points of view held by the meeting delegates. By contrast, the only subject that was recurrently initiated at a top management team meeting was Departmental Head D's double initiation of the subject *governmental agenda* (period III). Departmental Head D's recurrent initiation appeared to be necessary as the first initiation occurred during the discussion on the Research Mission's terminology; whereas the initiated subject refers to the Third Stream Mission. Hence, Departmental Head D re-initiated *governmental agenda* during the discussion of the Third Stream Mission. The second initiation then resulted in the Deputy VC's agreement 'Yes, yes' (Table 6.4: line 106).

Let us now turn to the link between a subject's initiation pattern, its type of content change and the content level. As already outlined in Chapter 4, Unico's Research, Teaching and Third Stream Missions were illustrated by several objectives followed by goals. An *objective* articulates specific strategic content, which constitutes a Mission's espoused

strategic direction. An objective, however, may not be obtained within the planning period (Ackoff 1981). Further detail on how to achieve an objective is reflected in the form of *goals*. In comparison to objectives, goals 'are expected to be obtained within the period covered by a plan' (Ackoff 1981: 104). In the final version of the strategic plan, Unico's three Missions consisted of several objectives (Research: 8, Teaching: 9, Third Stream: 8) and goals (Research: 21, Teaching: 29, Third Stream: 8). Stemming from both single initiated and recurrently initiated subjects, most of the changes to Unico's plans were made at the goal level (see Table 6.12). Looking at the type of content change and the content level, there is a striking distinction across both initiation patterns. While new specificity resulted mainly in goals being added (22 instances out of 25), changes made to an existing statement (increasing specificity and reducing specificity) occurred mostly at the objective level (11 instances out of 12).

In order to illustrate these relationships in more detail, the following three parts outline aspects of talk that shaped the type of content change.

#### 6.5.2.1 Contextual characteristics

Differences in the occurrence of the type of content change were rooted in the nature of the meetings that embedded the initiating talk. Most of the new specificity that occurred at the *goal* level resulted from strategy away days held in period II and IV (19 changes out of 22). These meetings' guiding questions focused on *How do we deliver (specific actions)?* (period II) and *What are the specific actions to achieve the strategic direction?* (period IV). This reflects the nature of goals, as they provide further detail to espoused strategic directions that, in turn, are manifested as objectives. Moreover, one case leading to new specificity at the objective level resulted from a recurrent initiation during strategic away days, whereas the remaining two instances of the new specificity at the objective level occurred in the top management team meeting in period III. Additionally, more than half of the content changes that were made to an existing statement, i.e. increasing specificity and reducing specificity, resulted from initiations at strategy away days (7 instances out of 11). These occurred in relation to period II's guiding question *What should we not do?*. Changes to Unico's plans resulting from the top management team meeting in period III were triggered by the meeting's guiding question *Is there anything missing? Do we need to re-formulate?*. Thus, changes to objectives and goals resulted from amendments made to existing statements, as well as from additions of new content, both at objective and goal level.



Adding talk instances, in relation to changes to Unico's plan that resulted from the top management team meeting held in period I, provides further insights. Comparing the level of changes to Unico's plans, that resulted from strategy away days, with changes that stemmed from discussions at top management team meetings, shows a distinct difference (see Table 6.13). Changes to Unico's plan that were made after the top management team meeting in period I are shown in brackets. While changes to Unico's plans occurred mainly at the objective level, after discussions at top management team meetings, text changes stemming from discussions at strategy away days were mostly made at the goal level. Hence, meeting delegates at Unico's strategy away days shaped the strategic plan by providing detail on how to achieve Unico's espoused strategic directions, which was then documented in several goals. However they had less influence in contributing to Unico's espoused strategic direction itself, which was articulated at the objective level. The top management team, as one might expect from the literature on formal planning roles (Ansoff 1965), mainly shaped Unico's espoused strategic directions across the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Missions.

Type of meeting	Content level change	
	Objective	Goal
Top management team	18 (13)	4 (0)
Strategy away day	8	19

Table 6.13: Content level change in relation to the type of meeting

#### 6.5.2.2 Referentiality to strategic plan

Within conversational patterns, utterances' reference to the strategic plan also shaped the type of content change and thus the content level. Instances of increasing specificity and reducing specificity were triggered by conversational patterns that specifically referenced an objective or goal. The strategic plan may therefore be referenced either in an initiating utterance, in a responsive utterance(s) or during both initiating and responsive utterances. During non-responses, reference to the plan was only made in the initiating utterance. The following example shows an instance where the plan's content was referenced in both the initiating and responsive utterance. Meeting Delegate A's single initiation of 'we thought some of them were a bit bland you know, **S1** "teaching excellence", yeah we agree with that but wouldn't everywhere say that?' (Table 6.10: lines 63 to 64) resulted in reducing specificity as, thereafter, the objective was removed from the Teaching Mission. The particular objective "- where teaching excellence is supported and celebrated" (Version 4) was referenced during both initiating and responsive utterances. The example in Table 6.6

provides an account in which the strategic plan was only referenced during a responsive utterance. Departmental Head C's single initiation 'we haven't got developing strategic partnerships have we' (see Table 6.6: lines 2 to 3) provided an example where the strategic plan was referenced only during a responsive utterance. During the initiation, Departmental Head C did not reference a particular objective or goal of the Third Stream Mission. Referentiality to the strategic plan was only made by the VC during an utterance constituting the responsive act. This determined which existing statement was changed. Supporting Departmental Head C's initiation, the VC referenced the Third Stream Mission's objective "engaging closely with Unico's Science Park ..." by stating

'... where it says "engaging with", we should change that into strategic partnerships I think, you're right, yes' (see Table 6.6: lines 14 to 17).

As a result, the following was added "forging strategic partnerships with ..." (see Table 6.7), which increased the objective's specificity.

Apart from three instances, new specificity across both levels of content (objective and goal) resulted from conversational patterns in which there had been no reference to the strategic plan. These three outliers occurred at the top management team meeting in period III, which was guided by the question *Do we need to reformulate? Version 7's content.* Top management team members thereby referenced a particular objective in order to add further detail. This detail was then manifested in new goals beneath the referenced objective. An illustrative example is this addition to the Teaching Mission; "-- work experience on placements" (Version 8). It was initiated by Departmental Head B 'I think under "maintain and enhance graduate employability" **S1** through sandwich placement ...' (Table 6.3: lines 2 to 5) followed by the Deputy VC 'Okay, that's fine, that's one of the ways, through work experience' (Table 6.3: lines 9 to 12). Moreover, the particular initiation point in time determined the section where a content change was made. For example, an initiated subject during the discussion of the Teaching Mission, led to changes to Unico's plan in the Teaching Mission and not, for instance, in the Third Mission.

#### 6.5.2.3 A subject's contentiousness

A subject's contentiousness also influences the type of content change. Such contentiousness resulted from the strategic plan's meaninglessness and/or delegates' disagreement with an objective or goal as it was documented in Unico's strategic plan. In the initiating utterance the contentiousness was reflected in the expressive aspect that



occurred in relation to the referenced text. Meeting delegates voiced their views about certain terms by recontextualising the strategic plan, which in turn resulted in a change to its content. While there were several contested subjects initiated during Unico's strategic plan production cycle (see for instance Extracts 5 and 6 in Chapter 5 for delegates' difficulties in recontextualising an espoused strategic direction in the Third Stream Mission), the focus of Chapter 6 is only on initiated subjects that resulted in changes to Unico's plans. A strategic plan's meaninglessness was expressed as *clarifying* in relation to the specific terminology. For instance, Meeting Delegate A's initiation of the subject *teaching excellence* during the reporting back session on Teaching at the recently appointed staff strategy away day. In relation to an existing objective in the Teaching Mission, s/he stated '...my personal view is it's just a bit bland ...' (Table 6.10: line 77). The objective was then removed as an objective from the Teaching Mission.

A disagreement was expressed as *disagreeing* in relation to the particular terminology. An useful example occurs in relation to the objective "- In professionally/vocationally focussed disciplines" during the same feedback session of the recently appointed staff strategy away day. Meeting Delegate B stated that

'... we had a real sticking issue with the first point [articulating the Teaching Mission in Version 4] while we agree that a lot of the courses through the university have a professional or vocational orientation, this is not true for all disciplines so the example we were given was XXX ...'.

Text producers kept the objective and amended it to increase its specificity. It thus stated "- Remain focused on disciplines of professional and vocational relevance" (Version 5). Three further goals were added that provided further detail on the respective objective. These resulted from further initiations during Meeting Delegate B's initiation utterance and other Delegates' initiations.

### 6.5.3 Summary

This section of Chapter 6 combines findings on the conversational patterns with the three types of content changes and the two content levels that were identified in Chapter 4. The first part illustrates the type of content change per conversational pattern. The second part demonstrates the link between the initiation pattern and content level in relation to the type of content change. It shows that new contents, coded as new specificity, resulted mostly from recurrently initiated subjects. Additionally, findings highlight that contextual

characteristics, utterances' referentiality to the strategic plan and a subject's contentiousness determine the type of content change and the level at which a change was made.

## 6.6 Summary to Chapter 6

Chapter 6 provides an in-depth analysis of the talk instances that resulted in a change to Unico's strategic plan. A talk instance refers to a passage of talk consisting of an utterance, or several utterances, that, in turn, are embedded in a speech communication, such as a meeting. An utterance consists of three inter-related components: i) referentiality; ii) a subject of talk and iii) an expressive aspect. Contextual and situational features are also captured in order to address an utterance's embeddedness in the speech communication.

Talk instances are further differentiated in an initiation and a response. A subject of talk was either initiated once during a meeting or it was initiated recurrently before leading to a change in Unico's strategic plan. Recurrence refers to multiple initiations at a meeting and/or initiations of the same subject of talk at separate meetings. An initiation was followed by a response, whereas a non-response provided a special responsive act. There were a further three responsive acts that referred to the same subject of talk that had been enacted during the initiating utterance. A response may also result in single immediate response, multiple immediate responses or a delayed response.

Concepts of initiation and response provide a framework to analyse the talk instances that led to a change in Unico's strategic plan. It allows categorisation of talk instances into eight conversational patterns. These result from combining the two initiation patterns with the four responsive acts. While every initiation was enacted by a Meeting Delegate, the role of text producers appears to be crucial; at least one engaged in every responsive act. Comparing instances of conversational patterns shows that multiple initiated subjects of talk exceeded the amount of single initiated subjects of talk. Furthermore, it shows that non-responses and multiple immediate responses occurred most often.

The analysis of each conversational pattern provided clues about the construction of Unico's strategic plan. It shows that contextual characteristics, utterances' referentiality to the strategic plan and a subject's contentiousness determined the type of content change and the level at which a change was made.



## CHAPTER 7

### Discussion and Theoretical Implications

#### 7.1 Introduction

In order to coherently illustrate the contributions made by this thesis, Chapter 7 is structured in two sections. The first section discusses the three research questions in detail. Each research question is addressed in a separate sub-section. The first sub-section discusses the exploratory question on *how is a strategic plan constructed as a communicative process?*. It illustrates that Unico's strategic plan evolved through recurrent recontextualisations and decontextualisations. Through recontextualising the plan, participants in the plan production process were able to shape subsequent versions of the plan. These content amendments were reflected in decontextualised form. Hence, situational aspects of talk cannot be traced in the written text. Moreover, this research shows that the plan was constructed within the Initiation - Response framework. The second sub-section discusses the first explanatory research question: *what are the implications of this communication process for the plan?*. It demonstrates that Unico's strategic plan became more detailed over time, with its final version reflecting agreed terminology. Through recurring decontextualisations, the plan became increasingly fixated. The third sub-section discusses the second explanatory research question: *what are the implications of this communication process for the plan production process?*. It illustrated that Unico's strategic plan structured discussions occurring during its production. Moreover, it demonstrates that the plan production process provided a meaning making platform for its participants. It also highlights the effects of varying participation and power on Unico's strategic plan production process.

The second section discusses implications made to existing theory. It consists of four sub-sections, which follow the thematic structuring of the Literature Review (Chapter 2). First, it elaborates on strategic planning by conceptualising it as a communicative process. Focusing on the creation of a strategic plan highlights aspects of participation and power. Second, it introduces the concept of co-orientation to the field of strategy-as-practice, elaborating on the framework of praxis, practitioner and practice. Third, it elaborates on the dialogic of text and agency and the notion of power, by providing a longitudinal research design. It also

extends the notion of co-orientation by introducing aspects of materiality, context and time. Fourth, it provides novel insights in to strategic planning in a university context.

Before I embark on the Discussion and Theoretical Implications, let us recap the starting point of this thesis. Despite debates about the efficacy of strategic planning (Glaister and Falshaw 1999; Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998) and propositions that communication is a key purpose of planning (Grant 2003; Ketokivi and Castañer 2004; Mintzberg 1994), there are few studies of how strategic planning actually occurs or how it has communicative effects (Langley 1988). Rather, the strategic plan is perceived as part of the institutionalised process of strategic planning. Although the strategic plan makes strategic content tangible, enabling it to be monitored (Beer and Eisenstat 2000); it is seen as promoting inflexibility and reinforcing formal strategic planning (Mintzberg et al. 1998). Yet recent findings show that strategic planning is evergreen in firms and that strategic plans remain an output of the strategic planning cycle (Ocasio and Joseph 2008). However, there has only been limited research examining the role of strategic plans in strategic planning activities (e.g. Giraudeau 2008; Grant 2003).

In order to reveal the micro activities which constitute the construction of a strategic plan (Jarzabkowski 2005; Johnson et al. 2003, 2007; Whittington 2006; Whittington and Cailluet 2008), I draw upon a theory of organisation as communication (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Van Every 2002). Based on the foundations of the Montréal School of organisational communication (Cooren and Taylor 1997; Taylor et al. 1996), I conceptualise strategic planning activities as constituted within a communicative process. This view goes beyond the commonly held view within the strategic management field, which views communication as occurring after a plan is developed (e.g. Bartkus et al. 2000; Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995; Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998) to regarding the plan as an emerging text that is constructed within the communication process. I suggest that the strategic plan is not only the result of planning activities, but also that it shapes the planning activities that take place during the process of its development. Through these recurrent activities, the formalised planning process, which has often been regarded as taken-for-granted, is constantly constructed. This conceptualisation thus reveals the planning activities which constitute a formalised planning process, and at the same time, construct a tangible outcome of this process, the strategic plan. This perspective on planning does not view the strategic plan, or the process of developing the plan, as strategy itself, but rather considers the nature and purpose of those communicative activities through which the institutionalised



activity of strategic planning is constituted in organisations (Giraudeau 2008; Grant 2003; Whittington and Cailluet 2008).

The following section discusses the research question in detail. The next section offers implications for existing theory.

## 7.2 Discussion

The first section of Chapter 7 addresses the following research question in more detail. It starts by discussing the findings associated with the exploratory research question *How is a strategic plan constructed as a communicative process?*. After this, the chapter discusses the insights arising from those findings that address the two explanatory research questions

- *What are the implications of this communication process for the plan?*
- *What are the implications of this communication process for the plan production process?*

### 7.2.1 How is a strategic plan constructed within a communicative process?

Conceptualising strategic planning as a communicative process provides the basis for tackling the exploratory research question *How is a strategic plan constructed as a communicative process?*. The following two parts explore the plan's construction constituted in an iterative relation of talk and text. The first part draws upon Ricoeur's notion of recontextualisation and decontextualisation (see part 7.2.1.1). The second part illustrates the plan's construction as a result of initiation and response (see part 7.2.1.2).

#### 7.2.1.1 The plan is constituted in a relation of recontextualisation and decontextualisation

The starting point for investigating how a strategic plan is developed was the distinction between talk and text (Ricoeur 1981). *Talk* is considered as any orally expressed discourse. It occurs in a current, immediate context-bound situation. I refer to any discourse or ideas expressed in writing as *text* (Ricoeur 1981). A text may be based on anterior talk and/or an author's individual ideas, which he/she may not have voiced before. Ricoeur (1981) positions talk within the immediate context of its creation, whereas text can move between contexts, albeit losing much of the contextual elements of its production. This distinction between talk and text forms the basis for an examination of the strategic plan as a text – a written document – that is constructed in a relationship with the talk that occurs during the

activities of the strategic planning process. Thus, I view strategic planning activities, resulting in a final strategic plan, as being constituted through an interplay of talk (oral discourse) and text (written discourse).

