

**Making Sense of the Strategic Thinking Literature
to Help Build a New Model of this Mysterious Construct**

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ABSTRACT:

There is a significant gap in the literature defining and putting some 'flesh on the bone' of the often misunderstood concept of strategic thinking. The aim of this paper is to provide a review and synthesis of the literature on strategic thinking to provide some insight into this mysterious, often talked about but rarely defined or modeled construct. A definition and model of strategic thinking is developed and linked to strategic planning to provide the theoretical foundation for a major empirical research project. The model has five elements: flexible inputs, entrepreneurial, strategic intent, participative and thinking in time.

KEY WORDS:

strategic thinking, strategic planning, strategic management, literature survey, model

PAPER PRESENTATION

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980s the term strategic thinking gained greater prominence in the strategy literature. Strategic thinking was a focus for some well known McKinsey and Company consultants in the early 1980s including Kenichi Ohmae (1982) and Tom Peters and Robert Waterman (1982). Henry Mintzberg's (1994a) influential book *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* has been quite controversial and also provides a strong argument for a greater role for strategic thinking and a lesser role for traditional, rational strategic planning. However Mintzberg's (1994a: 209) influential remarks on strategic thinking practice are limited to discussion of the 'vision' of a single strategist and the 'learning' that involves people at many different levels of the organization who have a detailed understanding of the strategic problems and opportunities confronting the business followed by the formal planning or 'programming' activity. There is a substantial gap in the literature defining and putting some 'flesh on the bone' of the often misunderstood concept of strategic thinking (Whittington, 2004) with Liedtka (1998a, 1998b) providing the only developed model of strategic thinking linked to strategic planning in the theoretical literature.

The strategy literature indicates that the evolution of the discipline from the focus on strategic planning, then to strategic management and into strategic thinking reflects the economic, technological and social changes that have taken place since strategy developed as a discipline in the mid-1950s (Liedtka, 1998a; Hamel, 2000). This is particularly the case since 1984 (Aggarwal, 1987; Prahalad and Hamel, 1994) with higher levels of environmental uncertainty evident, placing greater demands on the strategy process in organizations (Moss Kanter, 2006). A debate has emerged in the field between the rational perspective and the generative perspective in relation to strategic thinking practice. De Wit and Meyer (2004) note that the rational perspective is supported by the prescriptive literature (Mintzberg, 1990; Mintzberg et al., 1998) and the contributions of prominent experts such as Porter (1980), Andrews (1965) and Ansoff (1965) on planning tools and techniques. In this world strategic thinking practice is more convergent, rational and analytical (Raimond 1996). In the literature the generative perspective is supported by Ohmae (1982), Peters and Waterman (1982) and Mintzberg (1994) - among other writers - who see strategic thinking

practice as a more divergent, generative, creative and intuitive activity. There is a further group of writers providing a third perspective to the debate who see the need to balance the use of intuition and analysis in the practice of strategic thinking spanning the rational and generative perspectives (Wilson, 1994; Raimond, 1996; Liedtka, 1998a, 1998b).

Whittington (2004) has argued for sometime he would like to see strategy academics, business executives and consultants (ABCs) put more effort into better understanding the practice of strategic thinking. The aim of this paper is to provide a review and synthesis of the literature on strategic thinking to give some insight into this mysterious, often talked about but rarely defined or modeled construct. Key trends in the strategic thinking literature and important elements in the practice of strategic thinking are identified to assist development of a model of strategy-making which blends strategic thinking and strategic planning. This work directly addresses shortcomings in the strategy literature highlighted by Whittington (2004) in what is an under researched empirical area. This paper helps lay the foundation for empirical research going forward. Concerns in relation to general understanding of the key message from Ohmae (1982), Peters and Waterman (1982), and Hamel and Prahalad (1994) among ABCs is addressed by examination of the content of their contributions. In relation to the cognitive style of ABCs this paper treads a similar path to Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) limiting remarks to the association of left brain, analytical thinking to the rational perspective and right brain, intuitive, creative thinking to the generative perspective. This limitation allows the paper to focus on the strategy literature and strategy vocabulary to enable the development of a model grounded in the evolution of the discipline and its vocabulary, picking up especially on a theoretical contribution from Liedtka (1998a) in *Long Range Planning* to progress forward.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is themed around the three perspectives identified in the opening remarks. A careful examination of the contributions of leading writers in relation to strategic thinking practice in the strategy

