

# Playing Seriously with Strategy

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This article details two cycles of interventions and reflection in various executive development contexts led by the authors as facilitator/consultants. Their hunch that changing the constraints of strategy processes would also change the content generated was tested by changing the typical mode of work to that of 'serious play' and modifying the usual medium from verbal, computer and two-dimensional text and graphic by the introduction of 3-D media (LEGO bricks). The authors examine the potential for using serious play in the particular organizational challenge of making strategy, and highlight the capacity of 'action research' to contribute simultaneously to both academic understanding and practical value.

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## Introduction

This paper addresses the relationship between strategy content and strategy process in general, and the relationship between process constraints and content outcomes in particular. By 'process' we mean the sequence of events and activities through which 'conversations' about strategy in firms unfold over the time. By 'constraints' we mean the implicit and explicit restrictions on, and frames around, such conversations. Our basic hunch, firmly grounded in our experience in teaching and coaching managers on strategy-making, researching strategic management processes, and engaging in the practice of strategy-making ourselves, is that *if the constraints of strategy processes are changed, the content generated will also change*. The purpose of this article is to explore and further develop this hunch.

Because our field is still in the early stages of investigating the intricate relationship between strategy process and strategy content,<sup>1</sup> our research in this area is necessarily *exploratory*. Strategy making processes is an elusive object of study. Still, it has certainly been linked both to the conditioning variables that surround it (such as inertia and dominant logic)<sup>2</sup> and to the stage of development.<sup>3</sup> However, questions concerning how these linkages are related, and (perhaps more importantly) which specific process choices might prove most influential on strategy content, are still being posed in our field.

Since we began our research in this area, several studies have come to publication which provide initial empirical support for what appears to be an increasingly shared 'hunch' in the field. We place our study therefore within this growing literature on the connection between strategy process and strategy content: *We are interested in what is actually done, and not done, in people's context-rich*