In order to explain this interplay in detail, I draw upon the two Ricoeurian (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. For recontextualisation to occur, a text needs to be enacted by an individual in his/her talk. An individual thereby reveals his/her interpretation of the text, which is based on the current situational and contextual characteristics. Through decontextualisation, talk becomes materialised in written text. Thereby, the meaning of a verbal statement is detached from the speaker's mental intentions. Additionally, the text expresses meaning without reference to the situation and context during which the talk occurred. A text thus becomes an atemporal and acontextual object (Ricoeur 1981). As we have seen in Chapters 5 and 6, Unico's strategic plan provided the basis for discussion during the plan production cycle. Its content shapes the talk as individuals enact a particular content in their utterance. Through enacting the plan's content, talk unfolds in various directions as individuals recontextualise the plan's inscribed meaning by revealing their interpretation of its content (see Extracts 4 and 5 in sub-section 5.2.2). Recontextualisation is thereby situated in a current context that embeds the talk and provides it with the meanings associated with the situated interactions of that context, whereas the strategic plan inscribes meaning which is decontextualised from the situation in which it originated (see Figure 7.1). While decontextualisation allows the plan to provide a basis for interpretation across time periods and actors (Ricoeur 1981), I have illustrated that individuals held multiple, even competing, interpretations of a particular item of the plan's content. In order to bridge interpretations and to resolve potential difficulties in recontextualising, the strategic plan was amended in light of individuals' talk. As talk was materialised in a new version of the plan, its meaning became decontextualised. While individuals' enacting Unico's strategic plan (recontextualisation) shaped the plan's future content, in each version of the amended plan the original speakers and their intentions cannot be traced (decontextualisation).

#### 7.2.1.2 The plan becomes constructed as a result of initiation and response

Drawing upon the notion of co-orientation (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003; Taylor and Robichaud 2004) provides further theoretical grounding to explore how Unico's strategic plan was constructed. Co-orientation focuses on a common object X - the content of what the interactions are about – that emerges out of the ongoing interactions between A and B



(Newcomb 1953; Taylor 2003; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). The link in the interaction of A and B is thus the common object X. Thereby, A and B may be individuals or groups of actors (Taylor 2006). Each interaction has to be seen as taking place reflexively because it refers to what went on prior to the current interaction. As any specific interaction is part of sequentially occurring interactions, it becomes the reference point for future interactions. Hence, it is crucial to consider situational and contextual nuances that embed a social interaction, such as the language system and temporal location of the actual interaction, as they shape both its production and perception (Bakhtin 1986a; Orlikowski and Yates 2002; Taylor 2006; Taylor and Robichaud 2004).

While Robichaud et al. (2004) and Taylor and Robichaud (2004) adopted the notion of co-orientation empirically, they neither show how an object X enters a discussion, nor how it is sustained during a conversation. Based on the analytical category of *subject of talk* (semantic theme enacted in a social interaction), the findings show that a common object X entered the discussion as individuals enact parts of Unico's plan in their talk. Thus, through recontextualising Unico's plan, its content became the focus of the interactions of A and B, the common object X. The concept of decontextualisation shows that the common object X led to a content change that was reflected in a subsequent version of Unico's strategic plan. While Chapter 5 illustrates that the plan's content was constituted in individuals' recontextualisations that were brought into being at meetings throughout Unico's strategic plan production cycle, Chapter 6 offers a fine-grained analysis of how Unico's strategic plan was constructed. In Chapter 6, I draw upon Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notions of utterance and responsiveness. Findings in Chapter 6 show that changes to the plan's content resulted from eight talk patterns. A talk pattern consisted of an initiation and a responsive act. A content change was either initiated once or several times. Each initiation was followed by a response. There were four distinct responsive acts: i) non-response; ii) single immediate response; iii) multiple immediate responses and iv) delayed response. A non-response occurred when there had not been an orally expressed response to an initiated subject of talk (object X) at a meeting. A single response was uttered immediately subsequent to an initiated subject of talk during a meeting. Multiple responses occurred immediately subsequent to an initiated subject of talk during a meeting. There is an interruption in the subject of talk's occurrence between the initiating utterance and its response.

In relation to triggering a content change in Unico's plan, empirical findings on the Initiation – Response framework illustrate how a common object X was sustained during a conversation (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). The majority of subjects

of talk (object X) had to be recurrently initiated before triggering a content change. Each initiation that led to a content change was uttered by a participant who was not able to directly amend the plan due to their position in the plan production process. Individuals who were empowered to make the actual content changes to Unico's plan are termed text producers. The role of text producers will further be explained in part 7.2.3.3. The dominant responsive act that resulted in a content change was non-response. Non-responses occurred when no-one actively engaged in the initiated subject of talk (object X). This type of response may also be seen as a passive response. Where there was an active response, an individual actively engaging in the initiated subject of talk, a text producer participated in all but one case. The large number of passive responses may further be explained by examining the role of text producers in more detail. As text producers were able to make amendments to Unico's plan, they did not need to actively respond. The amendment to the plan's content reflected their response to initiations of change that arose at meetings. Unico's strategic plan thereby provided the means for text producers to respond in written form.

#### *Sub-section summary to 7.2.1*

Distinguishing between talk and text (Ricoeur 1981) set the basis to explore the evolution of Unico's strategic plan within a communicative process. Introducing Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation illustrated that individuals' enactment of the plan (recontextualisation) resulted in an amendment of its content. This alteration was articulated in a new version of the plan. Situational and contextual characteristics that embedded the recontextualisation, such as who made the statement, cannot be traced in the plan. The talk thus was decontextualised as it became materialised in the plan. Drawing upon the concept of co-orientation, consisting of the ABX relationship (Newcomb 1953; Taylor 2003), provides a fine-grained framework to show how the plan's content was constructed, elaborating on the talk and text relationship (see Figure 7.1). Through recontextualising the plan's content, it became the common object X that was enacted by individuals A and B. This illustrates how a common object X enters a conversation (Taylor and Robichaud 2004). The common object X thus influences the plan's future content, which appears in decontextualised form. Moreover, findings in Chapter 6 demonstrated that the plan's content became enacted either as an initiation or a response to an initiation. This showed that Unico's plan was constituted in an initiation and response framework. This provides novel findings on how an object X sustains during conversations (Robichaud et al. 2004). This thesis also illustrated that the content changes were initiated by individuals other than text producers. However, text producers engaged in



the communicative process through uttering responses. The plan, thus, was co-constructed by both text producers and individuals participating in the strategic plan production cycle.

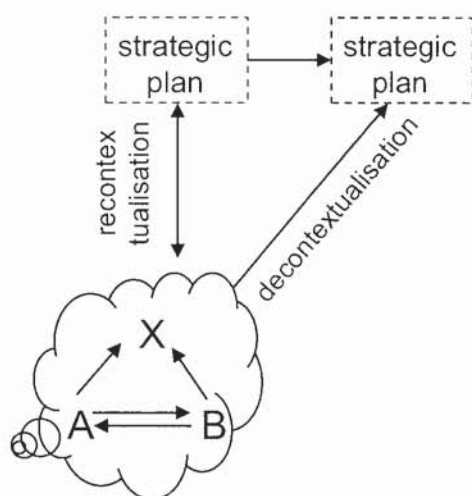


Figure 7.1: Recontextualisation and decontextualisation linked to the ABX relationship

The following two sub-sections will discuss the implications of the aforementioned communicative process for the plan (see sub-section 7.2.2) and its production process (see sub-section 7.2.3).

### 7.2.2 What are the implications of this communication process for the plan?

The production and the effects of documents are seen as background material in much empirical research (Atkinson and Coffey 2004; Prior 2004). This sub-section discusses such shortcomings in prior research by illustrating the implications of the production cycle for Unico's strategic plan. Unico's strategic plan may be described as a master plan that provided a framework for departmental plans (Ackoff 1970; Drucker 1958, 1959). Let us recap briefly the terms introduced in Chapter 4. Unico's strategic plan consisted of formal planning concepts to articulate an organisation's espoused direction. This thesis focuses on the development of objectives and goals, which reflected two content levels in Unico's strategic plan. Thus, each Mission's espoused strategic direction was manifested in the form of objectives (where do we want to be?) and goals (how do we get there?). Brackets illustrate the respective question that was given to address different aspects of the formal planning activities (see also Tapinos 2005b). An *objective* articulates specific strategic content which constitutes a Mission's espoused strategic direction. An objective, however, may not be obtained within the planning period (Ackoff 1981). Further detail on how to achieve an objective is reflected in the form of *goals*. Goals 'are expected to be obtained within the period covered by a plan' (Ackoff 1981: 104). Within the communicative process

(see sub-section 7.2.1), Unico's strategic plan evolved according to three types of content changes. These were reflected in a subsequent version of Unico's strategic plan. Between version  $n$  (current version) and version  $n-1$  content was altered by adding bullet or sub bullet points (*new specificity*) or amending existing content (*increasing specificity; reducing specificity*). Each type of content change occurred throughout the plan production cycle. However, variations in their occurrence had profound effects on the level of detail manifesting Unico's strategic plan.

Building upon sub-section 7.2.1, we saw that Unico's strategic plan was constituted through iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. I will now explain the implications of recurrent iterations of this triadic unit for the final version of Unico's plan. This sub-section is in three parts. First, it highlights that the strategic plan's content becomes more specific over time. Second, the final version of Unico's strategic plan reflects agreed terminology as a result of iterations of recontextualisations and decontextualisations. Third, the plan became fixated through recurring decontextualisations.

#### 7.2.2.1 Strategic plan's content becomes more detailed over time

As a result of multiple changes made to Unico's strategic plan during the plan production cycle, its content became more detailed. Although the number of content changes varied across Unico's three Missions per period, its content became more detailed with respect to the content level and the type of content change across the Research, Teaching and Third Stream Missions (see Table 7.1). Distinguishing between objectives and goals, Table 7.1 illustrates that dominant changes to Unico's espoused strategic directions were made up until period II. Thereafter, content changes mostly occurred at the goal level, manifested in ways to achieve the set direction. These changes reflect the institutionalised sequence of planning stages, starting with setting the direction, which were reflected in objectives, through to developing goals (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965). The increasing detail of Unico's strategic plan was also manifested in changes to its content (see Table 7.1). Distinguishing between three types of content change, the strategic plan's content became more detailed, as dominant changes resulted in new content being added (*new specificity*) and existing content being made more specific (*increasing specificity*). As a result, actors agreed on more precise meanings and ambiguity was reduced in the wording of the objectives and goals.



		Period I	Period II	Period III	Period IV	Period V
Missions		Research; <b>Teaching</b> ; Third Stream <sup>6</sup>	<b>Research</b> ; Teaching; Third Stream	Research; <b>Teaching</b> ; Third Stream	<b>Research</b> ; Teaching; <b>Third Stream</b>	Research; Teaching; Third Stream
Content development	De- scription	Set parameters	Open parameters	Increase specificity of parameters	Beginning to close parameters	Only very precise content changes
	Dominant Level	Objective	Objective	Goal	Goal	None
	Effect	New specificity	Increasing specificity	New specificity	New specificity	None

Table 7.1: Contextual characteristics embedding the strategic plan's evolution

#### 7.2.2.2 The strategic plan's final version reflects agreed terminology

Recent research findings demonstrate that strategic plans are still part of strategic planning activities (Giraudeau 2008; Grant 2003; Oakes et al. 1998). Their role is to provide a meaningful document that can be communicated, in order to facilitate strategy implementation (Balogun and Johnson 2005; Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Collier et al. 2004). However, Bresser and Bishop (1983) claimed that the more preplanning is reflected in the strategic plan, the less it will be appropriate. Despite these views on strategic plans, the process that creates such plans has been disregarded within the literature. This research project shows the text and talk activities that lead to the production of the plan as a meaningful document. It suggests that the final plan's content results in agreed terminology as a result of the multiple iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation (see sub-section 7.2.1). These reflect participants' recontextualisations, which had been expressed during Unico's strategic plan production cycle. While the plan's content became more detailed through content amendment throughout the plan production cycle, these content changes resulted from multiple, often competing interpretations of a particular plan's content which is a characteristic of universities (Ring and Perry 1985). Findings in Chapter 5 show accounts, for instance, of an academic viewpoint versus an administrator's perspective (see Extract 4 in sub-section 5.2.2), or buzzwords, which were meaningless to participants in the plan production cycle (see Extract 12 in section 5.3.2 for the VC's comment in line 8 to 10). In addition, multiple interview extracts illustrate that it was increasingly assumed that Unico's plan represented the views of participants as time progressed during the plan production cycle (for instance see Table 5.4 in sub-section 5.3.2). This research showed that interpretative planning, characterised by language that is

<sup>6</sup> Dominant pattern in bold

imprecise allowing individuals to match their personal interests to the ones of the organisation, may also occur in written form, i.e. a strategic plan, rather than solely verbally, as suggested by Stone and Brush (1996 page 14).

Drawing upon Eisenberg's (1984) concept of strategic ambiguity, the plan provided a resource for action as it enabled representatives of Unico's constituents to attribute different meanings to the same objective and goal. In ambiguity-prone contexts such as universities, it is important that initial goals are expressed with sufficient ambiguity that all actors can subscribe to them (Davenport and Leitch 2006). As my thesis shows, it is important not only to introduce goals that have some ambiguity, but also to provide members with the opportunity to attribute their own meanings to those goals. In particular, the plan and the production cycle, enabled members to debate the ambiguity of terms and to believe that they had derived shared meanings (Eisenberg and Goodall 1997). While much existing research is conducted from the perspective of one group of key actors who are trying to manage ambiguity (e.g. Denis et al. 1996; Jarzabkowski 2008), my focus upon the communicative process illustrates how multiple stakeholders debate ambiguity and invest specific outputs, such as plans, with meaning. Findings in Chapter 5 show that Unico's plan was amended to ensure that its final version provided a meaningful document for academics and administrators across Unico, as well as its stakeholders. Extracts illustrated that individuals revealed their interpretations of the plan when recontextualising its formulations. As a result of decontextualisations, the plan reflected the meanings invested in it by the representatives of a university's diverse constituents. Inviting both academic and administrative representatives to participate during the plan production cycle, resulted in a common understanding across the university, as the VC pointed out during the last top management meeting before its final approval (see Extract 12 in sub-section 5.3.3). This thesis thus shows that a strategic plan inscribes agreed terminology as a result of multiple content amendments voiced during a formal strategic planning process. Unico's plan is thus seen as manifesting consensus that bridged diverse constituents' interpretations on Unicos's objectives and goals (Wodak 2000). Such unified diversity creates the basis for co-ordinated activity (Contractor et al. 1993), as it determines future courses of action (Jarzabkowski 2005).

#### 7.2.2.3 Unico's plan became fixated through recurring decontextualisations

Strategic plans are seen as static and thus promoting inflexibility during strategic planning (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998). However this view fails to take into account the strategic plan's development process, during which the plan may not be static or inflexible.



This thesis offers novel insights into strategic planning as a communicative process, demonstrating that Unico's plan became more inflexible and reified as time progressed, through recurring iterations of decontextualisation. The plan's fixation may further be explained by drawing upon the notion of distanciation (Ricoeur 1981). Distanciation occurs when talk is materialised in text. Thus, the text inscribes the meaning of what was said. Findings in Chapters 5 and 6 illustrated how talk at top management team meetings and strategy away days resulted in content amendments. However, through distanciation, the speaker's mental intention becomes detached from the meaning expressed in the text (Ricoeur 1981). Moreover, fixation within text enables the talk to become an object which may be stored and archived (Ricoeur 1981; Smith 1984). This ensures that a strategic plan becomes accessible to others and enduring over time and space. Additionally, through recurrent decontextualisations, the context embedding these discussions was rendered less and less apparent in comparison to the constant fixation of the plan's content. Hence, situational aspects, such as time, place, to whom and why a particular statement was made, cannot be traced in the strategic plan. The final version's content may appear remote to outsiders of the plan production cycle, which may elaborate Mintzberg's (1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998) findings that plans do not reflect actual strategy. However it captures participants' meaning, as demonstrated in part 7.2.2.2. Despite multiple alterations, participants in the strategic plan production cycle indicated that the final plan still reflected individuals' points of view, as they were voiced at various stages during the production process (see sub-section 5.3.2).

Strategic plans are taken for granted within the strategic planning literature (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965; Hofer and Schendel 1978), even by scholars criticising their role (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998). However, the effects of the production process on the plan have largely been neglected. This thesis illustrated that, over the duration of a communicative process, a plan will become more authoritative, as sections of the text become increasingly fixated and distanciated from the discussions in which changes to the text take place. Thus, successive cycles of decontextualisation are associated with the production of an increasingly authoritative text. While participants in the production process were able to shape the plan by discussing their interpretations, which might then result in textual amendments, Unico's strategic plan became increasingly authoritative, due to the reification of its content over successive cycles of textual amendment. Hence, the plan became less subject to change, particularly in the last stage of the production cycle, as its parameters were already seen to convey agreed terminology. Even with a new Head of Teaching's making ad hoc changes at the last iteration of the plan, previous objectives were

kept as a result of the plan's authoritativeness and the assumption of the plan reflecting agreed wordings (cf., 7.2.2.2). Aspects of how the plan's increasingly authoritative nature affected the communicative process will be discussed in part 7.2.3.1.

