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‘Fail Fast, Start Over’

The improvisational mindset substituting for formal strategies

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The Improvisational Mindset Substituting for Formal Strategies

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Abstract

In contemporary volatile organizations, formal strategies are argued no longer deemed sufficient in dealing with an ever-changing environment. In this article, it is being investigated how organizing unfolds in a turbulent and dynamic organization, in the absence of explicit strategies. This is carried out by following a case company going through a major transformation, venturing into a new market. Drawing upon the organizational improvisation (OI) framework, it is being illustrated how improvisation and confidence can substitute for formal strategies and enable creativity and action, in turn leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. To enable this way of working, it is being indicated how a mental model of operating, allowing for emergence, is adopted throughout the organization. However, a dilemma with OI is presented, in the occurrence of too much improvisation. Further illustrating the complexity of OI, a low degree of formal structures can indeed enhance freedom and creativity, however, it may also be a way of keeping control – to secure a constant search for new ideas – ensuring an evolving company.

Keywords

Organizational Improvisation, Substitutes for Strategy, Confidence as Strategy, Action
Creating Strategy, Organizational Transformation

Introduction

Living in “a world on the move” (Hernes, 2014, p. 1), change is said to be the only constant (Thietart & Forgues, 1995). In an environment of ever-increasing speed and interconnectedness (Hernes, 2014), it is argued that in order to stay competitive – and in turn successful – organizations need to constantly evolve (Bojica & Fuentes, 2012). Organizational theory has traditionally emphasized order and control within organizations (Weick, 1998). Consequently, organizations have been treated as stable established entities, focused around routine as a constant and emergence as occasional (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This has led to assumptions of organizations as formal, clearly defined goal-oriented systems of how to operate, evolve and maintain themselves (Porter, 1980; Hernes, 2014). Therefore, focus has been on understanding the formal within organizations, such as strategic planning and long-term goals (Chandler, 1962).

However, increasing globalization and liberalized trade has created expanded interconnectedness across the globe, and modern technologies enable instant changes and just-in-time management (Zahra, Ireland & Hitt, 2000). This makes old assumptions of organizations as linear processes – assuming rationality and stability – questionable (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This way of viewing organizations is not sufficient in order to understand non-linear processes that are characterized by temporality and flexibility – often unfolding in contemporary organizations (ibid.) – as organizations cannot be treated as isolated static islands anymore (Hadida, Tarvainen & Rose, 2015). As a result, emergent strategies have gained increasingly attention over deliberate strategizing (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), as organizations become more dynamic and complex, often requiring immediate action.

The focus on organizational renewal as vital for organizational success has increased attention for entrepreneurial activity (Morris, van Vuuren, Cornwall & Scheepers, 2009; Goodalea, Kuratkob, Hornsbyc & Covin, 2011). Corporate entrepreneurship, described as entrepreneurial action and initiatives taken to transform organizations, from their established operations into new or expanded areas, with the help of strategic renewal processes (Goodalea et al., 2011). To be able to evolve, behaviors such as innovation, risk-taking and proactive action are argued vital, as they would enable organizations to become dynamic and adaptable (Morris et al., 2009). Hence, entrepreneurial activity is characterized by flexibility, adoption and emergence (Morris et al., 2009; Goodalea et al., 2011), often operating in environments particularly characterized by a high degree of uncertainty (Baker, Miner & Eesley, 2003). However, entrepreneurship processes research, e.g. for start-up companies, generally follows a design-preceding-execution framework (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990; Baker et al., 2003). This view assumes, again, linearity with planning as focal (Baker et al., 2003).

If we abandon the idea of transformation as evolving during sequential states, as explained in Lewin's (1951) classic change model, we must account for other features, such as adoption and emergence, as vital (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This leads to contradiction in understanding organizational processes, as contemporary volatile organizations cannot be understood using theories based on assumptions of stability (Hernes, 2014). These contradictory views are also present in corporate entrepreneurship research: some argue that approaches including formality, e.g. strategic guidelines, are vital in order to reach unity, others mean that this will create boundaries and impede creativity, and argue that the process must be treated reversely – letting the results shape the strategy (Kelley, 2011). How companies were organized four or five decades ago, see e.g. Mintzberg's (1979) classic structuring of organizations, is presumably considerable different from how organizing unfolds in corporations, increasingly adhoc, today. How does organizing unfold in these organizations characterized less by formality and predictability and more by adoption and emergence?

This article will aim to study a major transformation, taking place at an American consultancy, when a new department and line of business was initiated and developed. The new line of business of cyber security was a new route for the company, considerably different from their other operations as specialists in government contract consulting. The new offering – initially set up as a stand-alone start-up company – was later on added under the main company's offerings. From the start, major changes have been occurring and the

direction has been revised constantly. These changes have been occurring without much formally communicated strategies or guidelines within the organization. Hence, due to the contradiction in organizational research with understanding organizing in contemporary volatile organizations (Hernes, 2014), the unfolding's of organizing without explicit strategies in the case company, characterized less by formality and more by emergence, is relevant to study from an organizational theory perspective.

In order to fully understand this unfolding, allowing for non-linearity and temporality is vital (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), and it is argued that incorporating improvisation into organizational activity is one way of understanding these processes (Moorman & Miner, 1998a, 1998b). There is an increasing acknowledgement of OI within organizational research, however recent studies show that cumulative research is still low (Hadida et al., 2015). Especially, more research is needed on cross-level analyses of how organizational improvisation unfolds in practice between individuals, and within and organizations. This refers to e.g. employees as important components in the improvisation process and its outcome (Hadida et al., 2015). With this as a starting point, this paper aims to investigate and explain how organizing unfolds in a turbulent and dynamic organization, in the absence of explicit strategies.

First, this article will provide a theoretical framework drawing upon concepts of OI. Second, an introduction to the case company and the setting will be provided, along with a description of the methods used to conduct and analyze the study. Third, the empirical findings of the unfolding's at the workplace will be presented. This will thereafter be analyzed, drawing upon the OI framework, in particular improvisation – and confidence – as substitutes for strategy.

Introducing Improvisation as a Mindset

In the early 20th century, the organizational management research field, with the works of Taylor (1911), was centered on organizational planning. As organizations and strategy has been treated as a science of planned action, based on rationality and forecasting, improvisation as such has been seen as a negative consequence of faulty planning (Zheng, Venters & Cornford, 2011). However, it is becoming increasingly acknowledged that in contemporary, fluid organizations a plan may not be effective anymore in the exact moment it is being executed (Zheng et al., 2011). By recognizing this, organizations needed to develop ways of being more flexible and adaptable. Based on this reasoning, it is argued that OI is crucial within organizations (Moorman & Miner, 1998a, 1998b). It is particularly useful for organizations acting in highly heterogeneous, fluid and unpredictable markets (Hadida et al., 2015; Weick, 2001). The reason being that processes of innovation and creativity becomes vital in these environments, which cannot be achieved using a linear plan-then-execute way of operating (Weick, 1998; Thietart & Forgues, 1995).