literature is undertaken in the review which follows. The motivation for this approach is that frequently conversations among ABCs around these issues can surface some misunderstanding of the true meaning of contributions from prominent authors such as Ohmae (1982), Peters and Waterman (1982), and Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b). The point of this paper is to clarify who sits where in the debate and also use the synthesis of the insight from the review to develop a model of modern strategy-making blending strategic thinking elements and traditional planning later in the paper.

The Rational Perspective on the Practice of Strategic Thinking

In the evolution of strategic management thought numerous writers have developed clearly defined analytical approaches to strategic thinking (De Wit and Meyer, 2004). Certain key contributions to the literature associated with the rational perspective on strategic thinking in De Wit and Meyer (2004) have been explored in the preceding discussion, notably Andrews (1965), Ansoff (1965) and Porter (1980). Zabriskie and Huellmantel (1991: 27) also propose a systematic, sequential process for strategic thinking by senior executives when they:

- visualise what they want their organization to become.
- are able to reposition their resources to compete in tomorrow's markets.
- assess the risk, revenues, and costs of the strategy alternatives open to them.
- think about and identify the questions they want the strategic plan to answer.
- think logically and systematically about the planning steps and model they will use to activate their strategic thinking in the company's operations.

Eden (1990) describes an analytical strategic thinking process using cognitive mapping. Similar analytical approaches have been proposed in the popular literature (Morissey, 1990).

The Generative Perspective on the Practice of Strategic Thinking

Writers who support the generative perspective on the practice of strategic thinking assert that strategic planning cannot effectively develop organization strategy as it is programmed, formalized and analytical.

Rather successful business strategies flow from a particular mental approach which is essentially intuitive and creative rather than rational (Ohmae, 1982). Rational logic can be more of a hindrance than an aid to effective strategy formulation (Mintzberg, 1994a; 1994b). This is not to say that there is no place for logic (Ohmae, 1982), rather it is the relative level of input of logic compared with creativity (Ohmae 1982; Mintzberg 1994a; 1994b) and the timing of this input (Mintzberg, 1994b). In this context Mintzberg argues (1994a: 107): 'Strategic planning, as it has been practiced, has really been *strategic programming*, the articulation and elaboration of strategies, or visions that already exist.' In the wider management literature both Albrecht (1994) and Kinni (1994) have been similarly critical of strategic planning.

McKinsey and Company consultant Kenichi Ohmae (1982: 2) has been particularly influential in the strategy discipline with his views on the generative perspective articulated in his 1982 text *The Mind of the Strategist*:

...strategist(s) of great natural talent...have an intuitive grasp of the basic elements of strategy...Because it is creative, partly intuitive and often disruptive of the status quo, the resulting plans might not even hold water from the analyst's point of view. It is the creative element in these plans and the drive and will of the mind that conceived them that give these strategies their extraordinary competitive impact.

However, Ohmae (1982: 13-14) does provide some flexibility for the strategic thinker in the manner in which they formulate strategic problems and devise solutions:

...the most reliable means of dissecting a situation into its constituent parts and reassembling them in the desired pattern is not a step-by-step methodology such as systems analysis. Rather it is that ultimate nonlinear thinking tool, the human brain. True strategic thinking contrasts sharply with the conventional mechanic systems approach based on linear thinking. But it also contrasts with the approach that stakes everything on intuition, reaching conclusions without any real breakdown or analysis...the best possible solutions come from a combination of rational analysis,

based on the real nature of things, and imaginative reintegration of all the different items into a new pattern, using nonlinear brainpower.