#### *Sub-section summary to 7.2.2*

Past empirical research has been criticised for downplaying documents and their production (Atkinson and Coffey 2004; Prior 2004). This thesis offered unique insights into the evolution of a strategic plan, bringing the development of an organisational document to the centre stage of the analysis. This sub-section builds upon the communicative process consisting of the iterative relationship of talk and text. It discusses the first explanatory research question: *what are the implications of the communicative process for the plan?*.

While a strategic plan is assumed to have shared meaning in order to communicate, and so facilitate effective strategy implementation across an organisation (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Collier et al. 2004), this research illustrated implications of the plan production process upon its content. Having analysed multiple versions of the plan, we have seen that the plan's content became increasingly detailed over time. This occurred as new content was constantly added and existing content made more specific. Over time, the level of content changes also shifted. Changes at the objective level occurred during the first two periods, whereas periods III and IV were dominated by content changes at the goal level. As a result of multiple content amendments, Unico's strategic plan reflected agreed terminology amongst participants in the plan production process. New terms and changing existing terminology stemmed from recontextualisations that were voiced at various stages of the production process. Thus, text producers and members of the top management team viewed the plan as comprising agreed terminology. Unico's strategic plan became fixated as it was iteratively decontextualised. Situational and contextual characteristics that embedded talk became distanced as talk was materialised in written form. Thus, the speaker and his/her intention cannot be traced in the plan (Ricoeur 1981; Smith 1984). Despite recurring decontextualisations, participants revealed that the plan's final version still reflected individuals' comments, which were made at meetings during the plan production cycle. While Mintzberg and colleagues (1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998) criticised strategic plans as static and inflexible, findings on the evolution of Unico's strategic plan showed that a plan reflects individuals' points of view that may not be understood by outsiders of its production process, such as researchers, who only study the document as an outcome of that process. Due to the reification of the plan over successive cycles of decontextualisation, its content became less subject to change in particular in the last stage of the production process.



### **7.2.3 What are the implications of this communication process for the plan production process?**

This sub-section discusses this thesis second explanatory research question. Implications of the communicative process for the strategic plan production process are threefold. First, it shows that Unico's strategic plan structured talk during meetings. Second, it illustrates that the plan production cycle provides a meaning-making platform for its participants. Third, individuals' power and participation varied within the plan production cycle. Each of the three areas will now be discussed in more detail.

#### 7.2.3.1 The strategic plan as a structuring device

While strategic plans are part of disseminating strategy across an organisation (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995), there has not been a study that looked at the effects of a plan during its production process. Past research illustrates that organisational artefacts such as numbers systems (Denis et al. 2006) or engineering drawings (Bechky 2003b) have power effects. With respect to strategic plans, Oakes et al. (1998) and Jarzabkowski (2005) showed their role in legitimising courses of action. A strategic plan's legitimacy is aligned to its embeddedness within formal administrative practices of the organisation (Jarzabkowski 2005, 2008). This study elaborated on Jarzabkowski's (2005) findings as it showed that Unico's plan gained legitimacy as it sustained and reinforced planning activities such as direction setting during the plan production process. Through continuous enactment of planning activities, participants in the strategic plan production process re-enacted institutionalised planning norms, such as developing Missions, objectives and goals, in that institutionalised order, in order to develop future courses of action. As a result of this process certain objectives and goals gained legitimacy (Oakes et al. 1998; Jarzabkowski 2005).

Distinguishing between talk and text, whilst following the evolution of Unico's plan over time, demonstrated the organising role of a text; specifically how a text becomes authoritative and so legitimates particular courses of action (Kuhn 2008). Unico's strategic plan provided a structuring device which disciplined both the subject and the order of talk during a meeting. As individuals enacted the plan, they directed attention to a particular objective or goal, which thus shaped the subject of the talk (Kuhn 2008). A strategic plan's content thus sets conversational boundaries that determine, not only what is talked about, but also that delineate those topics that emerge (Bakhtin 1986a). Moreover, this research shows that the strategic plan has a strong influence on the temporal structuring of planning

activities (Orlikowski and Yates 2002), as it instantiates stages of the formalised strategic planning process as proposed by Ackoff (1981), Ansoff (1965) or Hofer and Schendel (1978).

Previous scholars have considered strategic plans or engineering drawings as stable entities that are used for communicative purposes across professional groups such as top and middle managers (Grant 2003) or engineers (Carlile 2004; Winsor 2000). Such research has focused on the influence of these documentary artefacts upon social interactions once created, neglecting those dynamics in which their development process is embedded. This thesis showed that the effects of an organisational document shift during its creation. While the plan's content disciplined the talk throughout its construction phase, it became increasingly authoritative, due to the reification of its content over successive cycles of textual amendment (see part 7.2.2.2). As its parameters were already seen to convey agreed terminology (see part 7.2.2.3), the plan became less subject to change, in particular in the last stage of the production cycle. Assumptions of agreement resulted from the communicative process, which provided opportunities for top management team members and other members within Unico to articulate views on, and shape the plan's content. At later stages of the production cycle, in particular in period V, it was more difficult for participants to trigger content changes, as the plan was already considered to carry meaningful statements that provided legitimate courses of action constituting Unico's strategic direction. This provides complementary findings to Jarzabkowski (2005) and Oakes et al. (1998) as it showed that a plan's legitimate courses of action are embedded in and result from agreed terminology, which is arrived at during an ostensibly participative production process.

#### 7.2.3.2 A strategic plan production cycle as a meaning-making platform

Strategic plans are closely aligned to formal strategic planning (Ackoff 1981; Hofer and Schendel 1978). However, the formal strategic planning process has been heavily criticised (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998) resulting in a declining interest in the subject within the literature (Whittington and Cailluet 2008). For instance, Bresser and Bishop (1983) called for a less formalised planning process, which in turn would increase the appropriateness of a strategic plan. However, despite heavy criticism, strategic planning is going strong within organisations (Grant 2003; Ocasio and Joseph 2008; Rigby 2003). Following Unico's strategic plan production provided detailed insights that may shed new light on the purpose of formal strategic planning and the role of strategic plans. As we have seen in sub-section 7.2.2 and part 7.2.3.1, Unico's strategic plan became reified as time



progressed because it was increasingly assumed that its content represented the views of participants in the plan production cycle. Through this recurrent interplay of talk and the strategic plan, an espoused strategy (Mintzberg and Waters 1985) was constructed and articulated within Unico's final strategic plan (see Figure 7.2). The iterative cycle of recontextualisation and decontextualisation shaped both the input of different individuals to the plan that is produced, as well as shaping the content of the plan itself. This refutes the current view that strategic plans are only part of disseminating strategy once the plan is finalised (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995; Mintzberg 1994). It showed that strategic plans are constructed as part of a communicative process. Within this communicative process, I suggest that a strategic plan production cycle provides a platform for meaning-making amongst participants in the plan's creation. This process thus enables knowledge sharing and problem-solving (Feldman 1989; Wegner 2004) providing a basis to disseminate plan internally and externally (Grant 2003). Top management team meetings and strategy away days provided the locations for individuals to voice their views on the plan's content. The plan thereby provided the means for delegates to reveal their interpretation of Unico's objectives and goals. As a result, the plan was amended until a final version was decided upon.

Unico's plan production thus provided a mechanism for employees to commit to objectives and goals (Korsgaard et al. 1995; Schaffer and Willauer 2003). Universities are characterised by conflicting constituencies and a lack of control over resources, autonomous a lack of direct control (Cohen and March 1974; Hardy 1991b). In such ambiguous contexts, vagueness in planning is a resource to achieve commitment to goals (Stone and Brush 1996). Thus, Stone and Brush (1996) suggested that commitment is created by aligning organisational goals to individuals goals (Stone and Brush 1996 page 13). This aligns to Eisenberg's (1984) concept of strategic ambiguity, which may be employed by powerful actors to generate collective action by encouraging constituents to sign up to a higher-order or more abstracted meaning that does not counteract their particular interests (Eisenberg and Goodall, 1997; Ring and Perry, 1985). While Eisenberg (1984) claimed that only powerful actors employ strategic ambiguity, this research showed the plan production process enabled different constituents to invest meaning in to the plan's formulations. As a result of recurrent decontextualisations, based on individuals' recontextualisations, the plan terminology was supported across Unico as it was open to various constituencies' interpretations. This recurrent process bridged the multiple, often competing, interpretations of the plan's content. Through the joint production of the plan by academics and administrators, there was considered to be a shared understanding of the plan's content

across Unico, as was illustrated in various interview extracts (see sub-section 5.3.2). Hence, Unico's plan production process provided the basis for representatives of a university's diverse constituents to invest meaning in to the plan's formulations. While I do not suggest that the plan actually has shared meaning, the strategic plan production cycle through which it was constructed represents agreement (Donnellon et al. 1986). This thesis shows that the plan production process provides the basis for a plan to inscribe agreed terminology, refuting Bresser and Bishop's (1983) suggestion that a formalised planning process increases the inappropriateness of a strategic plan.

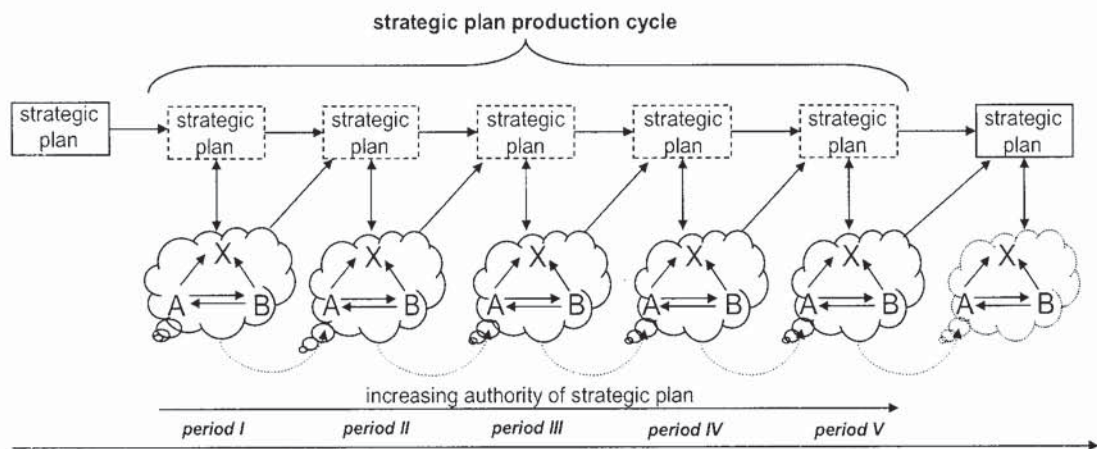


Figure 7.2: Iterative talk to text relationship

### 7.2.3.3 Varying degrees of participation and power

This part will highlight the effects of varying participation and power on Unico's strategic plan production process. A strategic plan production process is thereby considered as a decision-making process with a material outcome, the strategic plan. First, shows that participation varied according to the stage of the strategic plan production process. In line with notions of participatory decision-making within a university setting (Hardy et al. 1984), a wide range of individuals across Unico took part in the plan production cycle. Unico's strategic plan production cycle thus bridged a university's diffuse power relations (Cohen and March 1974; Mintzberg 1979c). Representatives of both academics and administrators participated in and shaped the plan's content. For instance, in Chapter 5 we have seen that the suggestion of the Director of Marketing and Communication resulted in a new goal (see Extract 10 in part 5.2.3.3). While Unico's senior executives were involved until the final plan's approval, participation of academics and administrators holding lower ranks varied during the plan production cycle (see Table 7.2).



Participation was thereby strongly linked to each period's characteristics. Above all, the strategic plan's construction shaped the nature of discussions. It provided the content, ordering of topics, and the temporal context in which talk unfolded at meetings (Bakhtin 1986a). In relation to the plan's content, the guiding question(s) at a meeting set the stage for specific topics to occur and thus constituted the different phases of the plan production cycle. Unico adopted a strategic planning sequence, evidenced in the development of objectives and goals that may be expected in private sector organisations, such as in oil majors (Grant 2003). While the top management team was involved throughout the plan production, participation of individuals from lower ranks occurred mainly during consultations in periods II and IV. This confirmed Mantere and Vaara's (2008) suggestion that individuals' participation in the strategic planning activities differed by hierarchical level. Thereafter, the strategic plan was approved by Senate and Council, conforming to a university's governance system (Hardy et al. 1984). Unico's strategic plan production sequence thus illustrated the increasing adoption of managerial practices within universities with the top management team driving the process (Hardy 1987; Slaughter and Leslie 1999).

This thesis demonstrates that while the creation of a strategic plan is a democratic decision-making process, involving individuals across a university (Hardy et al. 1984), power relationships determine who participates and when, during a plan production cycle, which is reflected in the type of meeting. It also sheds light on the role of meetings during planning activities, which has been of recent interest to the academic community (Hodgkinson et al. 2006; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). During Unico's plan production there were two categories of meetings, small meetings and large meetings. Top management team meetings and meetings including the wider top management were held in small meeting settings. These gatherings barely exceeded ten participants. Large meeting settings were used for consultations with academics and administrators across hierarchical levels. These strategy away days were held with more than thirty delegates. In turn, the type of meeting setting also shaped conversational patterns and the level of content change. At small meeting settings, most subjects of talk needed to be initiated once before leading to a content change. At other times, a top management team member used the opportunity to recurrently initiate an amendment to Unico's plan. For example, this was illustrated by Departmental Head C's repeated suggestion that had not triggered a content change after the Council's strategy away day. At strategy away days, a subject of talk needed to be recurrently initiated to trigger a content change. This recurrence highlighted shared points of view amongst delegates (see part 6.4.4.1). Moreover, Meeting Delegates were able to directly engage in

initiated subjects of talk during small meetings, whereas most initiations during strategy away days resulted in non-responses (see part 6.4.4.2). Hence, Unico's power elite, participating in small meeting settings, was able to influence the plan's evolution directly, whereas delegates at large meeting settings needed to voice collectively shared points of view to trigger a content change. In addition, findings illustrate that changes at the objectives level resulted from top management team meetings, whereas goals were added after strategy away days including a wider range of individuals across Unico (see part 6.5.2.1). This showed that top managers set Unico's espoused strategic directions, manifested in objectives, whereas individuals across Unico contributed to the articulations of how to achieve the set directions. These findings illustrate that Unico's plan production followed planning sequences used in private sector organisations (see Grant 2003).

	Period I	Period II	Period III	Period IV	Period V	
Period characteristics	De- scription	Initial discussion of strategy	Organisation- wide consultation	Let's pull it all together?	Agree targets	Last twists
	Guiding question	Where do we want to be in future? What is it that we want to do?	What else should we do? What should we not do? How do we deliver (specific actions)?	Is there anything missing? Do we need to re- formulate?	Do we need to reformulate? How do we measure it?	Only specific questions please?
Participation	(wider) <b>top management team</b> ; Senate; Council; all staff	(wider) <b>top management team</b> ; Senate; <b>Council</b> ; all <b>staff</b>	(wider) <b>top management team</b> ; Senate; Council; all staff	(wider) <b>top management team</b> ; Senate; Council; all staff	(wider) <b>top management team</b> ; Senate; <b>Council</b> ; all staff	

Table 7.2: Contextual characteristics of Unico's strategic plan production cycle

Second, while the plan production cycle in Unico represented widespread consultations with constituent members of the University, the process also constrained participation to only a subset of the organisation. Despite a university's democratic decision-making process, which is protected within its governance system (Hardy et al. 1984), we have seen its limitations based on Unico's strategic plan production process. Even when planning is a communicative process, only those members who are actually present in particular episodes can take part in recontextualisation and hence, have any opportunity to shape the plan. Participation in the production cycle, and thus recontextualisation, was restricted to those who were able to voice their interpretations of Unico's strategic plan during the production cycle. For instance, delegates of the Council's strategy away day depended upon prior membership to Council, which is based on an election process that inclines the selection of



certain individuals over others. Thus, planning activities reinforce social orders and political relationships by constituting opportunities for participation and agreement on the plan's terminology. The communicative process serves not only to generate a plan that is assumed to represent an agreed set of meanings from across the University, but also serves to embed and reinforce the power structures of the University in terms of who is able to contribute to the plan's content.