A somewhat common misconception is that improvisation means 'winging it' without preparation (Perry, 1991; Weick, 2001). But, improvisation is not to be seen as a random process – rather it builds on both freedom and composition (Perry, 1991). Skillful improvisation draws upon proficient knowledge and past experience (Moorman & Miner, 1998a; Weick, 2001; Huber & Glick, 1993), where focal is action and experimentation, not

obsessive planning (Perry, 1991). However, in contrast to viewing improvisation as the art of skillful action, Miner, Bassoff and Moorman (2001) argue that improvisation can also be unskilled and cause harm to the organization. For OI to be fruitful, Leybourne (2006) argues that an organization's internal environment must provide a basis for improvising, with a low degree of resistance to change. Improvisation is often triggered by events that could not have been foreseen, which require immediate action since regular plans or routines cannot provide a sufficient solution (Hadida et al., 2015). With the above introduction, the following sections will present ways for organizations to substitute for explicit strategies, drawing upon the framework of OI.

Improvisation as a Substitute for Strategy

Strategy has traditionally been viewed as a plan-then-execute process (Chandler, 1962), illustrating a linear way of reasoning. However, more recent views of strategy suggests that it should not be looked upon as a lengthy formal document to follow slavishly, but should rather be seen as an idea that evolves constantly, as circumstances changes (Perry, 1991). According to Weick (2001), "the likelihood of survival goes up when variation increases, when possibilities multiply, when trial and error becomes more diverse and less stylized, when people become less repetitious, and when creativity becomes supported" (p. 351). This implies that pre planned action, such as strategic plans, cannot adequately deal with present circumstances. In fact, on the contrary, if survival depends on variation, plans can become a threat since it restricts people's way of thinking, acting, and learning that old ways might no longer work (Weick, 2001). However, according to Miner, Bassoff and Moorman (2001) repeated improvisation without trial and error could create "opportunity traps", leading to an organizational drift over time. This is found being a common dilemma in product development, where constant shifts can create too much inconsistency (ibid.). Hence, strategic plans are more accurately looked upon as ways to inspire and orient people, to make people act. The action leads to tangible outcomes, which in turn helps people to make sense of a situation and to get an understanding of what to do next (Weick, 2001).

The traditional view of strategic planning resembles traditional music formats, specified, with little room for imagination when implementing, or playing the music (Perry, 1991). Applying an improvisational stance at strategy follows more a jazz format (ibid.). The use of jazz as a metaphor to redescribe organizational structure has been questioned, due to the seemingly large differences between jazz and organizational structure, since jazz is often noted by the lack of structure (Hatch, 1998, 1999). However, it is precisely for this reason the jazz metaphor might be able to provide a lens in order to understand the emergent ways of organizing within contemporary organizations (ibid.), as they cannot either, as discussed above, be understood based on framework based on assumptions of linearity. Jazz, as well as strategy, is an open and evolving process, with room for improvisation (Weick, 1987, 1995, 2001; Pasmore, 1998; Barrett, 2000). Jazz musicians creatively use a provided structure as a foundation making it possible to restructure foundations of their playing (Hatch, 1998, 1999). Organizational strategy is argued formulated and executed real-time, just as the jazz musician performs real time (Weick, 1995, 2001). Experienced jazz musicians further knows that playing a "wrong" note does not mean the piece will fail, the situation can be saved, and

ultimately result in a novel idea. Hence, allowing for and incorporating the unexpected is an important part within a jazz orchestra (Hatch, 1998, 1999). In addition, the audience is argued playing a role for the jazz orchestra as they react and interact with the music played (Pasmore, 1998).

If improvisation is a part of organizations, strategies are most likely to take different forms at different times, e.g. by Weick (2001) referred to as “just-in-time” strategies. The “just-in-time” strategy does not try to anticipate everything that could happen or everything you would need, but focuses upon knowledge, the ability to get a quick perception of a situation, and to trust in intuitions (Weick, 2001). It interprets and adds on to a situation, and creates meaning and sensibility into it. In retrospect these situations can be made sense of as directions or strategies. Thus, it becomes evident that strategy is closely related to action, it even *is* the action (ibid.). For example, in start-ups, founders may immerse into the start-up process and design the start-up while creating it (Baker et al., 2003). This way of directing a company does not follow a rational and well-structured plan that will predict outcomes, but incorporates uncertainty and change as an opportunity instead of seeing it as an interruption (ibid.; Hadida et al., 2015). These features are highly apparent in technology start-ups, operating in environments particularly characterized by a high degree of uncertainty (Baker et al., 2003). Action becomes vital, as Baker et al. (2003) argue – design and creation is not separable – it is a simultaneous process.

Action Creating Strategy

There is often limited information at hand when making decisions in loosely coupled organizations in uncertain environments (Zheng et al., 2011). Time is often of the essence (Crossan, Pina e Cunha, Vera, & Cunha, 2005), hence there is a need for rapid action. In such situations it is vital to draw upon intuitive skills and improvisational capabilities to overcome the limitations with rationality (ibid.). Previous knowledge and learned patterns leads to quick decision making, that may be recalled upon as “gut feel” (Dane & Pratt, 2007). “Analysis paralysis” - namely too much information – also calls for intuition, in order to not get stuck (ibid.). Making intuitive judgments, as opposed to random decision making or guessing, is based upon experience and knowledge, and requires not clinging on to rules or plans, but to use intuition to make sense of a situation and being able to act fast (Zheng et al., 2011).

