

Intuiting of Strategists in Crisis Situations: Our Struggle with the Concept of Time

Abstract

We discuss some methodological struggles we are currently facing with regards to an exploratory-qualitative PhD project on the process of intuiting of strategists in crisis situations. We deal in particular with a notion of creativity and strategy that characterises intuiting and takes place in flow, which naturally forces us to bring in the dimension of time. In doing so, we build on process philosophy and demonstrate that we need a different concept of time, because the sense of time seems to be transcended in flow when intuiting. We summarise our discussion by explaining flow as the experience of being in the presentness of creating in which we sense the fullness of time. We then outline our initial methodological considerations and end with some concluding remarks about the need to move into areas beyond the management and organisation scholarship in order to achieve a better understanding of these poorly-understood phenomena.

Keywords: intuition; time; process philosophy.

Background

In this paper we discuss some methodological struggles we are currently facing with regards to an exploratory-qualitative PhD project on the process of intuiting of strategists in crisis situations. The project falls within the broadly understood areas of strategic management and managerial and organizational cognition and looks into two interlocking topics which are both very knowledge-intensive: creativity and strategy. As primary conceptual framing of the research we use Polányi's (1962, 1966, 1969) notion of 'personal knowledge' and we also include aspects of the idea of 'organisational knowledge and learning' (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Easterby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini, 2000; Tsoukas, 2005). In doing so, we adopt a knowledge-based view of the firm (KBV), particularly focusing on the creation of new knowledge, which means we intend to collect, analyse and interpret data on how strategists create new knowledge (Dörfler, Baracscai, & Velencei, 2010; Stierand & Dörfler, 2015; Stierand, Dörfler, & MacBryde, 2014).

Methodologically, we thus need to build a bridge between the intra-personal dimension of '*creating the strategy*' and the inter-personal dimension of '*strategizing the creation.*' The former phase of this creative strategy process is linked to the notion of personal creativity that is generally referred to as an asocial, individualistic process (Runco, 1996, 2007). The latter phase, in a real-life setting at least, very likely includes the aspect of strategic team cognition, often explained by the concept of team member schemas (Rentsch & Klimoski, 2001) that are understood as interconnected knowledge bundles (Lord & Maher, 1991) of "incomplete agreement" (Rentsch & Klimoski, 2001, p. 108) that help team members to organise and understand complex phenomena (Poole, Gray, & Gioia, 1990).

Furthermore, in this PhD project we are particularly interested in unearthing a specific notion of creativity and strategy that characterises intuiting and takes place in a state of mind that

Csikszentmihályi (1997, 2002) calls ‘flow’ and Maslow (1968, 1971) named ‘peak experience.’

In doing so, we build on our own prior research

and distinguish between two types of intuiting: *intuitive insight* and *intuitive judgment*. In this prior research we have suggested that intuitive insight corresponds primarily to creativity, while intuitive judgment corresponds to strategy. Moreover, we explicitly intend to bring in the dimension of time by building on process philosophy (Chia, 2003; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, 2011) and focusing on *creating* and *strategizing* rather than creativity and strategy.

Due to the fact that we deal with a poorly-understood phenomenon, we believe that a strong philosophical framework is essential to be at all able to conduct this study and to achieve meaningful and thick findings. While intuition has increasingly been recognized as a form of knowledge (Bergson & Andison, 2010; Jung, 1919), we still need to justify its relevance as a phenomenon worth studying against mainstream researchers who see the intellect as the supreme human faculty and the prime instrument for decision-making (see Jung, 1919). Moreover, those who advocate intuition as an important phenomenon to research, struggle to agree on a robust definition. Agor (as cited in Maxwell, 2014, p. 111) describes intuition as “what we know for sure without knowing for certain”, Simon (1987) describes it as the capacity for rapid judgment through habitual analyses and recognition, Benner and Tanner (1987, p. 23) see it as “understanding without a rationale,” and Dane and Pratt (2007) explain it as “affectively charged judgments that arise through rapid, nonconscious, and holistic associations.”

Our Struggle: We need a different Concept of Time

What we know more certain is that intuition has been explained by intuitors as happening in the “interplay between knowing (intuition-as-expertise) and sensing (intuition-as-feeling)” (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004). But, in order to be able to adopt a process view for investigating

creating and strategizing in flow, when intuiting, we need a different concept of time, because the sense of time (as we know it) seems to be transcended in flow. Thus, during flow, creating and strategizing from a time perspective is perhaps best described as a '*creative glimpse*' that puts in motion an indirect strategic action (see Chia & Holt, 2011). In fact, it is not only the experience of transcending time but also of one's self that defines the flow experience, because one is so focused on a captivating present-moment activity that the activity requires all consciousness (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997; Mainemelis, 2001; Massimini & Carli, 1988).

The literature typically labels this individual complex experience of losing the sense of time and the consciousness of self with the term 'timelessness' (see Hartocollis, 1983; Mainemelis, 2002; Ornstein, 1986; Pöppel, 1988). The creativity literature has explained that timelessness can be experienced during flow and ecstasy (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997; May, 1994), two affective and highly intrinsically motivated states that are said to foster creativity (Gardner, 1993; Mainemelis, 2002; Massimini & Carli, 1988; Sosik, Kahai, & Avolio, 1999). More recently, Simpson, Tracey and Weston (2015) have developed a philosophical argument why such complex individual states should better be described by the term *timefulness* rather than timelessness. Whilst agreeing that we need to use research approaches that can unearth the temporal dimension of creativity and strategy practices, we remain critical of both terms, because they can be (and often are) confused with 'empty' and 'ful-filled' time (Gadamer, 1973).