In Ohmae's (1982) world the strategist needs both creative and rational thinking skills but the emphasis is on the creative. An interesting observation here is that Ohmae's (1982) view of systems analysis appears at odds with the more recent offerings of other writers (Stacey 1993; Liedtka 1998a, 1998b) discussed later in this literature survey.

Writing in the same year Peters and Waterman (1982: 32-33) set out the findings of their now famous McKinsey and Company research project. They make the pertinent observation that: 'Before the rise of the analytic model, the seat-of-the-pants technique was all there was. And it was wholly inadequate for dealing with a complex world.' Peters and Waterman (1982) acknowledge a role for analysis in business management, however they argue that analysis has been overdone. They see the need for the firm to search for the best available path for the organization to follow in the future and seek an effective resolution of implementation issues. In this context Peters and Waterman (1982: 53) note:

Pathfinding is essentially an aesthetic, intuitive process, a design process. There is an infinity of alternatives that can be posed for design problems...From that infinity there are plenty of bad ideas, and here the rational approach is helpful in sorting out the chaff. One is usually left with a large remaining set of good design ideas, however, and no amount of analysis will choose among them, for the final decision is essentially one of taste.

Like Ohmae (1982), Peters and Waterman (1982) are prepared to allow some flexibility to professional managers in the way they assess strategic alternatives whilst giving emphasis to the generative perspective.

Influential British academic Ralph Stacey (1993) observes that the strategic situation confronted by any organization is unique, ambiguous, paradoxical and presents varying levels of uncertainty dependent on

the contextual environment (Boisot, 1995). As a result managers need to develop new ways of dealing with particular situations as they arise thinking while they act often ‘...in irregular ways proceeding from one analogy to another, in order to frame and find both goals and ways of achieving them’ (Stacey, 1993: 19). Stacey (1993) also observes that strategic situations inevitably create conflict within the organization and as a result strategic thinking needs to consider cultural and political issues within the firm. Stacey (1993) sees strategic thinking as drawing on a diverse and paradoxical range of management and organization skills combining the individual and the team, the rational and generative. The need to generate new solutions and address ‘soft’ people issues gives emphasis to the generative perspective in strategic thinking practice in the opinion of this writer.

Mintzberg (1994b: 108) in his classic *Harvard Business Review* article ‘The fall and rise of strategic planning’ strongly argues strategic thinking favors a right brain, creative, intuitive, divergent approach.

Strategic thinking:

...is about synthesis. It involves intuition and creativity. The outcome of strategic thinking is an integrated perspective of the enterprise, a not-too-precisely articulated vision of direction...strategies...must be free to appear at any time and at any place in the organisation, typically through messy processes of informal learning that must necessarily be carried out by people at various levels who are deeply involved with the specific issues at hand.

Mintzberg’s (1994a, 1994b) argument is influenced by an extensive review of strategic planning studies including Sarrazin (1977/78), Gomer (1973), Quinn (1980), Koch (1976), Mintzberg and Waters (1982) and their identification of an entrepreneurial mode and a planning mode in strategy-making, Langley (1986, 1988, 1989), McGill University research on ‘Tracking Strategies’ (Mintzberg 1994b: 109) and the United States Government PPBS Experience in the Kennedy Administration in the 1960s. Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) argues that it is feasible for strategies to originate with line managers, in particular with the assistance of planners or internal consultants. Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) believes top management and

the CEO should distance themselves from business units during the strategy process to assist reflection and creativity at line management level. The CEO and top management can then later play a role in recognizing the value of these strategies and facilitate 'strategic programming' by internal consultants so that the strategy can be disseminated throughout the firm. A criticism of this article is that Mintzberg (1994a) does not recognize or address the role of input from the board of directors, external consultants or external stakeholders to business strategy. Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) does observe the benefits of learning from hard data, yet he indicates that the value of the hard data utilized in the strategy process is often undermined by the time needed to ensure insight, quality and accuracy. The data is often overly aggregated and does not address important subtleties. With developments in information technology and decision support systems in recent years (Rouse 1997; Sauter 1999) with executives able to monitor and drill down on sales information in real time (O'Shannassy, 2005) this aspect of the Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) thesis can reasonably be questioned.

