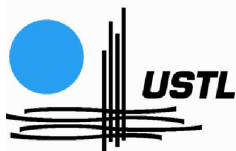


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**PROGRESSIVE BUILDING OF MACRO ATTENTION
STRUCTURES:
A TAXONOMY OF MICRO ACTIVITIES AND A
LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF STRATEGIC
KNOWLEDGE CREATION WITHIN A BUSINESS
INTELLIGENCE UNIT**

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In this paper, we address two questions of interest for the strategy-as-practice standing work group: what strategists do, and what influence the work of strategizing. **We explore how strategists progressively build structures for action which in turn constrain their ability to create strategic knowledge.** We don't want to unveil how macro structures influence daily activities. Rather, we study how they are built up from these micro activities. To do so, we use a two-steps methodology based on detailed analyses of strategists' daily activities. **First, we generate a taxonomy of activities in order to pick out the ones concerned with macro-structure creations from the job-related ones. Second, we analyze their evolution in terms of intensity, frequency and outcomes. We study how they lead to the establishment of particular macro-structures: attention structures, which are central to knowledge creation processes.**

In this research, we use a particular research field: a **Business Intelligence Service (BIS)**. Within large organizations, strategy building is distributed between different services, and external analysis is often devoted, at least partially, to BIS (Choudhury and Sampler, 1997). Yet theoretical papers from the strategy-as-practice field (e.g. Whittington, 2002) evoke different actors but they rarely name BIS. However, BIS play an important role in the strategy making process, acting like gatekeepers between decision-makers and the competitive environment.

For 16 months, we observed such a BIS in a large French firm of the telecommunication industry. Its job consisted in making sense of the competitive environment and in creating and diffusing strategic knowledge to decision-makers. The BIS reached its final size six months only before we started our investigation. By that time very few rules and norms were set up and the group faced a large range of possibilities for self-organizing. The BIS was thus particularly well suited to study the building of "macro" structures from the "micro" daily activities of its members.

We gathered data using an ethnographic approach and a participant observation methodology. We obtained about 2000 pages of detailed data describing the BIS' daily activities and the knowledge it created.

In the first part of the research, we did an emergent coding to categorize the exhaustive set of members' activities for the 6 first months of observation. We obtain 865 activities divided into 34 codes of 10 categories. This taxonomy shows that the BIS' members half of the time undertake activities leading to structure generation (either intentionally or

unintentionally) rather than to knowledge creation, i.e. job-related activities. Two emergent categories seem particularly important since they represent a good part of the BIS' activities: interactions outside the group (i.e. building legitimacy inside the organization) and establishments of attention structures (March and Simon, 1958 ; March and Olsen, 1976).

Those structures affects people's allocation of attention. They are generated by people's previous experiences and knowledge and by organizational goals. The concept of attention has been poorly studied for years. However, it has gained a renewal of interest in the past years (Ocasio, 1997; Bouquet et *al.*, 2003). **The second part of our research focuses on how attention allocations and other activities lead to the building of attention structures.** This is done by analyzing two processes of knowledge creation.

The BIS used the word "themes" to describe consistent sets of knowledge in which it had interest (it was thus an internal norm for delimitating areas of interest within the competitive environment). Consequently, we used themes to delimitate our cases. Both processes concerned complex regulatory evolutions in the telecommunication industry. When they started, the BIS didn't have knowledge about the themes and it didn't know how it would organize itself. So the processes were good cases for studying the emergence of attention structures from micro daily activities.

Building on data related with the 16-months treatment of both themes, we used interactions as a unit of analysis for picking out and characterizing allocations of attention. We analyzed intensity, duration and selectivity of allocations, their individual or collective characteristic, and the successive foci of attention. We also confronted the successive allocations with the pertinence of the knowledge created. Results show that both processes create their own attention structures but their timing is different. Differences in rhythm and formalization lead to positive or negative evaluations of the knowledge created.

To conclude, we discuss our findings and show the contributions and limits of our research. We aimed at studying how micro activities lead to macro structures. In order to answer that question, we first generated a taxonomy of a BIS' activities. It showed that half of them were not job-related but led to rules and norms creation, especially attention structures creation. So the second part of the research focused on how attention structures were built during two processes of knowledge creation. Results showed that different patterns of micro-activities alternatively led to early or progressive building of attention structures, those ones in turn constraining knowledge creation.

Our research provides many insights regarding the strategy-as-practice field. First, it proposes a **useful taxonomy of the daily strategizing activities** of business intelligence units. Analysis of their repartition shows the importance taken by “structuring” activities compared to job-related activities. Second, it unveils **the major significance of allocations of attention and of attention structures during path-dependent processes of strategic knowledge creation.** Third, it shows how individual or collective activities lead to structure generation and thus it adds to the strategy-as-practice field an **empirical study of the micro-macro link** between allocations of attentions and other activities (micro), and the generation of attention structures (macro).

(903 words)

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