That a “plan-then-execute” strategy might not be desired in contemporary companies does not mean there cannot exist a thought preceding action about orderliness (Weick, 2001). Presumptions that a situation will work out will lead to people acting in a confident way and in turn implanting the order that was anticipated (ibid.). Therefore, presumptions of logic are crucial for creating the exact reactions the presumption aims at. Managerial and entrepreneurial activity is often argued heavily involving chronic optimism, where presumptions of logic are considerably apparent (Weick, 2001). Weick (2001) argues that optimism can in fact be “the belief that makes the reality possible” (p. 348). Especially during times of massive uncertainty, where linkages of cause and effects are unclear, beliefs are needed in order to evoke action, in turn to materialize an event. This is illustrated in Weick’s (1983, 1995, 2001; Swieringa & Weick, 1982) classic anecdote about a military maneuver in the Alps. ”Plans, even when they are wrong, are useful because they serve as a pretext to start

acting... it is the action, not the plan, that explains their success” (Weick, 1983, p. 49). The anecdote unfolds as follows: when a small group of Hungarian soldiers are sent out by their lieutenant into the wilderness in the Alps, they get hit by a snowstorm and get lost. When they start losing hope to find their way back, one of the soldiers finds a map. The discovery of the map calms the group down, and on the third day they find their way back to the camp with the help of the map. When the lieutenant asks to see the map, he discovers that it is not a map of the Alps – it is a map of the Pyrenees. The story portrays how it is what people do in uncertain situations that are the crucial, not what they plan. It is not the map itself, or the planned strategy, that is vital, but the belief that they have found the map, or strategy, of how to get back to camp. This will give them confidence and hence will get people to take action and thereof leading them into the future (Weick, 1983, 1995). The real meaning will appear only when people respond to a map or a plan, and take action (Weick, 2001).

As illustrated above, self-fulfilling prophecy can substitute for strategy, as strong beliefs can reinforce consistent action, and in turn bring events into being. Imagine an organizational transformation: presumptions can substitute for strategy if the managers initiating the transformation act in a confident and forceful manner, employees will then assume that the initiators know where they are going, and the employees will therefore also assume they know where they are going, and act in a more forceful way. This will create the orderliness needed to make the actual transformation happen – self-fulfilling the initial wish – despite that no one might not have known at the start where they were headed (Weick, 2001).

OI does not deny or contradict the value of planning and control within organizations, but suggests that it is in the interaction between the opposites of stability and change, order and chaos, and control and freedom, that creativity and innovation is found (Zheng et al., 2011). Improvising strategies enables breaking loose from rigid thinking, can lead to new ways of learning, and enable capturing ways of learning that could not have been foreseen. Hence, vague plans can in fact be beneficial as they can enable people to act, learn and create meaning. If action is focal, and not a planned strategy, minimal formal structures can be argued enable people to be opportunistic, discover paths they did not know existed and find resources they did not know they had (Weick, 2001).

Drawing upon the earlier argument, that improvisation should not be mistaken for unguided action (Moorman & Miner, 1998a; Weick, 2001; Huber & Glick, 1993), there is a difference between strategic intent and strategic planning (Perry, 1991). Both are future looking, but intent concerns a future state whilst planning provides a pre specified map of how to get there (ibid.). Strategies are often initiated as an intent of a desired future state, however improvisational strategic thinking recognizes that spending a lot of time trying to plan out the unpredictable future and specifying steps to get there will be a waste of time (Hadida et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2011). Instead, action becomes the most vital factor, and oftentimes a trial and error tactics, enabling quick learning, generates the best results (Weick, 2001; Perry, 1991). Further, Perry (1991) argues that improvisation is to be seen as an interaction between vision and opportunity, meaning organizing knowledge and experiences into creative ways of bringing vision and opportunities together. This requires being able to constantly seize new information and a preparedness to act. Smaller loosely coupled organizations are often most likely to be successful with this way of operating as they can respond quicker to environmental changes and adapt in a less rigid manner (ibid.).

Methodology: Introducing The Story of GovCon

The case company, hereafter referred to as GovCon, was founded in 2003 and is headquartered in Washington DC. GovCon is a management consultancy, specializing in consulting government contractors how to sell to the US federal government. The company employs around 30 people and acts solely in the US market. It is a knowledge intensive service company, however, also acting as channel partners – reselling other companies' products and/or services to the government. In addition, GovCon specializes in proposal writing, consulting companies to find and bid on government opportunities.

The two founders, likewise managing partners, are of entrepreneurial nature and have during the majority of the company's existence constantly been searching for ways to develop and evolve the organization. Several attempts have been made to transform the company, but none of them seems considered particularly successful, as the operations each time have fallen back to the core business, i.e. government contract consulting. In recent years, the traditional government market has seen a substantial stagnation, adding to the managing partners' desire to make the company evolve.

Before the studied transformation started, the company was made up of five departments; government contract consulting, business development, channel partnering, proposals, and marketing. With the studied transformation, a sixth department was added; cyber security – at first set up as a stand-alone start-up company – and later on brought in under the main company umbrella. The major transformation started in 2014, resulting in GovCon, as mentioned, entering a completely new market in 2015, the cyber security marketplace. As a result, during 2015, GovCon added a cyber security product and service to the company offerings. A major event effecting the development of the new product occurred in May 2015, when it was revealed that the US federal government had been exposed to, at the time, the largest data breach in American history. With a short turnaround, GovCon responded to a request for proposal and was awarded the contract as the sole provider to support the US government with cyber security and restoration services to 4.2 million affected individuals.

The transformation GovCon is experiencing has taken many turns, and at times the direction has changed from one hour to the next. At first, the new offering was going to target government contractors and government agencies, GovCon's existing network of customers. With the event of the major contract won to support the government, the product was iterated to support individuals with cyber security protection and restoration services. However, a few months after the big contract award, the focus was turned to organizational protection. Entering 2016, a third shift was taking place, back to identity protection with organizational protection as a second offering. In addition to this, industry analysis reports were added as an add-on product to sell. In developing the new offering, GovCon is dependent on a technology partner firm, hereafter referred to as ProTec, a subcontractor providing GovCon with data on which the offering is built.

Design of the Study

As this study concern informal organizing, a qualitative case study approach is used since this allows for the researcher to get a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon (Czarniawska, 2014). In order to get a full understanding of the organizational transformation,

several different data collection methods were used. In accordance to Silverman (2011), interviews, participative as well as non-participative observations, and document analysis were gathered to get a broader understanding of the phenomenon. To be able to follow the actions of organizing without explicit strategy making, the research was conducted during a time period of one year. During this year, I also worked at the company as a full-time employee in one of the departments, working closely with one of the managing partners. Being in the middle of ‘the eye of the storm’ provided an opportunity to get a deep understanding of the ongoing transformation, crucial for getting a full understanding of the unfolding taking place. However, being a part of the organization where the research takes place, comes with a risk of bias and hence for the findings to become subjective. The benefits, though, is that it enables following the unfolding and interactions among people, which was vital for the research since organizing processes are not carried out in isolation. It is a constant evolving process involving multiple actors with different understandings and agendas (Silverman, 2011). Also, in accordance with Tsoukas and Chia (2002), a transformation can only be understood by being in the flux itself – “only by placing ourselves at the center of an unfolding phenomenon we can hope to know it from within” (p. 571). This research setting is particularly valuable for organizational research, since using multiple methods, including direct contact and observation during a somewhat longer timeframe, provides rich data on the actual unfolding’s as they occur (Baker et al., 2003).

