Covert Tactics and Open Strategy in the Perspective of Strategy as Practice: a Theoretical Essay

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Abstract

This theoretical essay aims to understand how covert tactics interrelate with Open Strategy in the perspective of strategy as practice. Covert tactics are understood as the gap between what the strategy proposes and what is actually done in the daily activities of organizations (or covert actions), resulting from the implementers to understand the organizational strategy, mainly in the context of everyday life practices. With the Open Strategy - greater inclusion of individuals and transparency of actions and information by the organization -, covert tactics tend to be minimized, since such openness tends to facilitate the interaction of organizational actors, the understanding of the objectives of the company and the collective sense, resulting in increased commitment and practices aligned with organizational strategy. Although Open Strategy represents a good alternative for covert tactics, for its adoption is necessary to consider some dilemmas: escalation, process, commitment, disclosure and empowerment, which, if not well identified and resolved can have negative effects on the organization. Such dilemmas are related to the uncertainty between level of openness and control organizational, which need to be considered before setting the levels of transparency and inclusion (openness) of the company. This theoretical reflection subsidized the development of propositions for future research. The contribution of this study is in the approach of distinct themes of strategy as practice, indicating that although the study perspective is micro-organizational, the perception that several macro-organizational processes occur simultaneously cannot be abandoned.

Keywords: Strategy as Practice; Covert Tactics; Open Strategy; Theoretical Essay.

Introduction

The concept of organizational strategy has long focused on internal aspects, due to a friendly or uncompetitive market and with simplified operations, being defined as the determination of long-term goals of a company and the actions and resources required to achieve such a goal (Chandler, 1962). From the 1960s, however, the strategy became related to the organizational structure (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) and it was understood that the environmental dynamics would affect the internal configuration of companies (Ansoff, Declerck, & Hayes, 1976). With this, the strategy came to be understood as the link between the organization and the external environment (Mintzberg, 1979), in other words, the direction and long-term conditions for the organization to take advantage in an ever-changing environment, through the configuration of its resources and capabilities, in order to satisfy the expectations of the interested parties (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2007).

Traditionally, strategy research focuses on the macro perspective of organizations, and the strategy is framed within an epistemological perspective that values scientific distancing over practical engagement, the general rather than the contextual (Whittington, 2004). In the last decades, however, research focused on strategy as practice, which defends a change in the strategy debate, towards a micro perspective, more specifically on the detailed processes and emerging and informal practices, is gaining space. Emerging strategies can arise both from new ways of developing a formal strategy and from informal strategies of companies that are legitimized over time, that is, strategies that emerge from the actions of individuals, while deliberate strategies are restricted to the formal strategy of organizations (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003).

In analyzing the actions of individuals, strategy as practice proposes, therefore, that the focus should no longer be solely on top managers and deliberate strategy, as it was developed in the traditional strategy, but the formation of the emergent strategy, to discover the role of other actors in the development of informal strategies (Vieira, Correia, & Lavarda, 2013). The approach of research with the strategy being done, that is with the day-to-day of the organizational actors, led to the identification of micro contexts, which tend to affect the organization as a whole, as is the case of covert tactics. This indicates a gap between what the strategies elaborated by senior management intends and what is really done at the level of implementation (Proterius, 2016). Such a gap would be solved with greater participation or inclusion of all organizational levels in the process of strategy formation, which is understood to be consistent with Open Strategy.

Inclusion, along with transparency, is understood as the central dimension of another emergent theme in strategy as practice: the Open Strategy. The focus on these dimensions clearly shows that Open Strategy challenges two orthodoxies: the strategy focused on top management and understood as something secret (Whittington, 2011). The underlying premise of Open Strategy is that the benefits of implementing strategic decisions increase when more actors have information about the organization and are involved in implementation, affecting the strategic result (Gegenhuber & Dobusch; 2017). It should be noted, however, that Open Strategy is not unequivocally a good

'thing'. Greater transparency and inclusion have characteristic problems (Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017), which may affect the behavior of individuals, including the greater practice of covert tactics, as presented in the sequence of this theoretical essay. Thus, the objective of this theoretical essay is to understand how covert tactics interrelate with Open Strategy from the perspective of strategy as practice.

The theoretical essay developed presents, therefore, a joint argument about covert tactics and Open Strategy, in the context of strategy as practice. The study of phenomena such as these, concomitantly, allows the reflection on organizational routines, which work with numerous processes happening at the same time, and not in isolation, as they are often presented in the literature. With this, we intend to obtain a theoretical gain, by showing how these phenomena can be associated, including in terms of cause and effect. Thus, the research question that directs this study is: How do covert tactics and Open Strategy interrelate from the perspective of strategy as practice?