Hamel and Prahalad (1994: 281) like Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) see the need for a strategy function which goes further than simply 'form filling' or strategic programming. There is a role for analysis in the formulation of strategy, however, it needs to be balanced by managers at all levels of the firm looking at the future with an open mind - not simply conducting an incremental analytical exercise. Observing the failings of strategy in the 1970s and 1980s they assert that organizations:

...need a new process for strategy-making, one that is more exploratory and less ritualistic. They need to apply new and different resources to the task of strategy-making, relying...not just on the wisdom of a few planners.

Hamel and Prahalad (1994) concur with Stacey (1993) and Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) on the importance of building within the organization the cultural, political and group context within which creative thought can take place. By 'crafting the strategic architecture' (Hamel and Prahalad 1994: 283) within the firm, companies develop the capacity to change by being able to 'think' differently, harnessing the input of staff at all levels of the firm to foster risk taking, experimentation and innovation (Hamel, 2000). In this context

strategic thinking needs to resemble the 'frame-breaking' behavior commonly seen in the arts (De Wit and Mayer 1998: 74). Schon (1983) refers to this as 'reflection-in-action' and Hamel (1996) to 'strategy as revolution'.

Heracleous (1998) offers an interesting, wide-ranging contribution to the discipline with his *Long Range Planning* article. Heracleous (1998) sets out a dialectic view of strategic thinking and strategic planning arguing:

...strategic thinking and strategic planning occur iteratively over time, where there is a continual quest for novel and creative strategies which can be born in the minds of strategists or can emerge from the grass roots, as well as employment of analytical processes to determine such issues as the strategies desirability and feasibility and to plan for their realisation.

Heracleous's (1998: 486) position on the relationship between creative strategic thinking and analytical strategic planning resolves both an academic issue in the literature and offers insight into how a practicing manager can effectively engage in strategic management from day to day. In this way a strategist or manager is able to think strategically and support this by perhaps performing a discounted cash flow analysis of an issue he or she is testing and probing whilst undertaking strategic thinking. Resolution of strategic problems requires intellectual flexibility for both the business executive or management consultant in devising solutions to strategic problems in the field. It is unlikely that strategic thinking in the real world is as clear and simple to delineate as Heracleous's dialectic view of the discipline indicates, however, it does facilitate this particular writer's argument well in the context of the literature. Graetz (2002) with a telecommunications case study provides strong support for the Heracleous (1998) theory and model.

Other writers supporting the generative perspective include Bates and Dillard (1993), Bonn (2001), Hussey (2001) and Stonehouse and Pemberton (2002); each of these articles view strategic thinking as a

creative activity. This position in relation to the generative perspective differs slightly from Ohmae (1982), Peters and Waterman (1982) and Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) who we have seen argue the need for an emphasis on creativity with some analysis. Bates and Dillard (1993) discuss selecting multi-level teams within organizations to perform strategic thinking which is quite different to Hamel and Prahalad's (1994) inclusive 'strategy architecture' or Mintzberg's (1994a, 1994b) explanation of internal stakeholder interaction. Moss Kanter (2006) confirms the need for new ideas, experimentation and innovation in strategy practice in the 2000s.

These views of the practice of strategy and strategic thinking are essentially representative of a *narrow* usage of the term emphasizing a mainly creative, intuitive way of thinking with specific characteristics focusing on high-level strategic issues. Elements of strategic thinking in this perspective may include vision and learning. This approach enjoyed improved respectability in the academic and corporate world in the early 1990s. This perspective is very much embedded in the descriptive and integrative literature. Mintzberg et al. (1998) indicate a slight move away from this narrow view of strategic thinking in the later 1990s literature with a trend to a new 'eclecticism' in the strategy discipline. This trend reflects the efforts of managers to strive to come to terms with an uncertain environmental context drawing on a wider range of subject matter to resolve strategic issues.