As mentioned, the field material was gathered during a time period of one year, and was divided into four phases. Phase one lasted the first six months being at the company, during the time period of the initiation of the transformation. This first phase aimed at getting an initial understanding of the developments of the new offering, and consisted of participative as well as non-participative observations. These observations were conducted during meetings – internal as well as external – as well as taking parts of documents such as company – and product – presentations. The field material gathered during phase one made it possible to determine the most suitable interviewees regarding the organizing within the company, which were conducted during phase two. During the second phase, two pilot interviews were conducted with the two founders, likewise managing partners (hereby referred to as Managing partner 1 respectively Managing partner 2), whereby one of them also is the CEO of the company. The managing partners were interviewed separately, and the interviews aimed at, based on the initial knowledge gathered during phase one, getting a somewhat deeper understanding of the phenomenon: organizing without explicit strategies in the company. As the two managing partners have been with the company since the start in 2003 and are the initiators of the studied transformation, they could provide the most comprehensive overview of this development.

In the third phase of the research, an additional 15 interviews were conducted. Based on the understanding obtained during earlier phases, interviewees could be suggested by myself. These interviews were gathered with four directors and 9 non-director employees, both part of the newly formed cyber security department as well as part of the consulting side of the business, and with two directors at external partner firms (all hereby referred to as employees). The interviewees are held anonymous for confidential reasons, which the interviewees were informed of before the interview started, and they are being described in the report with a number based on their appearance in the interview process.

In addition, during phase three, additional observations were gathered, such as product demos, since it was considered essential to see the tool and its functionalities in order to get a better understanding of it and its processes. The observations also took the form of participation in corporate meetings, as well as other meetings within the organization. A total of approximately 30 hours of observations were gathered. During these observations it was possible to study the actions and interactions of the actors involved, in addition to what they expressed during the interviews.

The collection of field material continued as long as new relevant information was brought up, before, as referred to by Glaser & Strauss (1967), saturation was reached. This led to that, in total, 17 interviews were conducted. This left room for follow-up interviews if considered necessary to further gather information on interesting aspects or new discoveries during the research process. Since I also worked at the company during the year this research took place, although not part of the gathered field material, a contextual understanding was achieved of the ongoing development and interaction between employees, during informal gatherings such as conversations occurring in the lunch area.

Collection of Field Material

The majority of the data collection was gathered at the HQ in Washington DC. On a few occasions it was also collected onsite the office location for the newly formed department in Maryland. The interviews, shown in Table 1, were semi-structured, in order to cover core areas of the studied phenomenon, but at the same time being open-ended, allowing for the interviewees to talk freely about their experience without steering the conversation in a predetermined direction (Silverman, 2011). The pilot interviews were conducted with the two managing partners as they were considered having the deepest knowledge about the unfolding transformation and the strategy making in the company. They could also provide information of the initiation and high level reasoning about venturing into this new marketplace. Several directors were also interviewed: some that had been directly involved in development of the new offering, and others that were more indirectly involved, yet playing crucial roles in other departments in the company. Therefore they were acting as vital mediators between the new venture and employees' in other departments, and in the organizing between them. Further, non-director employees were interviewed as they could give valuable accounts for how the organizing unfolds in practice, to give a complementing understanding to the perspectives of the top management and directors'. Further, interviews were gathered with two directors at external partner firms, providing a valuable outside perspective to the development. All together, interviewing individuals within and outside the company holding various positions, provided essential empirical data from different perspectives of how organizing unfolds.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, which during the interview allowed to concentrate on the interviewee. This enabled following up with relevant questions and being attentive also to the unsaid, such as body language and emotions. In addition, notes were taken enabling to remember to ask relevant follow up questions that came up during the interview, without interrupting the interviewee (Czarniawska, 2014). However, the focus during the interviews was to try to understand the interviewee and what he or she tried to mediate.

Conducting research based on interviews comes with some drawbacks important to keep in mind: Czarniawska (2014) argues that interviewees might be prone to say the “right” things rather than giving their true impressions, as they might be concerned with repercussions or wanting to please the interviewer. To mitigate these potential drawbacks, as mentioned above, several different methods of data collection were used, such as participative and non-participative observations, as well as document analysis to give a more complete picture than the interviewees were able to provide (Silverman, 2011).

The two pilot interviews with the managing partners provided in-depth and detailed accounts of the developments, and lasted for 90 minutes. The following 15 interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, which was considered enough to get their full view of the studied phenomenon: how organizing unfold without explicit strategies. The interviews with employees within the company were all gathered at the workplace where the interviewee normally works, however they took place in a separated part of the office, in order to provide an environment where the interviewee felt comfortable. The two interviews with the directors at the external partner firms were conducted over the phone, which entailed missing out on the benefits with face-to-face meetings, such as incorporating also the unsaid. However, these interviewees, daily being involved in phone meetings and virtual conferences, felt comfortable with this way of communicating, and hence in regards for their convenience this was not considered a major drawback.

Department	Position	# of interviews
Management	Managing Partner & CEO	1
	Managing Partner	1
Internal Departments	Directors	4
	Employees	9
External Partner Firm 1	Director	1
External Partner Firm 2	Director	1
TOTAL		17

Table 1. The table shows the number of interviews gathered, as well as the position of the interviewees.

Analysis of Field Material

As discussed above, the field material was collected during four phases. This made it suitable to use grounded theory, a constant comparative analysis approach when analyzing the collected empirical data (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). The reason being that a constant comparison approach can enable finding and conceptualize hidden social structures of the studied phenomenon (ibid.). This was highly relevant for the aim of this study since

organizing in a turbulent and dynamic organization, in the absence of explicit strategies, is made up of social structures not visible at a first glance.

In the second phase of the research the first set of interviews were conducted, which were coded and conceptualized into relevant themes using concept cards, by inspiration of the theories of Martin & Turner (1986). The first set of interviews resulted in identifying approximately 30 concepts, in a wide range of themes. The decision was made to focus mainly on how the transformation in the company was unfolding during these constantly shifting circumstances and directions. This involved an emphasis on organizing allowing for emergence within the company, a strongly recurring theme in the interviews. Hereafter, when often-recurring themes were discovered, the concept cards were narrowed down after careful deliberation, to better fit the aim of the study. As a result, in phase three, the interviews were focused around the importance of rapid action and situated strategies, also examining employees' ways of making sense of and acting in this way of operating. Also during this phase, documents and observation were coded and categorized and compared to the concepts found in the interviews. In this way, the accounts of the interviewees were crosschecked using triangulation (Silverman, 2011) to give a more complete picture on order to complement the findings in the interviews.

