

From Metaphor to Practice In the Crafting of Strategy

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This article explores how the link between the hand and the mind might be exploited in the making of strategy. Using Mintzberg's image of a potter undergoing iterative and recursive learning and knowledge-building processes as a point of departure, the authors develop a three-level theoretical schema, progressing from the physiological to the psychological to the social to trace the consequences of the hand-mind link. To illustrate the authors' theoretical schema, the authors present an illustration case of managers from a large telecommunications firm experimenting with a process for strategy making in which they actively use their hands to construct representations of their organization and its environment. The authors conclude that new and potent forms of strategy making might be attained if the fundamental human experience of using one's hands is put in the service of all kinds of organizational learning.

Keywords: *strategy; crafting; hand-mind link*

The potter sits before a lump of clay on the wheel. . . . She has an intimate knowledge of her work, her capabilities, and her markets. As a craftsman, she senses rather than analyses . . . all these things are working in her mind as her hands are working the clay. . . . Managers are craftsmen and strategy is their clay.

Mintzberg (1987)

In 1987, Henry Mintzberg employed this metaphor of the potter working the clay to illustrate the task and

process of strategy making as hands-on craftsmanship. He argued for fusing formulation and the implementation of strategy by describing the actions of a potter working his or her material, discovering new possibilities through the tactile manipulation of the clay, and constantly integrating the work of hands with the work of mind.¹ Although this metaphor directs attention to the intrinsically enactive nature of strategy making at both the social and psychological levels, it also bears the seed of an important unex-