Third, power is evidenced in the role of being a text producer, as these are the only individuals who are authorised to make the actual content amendments in the plan (decontextualisation). Negotiations over the plan's content thereby strengthen the role of text producers and the purposefulness of the strategic plan. In the case of Unico, the Deputy VC and ultimately the VC had the authority over the plan's content. In line with the perceived managerial shift within the university sector (Clark 1998; Ferlie et al. 1996), this highlights the top management team's responsibility for a university's espoused strategic directions. Moreover, it provides an alternative view to that of Cohen and March (1974) of strategic plans within a university. In the past, strategic plans were seen as being compiled from individual departmental plans or decorative as they have no backing amongst the academic community (Cohen and March 1974; Hardy et al. 1984). This thesis demonstrates that Unico's plan resulted from a joint effort, led by the two most senior academics, involving both academics and administrators.

Whilst text producers were able to exercise the power of their position over what content would be amended and what form that amendment would take; they were also participants in the plan production cycle, and so, took part in recontextualising cycles. Looking at initiations which were followed by an active response, findings in Chapter 6 show that at least one text producer actively engaged in the responsive act. This highlights another dimension to their role. In order to trigger a content change, it was not only crucial that a text producer was present at a meeting, but that they actually engaged in the talk. Although text producers did not utter an initiation, it also demonstrated the commitment and effort of text producers in the plan production. The scope for text producers to amend Unico's plan however was constrained by the production process itself. Recurrently initiated subjects of talk, both at a meeting and across meetings, thereby provided delegates with the means to influence the plan's evolution. As was illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, content alterations were informed by the talk that was voiced during planning meetings.

The role of text producers is embedded in the strategic planning activities, which empowers top executives with the creation of a plan (Ackoff 1970). Hence, their status in the plan production process is unquestioned (Knights and Morgan 1991). A staged process of recontextualisation and decontextualisation also highlighted the dominant role of the plan's producers. It demonstrated that the actual changes to the text were made after the meeting in which Unico's plan was recontextualised. Hence, I suggest that the plan production cycle occurs in a layered process that inscribes power relationships within the University. While text producers, at the inner core of the University hierarchy, controlled the actual content changes, a sequential view of the iterative talk to text relation shows that there was a time lag between recontextualisation and decontextualisation (see sub-section 5.3.1). Thus, decontextualisation occurred in a staged process (see Figure 7.3). The VC and Deputy VC met in a closed meeting to amend Unico's strategic plan, where they recontextualised personal notes and official meeting summaries taken from respective meetings. Such intermediary texts already materialised a meeting's talk in decontextualised form. Hence, talk was decontextualised and materialised in intermediary texts. These were then recontextualised by the plan's producers to amend the plan's content. The plan's content in the amended version stemmed from talk that had been decontextualised at least twice.

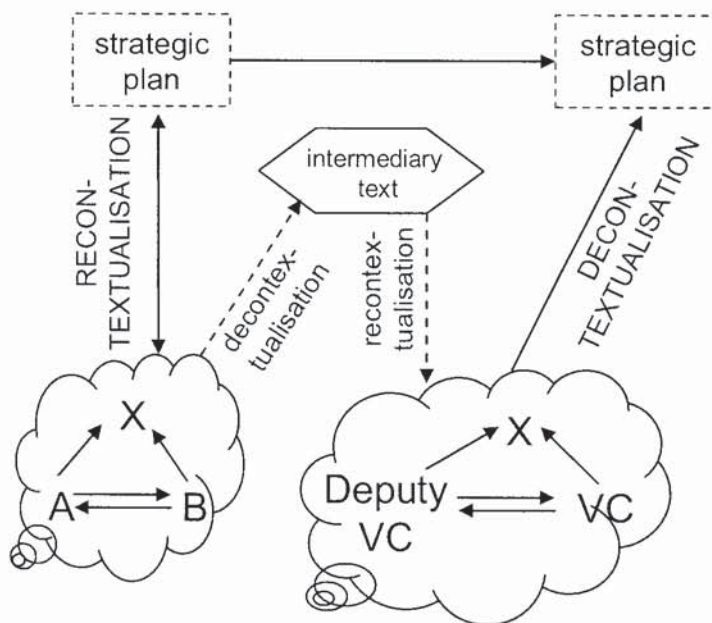


Figure 7.3: Staged process of recontextualisation and decontextualisation

Thus, I suggest that individuals who hold such a dominant position in an organisation control the plan's content, in that they are able to decide upon which comments will be materialised in a new version of the strategic plan. Due to the scope of the communicative



process, these text producers cannot control all the talk that takes place. Furthermore, they may have a genuine intention to gather views and increase commitment to the strategic plan, by ensuring that it is widely communicated and altered in interaction with multiple participants. However, as the plan became increasingly reified, the role of the text producers also shifted during the production cycle. In the earlier phases of the strategic plan production process, as seen in the extracts from Period II (see Extract 5 in sub-section 5.2.2) and Period III (see Extract 4 in sub-section 5.2.2), their role was to amend the plan's content, so that it better reflected individuals' recontextualisations. However, by the last stage of the plan production period, text producers protected the agreed version of the plan in order to conserve the meaning that had arisen from multiple cycles of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. As the text became more fixated, so the text producers, as its custodians, protected its fixation; illustrating the way that an authoritative text is also representative of, and implicated in, an authoritative power structure within an organisation. Such shifts also account for the absence of content changes made to objectives and goals in Period V. Hence, their role shifted during the plan production process, from participants to custodians.

#### *Sub-section summary to 7.2.3*

Implications of the recursive interplay of talk and the strategic plan are threefold. First, it shows that the strategic plan provided a structuring device that shaped what and when a strategic content was discussed. Moreover, we have seen that the plan provided a structuring device on talk during discussions. Second, it demonstrates that the strategic plan production process provided a meaning-making platform for its participants. The plan thereby provided the means for delegates to reveal their interpretation of Unico's objectives and goals. This process thus provided a basis for the final version of the plan to reflect agreed terminology. This was arrived at as participants recurrently recontextualised the plan's content, thus providing text producers with feedback on their understanding of the plan's terminology. Third, it highlights varying degrees of participation and power in the plan production process. Depending on the period's characteristics, different groups of individuals participated in the plan production, which was driven by the top management team. Varying degrees of participation linked to the differing power bases of delegates were reflected in the type of meeting. These also had different effects on the conversation patterns and the level of content change. Moreover, it shows the limitations of a democratic decision-making process. In order to shape the plan, individuals needed to be present at meetings, which excluded individuals who were not selected for strategy away days or were not elected to the Senate or Council. Furthermore, it highlights the role of text producers who were

authorised to make the actual content alterations to Unico's strategic plan. Embedded in the layered process of recontextualisation and decontextualisation, they could select what content to amend. The role of text producers during the plan's evolution was further emphasised by their active participation in responsive acts. In addition, the role of text producers shifted during the production process. During the first periods, they acted as facilitators. During the later periods, they protected the plan's content as it represented agreed terminology, which resulted from the plan's evolution.

#### **7.2.4 Summary**

The first section of Chapter 7 discusses this thesis' three research questions. The first sub-section illustrates that a strategic plan is constructed through iterations of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. The distinction between talk and text (Ricoeur 1981) thereby provides the theoretical basis. It illustrates that individuals recontextualising the plan shaped the subsequent version's content. However, situational and contextual characteristics, such as who, when and where the talk occurred cannot be traced in the new version of the plan. Furthermore, the notion of co-orientation, consisting of the ABX relationship, provides a fine-grained framework to further demonstrate the construction of the strategic plan. It shows that through recontextualising, the plan's content became the focus of A and B's interaction, the common object X. In turn, the common object X then provided the basis for the textual amendment. Moreover, a detailed analysis shows that content changes were constructed through an initiation and a response. While text producers engaged in responsive acts, initiations were solely enacted by delegates other than text producers.

The second sub-section discusses the implications of this communicative process for the plan. It illustrates that the strategic plan became more detailed over time. This was illustrated in the type of content change per period. The first four periods were dominated by content changes that led to either increasing specificity of an existing statement, or new content was added to the plan, whereas there was no content alteration to objectives and goals made in the last stage of the plan production process (period V). As a result of the multiple content alterations, the strategic plan was considered to have shared understanding across Unico's employees. Through recurrent recontextualisations, the plan became amended with the aim of reducing competing interpretations amongst academics and administrators. The final version of Unico's strategic plan was thus seen as reflecting agreed terminology. Moreover, Unico's plan became increasingly fixated through recurring decontextualisations. The materialisation of talk in text, in this case a strategic document, provided the basis for its storage and duration over time. However, characteristics of talk,



such as the speaker's mental intentions, were detached and could not be traced within the written text.

The third sub-section demonstrates the effects of the communicative process on the plan production process. It shows that the strategic plan provided a means for structuring its production process. It also shows that the communicative process provided a meaning making platform for its participants. The plan thereby provided the means for delegates to recontextualise and thus to reveal their interpretations of the plan. As a result, the plan was amended accordingly in order to bridge various interpretations amongst academics and administrators. This process thus provided the mechanism for the plan to represent agreed terminology. Furthermore, degrees of participation and power varied during the plan production process. The top management team thereby drove the plan's creation. As part of a university's democratic decision-making process, academics and administrators from across Unico were also consulted during the production cycle. Differences in participation and power were reflected in the type of meeting, conversational patterns and the level of content change.

### **7.3 Theoretical implications**

The second section of Chapter 7 outlines theoretical implications for existing theory. This thesis makes contributions to and offers future directions for research in four areas: i) strategic planning, ii) strategy-as-practice, iii) organisation communication and iv) strategic planning in a university context. In the following four sub-sections, each theoretical implication will be outlined in more detail.

#### **7.3.1 Strategic planning**

Recent evidence has shown that formal strategic planning is still exercised within organisations (Grant 2003) and so 'is not a management fad but an enduring and evolving management practice' (Ocasio and Joseph 2008: 268). This research has focused on the strategic plan production cycle, which is part of the strategic planning process. It includes those activities that have the opportunity to shape the plan's content. The strategic plan production cycle is therefore completed once the final strategic plan is created. Herewith, I will discuss five key contributions to the strategic planning literature, arising from this thesis.

First, this thesis makes a contribution to the strategic planning literature by elaborating on the view that communication is important during the creation of a strategic plan (Grant 2003; Ketokivi and Castañer 2004; Lines 2004). Currently, it is assumed that the communicative value of the plan lies in its dissemination once it has been formulated (Kotter 1995; Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998). Such views overlook how communication occurs, who is involved and what are the implications of this communication for the strategic plan. This thesis offers an alternative view of strategic planning by conceptualising it as being constituted through a communicative process. This process consists of an iterative interplay between plans and talk, and becomes manifested in the creation of a final strategic plan. I have demonstrated that Unico's plan both shapes planning activities and, at the same time, is shaped by these very same activities. The strategic plan is thus an organising device for embedding social order during strategic planning activities. Findings show that communication is not only a process that occurs after the strategic plan has been developed, but, rather, is something that is integral to the planning process itself. The conceptualisation of strategic planning as a communicative process provides a theoretical base from which future research can explore the role of a finalised strategic plan in controlling and monitoring strategic activities.

Second, reconceptualising strategic planning as a communicative process highlights a further dimension of planning, participation in planning activities (Mantere and Vaara 2008), which is also part of the communication process. Past research has highlighted that individuals' role expectations both enable and constrain strategic agency (Mantere 2008; Mantere and Vaara 2008). Moreover, studies have shown that employees who hold positions below top management may influence strategic decisions (e.g. Dutton and Ashford 1993; Floyd and Wooldridge 1996). Additionally, interactions between managers at the top, and lower hierarchical levels, are considered to be key to effective planning (Balogun and Johnson 2005; Rapert et al. 2002; Vilá and Canales 2008). However, most empirical studies have applied research designs looking at individuals' involvement in planning activities, using interviews (e.g. Mantere 2008) or questionnaires (e.g. Floyd and Wooldridge 1992a). This thesis elaborates on these findings by drawing upon a processual study that looked at the creation of a strategic plan, in real time, that involved individuals across hierarchical levels and departments, during the evolving stages in the production cycle. As Unico's plan represented agreed terminology, it shows that Unico's plan production provided a mechanism for employees to commit to objectives and goals (Korsgaard et al. 1995; Schaffer and Willauer 2003). Findings show how individuals across an organisation



contributed to the construction of a strategic plan. Moreover, it has been illustrated that participation in the strategic plan production cycle varied by hierarchical level and position, the stage in the production cycle, and the type of meeting (see Table 7.2). As these had different impacts on the plan's evolution, they will be outlined in more detail in the next paragraph. While many individuals participated in the strategic planning activities, and were thereby able to raise concerns and suggest amendments to the content of a strategic plan, there were only a few who, due to hierarchy and position, were actually able to amend a strategic plan's content. The plan's evolution was constituted through individuals' comments shaping its future content; however it was the text producers who selected what content to alter.

Participation was strongly aligned to the purpose of a meeting and the stage at which it occurred within the plan production cycle (see Table 7.2). In much previous research, the focus on individuals (e.g. Dutton et al. 2001) and their role expectations (e.g. Mantere and Vaara 2008), has limited contextual findings about varying degrees of participation and its influence on strategic planning activities. The findings of this thesis show that individuals from different hierarchical levels and across departments were invited to participate during an early stage of Unico's production cycle (see Table 7.2), whereas members from the top management team, holding academic and administrative positions, engaged throughout the plan's construction. Individuals' involvement in the plan production cycle also coincided with the type of meeting. This research followed formal planning meetings that discussed the development of a strategic plan; two types of meeting constituted the plan production cycle. Meetings of individuals holding senior management responsibility across Unico took place in small meeting settings with less than ten participants, which is similar to Jarzabkowski and Seidl's (2008) findings. Consultations with individuals across Unico occurred at strategy away days, as these provided the basis for engaging with more than thirty five participants, as pointed out by Hodgkinson et al. (2006). Findings illustrate that the nature of the involvement varied across these two types of meetings. An individual's active engagement was more difficult in large meeting settings compared to a meeting with less than ten people. This was due to the time available for individuals to engage in each other's talk. It was also evidenced in the large number of recurrent initiations and non-responses during strategy away days. The type of meeting therefore influenced whether each meeting delegate was able to actively participate in the discussion. Relating the level of content change to the type of meeting (see part 6.5.2.1) illustrates that changes made to objectives stemmed mainly from top management team meetings, whereas goals resulted from strategy away days. This shows that the top management set the espoused strategic

directions across Missions, manifested in objectives. During consultations, individuals were involved in developing ways to achieve the set directions, which were articulated in goals. Ultimately, a plan's content may have been influenced by many who participated in the communication process, albeit that its actual text had been constructed by a few key players. This confirms Mantere and Vaara (2008) suggestion that individuals' participation in the strategic planning activities differed by hierarchical level.

Third, this thesis offers tentative explanations of the popularity of strategic planning by focusing on the creation of a strategic plan. This approach is located within the realm of scholars who are interested in the social aspects of strategic planning (Hendry 2000; Knights and Morgan 1991; Mintzberg 1990). It moves away from research that has been largely occupied with tracing a link to increasing firms' performance (Andersen 2000; Ketchen et al. 1996; Miller and Cardinal 1994). I suggest that a strategic plan production cycle provides a meaning-making platform for participating individuals. This refutes the incomplete view of strategic plans as inflexible documents (see for instance Mankins and Steele 2006; Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998) that are part of communicating strategy across levels (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995), which currently dominates the strategic planning literature. Individuals' meaning-making is closely aligned to the plan's evolution. Such meaning-making occurs as participants in the strategic plan production cycle reveal their interpretations of the plan's content while it is under construction (see A in Figure 7.4). These interpretations result in multiple content amendments that increase the plan's detail and specificity. These alterations are crucial as they lead to agreed terminology amongst participants that are then incorporated in the final strategic plan. Although the plan becomes remote through recurrent distanciation and fixation of its content (see B in Figure 7.4), the iterative process of recontextualisation and decontextualisation results in a strategic plan that symbolises shared meaning because it reflects agreed terminology of individuals across an organisation (see C in Figure 7.4). Thus, I argue that it is the recursive communicative process that constitutes the strategic plan production cycle, which is of significance (see Figure 7.4), rather than the plan itself. Looking at the strategic plan production cycle provides novel insights that may explain the ongoing popularity of strategic planning (Andersen 2000; Rigby 2003) that is aligned to the creation of a strategic plan (Grant 2003).