Between phase three and phase four, the concept cards were re-categorized again, connecting common themes to each other (Czarniawska, 2014). This resulted in themes of how the organizing unfolds in practice, problematizing constantly adjusting the ways of working. This focused on the need to operate without set structures to allow for innovation and creativity, whilst at the same time balancing a need for unity. In addition, themes covered were the demands required of employees and how they needed handled this way of working. To explain and understand the unfolding of the field material, theories of OI were used. In particular, theories of improvisation – and confidence – as substitutes for strategy, were used to help further understand how organizing unfolds in a turbulent environment where there is a lack of formal strategies.

Findings: The “Oh S* Moment”!**

In the end of 2014, the managing partners sat down for their annual meeting, trying to figure out what the business would look like the following year. During this period, it was massively publicized in US media that the multinational company Sony, had been experiencing a major data breach. Being in a constant search for ways to evolve the company, the massive publicity of the increasing data breaches in society, raised the question between the two managing partners: “do we have anything in cyber security”?

Looking into their existing network of technology partners acting within the cyber security market, a partner called ProTec caught their attention. ProTec seemed to have an interesting technology and the managing partners decided on trying to pursue an extended relationship. The reasoning behind this was that ProTec's technology and GovCon's experience within the public sector could be leveraged into creating a novel offering in the cyber security market. At this point, however, the managing partners had almost no knowledge about ProTec's operations or the technology behind it. It was first on a call a

month later they got more of an understanding of the technology behind ProTec's offering, as one of the managing partner describes:

We didn't even know that it was called threat intelligence at the time... and then he [the point of contact at ProTec] says "we're actually talking to Sony right now" and I thought that was pretty cool since Sony is in the news and ProTec is talking to them. So this seemed to be this best kept secret thing. (Managing partner 2).

The reason why GovCon ventured into cyber security is somewhat unclear. External events, such as the highly publicized data breaches of Sony and Target, were on top of 'everybody's' minds. The development of exaggerating major data breaches in society as a whole triggered the founders, as it seemed to be a space that was "ticking up". One of the managing partners describes the interest of the industry as follows:

I don't know why we decided that cyber security was the route to go, it kind of just stuck out. The big Anthem breach happened around that time, which was massive. Right before that you heard of the big breach of Target and there was a big breach with Home Depot. It started to hit brands and companies that you knew very well. It was hitting homes, they were familiar, and so I just thought that cyber security seemed to be ticking up. (Managing partner 1).

However, it was not until February 2015, during a screen sharing session between the two companies, that it became clearer that there was actually an opportunity to pursue. During this meeting, ProTec introduced their technology, and pulled up examples of the data they provide. The data was showing extremely sensitive information about high target organizations, illegally sold on the dark web. The technology showed if someone had been exposed to a data breach – information that later on became part of GovCon's offering. One of the managing partners explains that this meeting became the turning point of when they realized the value of the offering:

When you see that data, it's explicit, and it's almost like "I'm not supposed to see that and here I am seeing that"... I remember we [the managing partners] were emailing and texting while we were on this call, and we were both yelling to each other "hit shift print screen, hit shift print screen", because you could literally see these people and their passwords, and at that point we thought that we had hit something. That was what I call the *Oh Shit Moment*, we've got something very valuable here that I think we can capitalize on. I think we can actually build a business around this. (Managing partner 2).

After this meeting, GovCon started developing a technology for the new product. In addition, some employees eventually transferred from the consulting side of the business to the new department, new employees were hired, and in early May a new office was opened in Maryland, at a start-up incubator known for its technology – and cyber – expertise.

...and Then the Big Data Breach Happened

The first six months of 2015 were intense in terms of developing the new department and the product. During this period, not much was officially communicated to the employees about

these new encounters. In early June 2015, during the monthly corporate meeting where all employees are gathered, it was internally announced that GovCon had won a big contract with the US federal government. This contract, supplying 4.2 million former and current federal employees with cyber security protection and restoration services, was a result of, at the time, the largest known data breach in US federal history. The GovCon employees perceived this as the official starting point of the transformation of the company. They were about to venture into something new. Reflecting on the news revealed during this meeting, an employee expresses:

We had this corporate meeting... Breaking the news a few weeks before it was on CNN and it was a lot of hush hush about it and we were instructed not to talk to anyone about it. We didn't really understand it, we just understood that it was big and we had won some opportunity and millions of people's identities had been stolen, we had some part of this and that's when I realized that this was probably a big part of the company. (Employee 9).

To the majority of the employees, this contract was perceived as a big deal and positive for the organization. However, although the news were exiting, it also evoked reactions of confusion of how other departments would fit into this, as expressed by one employee:

It was definitely exiting, that first meeting [the monthly meeting] when they [the managing partners] were telling us how big the award was and how massively publicized we were going to be from it, it was like "wow that's pretty cool that this little company might be about to explode into something big and we're all here in the very beginning which is pretty awesome", but then it was also like "where do we fit into that"? (Employee 12).

Getting "Something" Out There

Developing the new cyber security product was described as a fast-speed process. Some market research was gathered in terms of scanning the market and getting an understanding of competitors. However, the focus was to, as quickly as possible, get the product "out there" – following the concept of Minimal Viable Product (MVP). MVP is a common concept among technology companies – getting the product out on the market, knowing it is not going to be a perfect product, as one of the managing partners explains:

We rushed to get to the 1.0 version of the product, because it's all about getting something out to the marketplace. It doesn't have to be perfect, but get it out there, start building adoption and then iterate, then build on top of that. Yes, you have to do your homework to understand if this is going to be something that people want, but companies can spend years and years and years and months or whatever, infinite amounts of time trying to analyze and research and analyze, but by the time you do that, the market's changed. (Managing partner 1).

The new product was funded internally, which was beneficial in several ways. According to the managing partners, this shortened the go-to-market time significantly and enabled the possibility to make quick iterations. Not involving external investors meant they did not need to get involved in a lengthy process of presenting research to validate the assumptions on which they based their decisions for moving in certain directions. This decreased the risk of

getting stuck in long product development processes and seeing the market go by. The managing partners and the employees of the new department operated with a mindset acknowledging they did not have any previous experience of this specific market, and that there would be a need for constant evolution. One of the managing partners illustrates the evolving market and the constant need for adjustments as follows:

That's the benefit with being a small company, we're not a thousand people and we're not fifty thousand people, for better or for worse we can make decisions hour by hour at times. We definitely jumped into this, knowing that there was a need and that it's going to evolve, it's technology, it's security, so if you don't expect it to evolve, don't go down this path. And if you can't stomach change, then don't go down this path. We didn't know specifically what to expect, but just like any market: adjust, adjust, adjust. You have to adjust, otherwise it won't work, that's the lesson I've learned. (Managing partner 1).

