

STRATEGY SCHOOLS

Emergence, Cognition and Learning

Mintzberg · Weick · Rumelt

PAPER 03 / 04

A Furtherance reference compendium on the intellectual traditions behind organisational design, leadership, execution, and culture.

IN THIS PAPER

The positioning and resource schools treat strategy as analysis. This paper covers the reaction – strategy as something that **emerges**, is **made sense of**, and is **diagnosed** rather than merely planned. The question it answers: if strategy is not just a plan, what is it, and how is it actually formed?

Mintzberg shows realised strategy is part deliberate, part emergent. Weick reframes strategy as retrospective sensemaking and enactment. Rumelt cuts through the fog with the hard discipline of good strategy: diagnosis, guiding policy, coherent action.

Henry Mintzberg *Crafting Strategy, 1987*

Strategy process · emergent strategy · McGill

CORE THESIS

Strategy is not only what leaders intend but what organisations actually do. **Realised strategy** is a blend of the **deliberate** (intended and carried out) and the **emergent** (patterns that form without prior intention). Strategy is *crafted*, like a potter at the wheel, as much as it is planned.

FRAMEWORK

Type	Meaning
Intended strategy	What leaders plan to do
Deliberate strategy	Intentions actually realised
Emergent strategy	Patterns that arise from action, unplanned
Realised strategy	What actually happens – deliberate + emergent

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive, empirical study of how strategies actually form, and a sustained critique of formal strategic planning.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The great corrective to the planning and positioning orthodoxy; emergence is now part of the field's foundation. The critique: it is largely descriptive and can under-value the role of deliberate direction and commitment.

Karl Weick *b. 1936*

Organisational psychology · sensemaking and enactment

CORE THESIS

Strategy and organisation are produced through **sensemaking** – the retrospective, social process of turning ambiguous experience into meaning that enables action. Through **enactment**, organisations partly *create* the environments they then respond to. Under uncertainty, **plausibility** matters more than accuracy: a workable story gets people moving.

FRAMEWORK

Concept	What it holds
Sensemaking	Meaning is made after the fact, to enable the next act
Enactment	We help create the environment we react to
Plausibility over accuracy	A good-enough story beats a perfect map, in motion
Loose coupling	Parts of an organisation are connected yet semi-independent

METHODOLOGY

The social psychology of organising, drawn from close reading of cases and crises.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

A profound reframing of strategy as meaning-making and action rather than calculation, and of why organisations act their way into understanding. The critique: it is abstract and offers little direct prescription.

Richard Rumelt *Good Strategy / Bad Strategy, 2011*

Strategy · the kernel and the crux

CORE THESIS

Most “strategy” is **bad strategy** – fluff, ambition mistaken for a plan, a failure to face the real challenge. **Good strategy** has a **kernel**: a clear diagnosis, a guiding policy, and coherent action – and it works by finding the **crux** and concentrating force there.

FRAMEWORK

Element of the kernel	What it does
Diagnosis	Name the nature of the challenge; simplify the complexity
Guiding policy	Choose an overall approach to the challenge
Coherent action	Coordinated steps that carry out the policy

The hallmarks of **bad strategy** – fluff, failure to face the challenge, mistaking goals for strategy – are as useful a test as the kernel itself.

METHODOLOGY

An analytical, practitioner-facing account drawn from decades of strategy work and teaching.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The sharpest modern statement of what strategy actually is, and a bracing antidote to corporate strategy theatre. The critique: it is closer to expert craft than to a formal, testable theory.

Synthesis

Theorist	Strategy is...	Key idea	Register
Mintzberg	Partly emergent	Deliberate + emergent	Descriptive
Weick	Enacted meaning	Sensemaking; enactment	Interpretive
Rumelt	A diagnosis to act on	The kernel; the crux	Practitioner-analytic

FOR THE OPERATOR

This camp reframes strategy as emergent, interpreted and diagnosed – realised strategy is deliberate plus emergent (Mintzberg), made through sensemaking and enactment (Weick), and, at its best, a kernel of diagnosis, guiding policy and coherent action (Rumelt). For the operator: strategy is less a plan to execute than a diagnosis to act on and adapt – face the real challenge, make sense of ambiguity, and let pattern emerge. The final paper turns to the modern frameworks that make all of this usable.