We argue, therefore, by building on Gadamer's work (Gadamer, 1960/2004, 1973, 1993), that being in flow means being in the 'presentness' (*Gegenwärtigkeit*) of creating in which we sense the *fullness of time*, the experience of the 'contemporaneity' (*Gleichzeitigkeit*) of the '*tarrying*' (*Verweilen*) of the self in creating and the '*while*' (*die Weile*) of time in the creation (see Tate, 2012). We believe that our explanation is fully in line with the concept of the flow experience being the sweet spot between anxiety (resulting from the creative challenges at hand) and

boredom (resulting from one's skills to cope with the challenges) (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Csikszentmihályi, 2002; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Perhaps we can also envisage the 'presentness' concept as somehow condensing the past as well as the future, more precisely the various possible futures, into the present moment. Such conceptualisation would perhaps also help understanding how creators of some particularly advanced ideas are quite literally 'ahead' of their time.

Philosophically, this was explained by saying that "the intelligible world descends to the material world via the *soul* and implies that all time has its true place in the *soul*" (Gadamer, 1973, p. 78, italics added by us). This resonates with Kant's (1781/1998) argument, that we have two kinds of sensory (infra-intellectual, (see Bergson, 1911, p. 360)) intuitions, the intuitions of space and time, the former being external the latter internal. This explanation is in harmony with Plato's understanding of intuition as a kind of recollection of what we once knew and of what is still within us waiting to be accessed (Allen, 1959) that he originally described through the concept of 'anamnesis', the ability to recollect knowledge from past incarnations through purifying the body (catharsis) and thereby regaining contact with the soul through reasoning (noesis) (*Phaedo*: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedo.html>; *Meno*: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/meno.html>). By building on Polányi's work (e.g. Polányi, 1962, 1966), we thus understand intuiting in flow as the tacit knowing of what we create through indwelling, thereby coming to embody the creation even if it only exists in front of our mind's eye. This very experience, we argue, is sensed as a kind of spacing within time, "an interval in the midst of passing" through tarrying (Tate, 2012, p. 109). That is, the time-space of the process of creating is opened and held open for allowing the creation to come forth and stay a while (Tate, 2012).

Our Methodological Considerations (so far!)

Due to the phenomenal complexity and experiential and temporal quality of the study, we intend to frame it in the intersection of phenomenology and the process view. This entails adopting what, based on Heidegger's work, Boje (2018) describes as a relational process ontology, which essentially means that not only processes are granted valid existence but they are also considered fundamentally interconnected with complex patterns of interactions. Qualitative data will be collected in forms of stories within the context of the *Doctors without Borders* organisation.

There are two parts of the organisation where we intend to collect data from: (1) In the headquarters, where the strategizing is taking place, interviews will be conducted and supplemented by observations, if possible including elements of ethnography. (2) Interviews will be conducted with medical doctors who have substantial experience in the field. In both cases the focus is on collecting stories (Boje, 1991, 2001), which will be analysed adopting the '1st-order/2nd-order' method (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013) by looking for emergent themes and aggregating them.

Beyond the direct findings from the two parts of the study, we are very interested in how the two parts of the organisation are linked, i.e. how the narrative of one context may become the antenarrative of another one (Boje, Haley, & Saylor, 2016; Stierand et al.). In the context of *Doctors without Borders*, this could mean e.g. the stories from the field finding their way into the boardrooms and influence the strategizing. It can be seen that the *Doctors without Borders* is a particularly suitable organisation for this type of study, as it provides the opportunity for observing the phenomena we are interested in. Dealing with the problem of access is crucial and often hinders a PhD research project; in this case initial contact has already been made through a high-level administrator in the organisation.

Concluding Remarks

In this short paper we attempt to explain our struggle with one of the most complex problems we have faced so far: the concept of time. Not only the doctoral student but also the two supervisors, who are not strangers to engaging in methodological and philosophical endeavours in order to frame an understanding of a complex phenomenon, struggle to find ways to methodologically execute their philosophical conceptualising about time. The notion of time is one that puzzled philosophers, scientists as well as artists since the early days of human thought. We do not expect to find any sort of final solution in this paper or over the next few years, but we do intend to find a conceptualisation that can work forcefully for the current research project.

In the future, we will probably find further, perhaps very different, conceptualisations, and while we may never be able to provide a decent intellectual/analytical account of the concept of time generally, we hope to achieve an intuitive understanding that will yield partial intellectual conceptualisations that will be both meaningful and useful for application in our forthcoming research projects. It is clear to us that for this we will need to move into areas beyond the management and organisation scholarship, definitely into the realms of philosophy and quantum physics, but perhaps also to arts and mysticism. But, we believe that transgressing these disciplinary boundaries will be useful for achieving a better understanding of some particularly complex phenomena, such as creativity and intuition.

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