When the 1.0 version of the product was released it seemed ready in its infancy. The first weeks after the launch the interest from prospects were massive, and the sales people had a busy schedule demoing the product. However, as time passed it became obvious that parts of the product were not working optimally, it needed to be iterated. Reflecting on this, one employee describes this as follows:

When we first started, we were getting demos from all kinds of Fortune 500 companies, so that in itself felt like a success. But I guess after a few demos we started to realize there wasn't that much data that was showing. So, we weren't necessarily able to transfer that into direct sales, so then we would view that ultimately as kind of a failure but the thing is, the product version we were showing them [prospects] was so limited at that time, and didn't have the full data set that it was supposed to have. (Employee 4).

From focusing on organizational protection, GovCon shifted gears to focus on personal protection. However, the personal protection service was not ready either, whereas another shift was made to sell organizational analysis reports. This was a third shift in order for the department to have something to sell, to not just 'sit there' doing nothing. That the product at times was not working optimally had several effects. Some employees were confused what the direction of the company was, since it changed so frequently. The process of developing the new line of business based on "getting something out there", and then making iterations, was perceived by most employees as how the development needed to be. Everyone was learning and recognized that learning from the past is the way to move forward. However, even though it was perceived as the natural process, there were difficulties, as an employee expresses:

I think we went full steam ahead building this new department, but maybe it was shot into space too quickly. It's a great idea and a great concept, but I think it takes time to build, it's still in its infancy. There's going to be some trial and error but you have to calculate prior to making the jump to light speed. You need to know what the downfall can be, you can't just go after things. A lot of decisions are made more by impulse than necessarily logic sometimes. (Employee 13).

In addition, it made employees feel somewhat of a lack of something to “measure” their work against. This affected the workgroup in terms of morale and confidence as they had difficulties knowing how good of a job they were performing, since the internal struggles with the product led to setbacks.

Action Leading to Strategy

As the new cyber security product was developed with iterated adjustments and new directions, the strategy was constantly changed with current circumstances. For example, when a major client had been signed for the organizational protection service, a strategy and process of how to deliver was figured out after the client was onboard. One of the employees, explains this process as follows:

Now when we’ve had this major new sale, it’s forced us to figure out how we properly onboard a client. The first five clients were smaller and it was a lesser offering at the time, we kind of just went with it. But now we’re kind of forced to actually get a little more serious about a more formal process. (Employee 4).

The ‘action-preceding-strategy’ way of operating is also visible in other departments. During sales calls, there were almost no pre-planned steps or manuscripts to follow. The sales people “went with it” and adjusted what to say after how the conversations went. An employee, exemplifies the room for improvisation in the sales process, also illustrating the attitude with which the team operated:

What I really did to learn was just to listen in on a couple of calls, and then just did it by trial and error, realizing “oh this works, people seem to be responsive to that, or, this clearly doesn’t work and that went really badly”. Until I closed deals I had no idea of what I was doing or what was the right thing to be doing. I didn’t really have any way to gage it until I got responses and people were coming back to me. You have to kind of feel it out because you can never really predict people, so there’s only so much training that can help you, you have to go by the situation. (Employee 7).

The team operated with a low degree of formal structures. Action was key, in turn creating meaning, which in turn created a strategy of what to do next. Employees have adopted a way of working acting on intuition when needed. It is being expressed that despite a lack of formally communicated strategies or visions, they still intuitively know what to do and where they are going. For some employees, however, the lack of structures and the ups and downs with the developments of the product was experienced as somewhat difficult at first. However, this way of operating needed to be adjusted to when working in such an unpredictable environment, as an employee expresses:

Most people are more comfortable in a more structured environment, so it’s definitely made me grow as a person, because you have to realize that you can’t control everything, and you have to deal with some adversity to come out of it and know what you need to do. (Employee 6).

Being in a constant flux and seizing new opportunities is present throughout the company. Acting in the technology industry, the constant volatility becomes ever so present, and a mode of working that employees need to assimilate to. To be able to respond to rapid environmental changes, action is taken quickly and there is not much hesitance to make drastic changes. The product adjustments and development of the strategy is heavily based upon feedback from prospects and conversations with other industry players. In this vein, GovCon constantly seeks and seizes information and new ways of learning. To enable this way of operating, the culture within the company allows “throwing darts” and not being afraid of failure. One of the managing partners describes this attitude and realizing that some ideas will indeed fail, as follows:

My role within this new line of business, just like with GovCon, typically is to be the mad scientist. To come up with the ideas, to a degree validate the ideas, and then bring them to my business partner who helps further validate the idea and help implement and execute. I’m not shy about getting out there and speaking in front of people. I’m not shy about throwing darts and looking at concepts and realizing that some of them are going to fail and some of them may actually work out. We’ve had a couple of those that have failed over the years, so we’ve taken calculated risks over the years with some ancillary ideas like this. But my role generally is to dream it up and then bring folks in that help validate and execute. Because, I’m definitely not an executor, I’m a dreamer. (Managing partner 1).

The culture and attitude of “throwing darts” and not being afraid of failure is also found in other departments. Bringing up ideas is encouraged and GovCon has significantly changed over recent years, showing how the company allows for emergence and constantly evolves. An employee expresses this as follows:

We’re always looking for ideas, I take ideas frequently to the CEO, and sometimes we’re able to flesh it out, and sometimes we’re not. This is a place that does allow for ideas... But as with everything, and this happens to me too, sometimes it’s going to be a great idea, and sometimes the ideas are shot down out of the sky. As a company as a whole we’re always interested in ideas, the company we were four years ago is not even remotely close to the company we are today. (Employee 3).

However, the constant search for new ideas also leads to that it occasionally is difficult to keep on route and reach a unified direction, as employees’ have different perceptions of what to do and tend to go in separate directions. This is illustrated as an employee describes it as follows:

Sometimes it causes problems if we’re all going in different directions, when we have no one there looking at us saying no, no, no we’ve got to do it this way. We need someone to keep us on route, otherwise it just makes it twice as difficult for us. Because you know, the CEO would have an idea on Monday and then I would have an idea on Tuesday and another director would have an idea on Wednesday and we all need everything done by Thursday. It just makes it twice as difficult to function as a company. (Employee 2).

In spite of some difficulties experienced with working in a state of constant flux and changing ideas of directions, employees within the company share an identification and pride in being an entrepreneurial company. There is a belief that operating in an ad hoc way is needed in order to constantly evolve. Most employees believe this new route is going to be successful and the way of the future for the company. This attempt to transform is seen as more serious and a better offering than other ideas that have been pursued throughout the years. This was initially attributed to the managing partners' determination and heavy investment in the idea, along with that the new offering is a valuable concept. The development in society as a whole, with increasing data breaches – in turn creating a larger need for the product and service – has also contributed to the belief that this new venture will be part of the future of the company.