Balancing the Rational and Generative Perspectives on the Practice of Strategic Thinking

The third perspective in this debate, and the basis for a *broad* definition of strategic thinking, is that strategic thinking cannot be performed effectively without calling on all or some of the characteristics of the rational and the generative perspectives (Wilson, 1994, 1998). Such an approach combines elements of the prescriptive, descriptive and integrative literature (Mintzberg, 1990; Mintzberg et al., 1998; Mintzberg and Lampel, 1999), depending on the internal and external situation of the firm, and the state of the industry (Wilson, 1994; Liedtka, 1998a). In this perspective strategic thinking must combine right brain generative, intuitive, creative, imaginative thought with left brain, rational, analytical, quantitative activity

in as much or as little depth as necessary to facilitate the desired outcome (Raimond, 1996). There is considerable support in the literature for this point of view (Liedtka, 1998a, 1998b; Wilson 1994, 1998; Raimond, 1996).

Wilson (1994: 12) explains the evolution of the discipline from strategic planning in the 1970s with its original design flaws into ‘a viable system of *strategic management* (or *strategic thinking*).’ The most important finding of this study was the increasing emphasis on both organization and culture as key factors in effective strategy. Wilson’s (1994) research identified a major shift in responsibility from staff to line managers, and from the corporate level of responsibility to the business level of the firm. This opinion is consistent with Mintzberg’s (1994a, 1994b) argument that a broader range of employees in organizations are involved in modern strategy-making. Wilson (1998) also insists on a balance between intuition and instinct and facts and data in thinking through future strategy. In Wilson’s (1998) view organizations need to resolve this tension between intuition and analysis effectively and the tension and the challenge in resolving the tension is different from one organization to another.

Raimond (1996: 208) identifies two approaches to thinking strategically. First, predicting the future applying analytical tools and techniques to identify the key forces impacting outcomes. This left brain, rigorous, analytical, convergent approach to strategy has been associated with North American and British firms. Second, Raimond (1996) refers to inventing the future by thinking intuitively and creatively about key industries in which we would like to be and how the firm might dominate them. This right brain, intuitive, creative, divergent approach to strategy has been identified as a core competence giving advantage to Asian firms (Nonaku and Takeuchi, 1995). Raimond (1996) argues the need for both approaches as a means of harnessing the ideas, energy and commitment of staff at all levels of the firm.

Liedtka (1998a: 122) following on from Mintzberg’s (1994a; 1994b) contribution sees strategic thinking as a ‘particular way of thinking, with specific attributes’ and makes a significant contribution to learning

and professional practice by developing a model with five elements in her conceptualization of strategic thinking. First, strategic thinking is based on a systems perspective - a holistic view of the organization. The strategic thinker has a mental picture of a complete system of value creation in the firm and his or her own small role within the larger system (Liedtka, 1998a, 1998b). Second, strategic thinking is driven by the strategic intent of the firm providing focus and energy to the staff and the organization to achieve goals (Liedtka, 1998a, 1998b). As Boisot (1995: 36) explains strategic intent is ‘...an intuitively formed pattern...or vision...to give...orientation ...in...the presence of turbulence.’ Third, strategists need to ‘think in time’ (Liedtka 1998a: 123) linking the firm’s past, present and future, recognizing unfamiliar strategy directions relative to the past, and also continuous oscillation in thought process from the past, present and future in their thought processes (Neustadt and May, 1986). Fourth, strategic thinking is ‘hypothesis-driven’ (Liedtka, 1998b: 2) and the ‘scientific method accommodates both creative and analytical thinking sequentially in its use of iterative cycles of hypothesis generating and testing.’ Here Liedtka (1998a) uses the term ‘scientific’ in its truest sense in terms of the empirical and the abstract elements of this approach (Zikmund, 1997) as distinct from the strategy as science metaphor in the strategy literature (De Wit and Meyer, 2004). Finally, strategic thinking is intelligently opportunistic in that the firm whilst following a particular strategy should not lose sight of alternative strategies or commercial opportunities that may be more appropriate for a changing environment.