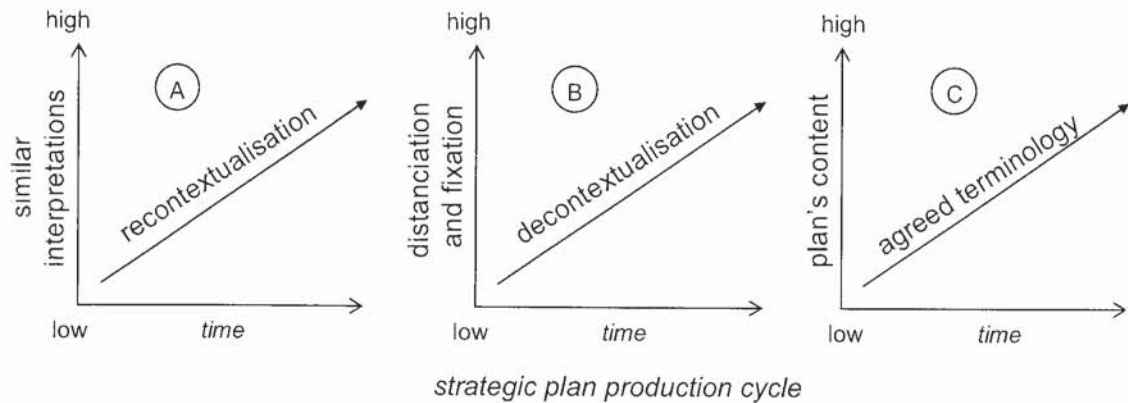


Figure 7.4: Strategic plan production cycle as a meaning-making platform

Fourth, the findings offer novel insights into the role of the strategic plan during planning activities. This elaborates on our current understanding of strategic plans. Since Mintzberg's (1994) landmark critique, a strategic plan is seen as a formal document that promotes inflexibility. Nonetheless, recent research has shown that plans are still part of planning activities (Balogun and Johnson 2005; Grant 2003). Within the strategic planning literature, a strategic plan is seen as having three purposes: communicating strategy across hierarchies (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995), making strategic content tangible (Giraudeau 2008; Shaw et al. 1998) and legitimising courses of action (Jarzabkowski 2005; Oakes et al. 1998). Elaborating on those findings, this research shows how a strategic plan becomes authoritative and its consequences for planning activities during the communication process. While I do not suggest that the plan actually has shared meaning, the communicative process (see Figure 7.4) through which it was constructed enables it, symbolically, to represent agreement (Donnellon et al. 1986) and hence gives the plan legitimacy as an organisational document (Clegg 1989; Jarzabkowski 2005). Findings about the increasingly authoritative nature of the text is due in part to participants' and text producers' assumptions that the text has been subject to widespread meaning-making and thus inscribes a set of agreed values that imbue it with authority. As a result, the strategic plan shapes planning activities. Due to its authoritative nature, the strategic plan's content determined the topic that was enacted in utterances. Its structure also influenced the order that items were talked about during meetings. Moreover, a plan's content promotes certain topics and delineates others from occurring (Bakhtin 1986a). It thus set conversation boundaries for what and when something was discussed at dedicated planning meetings. Based on my findings, I suggest reconsidering the role of strategic documents on strategic planning activities. While these are institutionalised processes that may not make actual *strategy* (Mintzberg 1990; Mintzberg et al. 1998), they are important processes within organisations that need to be

better understood. At least some of their purpose is to discuss and articulate an espoused strategy, even if the strategic plan itself cannot be regarded as an organisation's strategy. Future studies should thus place a stronger emphasis on the strategic plan during their analyses, rather than treating it as mere background material (Atkinson and Coffey 2004).

Fifth, this thesis elaborates on the current literature by illustrating how power is embedded within the strategic plan production cycle. Although power is implicit in strategic planning activities (Narayanan and Fahey 1982), it has largely been neglected in empirical research on planning. In order to overcome its narrow conceptualisation (Hardy 1996), I will address each of the four dimensions of power in following order<sup>7</sup>: 4<sup>th</sup> power of the system, 3<sup>rd</sup> power over meaning, 2<sup>nd</sup> power over participation/agenda, 1<sup>st</sup> power of resources. Embedded in the fourth dimension of power (Clegg 1989; Foucault 1980, 1982), the institutionalised strategic planning practice embeds a certain distribution of power that may be seen as taken-for-granted in terms of what planning it is and how it should be done (Knights and Morgan 1991). This is evident as Unico followed a planning sequence, which was unquestioned by any participant. During the strategic plan production cycle Unico's power relations were invoked and re-enacted. These determined not only who held authorship of Unico's strategic plan but also determined the 'appropriate' mechanisms for exercising this power, such as using consultative and participative processes. The authority of the text producers has not been questioned during the plan production process. According to the third dimension of power, conflict may be prevented from arising by management of meaning (Lukes 1974). The strategic plan production cycle thus provided a meaning-making platform (see part 7.2.3.2). During this process text producers amended the strategic plan's terminology in light of individuals' recontextualisations in order to reduce competing interpretations. These recontextualisations provided text producers with various interpretations of the plan's content. At the end of the production cycle, the agreed terminology of the plan was thus considered to be a meaningful document for employees across Unico. Based on the second dimension of power, powerful actors are able to exclude individuals from participating or to suppress certain topics from the agenda (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 1963, 1970). Due to their position, Unico's VC and Deputy VC were responsible for Unico's strategic plan and thus were able to control both who was invited to participate in the planning process and also to shape the agenda, in terms of the initial content of the plan. The plan itself also had power effects in legitimising certain topics to be discussed at meetings while excluding others from the agenda. This shows that it is not only powerful actors that are able to

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<sup>7</sup> In my view, each power dimension operates simultaneously.



deliberately suppress and exclude certain issues from the decision making process (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 1963, 1970) but also the material artefacts upon which they draw. With respect to the first dimension of power, which focuses on issues with observable conflict (Dahl 1957, 1961; Parsons 1963a, 1963b), this thesis shows that the plan's final content emerged out of a decision-making process. Through recontextualising, individuals revealed contentious objectives and goals (see part 6.5.2.3), which subsequently became amended during the plan production cycle. Hence, observable conflicts were resolved by iteratively amending the plan's content. However, focusing solely on the power of resources provides a too narrow view of planning activities, which the creation of a strategic plan is part of. Addressing additional dimensions of power thus overcomes the narrow conceptualisation of power in past research (Hardy 1996).

This sub-section illustrated five contributions that elaborate on the current strategic planning literature. Drawing upon the notion of co-orientation (Newcomb 1953; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003), strategic planning has been re-conceptualised as consisting of a communicative process which consists of an iterative talk to text relation. This highlights the communicative role of the plan itself, as opposed to current views that limit the plan's role solely to the dissemination of objectives and goals across hierarchies (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Kotter 1995). Findings based on a processual analysis illustrate that individuals' participation varies by hierarchical level, position and stage in the plan production cycle, and that this participation shapes the type of content change. Strategic planning as a communicative process also offers a tentative explanation for its remaining popularity (Grant 2003; Rigby 2003) despite heavy criticism in terms of its role in producing strategic action (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998). Based on the research findings, a strategic plan production cycle is considered as a meaning-making platform. As a result of continuous content alterations based on individuals' interpretations of the plan's content, the finalised strategic plan reflects agreed terminology. Moreover, the research shows that the strategic plan impacts upon strategic planning activities even during the process of its formulation. The strategic plan's content sets conversation boundaries as it shapes what and when something is talked about during planning meetings. Additionally, this thesis elaborated on the notion of power implicit in the strategic planning process (Narayanan and Fahey 1982). Demonstrating each of the four dimensions also overcomes the narrow conceptualisation of power in past planning research (Hardy 1996).

### 7.3.2 Strategy-as-practice

This sub-section looks at the contributions made to the strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) literature. In this thesis, I draw upon the interconnected practitioner, praxis, practices (PPP) framework (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006) to demonstrate strategising at the micro level. The notion of co-orientation, consisting of an ABX relationship, provides the basis from which to elaborate on this framework. Co-orientation focuses on a common object X - the content of what the interactions are about - that emerges out of the ongoing interaction of actors A and B (Newcomb 1953; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003). It also provides an alternative theoretical framework to discursive studies (Maitlis and Lawrence 2003; Sillince and Mueller 2007) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967) as applied by Samra-Fredricks (2003, 2005). In the next section I will illustrate elaborations made to three areas: i) practitioner; ii) praxis; and iii) practices.

The concept of practitioner forms the first category of the PPP framework (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). It refers to the individuals who are *doing* strategising activities. Categorising current empirical research in the area of s-as-p by the type of practitioner, Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) showed that it is dominated by studies on aggregate actors. Thus, findings are based on studies grouping individuals together, for instance as middle managers (Balogun and Johnson 2005) or engineers (Laine and Vaara 2007), but neglect the dynamics of interactions amongst these individuals (Carpenter et al. 2004). This research contributes to the under-developed area that examines individuals' interactions at the micro level. While past research looked at individual interactions (Rouleau 2005; Samra-Fredricks 2003, 2005) or individuals' experience (Mantere 2005, 2008), this thesis extends findings by including individuals across hierarchical levels and positions as they participated in Unico's strategic plan production cycle. Hence, status aligned to power and power embedded in the communicative process were taken into consideration, whereas aspects of power have largely been absent in current s-as-p research (Carter et al. 2008).

The concept of praxis forms the second category of the PPP framework (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). Praxis is defined as the stream of activity in which strategy is accomplished over time (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). Praxis spans several layers interconnecting micro activities of individuals with wider institutions which embed those activities (Reckwitz 2002; Sztompka 1991). Past s-as-p research was mostly conducted at the intersection between micro and macro, the meso level, meaning organisational or sub-organisational processes (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). However, only a very limited number of studies occurred both at the micro and meso level in terms of



exploring the interplay between individual interactions and sub-organisational and organisational processes. While past research has looked at episodes of individuals' interactions (Rouleau 2005; Stensaker and Falkenberg 2007), this thesis extends those findings by providing a processual study on how individuals across a university participated in the strategic plan production cycle, so linking micro aspects of individual's communicative interactions with the meso process of producing a strategic plan. Findings showed how recurrent episodic interactions between individuals, that took place at planning meetings, constituted the construction of Unico's strategic plan. Each meeting was thus an episodic incident (Hendry and Seidl 2003; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008) in an ongoing stream of planning praxis.

The notion of co-orientation that underpins the communicative process in this thesis, provides a sound theoretical framework for exploring individuals' interactions both at the micro level and meso level. The common object X is the unit of analysis which enabled me to trace the semantic themes constituting strategising activities. Furthermore, Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of utterance offers a new angle for investigating strategising activities in light of situational and contextual characteristics. Meaning is conceptualised as contextual and thus may differ amongst individuals who engage in this ABX relationship. Following this view, praxis is constituted as a chain of utterances. Individuals enact various objects X, such as a strategic plan's content, within their utterance. The ABX relation thus provides a framework with a coherent focus on semantic themes to follow evolving strategising activities during an episode and across episodes. At a methodological level, future studies may adopt the concept of co-orientation to investigate individuals' or aggregate actors' interactions at the micro level (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). This will bring more research to the micro level, which s-as-p initially set out to do (Johnson et al. 2003). In order to operationalise such research foci, an utterance may thereby provide a novel level of analysis.

The concept of practices forms the third category of the PPP framework (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). Practices are entangled and interrelated elements of activity. They are the various means of 'doing', within which organising is constituted, rather than static concepts or objects to be employed (Chia 2000; Orlikowski 2007; Schatzki 2006). This thesis makes three contributions with respect to the concept of practices. First, it elaborates on findings that showed how institutionalised practices shaped strategy praxis (Jarzabkowski 2003, 2004, 2008; Regnér 2003; Whittington 2006). This research demonstrates that the institutionalised strategic planning practice (Mintzberg et al. 1998)

influenced Unico's strategic plan production cycle. The strategic plan's construction started by inscribing objectives before moving to the development of goals. Therefore, this process determined the content categories of a strategic plan consisting of objectives and goals (Ackoff 1970; Murdick 1965). Moreover, it set conversational boundaries as to what is discussed during planning meetings, restricting topics unrelated to strategic planning from emerging. My research also elaborated on findings that show how a strategy document provides legitimacy (Jarzabkowski 2005; Oakes et al. 1998). We have seen that Unico's strategic plan became fixated through iterative cycles of recontextualisation and decontextualisation. As a result the plan reflected agreed terminology, although its content became distanced from the talk that it was constructed in. Through this process, articulated objectives and goals symbolised agreed espoused strategic directions and future actions. The thesis thus shows how a strategic plan becomes a legitimate document inscribing courses for action.

Second, this research elaborates on findings on meeting practices (Bourque and Johnson 2008; Hodgkinson et al. 2006). In particular, it extends findings on how talk unfolds at meetings and across meetings within a university setting (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) provided three meeting conduct practices: free discussion, restricted free discussion and restricted discussion. This thesis showed a more fine-grained analysis of talk at meetings. Focusing on the joint development of a strategic plan within a university, this thesis demonstrates that changes within the plan were constituted not simply by forms of discussion but by particular types of initiations and responses. Findings reveal that many of the content changes were due to recurrent initiations at a meeting and/or across meetings. This shows that the volume of talk, in terms of the number of initiations and contextual characteristics that embed an initiating utterance, influences both the response and the impact of the initiation in triggering a content change. Findings also illustrate that talk may have had an effect even though an active response had not been voiced during at meeting. Thus, the paper extends our knowledge of discussion practices within meetings, which remain an under-examined area of s-as-p research. In order to further explore meeting practices, future research might pay stronger attention to contextual characteristics that embed and thus influence the flow of talk at meetings.

Third, this research extended empirical findings on the role of material practices. Within s-as-p and other practice-orientated empirical research, there has been little consideration of the role of material artefacts 'through which practices are performed' (Orlikowski 2007: 1436). One of the few examples is provided by Denis et al. (2006). Their research shows



how managers took a controversial decision based on the increasingly authoritative value that was inscribed in the number system. My research offers an analytical distinction between institutionalised strategic planning practice and one of its inter-related material elements, the strategic plan. That is, the strategic plan evolves through recurrently enacting the strategic planning practice. Moreover, findings show that the strategic plan shaped individuals' interactions as it determined what and when particular topics, such as the Teaching Mission, were discussed during a planning meeting. Additionally, we have seen that that strategic plan became increasingly fixated as it reflected agreed terminology. Hence, it became more difficult for individuals to trigger a content change at later stages of the plan production process. Based on my analysis, I suggest a stronger inclusion of material practices, such as plans, PowerPoint®s, whiteboards and spreadsheets, in s-as-p research, in order to further knowledge and theories about the role, impact and enactment of these institutionalised practices in strategy praxis.

This sub-section contributes to the strategy-as-practice field (Jarzabkowski 2005; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2003, 2007; Whittington 2003, 2006) by drawing upon a theory from the organisational communication field. The notion of co-orientation provides a theoretical framework to further explore phenomena at the micro level and at the intersection between the micro and meso level. Focusing on micro activities, it theorises contextual characteristics, which are downplayed in current research. The findings of this thesis also elaborate on the practitioner, praxis, practices framework (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006) by empirically applying each concept. It illustrates how recurrent episodic interactions that took place at planning meetings constituted the construction of Unico's strategic plan. This contributes to the limited number of studies that have focused on interactions of individual practitioners both at the micro and meso level (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). Moreover, this research elaborates on the concept of practices, demonstrating how the institutionalised practice of strategic planning shaped the plan's construction. While the role of material artefacts has largely been neglected in practice studies (Orlikowski 2007), this research has revealed the role of a strategic plan, a material artefact, on strategising activities.

### **7.3.3 Dialogic view on organisational communication**

This sub-section is structured in two parts. First, it illustrates two key contributions made to the field of organisational communication. In using a longitudinal research design, this thesis elaborates on the dialogic of text and agency and the notion of power. Second, it extends the notion of co-orientation by introducing aspects of materiality, context and time.