Discussion: Stabilized Unpredictability

In the creation and development of the new cyber security department and product at GovCon, it is to be seen that, the lack of formally written or communicated strategies within the company is not to be mistaken for an unorganized organization. However, the ways of organizing in this dynamic and emergent company are different from what traditional models of organizing have taught us. The entrepreneurial mind and spirit of the two managing partners have trickled down in the organization into a mental model of organizing. In accordance with Weick's (2002) reasoning about organizational cultures that value and embrace the "aesthetics of imperfection", and that along with Zheng et al. (2011) accepts failure as a part of a bigger process, the internal context in the organization is set up to value and testing out new ideas, even when knowing beforehand that not all will work out. That some ideas will not work out is seen as unavoidable, and also a crucial part of learning, in order to evolve.

The managing partners of GovCon much acted on intuition when deciding to venture into cyber security. External events, such as massively publicized data breaches, also played a role in raising an interest for the industry – it seemed to be a growing space. They decided to venture into this space, at that point, without having the knowledge or technology needed to provide cyber security protection services. Drawing upon Weick's (1983, 1995, 2001; Swieringa & Weick, 1982) anecdote about the military maneuver in the Alps, the meeting referred to as the *oh shit moment*, when they really understood they value of the offering, can be understood as the moment when they found "the map", or namely the strategy, leading them into the future. However, on the contrary from the map in the anecdote, for the managing partners this was not a formal document with specified steps to follow in order to reach the goal. In accordance to Perry (1991), the strategy instead took the form of an evolving idea that would change along with shifting circumstances.

For the majority of the employees, on the other hand, the corporate meeting where it was revealed that GovCon had won a major award with the US federal government was the turning point of when they understood they were in the middle of an ongoing transformation. The award was a big win and at that moment they realized they were venturing into something new. Again, drawing upon the anecdote described above (Weick, 1983, 1995, 2001; Swieringa & Weick, 1982), about the military maneuver in the Alps, this meeting became the moment when the employees' "discovered" the map that would lead them into the

future. The confidence the managers displayed, in addition to the major contract win, gave confidence to the whole organization. This in turn led employees to acting forcefully and treating this new venture as the obvious answer to the question where they were going to evolve next. After this meeting things started coming together, as some employees were transferred from the consulting side of the business to the new department, new employees were hired, and an additional office was opened. Additionally, the belief in the value of the offering was strong, and visible in conversations between employees. Hence, action was starting to be taken, which would lead up to the new venture materializing. In this sense, the events show similarities with Weick's (2001) reasoning that confidence can substitute for strategy, and that optimism can indeed be "the belief that makes the reality possible" (p. 348). A strong confidence in where they were going led to action becoming more forceful and the chances of succeeding were amplified.

The internal set up of the company allows for acting rapidly when an opportunity arises. Acting on intuition is not only found in top management, some employees have also adopted this way of working. Despite that there is not much explicitly communicated strategy within the company, employees' express they intuitively still know what to do. Some employees have adopted, what could be called a mental mindset of constant change, which had to be adjusted to and embraced, otherwise it would not have worked out. The employees can be seen either as having somewhat of an entrepreneurial mindset or had to learn to become more improvisational, findings also found in other research of technology start-ups (Zheng et al., 2011). This is evident in e.g., an employee expressing that when starting working at GovCon, she was dependent on structure and control, but had to become more relaxed and taking things more "on the fly". There was no other way than to embrace that, since the company is set up to operate in a non-linear way, required in an emergent and unpredictable environment. The improvisational style of strategizing and organizing is not just evident in top management or for those more officially enrolled in entrepreneurial and innovative processes within the organization. Employees, even if not formally part of creative teams, have to improvise to make sense of their own situation. This is illustrated in that there does not exist much training for employees, they have to figure things out on their own. For example, sales calls for the new product, are much of a trial and error process, trying to figure out what works and what does not work.

It could be argued that the internal environment in the organization has become a system of stabilized processes of unpredictability. The reason being that the studied transformation had the ability to be world-shaking for employees within the organization, as some expressed that they did not know how they would fit into the new route the organizations was taking. Yet, most employees did not seem considerably disturbed by this new uncertain route. The attitude they adopted was concurrent with that new ideas must be tried out to be able to move forward. Hence, what might be seen as unstructured and unstable processes of working are actually fairly organized processes of 'letting go of control', not implying disorder, but a high level planning with a minimal set structure, in accordance to Zheng et al. (2011).

Adopting a 'Fail Fast, Start Over' Mindset

Perry (1991) highlights that a successful strategy requires adopting a mindset treating it as a constantly evolving idea. Openness for improvisation needs to be present in order to capture ways of learning and breaking loose from rigid thinking, in order to find better solutions. Resembling strategy and improvisation with a jazz metaphor has therefore been argued illustrating these encounters (Perry, 1991; Hatch, 1998, 1999). At first sight, the organizing at GovCon, just like a jazz orchestra, could for an untrained eye be interpreted as unstructured and merely spontaneous. However, as with the jazz orchestra, the organizing without explicitly communicated strategies is built on previous knowledge and experience. For GovCon this initially means building on the managers' situated extensive knowledge and experience with start-ups and also with the technology sector. However, as both managers and employees had almost no knowledge about the cyber security sector, there was a need for improvisation as they were all learning along the way, making the idea and the strategy an open and evolving process. The audience is also argued being co-players in a jazz concert, interacting and affecting the music (Pasmore, 1991). This resembles the developments at GovCon, as much of their adoptions and iterations are based upon feedback from prospects and conversations with other industry players. This constant search for new information enables the organization to, as Perry (1991) argues, bringing vision and opportunity together.

The development of the new product, learning on the fly, highlights that action is one of the most important factors in strategy making at GovCon, more so than preplanned documents to follow. This way of operating also illustrates how strategy will be a result of the action, following an 'action-preceding-strategy' approach of operating. The conscious decision of not having external investors made this possible as it enabled taking action and change direction, if needed, from one hour to the next. The focus was to get *something* out on the market, following the concept of MVP, then to learn and adopt. This set up, allowing for quick iterations, counteract the danger with what Dane and Pratt (2007) refer to as "analysis paralysis", getting stuck and risk seeing the market go by. However, this way of organizing and operating is a double-edged sword. In one sense, as discussed above, employees view this as the natural way of operating, in order for the company to evolve. In another sense, though, some employees express a lack of formal communication regarding directions, creating confusion in regards to the unified direction of the company. This is sometimes discussed as the dilemma with improvisation, shown in previous research by e.g. Miner, Bassoff and Moorman (2001): the delicate balance where too much improvisation can risk resulting in too much inconsistency. The risk with going in too many directions at the same time can result in a fragmented organization, which is touched upon with the constant flows of ideas at GovCon. The benefits are that it can result in great ideas and innovation, however, as stated, it can also result in too many directions, making things "twice as difficult". For some employees the improvisation and minimal set structures are experienced as confusing, whilst for others it is seen as freedom and enabling creativity.