From the theoretical basis developed, two general propositions are constructed, with the intention of specifying the implications logically deduced from the theoretical arguments presented here and that may direct future research on the subject (Whetten, 2003): P1) the Open Strategy, through the dimensions of inclusion and transparency, minimizes the occurrence of covert tactics; P2) the loss of control of the organization over the ideal level of openness, in the dimensions of inclusion and transparency, results in a greater probability of the dilemmas of process, commitment, disclosure and empowerment, reflected in covert tactics.

In the sequence, the topics that support this study are presented, beginning with the clarifications about the concepts of covert tactics (Proterius, 2016) and Open Strategy (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Whittington, 2011; Baptista, Wilson, Galliers, & Bynghall, 2017; Füller, 2017; Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017; Hautz et al., 2017; Hutter; Nketia; Luedicke, 2017; Mack & Szulanski (2017); Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Niemiec, 2017; Yakis-Douglas, Angwin, Ahn, & Meadows, 2017), from the perspective of strategy as practice (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007). In the sequence, we discuss the interrelation between the themes.

Covert tactics

The gap between what people should do and what they actually do, has given rise to the practical approach to strategic management (Jarzabkowski, 2004). In this sense, Proterius (2016), after years of consulting service, experiencing organizational problems, brings up a discussion about covert tactics, which refer precisely to the gap between what the strategy proposes and what is actually done in the day-to-day of organizations. The author starts his text by warning: "if you have a strategy, beware of its crooked implementation".

The concept of covert tactics emerged from formal and informal conversations with individuals from various organizations through which Proterius (2016) claims to have found a pattern. According to the author, organizations have formal strategies, but often these do not appear to be the central focus. There are other occurrences in the organization that are relevant to trying to understand the non-implementation of the formal strategy and to determine if there are other problems (dressed as strategies) that perhaps strategists and managers are not aware of, precisely because they are

busy pursuing the objectives of the formal strategy. Therefore, formal strategy is defended publicly, while covert tactics are what happens in the daily practices of individuals.

The central question of covert tactics is that when thinking about formal strategy the upper echelon tends to devote efforts to make it "interesting" by using terms such as "vanguard," "stakeholder value," "service leaders or innovation "and other generic rhetoric, rather than worrying about the comprehensibility of the strategy on the part of who actually will execute it. With this, the audience (implementers) become unable to translate the strategy into their work - the term "audience" is used purposely by the author, since the public rarely becomes part of the action. They watch from a distance and applaud if asked. They boil down to "silent observers" of an often ineffective message.

To resolve the problems of bad communication, inefficient message and misalignment, managers typically set strategic objectives and indicators. If this does not bring the desired results, "new values" are introduced, hoping to change the organization's culture (often unsuccessfully). More measurements are included and the success remains elusive. The problem is, therefore, that the strategy is not embedded in the organization's implementation structures, including employees, resource allocation, and support. Implementers do not believe in strategy (there is no consensus on performance) and follow their own "strategic" activities, the covert tactics that keep the organization running.

Covert tactics have, in general, five characteristics (Proterius, 2016). First, covert tactics are informal - originate in the minds of individuals - which makes it difficult to detect and treat such tactics. Individuals tend not to talk about this, since they are not formalized processes. Covert tactics depend on the individual's perceptions of the formal strategy, but are mainly driven by what individuals see as good for the "self" and not so much for the organization. This was evidenced in excerpts from interviews made by the author, where interviewees affirmed making decisions, seeking to solve problems based on what they perceive to be the correct one, without consulting the top management or reflecting on the alignment with the organizational strategy. For this, they used as justification the supposed lack of knowledge of the top management ("senior management doesn't know what happens at the lowest levels of the organization, so I do what I think is right", "Top management live on a different planet. Reality requires me to do the right thing") and agility in solving problems ("I do it although there is no agreement or policy, because apologizing is easier than obtaining permission anyway"). This suggests that individuals are often willing to censor risk.

The second feature of cover tactics is that they are not coordinated - there can be as many covert actions as there are employees; an individual may also have more than one. Individuals act in their own way, based on what they think is relevant to the situation. It cannot be denied that in doing so, employees show initiative, which is a sought trait when there is a quest for management talent; however, when actions are not aligned with formal strategy, they can result in harm to the organization. The disillusionment with top-level management (in) competence is a strong engine that often underlies the development of these individual strategies. In the author's observation this practice is more visible at the senior team level – the more secure the individual is,

whether in terms of professional stability, experience or access to information, the greater the tendency to take covert tactics.