In order to elaborate on the ongoing dialogic of text and agency (Cooren 2004)/conversation (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor et al. 1996), I have distinguished analytically between talk (oral discourse) and text (written discourse); in many previous conceptualisations and research, they have been conflated (Cooren and Taylor 1997; Kuhn 2008; Taylor et al. 1996). This research further elaborates on this dialogic by providing a longitudinal research design, which is rare in communication research (Monge et al. 1984). Until now, empirical accounts have generally provided only single episodes of such interactions (Fairhurst and Putnam 2004; Putnam and Cooren 2004; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). In order to better understand how text-talk relationships constitute widespread meanings and social orders, I have drawn upon Ricoeur's (1981) concepts of recontextualisation and decontextualisation (Iedema and Wodak 1999). As strategic planning is concerned with the creation of a plan, which is specifically an item of text (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998), it provided an appropriate context of study. Following a strategic plan's construction over time enabled us to gain insights into contextual characteristics shaping the talk and text dialogic. Furthermore, by comparing cycles of text and talk in different periods, I was able to identify implications of this dialogic for the plan as well as for the process of its production. As time progressed, recursive notions of recontextualisation and decontextualisation resulted in agreed formulations that were manifested in Unico's final strategic plan. During this period, the plan became reified and thus increasingly authoritative, as its distanced formulations articulated Unico's strategic direction. Additionally, the strategic plan influenced the unfolding of talk at planning meetings. Findings demonstrated that the plan disciplined the talk, in that it determined both the occurrence and the subject of talk. At the same time, drawing upon Ricoeur's (1981) concept of decontextualisation we have seen that talk shaped the future content of the strategic plan. This thesis thus offers a framework for in-depth analysis of the interplay between talk and text. Findings and the process model illustrated in Figure 7.2 provide the basis for future research on the interplay between talk and text. It may be applicable particularly in settings in which the inevitable use of a written text may be separated from the talk that constructs that text; for example as may be found in the formation of policy documents (e.g. Bazerman 1997).

This thesis also elaborates on the notion of power which has been largely absent in organisational communication studies (Hardy 2004; Hardy and Phillips 2004; Hawes 1999). A university provides a relevant research setting, as different actors have different professional and managerial interests that they bring to the communication process, and



these interests have political connotations about relative power and influence (Hardy 1991b; Jarzabkowski 2008; Mintzberg 1979c). I have shown that, while recontextualisation opens communication up to participation and the voicing of different interests, decontextualisation is an act of power that shapes how talk becomes materialised in text. The authors of the text, whom I have termed text producers, even where they may intend to represent the polyvocality of the communication, must make choices that include some nuances of talk and not others. Hence, the ability to exercise authorship provides a dominant position. When this authorship is aligned to organisational status and hierarchy, as in strategic planning, power and politics are further embedded in the communication process. I thus propose that in some contexts, such as strategic planning, decontextualisation is a political process that enables the influence of some actors at the expense of others (Hardy and Clegg 1996), and that this influence is manifested in authoritative documents such as strategy texts. These findings may provide the basis for further empirical research into power and social order as it is constituted in organisational communication processes.

The next part extends the concept of co-orientation (Newcomb 1953; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2006; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). Following Taylor's (2003) suggestion, I have drawn upon Bakhtin to elaborate on the current conceptualisation of the ABX relationship. The common object X emerges out the interactions for instance between individuals A and B. For Newcomb (1953) the common object X refers to individuals' behaviour towards something. Later adaptations refer to the common object X as capturing what social interactions are about (cf., Kuhn 2008; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003, 2006). Further insights into the communicative triad, consisting of the ABX relationship, are gained by building upon the notion of utterance (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b). In particular it elaborates on later adaptations of Newcomb's (1953) notion of co-orientation. Drawing upon an utterance's components showed that the common object X consists of a semantic theme, which has both referential and expressive aspects. The semantic theme (subject of talk) thus refers to what the utterance is about, the actual content of an interaction. However, the conveyed meaning of any interaction has to be seen in relation to the situated communicative context (Eisenberg et al. 1998; Gray et al. 1985). Thus, referential and expressive aspects provide relational aspects to others' utterances. While referential and expressive aspects have to be seen as intertwined, an analytical distinction offers a powerful analysis for future research on social interactions. The aspect of referentiality refers to a semantic theme(s) that was enacted during an utterance. It/they may refer to something/someone that has already been enacted during the same speech communication, such as a strategy away day, or it may not have been enacted. It thus puts the enacted

semantic theme in relation to past or future interactions rather than viewing its enactment in isolation. An expressive aspect refers to the emotional evaluation implicit in uttering a subject of talk; this reveals the subjective context of an utterance. Situational and contextual characteristics shape a subject of talk's referentiality and expressive aspects. Building upon Robichaud et al.'s (2004) suggestion to trace the evolution of a common object X, distinguishing between a subject of talk's referentiality and expressive aspects, provided a fine-grained framework to follow how and why they were enacted both at a meeting and across meetings.

The notion of co-orientation is further extended by introducing aspects of i) materiality; ii) context and iii) time (see Figure 7.5). Materiality is currently absent, although providing another dimension to the current notion of co-orientation, consisting of the ABX relation (Grouleau 2006). Previous accounts showed how official procedures shape interactions, such as those between police officers and the dispatcher (Cooren and Fairhurst 2004). While these material aspects were given prior to the situation under observation (Cooren and Fairhurst 2004), there have been no studies that looked at the social interactions involved in constructing a material artefact. Hence, their role during social interactions has been neglected. In order to introduce materiality to the notion of co-orientation, I distinguish between talk and text (Ricoeur 1981). This provides the theoretical grounding to introduce a written text as a material aspect in the conceptualisation of co-orientation. To continue the distinction between talk and text, the plan's content is henceforth referred to as *content Y*. Drawing upon the concept of recontextualisation (Ricoeur 1981), we have seen that content Y enters the ABX relation as individuals enact the plan's content (see Figure 7.5). This provided an alternative explanation of how a particular subject of talk enters a conversation (Robichaud et al. 2004). It also shows that the common object X is strongly influenced by the plan's content. That is, in the planning meetings, participants do not talk about just anything, but talk specifically about aspects of the plan's content. Furthermore, Unico's strategic plan disciplined talk, not only in terms of what was talked about, but also when, in terms of the order of talk, as the findings in Chapter 5 and part 7.2.3.4 indicate. Thus, it had a structuring effect on the interaction of individuals captured as A and B. Future studies may use this elaboration of materiality (Y) in the ABX relationship, to further investigate how material aspects of text shape workplace communicative interactions ( e.g. Winsor 2000).



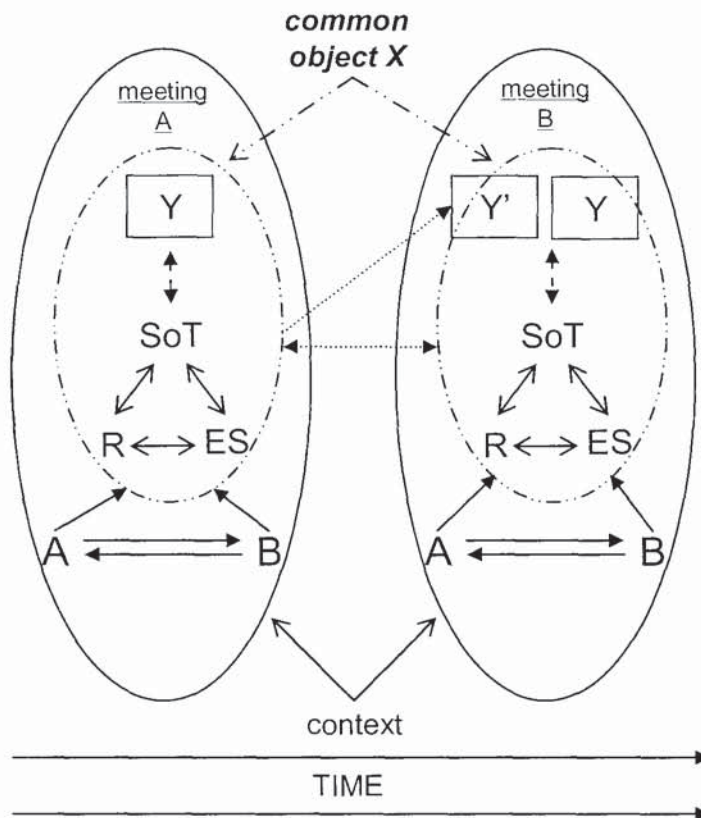


Figure 7.5: ABX-Y relationship – an extension of the notion of co-orientation

- \* Y refers to material artefacts
- \*\* SoT refers to subject of talk
- \*\*\* R refers to referentiality
- \*\*\*\* ES refers to expressive aspect

The notion of co-orientation offers a communication-based framework for grounding the activities of organising within human interactions, without neglecting the contextual nuances of such activities, which has been a major criticism of previous organisational discourse studies (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Sillince 2007). However, scholars applying the concept of co-orientation to date (e.g. Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004) have paid scant attention to the contextual characteristics embedding the communicative interactions under investigation. To understand the nature of the ABX-Y relationship in more detail, it is crucial to look at the context of a meeting and the status of individuals participating in the social interactions under study, which will now be addressed in more detail.

The context of a meeting has a strong influence on the nature of what will be talked about, as it sets conversational boundaries and thus enables some topics and constrains others from arising (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b). So far, studies have only briefly touched upon and introduced background information on talk extracts (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and

Robichaud 2004). However, they fall short in connecting how the context of an observed meeting shapes the unfolding of talk and/or whether individuals break out of conversational boundaries, such as those set by an official agenda. For example, in Robichaud et al.'s (2004) study of the mayor and a town's communal representatives, it is unclear whether the initial presentation of the mayor set the scene for topics to arise with respect to the state of streets and sidewalks. In my thesis, which is based on empirical research into the creation of a strategic plan in a university context, the purpose of talk at planning meetings was to address issues related to Unico's strategic plan. This purpose was reinforced by each meeting's guiding question that asked meeting delegates to address specific aspects of the strategic plan. A meeting context also sets temporal structures on the talk (Orlikowski and Yates 2002). So, for instance, an individual may be able to initiate several subjects of talk when reporting back at a strategy away day, whereas such lengthy utterances are uncommon during small meetings. The comparison of content changes resulting from top management team meetings and strategy away days in part 6.5.2.1 shows that different types of meetings enable or restrain discussions about a particular semantic theme (subject of talk/common object X). Due to the tight schedule at strategy away days, it was difficult for participants to engage immediately after an object X was initiated. At top management team meetings, individuals were able to utter a response once an object X became initiated. Therefore, an object's occurrence at a small type of meeting, such as a top management team meeting, took a different path than in large meeting settings such as a strategy away day. Thus, my thesis demonstrates that contextual characteristics should be highlighted when following the evolution of a common object X; an area that has been under-addressed in other research on communication and co-orientation (e.g. Robichaud et al. 2004).

Embedded within an organisation are the notions of power (Clegg 1989; Hardy 1996). As with most studies in the field of organisational communication (Hardy 2004), power has been absent when theorising and applying the concept of co-orientation. Drawing upon four dimensions of power, this thesis introduces notions of power into the theory of the ABX-Y relationship. Aspects of systemic power, which guide individuals' interactions, have previously been addressed. We have seen that a strategic planning meeting sets conversation boundaries on what is discussed at a meeting and who is participating. As shown, these conversations contribute to the third dimension of power (Lukes 1974), in terms of how meaning is managed, because the plan and its production cycle provide a meaning-making platform. However, aspects of concern or contentiousness with a common object X have not been addressed, in depth, in co-orientation theory, with respect to their occurrence in a speech situation. While empirical extracts in Robichaud et al.'s (2004) study looked at the



heated debate of topics that upset a town's residents, they failed to address whether and how the mayor dealt with these complaints. This thesis showed that the plan contained aspects that were contested by employees across Unico. Through enacting the particular content, individuals invoked a content change in light of their concerns (see part 6.5.2.3).

The second dimension of power advocates that the source of power rests within the decision making process and its participants (Hardy 1996). Due to their status, certain individuals are able to control a meeting's agenda and thus restrict which objects of talk will occur at a meeting (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 1963, 1970). Previous studies have pointed out that individuals taking part in organisational interactions hold different roles, but they did not further elaborate the implications of such differences. For instance, Taylor and Robichaud (2004) illustrated interactions between the CEO of a large Canadian firm and one of his closest associates. However, they failed to show how these differences influenced the flow of the object X. Also, Robichaud et al. (2004) failed to point out whether the topics of the day were pre-determined by the mayor's presentation. This thesis shows that differences in status empowered certain individuals, termed text producers, to amend the strategic plan's content, while individuals across positions and hierarchical levels were only able to participate in its construction within the dedicated meeting spaces.

In relation to the first dimension of power, neither of the studies by Dahl (1957) and Parsons (1963a, 1963b), showed the outcome of the discussions presented. Hence, they did not address whether Mr Sam (Robichaud et al. 2004) or the mayor (Taylor and Robichaud 2004) took into consideration comments with respect to either the CEO's succession or about repairing sidewalks and potholes. Findings in this thesis show that while decisions of Unico's espoused strategic directions, in form of strategic objectives, were set by top managers, individuals across positions contributed to the achievement of those directions, as articulated in goals. Based on these findings about the dimensions of power that are contextual features of communication processes, I would encourage future studies to devote attention to the differences embedded within the organisational context. Such differences may have profound effects on communicative interactions. Thus, future studies might incorporate differences in the status of individuals, in order to further elaborate the current conceptualisation of interactions between A and B and their relationship to an unfolding object X.

Aspects of time are largely absent in the conceptualisation and application of co-orientation, which may be due to the lack of longitudinal studies in the field of organisational

communication (Monge et al. 1984). Thus, the notion of co-orientation will be extended by taking a sequential view of time. This illustrates i) the evolution of a subject of talk, and ii) how ideas can travel across time and space. Drawing upon the distinction between talk and text, we have seen that a subject of talk emerges as the plan's content becomes enacted. However, until now there has been no account showing how the content of an interaction evolves at a meeting or across meetings (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). Bakhtin's (1986a) notion of responsiveness provides theoretical grounding to illustrate that the occurrence of a semantic theme was constituted through an initiation and a responsive act. An initiation refers to the initial enactment of a subject of talk during a meeting. This analysis was limited to selected subjects of talk that led to a content change to Unico's strategic plan. An initiation was then followed by a response. A response occurs in relation to the same subject of talk that had been enacted during the initiating utterance. Thus both initiation and response occur at the same meeting. In terms of responsive aspects, sub-section 6.3.2 shows that a response, with respect to the same object X, may not only occur immediately subsequent to an initiation but could be uttered a few utterances after the actual initiation at the same meeting. Following the occurrence of the same object X, such as placements, at and across meetings, showed that some objects X were recurrently initiated before resulting in a content change. This is due to the differing contextual meaning, as each initiation was enacted in a new utterance, both at a meeting and across meetings. Thus, each utterance had distinct referential aspects with respect to the strategic plan and the flow of talk.

A sequential view of the dialogic of talk and text also shows that ideas can travel across time and space by becoming fixated. Fixation occurs as talk becomes materialised in the form of a written text (Ricoeur 1981). Hence, ideas captured in a written text shape future interactions. Figure 7.5 illustrates that a common object X, voiced in a meeting in one time period, has the ability to shape the content Y of a subsequent version, which is henceforth referred to as content Y'. For instance, a new objective that was introduced into the Teaching Mission in Version 7, influenced the talk at the top management team (TMT) meeting, as it became enacted by TMT members. In turn, this addition in Version 7, was based on a comment that was voiced during the external governing body's strategy away day. However, distanciation and decontextualisation occur as talk becomes fixated. Hence, the speaker's mental intention, and the context in which the comment arose, cannot be traced when looking at content Y'. As content Y' becomes enacted in a future meeting, it influences what and when something is talked about. Moreover, as a written text provides an atemporal object that may travel across time and space (Ricoeur 1981; Smith 1984), it



may provide the basis for discussion in separate speech situations. Thus content Y may be enacted during sequential meetings (see Figure 7.5). While the conveyed meaning of the object X differs in both meetings, enacting content Y influenced the subject of the common object X by providing the same referentiality. For instance, Version 3 of Unico's strategic plan provided the basis for discussing Unico's espoused strategic directions at both the senior management and newly appointed staff strategy away days in period II. Taking a sequential view, we have seen that the same subject of talk may be enacted in the form of an initiation and a response. Furthermore, it may need to be recurrently initiated before leading to a content change. My results, showing the sequential and temporal nature of communication, indicate the need for further longitudinal studies, which can extend the time-period comparisons and subsequent process models arising from my study.

This sub-section is structured in two parts. First, it elaborates on the dialogic of text and agency/conversation by distinguishing between talk and a written text. While previous research focused on episodes of communication, this research provides a processual study illustrating implications of sequential episodes for the written text and its production process. Moreover, this thesis elaborates on the notion of power which has been largely absent in organisational communication studies (Hardy 2004; Hardy and Phillips 2004; Hawes 1999). In particular, my study elaborates on the notion of co-orientation by demonstrating that actors A and B should not be seen as equals during planning activities. Second, it extends the current conceptualisation of the co-orientation framework by introducing aspects of materiality, context and time. The thesis shows that a material aspect, Unico's strategic plan, shaped interactions as it was enacted by participants in the plan production cycle. An emphasis on context illustrates that a meeting's purpose shapes the nature of those common objects X that emerge at planning meetings and also sets temporal ordering structures that constrain the random occurrence of objects X during a meeting. Due to the single episodic nature of current empirical accounts (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004), aspects of time are absent when applying the ABX relationship. A sequential view shows how subjects of talk evolve at and across meetings, and how ideas can travel across time and space by becoming fixated in text.