In loosely coupled organization, as discussed, using improvisation to support creativity can be interpreted as 'letting go of control'. This could indeed be true, however, drawing upon Weick's (2001) reasoning: "the likelihood of survival goes up when variation increases, when possibilities multiply, when trial and error becomes more diverse and less stylized, when people become less repetitious, and when creativity becomes supported" (p. 351), possible is, contrary to 'letting go of control', operating with a low degree of set

structure could be a way of instead keeping control: over employees' way of acting and thinking – in a constant search for new ideas – ensuring an evolving company. For example, a minimal set structure of how to operate can result in employees having an open mind and being in search for new opportunities and new ways of working. This could be a way of trying to ensure not getting stuck in outdated ways of working and enhance creativity.

Since strategic plans could become a threat towards experimentation and constrain learning within a company (Weick, 2001), the lack of them is argued to increase trial and error, much found in the entrepreneurial mindset permeating GovCon. The culture of “throwing darts”, realizing that some ideas will fail and others might work, which has been the mode of operating throughout the company's history, suggests that GovCon is not afraid of failure. The organization operates with what could be called a ‘fail fast, start over’ mindset, being quick to act on possible opportunities, but also quick to let go of them in case they do not work out, in favor for new, and possibly better, opportunities.

There is an existing belief within the organization that operating with a mindset of constantly seeking new ideas and ways to evolve is something one should always strive for. This has become an institutionalized view, and that in an environment like this, changes are so frequent that a preplanned strategy would not be beneficial. This new venture, experienced as differing from earlier attempts of transforming, is considered the way of the future for the company. This is attributed to the determination and confidence shown by managers, along with the perceived value of the offering in the market. This illustrates how confidence can make ‘the reality come true’, and substitute for traditional formal ways of strategizing.

Conclusion and Implications

The aim of this research was to investigate and explain how organizing unfolds in a turbulent and dynamic organization, in the absence of formal strategies. By studying GovCon's transformation of venturing into a new market, it is found that minimal set structures are indeed required due to the volatile and unpredictable market. The organization needs to be able to rapidly respond to changes, in order to not get stuck and risk seeing the market go by. Within the organization it is acknowledged that in this environment, preplanned strategies would most likely be outdated at the time of implementation, or even worse, harmful to the organization's need for taking rapid action and ability to innovate.

Thereby, what has been developed within the organization, substituting for traditional formal strategies, is what could be presented as a mental model of organizing. This mindset, requiring employees to operate with an openness for change and improvisation as a way of finding improved solutions. Improvisation leads to one of the most vital factors for the organization, action. When action is taken, a situated strategy of where to go next emerges. In this vein, the strategy is treated as a constantly evolving idea – never static. By infusing confidence and optimism into the idea of new venture, a chain of reactions and actions were set in motion. This led to a self-fulfilling prophecy, materializing the idea of the new cyber security venture.

In loosely coupled organization, possible is, that ‘letting go of control’, contrary to what it implies, is a way of keeping control: over employees' way of acting and thinking – in a constant search for new ideas – ensuring an evolving company. However, operating with a

low degree of formal structure can in some aspects be problematic. It can create too much inconsistency and confusion for employees, leading to experiencing a lack of unity. Further, it requires employees to embrace instability and unpredictability. Hence, the improvisational mindset is needed in companies acting in volatile environments, since a preplanned strategy will be old news at the time of implementation, and to support innovation in order to move forward. However, contradicting some OI research that propose loose structures in order to reach creativity, in order to reach creativity some degree of formal structure might be needed.

A limitation with this study, even though the transformation is followed for one year, is that the transformation is only in the beginning of its journey, and hence it would be beneficial to follow the unfolding for a longer period of time in order to get a more complete picture of the development. Further, another limitation is that the findings may be object to increased bias, due to the risks with “going native”, however, as argued, the benefits for this particular empirical phenomena of study are argued outweighing the potential disadvantages. This article illustrates challenges contemporary organizations are facing, with preplanned strategies not being sufficient in dealing with current circumstance. In particular, for visionary entrepreneurial leaders it might not be as difficult since the ‘ever evolving idea’ or strategy possible is highly visible in their own minds. However, for employees this can be more of a challenge since they might not be able to visualize this unarticulated idea or strategy. This highlights the complexity of minimal formal structure and improvisation, in the interaction between the opposites of stability and change, and control and freedom.

The above argumentation leads into interesting areas for further research: investigating different groups’ ways of working in environments characterized by a low degree of non-formal strategies. Further, how do different groups interact with each other in terms of OI? This inevitably leads to reflecting upon group dynamics and power struggles within organizations where OI is practiced. Who allows for improvisation and to whom, and are there certain ways of improvisation that are allowed whilst others are not? Micro-political power struggles between different social groups are present organizations, and hence it could be expected being found in improvising practices and organizations operating without much explicitly communicated strategy. Perhaps even more so in these settings since less formal, set ways of operating could leave more room for subjective interpretation and self-interests steering how events unfolds. Further, how external groups or external pressure impact organizing and how strategies come into being, in the absence of formal strategies, could be further investigated. One such example is touched upon in this paper, as GovCon is operating with a mindset following the approach of MVP, influenced by other companies acting in the technology industry. As this was not the subject of investigation for this particular research this was not analyzed further. However, for future research, the influence of the market and other industry players could be a valuable contribution to the organizational strategy and improvisational research field.

There are, as of yet, no clear findings or models in organizational research that can fully account for how organizing unfold in contemporary organizations, in the absence of explicit strategies. Although, one should not expect finding clear cut explanations within a research field problematizing just that – that no linear models can explain the unfolding in emergent and unpredictable organizations. However, despite the absence of clear cut models of explanations, this paper, with the aim of investigating and explaining how organizing

unfolds in a turbulent and dynamic organization, in the absence of formal strategies, contributes to the research field with knowledge of what could substitute for the lack of formal strategies. It also gives attention to and problematizes the complexity with an improvisational approach of operating. Further, this paper contributes to the research field an empirical case of how OI unfolds in practice, and how improvisation – and confidence – can substitute for strategy, areas otherwise oftentimes illustrated in anecdotal or metaphorical terms.

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