This perspective on the practice of strategic thinking embraces a *broader* view of strategic thinking, more open to an appreciation of balance in the use of intuition and analysis in thinking through future strategy. Liedtka’s (1998a, 1998b) innovative five element model in particular is broader in scope than more narrow offerings from Ohmae (1982), Peters and Waterman (1982) and Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b). This broader perspective on strategic thinking is supported by a lexical and content analysis in an executive training setting by Crouch and Basch (1997: 22) which associated a broad range of nouns (e.g. collective, environment) and verbs (e.g. change, exchange) with key strategy prototypes ‘*direction, goal and strategy*’. More recent contributions in the discipline such as Stonehouse and Pemberton (2002) have

spent some time endeavoring to carefully explain the difference between strategic thinking, strategic planning and strategic management. At the end of the day the use of terminology is highly contentious as the strategy discipline continues to evolve.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below provides a summary of the classification of the literature discussed in this paper. Reflection on the learning from the literature, especially insights from Mintzberg and Waters (1982), Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) and Liedtka's (1998a, 1998b) model with its innovative vocabulary provides the basis for a new definition and model of strategic thinking with a view to future empirical research. If we embrace the spirit of Kenichi Ohmae's (1982) approach to strategic thinking with this insight, reassembling the key elements of strategic thinking practice in the literature into a new model of strategic thinking and link this to planning in strategy-making we have the basis for a fresh contribution to learning and practice.

Table 1
Summary Classification of the Strategic Thinking Literature and Thinking Style Preference

Rational Perspective	Generative Perspective	Rational and Generative Perspective
Andrews (1965)	Ohmae (1982)	Wilson (1994, 1998)
Ansoff (1965)	Peters and Waterman (1982)	Raimond (1996)
Porter (1980)	Stacey (1993)	Crouch and Basch (1997)
Eden (1990)	Bates and Dillard (1993)	Liedtka (1998a, 1998b)
Zabriskie and Huellmantel (1991)	Hamel and Prahalad (1994)	
	Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b)	
	Heracleous (1998)	
	Bonn (2001)	
	Hussey (2001)	
	Stonehouse and Pemberton (2002)	
	Graetz (2002)	

Strategic thinking is defined for this paper as a particular way of solving strategic problems and opportunities at the individual and institutional level combining generative and rational thought processes.