#### **7.3.4 Strategic planning in a university context**

Due to the research setting, this thesis makes contributions to the literature on strategic planning in universities (e.g. Cohen et al. 1972; Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Hardy et al. 1984; Jarzabkowski 2003, 2005, 2008). It elaborates on debates about the nature of participative decision-making processes within universities, by illustrating detailed findings

on the creation of a strategic plan. Within the literature there are several views on decision-making processes within universities. Scholars have debated whether decisions within universities result from a consensus of collegiality (Goodman 1962) or out of a political model (Baldrige et al. 1978). However, others have viewed a participatory decision-making process as not being the primary influence on the decision outcome, but rather as arising from a garbage can process (Cohen and March 1974). First, this thesis elaborates on the value of a participatory decision-making process. Second, it elaborates on the view that decisions emerge out of a complex decision-making process.

First, this thesis showed that a participatory decision-making process should not be downplayed as having only symbolic value. In the garbage can model, the contribution of decision-making processes within universities, is not to achieve a specific outcome but rather to provide a context in which problems, participants, solutions and choice opportunities can be brought together (Cohen and March 1974; Cohen et al. 1972). However, with respect to the creation of a strategic plan, this thesis shows that a participatory decision-making process is more purposive than the garbage can model suggests. It provides a meaning-making platform that results in agreed terminology on espoused strategic objectives and goals, which are articulated in a university's strategic plan. These symbolise legitimacy for the espoused courses of action, which can then be legitimately implemented, as illustrated by Jarzabkowski (2008, and Seidl 2008). Thus, Unico's strategic plan reflected a specific strategic focus, which was directed from the university's top managers and combined with additions initiated by members across Unico. These findings also elaborate on the role of formal strategic plans within a university context. To some extent, they counter Cohen and March's (1974) view that a university's strategic plan is either compiled from individual departmental plans or decorative with no impact on academic issues. While conflict with respect to the plan's content arose during top management team meetings and strategy away days, most ambiguous goals were dealt with by constantly amending the strategic plan in light of individuals' recontextualisations. Findings also illustrated the effects of objects and goals that were formulated too ambiguously, as these led to difficulties in recontextualising a plan's content, such as the formulation of Unico's Third Stream Mission. While objectives and goals may be expressed ambiguously to bridge multiple interests (Ring and Perry 1985), the level of ambiguity needs to be managed sufficiently to generate an impression of shared meaning. I thus suggest that University planning practices may have evolved into more coherent and accepted managerialist procedures since Cohen and March's (1974) foundational study. Indeed, my research reveals the impact of an increasing adoption of managerial practices



within universities (Hardy 1987, 1991b; Gioia et al. 1994). Findings illustrate that Unico engaged in formal strategic planning activities that mirror those in private sector organisations such as oil majors (Grant 2003) or General Electric (Allaire and Firsirotu 1990; Ocasio and Joseph 2008). Such a shift towards private sector management practices occurred in response to institutional pressures (Hardy 1987, 1991b; Lounsbury 2001) such as declining state funding (Slaughter and Leslie 1999).

Second, this thesis elaborates on the view that university decisions emerge out of a complex decision-making process (Hardy et al. 1984). This research looked at a particular circumstance of decision-making, the creation of a strategic plan. It provides detailed findings on how a plan was constructed through a participative process that spanned academics and administrators across hierarchical levels. While universities are characterised by diffuse power relations between academics and administrators (Cohen and March 1974; Mintzberg 1979c), the plan production bridged those, as individuals from both groups were included at various stages of the process. My case study shows that members across Unico's departments and governing bodies took part during the plan production cycle. This ensured adherence to the mechanisms of participative decision-making, which remain important in the university context (Hardy et al. 1984; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). During the strategic plan production cycle, top managers and professionals across Unico invested considerable effort and commitment to the plan's development. The fine-grained Initiation and Response framework, illustrated in section 6.4, demonstrates that Unico's strategic plan was jointly constructed. Content changes were initiated solely by participants in the plan production. These included individuals spanning hierarchical levels across academic and administrative departments. If initiations were followed by an active responsive act, the VC and Deputy VC engaged in the response. While this process reflects the distribution of power within universities, the notion of the strategic plan was not questioned at any time during its production. Hence, existing views of the professional-managerial tension in public and third sector organisations (e.g. Denis et al. 1996; Reay and Hinings 2005), may be tinged by an increasingly pragmatic relationship, as both parties learn to work within more business-like practices (e.g. Scott et al. 2000), or may even be changing to one of managerialism, as professional organisations accept the importation of business practices (e.g. Oakes et al. 1998; Townley 2002). Based on my analysis and findings, I suggest moving from views of universities as organised anarchies (Cohen and March 1974; Cohen et al. 1972; March and Olsen 1976), which may have less relevance in the current university context, and rather focus on identifying consequences resulting from managerial ways of operating.

This sub-section on strategic planning in a university context has shown an example of how a private sector practice impacted upon decision-making processes. Unico's strategic plan production cycle was embedded within a strategic planning process that is similar to private sector organisations (see for instance Grant 2003). This thesis elaborates on current knowledge on universities' participatory decision-making processes. It illustrated that such processes provide a meaning-making platform that bridges diffuse power relations amongst academics and administrators. As a result of continuous interactions and alterations, Unico's strategic plan reflected agreed terminology. Based on these findings, I suggest further research should explore the role of management practices on public or third sector organisations.



## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusions

This chapter seeks to summarise all the findings presented, analysed and discussed in the previous chapters, in order to highlight the conclusions drawn from such a unique study on the construction of a strategic plan. The following sections form the last Chapter of this thesis. First, a brief summary will be given. Second, theoretical and methodological contributions are outlined. Third, research limitations are addressed. Fourth, future areas for research will be outlined. Fifth, practical implications of this study are offered. Sixth, I will provide personal reflections on getting access to and conducting longitudinal research.

#### 8.1 Summary of the thesis

In order to examine social interactions at the micro level, in particular the construction of a strategic plan, I reconceptualised strategic planning as a communicative process. In doing so, I drew upon the concept of co-orientation (Newcomb 1953) and its adaptation by the Montréal School of organisational communication (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003, 2006; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). The underlying assumption in the notion of co-orientation is the view that an organisation is socially constructed and continuously reconstructed. In this view, organisation is not a pre-existing and separate entity to communication, but rather is constituted within, and brought into being through, a communicative process. Such an approach highlights the duality between action and structure (Berger and Luckman 1966; Fairhurst and Putnam 2004; Giddens 1984; Putnam and Fairhurst 2001) and consists of a recurrent, reciprocal relationship between text and agency (Cooren 2004)/conversation (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor et al. 1996). Through co-orientation organising occurs within a communicative process (cf., sub-section 2.4.2). Co-orientation focuses on a common object X - the semantic theme of what the interactions are about – that emerges out of the ongoing interactions between A and B (Newcomb 1953; Taylor 2003; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). The link in the interaction of A and B is thus the common object X. A and B may be individuals or groups of actors (Taylor 2006). Each interaction has to be seen as taking place reflexively because it refers to what went on prior

to the current interaction. As any specific interaction is part of sequentially occurring interactions, it becomes the reference point for future interactions. Hence, it was crucial to consider situational and contextual nuances that embed a social interaction, such as the language system and temporal location of the actual interaction, as they shape both its production and perception (Bakhtin 1986a; Taylor 2003, 2006; Taylor and Robichaud 2004).

Such reconceptualisation provided the basis for examining the exploratory research question *how is a strategic plan constructed as a communicative process?* and the two explanatory research questions *what are the implications of this communicative process for the plan?;* *what are the implications of this communicative process for the plan production process?.* A longitudinal in-depth case study approach (Langley 1999; Pettigrew 1990; Yin 1994) was adopted within a British university (Unico). The main data sources were non-participant observation of strategic planning meetings (n = 25) and the collection of ten versions of Unico's strategic plan. Additionally, seventy-six interviews were held with participants at various points in time throughout the plan production cycle. Due to high quality access, I was able to follow Unico's planning efforts over 10-months as its strategy was reviewed as a result of a change in leadership. Drawing upon the well-known strategic planning sequence, it started with setting directions according to Unico's three Missions followed by the development of respective goals and measures. The evolving strategic content coincided with the development of Unico's strategic plan.

Findings stemmed from three different levels of analysis: i) Unico's strategic plan; ii) the interrelation of strategy talk and Unico's strategic plan; and iii) talk that resulted in a change to the plan's content. Data analysis went through four phases. In the first phase, Unico's production process was distinguished in five stages by drawing upon contextual characteristics. In the second phase, I conducted a textual analysis, which illustrated that Unico's strategic plan evolved as its content was changed until the completion of its final version (cf., Chapter 4). As a result of these changes, the plan's content became increasingly specific as time progressed. Findings also showed that each Mission had its own distinct development. In the third phase, I shifted the level of analysis to the inter-relation of talk and text, and showed that the content of Unico's strategic plan provided the basis for discussion during the plan production cycle (cf., Chapter 5). It shaped the talk, as individuals enacted a particular content in their talk. Through enacting the plan, talk unfolded in various directions as individuals recontextualised the plan's inscribed meaning by revealing their interpretation of its content. Recontextualisation is thereby situated in a



current context that embeds the talk, whereas the plan inscribes meaning which is decontextualised from the situation in which it originated. While decontextualisation enabled Unico's plan to provide a basis for interpretation across time periods and actors, I have illustrated that individuals held multiple, even competing interpretations of particular items of the plan's content. In order to bridge interpretations and to resolve potential difficulties in recontextualising, the strategic plan was amended in light of individuals' intentions. As talk became materialised in a new version of the plan, its meaning became decontextualised. Thus, in each version of the amended strategic plan, the original speakers and their intentions cannot be traced. In the fourth phase, I turned my attention to talk instances that led to a content change (cf., Chapter 6). Talk was clustered according to eight conversational patterns that resulted from the Initiation and Response framework (cf., section 6.4). Looking at the findings of each conversational pattern provided clues about the construction of Unico's strategic plan. It showed that contextual characteristics, utterances' referentiality to the plan and a subject's contentiousness determined the type of content change and the level that such change were made. Section 8.2 will now outline contributions made to the areas of literature that were introduced in Chapter 2.

## **8.2 Contributions**

This thesis makes theoretical and methodological contributions which will be outlined below.

### **8.2.1 Theoretical contributions**

Theoretical contributions were made in the following four areas: strategic planning, strategy-as-practice, the Montréal School of organisational communication and strategic planning in a university context.

An alternative view of strategic planning is a key contribution to the strategic planning literature (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Grant 2003; Kotter 1995; Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998; Ocasio and Joseph 2008). The strategic planning process is reconceptualised as a communicative processes consisting of an interplay between talk and text. Hence, strategic planning comes into being through individuals' interactions (see sub-section 7.2.1). Notions of participation and power are embedded in a communicative process. Differing distributions of power influenced who held authorship over the plan and who was able to

contribute to the plan's construction throughout its production cycle (see sub-section 7.2.3). Findings also showed the strong influence of the strategic plan as it shapes planning activities through the plan production cycle. The plan's content structured talk within specific meetings. Additionally, as the plan was recurrently amended, it was increasingly fixated, as its content reflected agreed terminology (see sub-section 7.2.2).

Elaborations to the strategy-as-practice literature have been made in three areas: practitioner, praxis and practices. This study's focuses on individuals across an organisation's hierarchical levels and departments, which is currently an under-explored area within the s-as-p field (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). The concept of co-orientation (Newcomb 1953; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003) in conjunction with Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of utterance, provides a basis to theorise from in situ interactions without neglecting contextual nuances that embed the communicative process. This research focuses on a material artefact, the strategic plan, which is embedded within the strategic planning practice. It has shown how the plan was constructed over five periods.

With respect to the organisational communication literature, elaborations have been made on the dialogic of text and agency/conversation by distinguishing between talk and a written text (Cooren 2004; Kuhn 2008; Taylor et al. 1996). While previous research focused on episodes of communication, this research provides a processual study, illustrating implications of sequential episodes for the written text and its production process. Moreover, this thesis elaborates on the notion of power, which has been largely absent in organisational communication studies (Hardy 2004; Hardy and Phillips 2004; Hawes 1999). This thesis has also extended the notion of co-orientation. Building upon the adaptation by the Montréal School of organisational communication (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor 2003; Taylor and Robichaud 2004), it introduces three further extensions to the concept of co-orientation (see sub-section 7.3.3). Materiality, in this case a strategic plan, is added to the concept of co-orientation by distinguishing between talk and text (Ricoeur 1981). When empirically adopting the notion of co-orientation, scholars have recognised contextual nuances embedding the communicative process (Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004). However, context occurred primarily as background information on the respective talk extracts, whereas my study was grounded in the specific and evolving contexts of strategic planning meetings. The longitudinal nature of my study has also provided time as another dimension that is currently absent in the conceptualisation of co-orientation. While a written text provides an atemporal object that may travel across time



and space (Ricoeur 1981; Smith 1984), talk consists of a chain of utterances, which occur in an immediate situation that has distinct contextual meaning (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b).

Contributions have been made to the literature on strategic planning in universities (Cohen et al. 1972; Cohen and March 1974; Hardy 1987, 1990, 1991a; Hardy et al. 1984; Jarzabkowski 2003, 2005, 2008; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). This thesis illustrates that Unico's strategic plan production cycle provided a meaning-making platform for its participants, bridging diffuse power relations between senior managers, academics and administrators (Cohen and March 1974; Mintzberg 1979c). Unico's strategic plan was thus constructed through participative decision-making, as indicated in previous studies of university strategy-making (cf., Hardy et al. 1984). However, this research also moves on from Cohen and March's (1974) view that a university's strategic plan is either compiled of individual departmental plans or decorative with no impact on academic issues. Iterative amendments to the plan's content resulted in agreed terminology that was considered by the participants to provide a platform for shared meaning about University strategy.

### **8.2.2 Methodological contributions**

This thesis also makes three methodological contributions. The first methodological contribution results from including material aspects in theorising about social interactions embedded within a communicative process. This also has provided a novel approach to studying practice (cf., sub-section 7.3.2) and extending the notion of co-orientation (cf., sub-section 7.3.3). In order to separate discursive and material elements (Iedema 2007), I have drawn upon Ricoeur's (1981) distinction between talk and text. Talk is considered as any orally expressed discourse. It occurs in a current, immediate context-bound situation. A text may be based on anterior talk and/or an author's individual ideas, which he/she may not have voiced before. Previous studies conflated both discursive forms under the term text (cf., Cooren and Taylor 1997; Kuhn 2008; Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Robichaud et al. 2004; Taylor and Robichaud 2004; Taylor et al. 1996). This research shows that the strategic plan's content co-emerged as a result of recurrent iterations of talk and text (cf., sub-section 7.2.1). In sub-section 5.2.1 we have also seen that the plan's content disciplined talk by shaping when and what is talked about during a meeting.

The second methodological contribution stems from adopting dialogism, as advocated by Paul Ricoeur and Mikhail Bakhtin. Both scholars' notions of dialogism have a strong link to the contextual embeddedness of the speech situation and appropriation of a written text (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b; Ricoeur 1981). The meaning conveyed in discourse (Ricoeur 1981)/

an utterance (Bakhtin 1986a) is determined by the immediate situation. Words gain their meaning from the composition of the discourse/utterance, as well as the words embedded in discourse/utterances that will follow and that preceded the current/immediate utterance. Ricoeur and Bakhtin thus offer strong theoretical frameworks to tackle shortcomings of organisational discourse studies, which are in danger of neglecting context (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Sillince 2007). The strong contextual focus advocated by these scholars was developed in this thesis by appropriating the notions of recontextualisation and decontextualisation (Ricoeur 1981), as well as of utterance and responsiveness (Bakhtin 1986a, 1986b). In relation to Ricoeur (1981), sub-section 5.2.2 demonstrated that recontextualisation is shaped by contextual embeddedness; in particular the version of the strategic plan and the meeting's guiding question influenced how the plan's content became recontextualised. Decontextualisation was embedded in Unico's distribution of power, which determined who held authorship over the plan. Hence, only certain actors were able to decide what content to change and how to amend it. Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) dialogism is reflected in the notions of utterance and responsiveness. The concept of utterance provides the theoretical grounding to analyse talk in relation to the plan's content changes. While the same semantic theme (subject of talk/common object X) may be enacted in two utterances, the spatial and temporal situation determines whether it is uttered as an initiation or a response (cf., section 6.4). Future studies may adopt Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) notion of utterance as unit of analysis, which provides a specific alternative to the rather broad category of discourse (Grant et al. 1998). Drawing upon the concept of responsiveness (Bakhtin, 1986a, 1986b), I have illustrated, for instance, that a plan's content change may act as a written response to an initiated subject of talk that had not been followed by an oral response. This strong emphasis on contextual characteristics shows that initiations were solely uttered by participants in the plan production cycle, whereas a text producer engaged in all but one oral response.