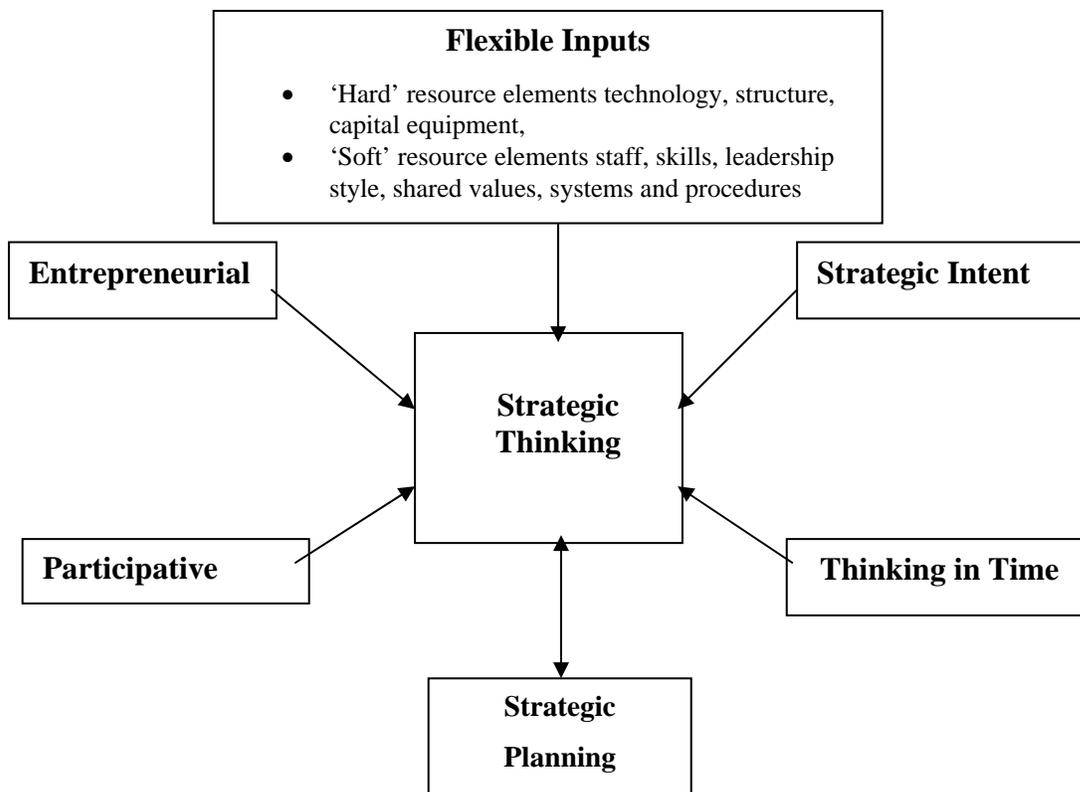
Thought and action can be intertwined or linear or something in between (Eccles 1993) depending on the strategy context confronting the organization. The activity is participative in that it can involve both internal and external stakeholders depending on this context. Pragmatically there is no single formula to strategic thinking for the individual or organization and it is evident from the lessons of the evolution of strategy that practicing managers need some flexibility in problem solving style. Liedtka (1998a, 1998b) draws attention to the need for a systems perspective and this can be developed further drawing on Ahmed, Hardaker and Carpenter (1996) with their emphasis on flexible inputs to organization strategy. It is argued in this paper then that *flexible inputs* combining the ‘soft’ resource elements of leadership style, staff, skills, systems and shared values with ‘hard’ resource elements including capital equipment, technology and structure provides this system perspective and enhances organizational change capability. *Entrepreneurial* risk taking, experimentation and innovation should be encouraged with implications for patterns of resource allocation (Moss Kanter, 2006), and the capacity of individuals and the organization for evolutionary and revolutionary change (Mintzberg and Waters, 1982; Hart, 1992). *Strategic intent* is required where the CEO and top managers provide a direct, intuitive understanding of future direction of the organization from the top down that gives focus to strategic thinking (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990).

A *participative* element allowing interaction of the board, the CEO, top managers and line managers with external stakeholders in an inclusive process with learning, dialogue and feedback is a helpful component, especially as the organization grows (Mason and Mitroff, 1981; Frooman, 1998; Collier, Fishwick and Floyd, 2004). Finally Liedtka (1998a, 1998b) introduced *thinking in time* combining understanding of the past, present and future of the organization and examining scenarios (Abraham, 2005) to determine a feasible future direction. This insight gives the five element model of strategic thinking in Figure 1 below, well grounded in the evolution of the strategy discipline and reflects modern strategy terminology.

Strategic planning is undertaken as a rational, programming activity (Mintzberg, 1994a, 1994b) usually in a regular cycle focusing on the formalization, operationalization, justification and documentation (Heracleous, 1998) of the outcome of the informal ‘day-to-day’ problem solving or strategic thinking

activities at the individual and institutional level. Preparation of budgets, forecasts and schedules for action are often considered important strategic planning activities. Strategic planning aligns the activities of the corporate headquarters and the strategic business units while strategic thinking tests, challenges and probes that alignment in an ongoing cycle. The traditional **strategic management** activities of planning, leading, directing and controlling (Pearce and Robinson 1988) are now embedded and intertwined (Eccles 1993) in this interaction of the activities of strategic thinking and strategic planning in strategy-making.

Figure 1
Strategy-Making: Strategic Thinking and Strategic Planning



CONCLUSION

The contribution of this paper is significant if we accept that Ohmae (1982), Peters and Waterman (1982) and Mintzberg (1994a, 1994b) have had a significant impact on the strategic management discipline. The key literature has been explored and discussed around a classification accepted by influential European experts (De Wit and Meyer, 2004). Whittington (2004) has called for more attention to be given to developing understanding of strategic thinking practice and this paper has directly addressed this request.

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