The third methodological contribution is made by introducing the notion of temporal space. This provides an attempt, at the methodological level, to address the notion of temporal dynamics, which is currently absent in most strategy process research (Langley 2007; Mosakowski and Earley 2000). Each social interaction is situated in time<sup>8</sup> and space (Cooren and Fairhurst 2004). In line with a practice perspective, time is seen as an enacted phenomena (Giddens 1984). Moreover, drawing upon structuration theory (Giddens 1984) 'temporality is both produced in situated practices and reproduced through the influence of

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<sup>8</sup> For the difference between clock time and event time see Jacques (1982) and Clark (1985).



institutionalized norms' (Orlikowski and Yates 2002: 685). *Temporal space* refers to temporal structures (Orlikowski and Yates 2002) during which individuals enact formalised strategic planning activities located within a physical space. As sub-section 7.2.3 demonstrated, the temporal space to participate in strategic planning activities is contested and restrictive (see also Frers 2009). On the one hand, in an organisational setting the announcement and dedication of a specific room provides the temporal space to discuss strategic planning amongst invited individuals. On the other hand, the institutional practice of strategic planning sets conversational boundaries to what can and cannot be talked about during such a planning meeting (Bakhtin 1986a). Moreover, strategic planning lies in the hands of the top management as they are responsible for an organisation's future (Ackoff 1970; Ansoff 1965). Thus, they are empowered to drive the strategic plan's development. Moreover, they are able to determine to some extent who is participating in the plan production. In Unico's case, participants from across Unico were invited to participate in discussing the plan's content during strategy away days in periods II and IV. Thereafter, the plan's construction was restricted to Unico's top management team. The distribution of Unico's governing system also determined the influence of its two governing bodies (Senate and Council) on the plan's development.

### 8.3 Research limitations

A number of inevitable limitations can be associated with my research. First, the theoretical angle taken determined my foci and hence shaped the findings. However, this applies to any research undertaken, whether of quantitative or qualitative nature. Reconceptualising strategic planning as a communicative process provides a sound theoretical framework to build upon in future, both in my own work and for other scholars.

Second, a single in-depth case study is inclined to low generalisability of findings (Langley 1999; Yin 1994, 2003). Rather, it tends to be high in accuracy (Langley 1999), providing grounds for establishing and extending existing theory (Eisenhardt 1989). By selecting a longitudinal single case study approach, I was able to follow what managers actually do when developing a strategic plan (Mintzberg 1979a; Pettigrew 1992).

Third, the university context in which this research was undertaken implies another research limitation common to in-depth case study research (Yin 1994, 2003). While this study was

conducted in a university context, I would expect these findings to be relevant in similar organisational settings with diffuse power structures and democratic decision-making (Hardy et al. 1984), such as health care (Denis et al. 1991, 2006; Dutton et al. 2001) or other governmental institutions (Davenport and Leitch 2006). Although I have focused solely on the development of one type of document, in my case a strategic plan, other research has shown a document's significance on organising and sharing meaning across organisational boundaries (Bechky 2003a; Carlile 2002, 2004).

Fourth, as a result of conducting a longitudinal in-depth case study within one organisation, Unico, I have collected large amounts of data. In order to overcome an 'analysis nightmare' (Miles and Huberman 1994: 77) and to avoid 'death by data asphyxiation' (Pettigrew 1990: 281), I selected the data to be included in the analysis (Taylor 2001). While I attempted to draw upon all four data sources (non-participant observations, versions of Unico's strategic plan, interviews and e-mails), research foci and time, as well as resource constraints, limited the depth of the findings. In the near future, I will be going back to the stored raw data in order to explore further aspects of the data, using additional theoretical lenses.

## 8.4 Future directions

By extending the notion of co-orientation (Newcomb 1953; Taylor 2003, 2006), this thesis has provided a framework for investigating social interactions with respect to situational and contextual features, which are largely absent in organisational communication research (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Sillince 2007). Future research endeavours may explore differences in the emergence of objects X (semantic themes) based on the different dynamics during a meeting. Moreover, Bakhtin's (1986a, 1986b) utterance's components offer further scope for empirical research. Analytical concepts of referentiality and expressive aspects provide contextual detail on the enacted semantic themes. Such research effort would require access to meetings that have similar settings, such as the same set of slides presented in the same order, equal time available to discuss strategic contents etc.

Re-emphasising calls within the strategy-as-practice field (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2003, 2007), little is still known about strategising activities at the micro level. I suggest examining the role of material artefacts in further detail, either by drawing upon the extension of the notion of co-orientation (cf., sub-section 7.3.3) or other theoretical



lenses available, such as a boundary object perspective (Star and Griesemer 1989). This thesis illustrates how a strategic plan structured the sequence and the nature of topics that arose during meetings, focusing on its creation. In particular in recent months, the role of computer programmes, based on complex mathematical models, on stock trading has come under scrutiny. Stock broking thus provides an intriguing context to explore the role of artefacts, both on the way stocks are currently traded, as well as on the success measures of those activities.

## 8.5 Practical implications

In this section I will offer practical implications based on the empirical findings of this research. While these stem from research undertaken in a university context, they may also apply to other organisational contexts undergoing strategic planning as a meaning-making platform for developing agreed terminology. Communication is seen as key to effective planning and implementation (Beer and Eisenstat 2000; Grant 2003; Rapert et al. 2002; Tourish 2005; Vilà and Canales 2008). Based on findings stemming from Unico's strategy plan production cycle, I have identified three enablers and barriers to formulating meaningful strategic directions, which are manifested in the strategic plan. In order to effectively communicate, an organisation's strategic directions need to be formulated using terms which provide flexibility for local adaptation in different parts of the organisation. There are two enabling mechanisms that ensure such flexibility. Discussions need to be fostered to create commitment amongst the top management team. Moreover, enrolling multiple individuals across organisational levels sets the basis to provide feedback loops. Feedback gained from top managers and employees enables flexible terms to be derived that are meaningful across organisational levels. However, there are also barriers to formulating meaningful strategic directions. Barriers result from strategic directions that are expressed too narrowly or too broadly. Too narrow refers to terms that are only understood in a small section within an organisation. Terms that are expressed too broadly lack meaning and hence may not be operationalised. Such terminology may also lead to resistance as employees simply do not understand the organisation's strategic directions. In addition, operational aspects of how to achieve the strategic directions, while beyond the scope of this thesis, also need to be addressed.

## 8.6 Personal reflections on getting access to and conducting longitudinal research

The last section of Chapter 8 offers personal reflections on the research process. Much has been written about analysing longitudinal qualitative data (Leonard-Barton 1990; Miles and Huberman 1994; Pettigrew 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998). In the last section, I will provide some personal reflections with respect to accessing and conducting longitudinal research. Any empirical research stands or falls with access to the data, whether it is a data base holding stock exchanges over the last five years or, in my case, the development of a strategic plan. A crucial aspect of gaining access to conduct longitudinal research is constantly nourishing social relationships with gatekeepers in the case organisation(s). Interactions with gatekeepers ensures knowledge about current issues that are discussed amongst the research participants, as well as ensuring access to both planned and impromptu activities of pertinence to the study. In my research, gatekeepers included individuals who are in charge of meeting agendas and are well connected within Unico, such as senior executives and administrators in central positions. Gatekeepers are identified through formal interviews, building up contextual knowledge about the case organisation. Thereafter, relations are kept alive by staying in touch via e-mail or by dropping into the office for a chat once in a while.

Conducting longitudinal research is fun, but tricky at the same time. This type of research is fun, as one is able to follow organisational processes which one would normally not be able to take part in. I genuinely enjoyed delving into the conversations about Unico's future direction and collecting material that was made available. As conversations evolve during the research process so do priorities and topics. Thus, it is key to collect multiple data sources, as one does not know, at the time of the collection, whether a certain document may become more important a few weeks later. Research may also be tricky in the sense that one has to remind oneself about the role of the researcher when sitting in meetings or shadowing research participants. On the one hand, a researcher needs to be part of the research context to understand or at least grasp what the individuals under study do. On the other hand, a researcher needs to keep his/her independence over the research subject in order to analyse the collected data. I dealt with this challenge by amending my physical appearance according to the purpose and nature of the meeting or interview. During non-participant observations I saw myself as the *grey mouse* sitting in the back of the room quietly typing observational notes, whilst aiming at not being spotted. This identity was also



reflected by wearing a grey cashmere pullover and black trousers. Before conducting interviews in various departments, I walked through the respective corridors to get a feel of the dress code. So, I wore jeans and sneakers when interviewing staff members who had only recently joined the engineering department, as opposed to a blue shirt and brown trousers when talking to senior members within the Business School. By changing clothing, I adapted to the different situations as part of the research context.

***THE END***

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Appendices

## **APPENDICES**



Appendices

**Appendix A: Research flyer**

## **Communicating Strategy Across Levels**

*This research is aimed at identifying and improving communication practices, procedures and frameworks in the strategy-making process across hierarchical and horizontal levels.*

### **Background to research**

Strategic planning is considered an important communication process for ensuring that different divisions and business units are integrated into understanding and implementing organisational objectives. Formulating and implementing strategy are complex and dynamic processes, which involve organisational members across hierarchical and horizontal levels. In the process of strategy creation, decisions have to be taken on past and present actions as well as considering future challenges. These decisions direct the future of an organisation and need to be successfully implemented, requiring effective communication within the planning process, rather than as a separate function, in order to create commitment and shared understandings by members across each organisational level. The specific frameworks, practices and procedures that are used to support the strategy-making process, such as analytic models, planning templates and presentation formats, have been shown to both foster dialogues and guide decision-making but also, potentially, to hamper the communication of strategy across levels, leading to its ineffective implementation. This research thus aims to examine how specific strategy frameworks, practices and procedures, are incorporated into the strategic planning process at different levels and the extent to which they enable or constrain within-team dialogues and across team strategic communication.

This research addresses two main questions that are important for looking at a successful communication of strategy across hierarchical and horizontal levels.

- 1. How is strategy communicated across hierarchical and horizontal levels?*
- 2. What is the role of specific strategy frameworks, practices and procedures in the strategy-making process and how do they affect the communication of strategic issues across levels?*

### **Outcomes for your organisation**

We will collaborate with managers in designing this research to meet any specific outcomes or information needs. Broadly, outcomes are expected to benefit your organisation as follows:

- Analysis of the effectiveness of the communication practices that your organisation currently uses to communicate and implement strategic issues
- Identification of enablers and barriers to communicating strategy across hierarchical and horizontal levels
- Regular feedback as required, including a report and within-firm workshop to present the findings to relevant participants.
- Recommendations for improving the relevance and effectiveness of practices and processes for communicating strategy successfully across organisational levels



## **Appendix B: Sample interview guide**

**Meeting: Vice-Chancellor:** 19-03-07 @ 11am – 11.30am

### **Introductory questions**

- What was your impression of Unico's existing strategy when you came in?
  - Do you think there are there any misalignments between individual departmental strategies; Or are there major "conflicting" differences?
  - And are there any misalignments between the "new" overarching strategy and individual departments strategies?
- What happened with the strategy document created by the previous VC shortly before his departure?
  - May I have access to previous strategy documents?
- What did you think about the executive away-day, 3<sup>rd</sup> January?
  - What do you think about the feedback you received?

### **Strategy presentation**

- On which information did you base the first strategy presentation, I think given at the end of December 2006 to Senate.
  - Who was involved in creating the first presentation?
- How did you assess Unico and its parts?
  - Did you collect some written communication (e.g. strategic plans; financial statements) from individual Schools/Departments when you got in touch with them the first time?
    - > Did this information help giving you an overview about the different schools/departments?
- Does the RAE submission by the end of this year and the announcement in late 2008 influence the future strategy?
- Who is involved in developing the strategy presentation further? Who decides about what's going in the strategy presentation? Who is involved in this strategic decision process?
- To whom did you send the "slim" version of the strategy presentation and when?
- Has there been some feedback on the strategy review/strategy presentation?
  - Formal (in written form)
  - Informal (in conversations)

### **Council**

- What has been presented to the Council on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December?
- Has there been any feedback on the strategy presentation?
  - Formal (in written form)?
    - Documented?
  - Informal?

-> If so, what were the concerns?

## Appendices

### Senate

- Has there been some feedback from Senate over the last 3(?) Senate meetings?
    - Formal (in written form)?
      - Documented?
    - Informal?
- > If so, what were the concerns?

### Fortnightly meetings

- What is happening during the “fortnightly” operational executive team meetings?
  - > Did you receive any feedback on the strategy presentation in those meetings?
  
- What are the discussions about fortnightly strategy meetings?
  - > access?

### General

- **What is the rough plan for this academic year?**



## Appendix C: Sample illustration of the research data base, Teaching Mission

doc Vsn	Reference point in underlying Version (not applicable to additional comments)	Content change in document	refined coding categories (12-03-08)	who/what triggered change	Coding relationship	Actual comment on 'reference point' (cited)	source of comment	date of comment & meeting
FI-Vs 07-05- 16	-- New	programmes to be tested against relevance criteria as well as against academic quality and demand criteria				<p>reporting back on L&amp;T: female delegate: ... We talked about making sure that all of the courses that are provided are reviewed regularly, both the mode of delivery and how it could be more flexibly delivered but also the relevance of the courses to the market that we're aiming for, whether it's what the potential students are actually looking for, just to make sure that review processes are carried out. ...</p>	talk	04-04-07 recently appointed staff
FI-Vs 07-07- 27			<b>New specificity</b>			<p>meeting minutes: - The University should continue its focus on delivering professional and vocationally relevant programmes leading to high levels of graduate employment. Programmes are regularly reviewed which helps to ensure that remain up-to-date and relevant to the needs of employers.</p>	minutes	
				talk	<b>relationship B</b>	<p>reporting back on L&amp;T: female delegate: ... We felt that one of the long-term aims ... We should really be as flexible and adaptable as possible so that we can respond to the demands out there [in the market] ... And I guess the good market intelligence links to flexibility was really what we were talking about ... [research comment: -&gt; this sub bullet point relates to the next one on "professional accreditation for programmes", where the same female delegate suggests to be informed what these accrediting bodies want]</p>	talk	03-04-07 snr mngt away day

meeting minutes on L&T: minutes  
- It is important not to lose sight of the need to continue providing programmes of high educational quality, including those designed to meet vocational and professional needs.

Table C1: Sample illustration of the research database, Teaching Mission



**Appendix D: Coding relationships across five periods**

<b>period</b>	period I	period II	period III	period IV	period V	Total
<b>relationships A, A*, G1</b>	14	53	4	15	0	86
<b>relationships E</b>	0	6	1	0	0	7
<b>all other relationships</b>	0	20	6	50	0	76
<b>Total</b>	<i>14</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>169</i>

Table D1: Coding relationships across five periods

**Appendix E: Type of content change across ten versions of Unico's strategic plan**

	Vsn 1-2	Vsn 2-3	Vsn 3-4	Vsn 4-5	Vsn 5-6	Vsn 6-7	Vsn 7-8	Vsn 8-9	Vsn 9-10
New specificity	12	1	6	3	0	21	7	0	38
Increasing specificity	2	4	4	2	3	11	4	3	15
Reducing specificity	0	3	1	3	2	15	0	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>61</b>

Table E.1: Type of content change across ten versions of Unico's strategic plan





	period III												period IV												period V		TOTAL
	Vsn 7-8						Vsn 8-9						Vsn 9-10						Version 10								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	A	B	C	D	E	F	A	B	C	D	E	F	G1	G2							
Research	2												3	11							0		29				
	1	1					1						4								0		22				
							1						1						1		0		14				
Teaching	2												4	19							0		45				
							2						3	5							0		13				
													1	3					1	1	0		12				
Third Stream	2	1											1								0		14				
	1					1							2	1							0		13				
																					0		7				
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>169</b>				

Table F1: Coding relationship per Mission by type of content change (continued)