Covert tactics happen in response to individual micro-situations – people do things to improve their situation (but they may be destroying value in the whole) -, according to the third characteristic mentioned by Proterius (2016). Covered actions happen in micro-situations, where individuals feel they have control (direct) over the environment, work and focus on themselves. Often individuals applaud the formal strategy and affirm supporting it; however, in micro situations they are focused on themselves, on their teams or departments ("how can I get more?"). Some actions seem beneficial, but they destroy the value of the whole, as is the case of fights and competitions for power and resources.

The fourth characteristic of covert tactics refers to information asymmetry. The asymmetry of information is related to greater access to information, which can be manipulated or hidden, by some members of the organization. Thus, asymmetry allows the agents with more information to behave opportunistically, that is, acting for their own benefit.

While the fifth and last, it emphasizes that the covert tactics are not deliberately designed to oppose the formal strategy, that is, such actions can originate from the need for quick resolution, a lack of return from a superior, among others, which leads the individual to solve a given situation according to what he considers "right". Although it is possible, that employees perform dysfunctional actions, which may harm the organization, malice generally does not govern the development of covert tactics. They tend to be the result of solving routine issues by individuals who do not understand how the organization's strategy is reflected in their daily activities.

Full removal of covert tactics, thereby eliminating the existing gap between what is strategically planned and what is done, seems, in principle, the most obvious response to dealing with this problem. Briefly, if there are no actions diverging from the formal strategy, the gap will not exist. Here is the first problem: people (employees) do not share covert tactics with people they do not trust (management), especially in that situation, where management is perceived as the source of the problem. Therefore, top management will not be able to remove something that it is not able to identify, making this alternative unfeasible.

Proterius (2016) indicates that a resource to minimize covert tactics is in the strategy message change, that needs to be inserted in the micro-organizational situation, but this will only be achieved when those who hear the proposed strategy (the audience), become participants. Covert tactics are a sign of non-participation and therefore an unsuccessful strategy message. Employees must understand the business and their role in it. When individuals become participants, they are able to understand how (micro) actions are related to organizational (macro) strategy. Thus, organizations need to be more transparent, in order to inform organizational objectives to strategic agents, including them in the process of building the future, in other words, they need to open their strategy (Open Strategy).

Open Strategy

The term Open Strategy was first employed in the Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007) study, related to the notion of open innovation. According to the authors the Open Strategy would balance the principles of traditional business strategy with open innovation as a way of giving meaning to innovation communities, ecosystems, networks and their implications for competitive advantage. It should be noted, however, that the "content" of Open Strategy is not limited to approaches to open innovation, but can extend to a number of strategies (Hautz et al., 2017), as evidenced by Yakis-Douglas et al. (2017), in a study on Open Strategy applied in the context of mergers and acquisitions of companies..

Open Strategy can be understood as a process by which an organization's strategy, be it innovation, marketing, purchase, cost reduction or other, expands beyond the corporate elite, through the collaborative involvement of a variety of parties stakeholders, internal and external, so that the suggestions to organizations stem from a merging of the multiple perspectives represented between the various stakeholders (Whittington, 2011; Malhotra et al., 2017). The benefits attributed to the development of open strategies include a greater number of suggestions for advancement from more diverse sources of information, a better understanding of strategic decisions and a greater commitment to these decisions, which may result in a better overall decision quality (Hautz et al., 2017).

According to Gegenhuber and Dobusch (2017) the premise underlying Open Strategy is that the benefits of implementing strategic decisions increase when more actors are involved in the implementation or affecting the strategic results. The level of openness, however, is not static, but dynamic (Appleyard & Chesbrough, 2017): there may be times where it is a greater advantage for the company to be open or closed. Some companies can be competitive by always being closed and others open from the beginning. In centralized organizations where strategy activity is traditionally exclusive, for example, the opening of the strategic process may conflict with existing organizational norms and routines (Andersen, 2004).

In this sense, Whittington et al. (2011) explains that Open Strategy is a continuum composed of two critical dimensions: (i) openness in terms of inclusion - of the variety of actors, internal and external, in drawing up the strategy; and, (ii) openness in terms of transparency - within and outside the organizations, both in the formulation phase of the strategy and in the communication of the strategy. Thus, the opening of the strategy varies continuously along the two dimensions, being driven by organizational and environmental contingencies. This definition seeks to capture the different degrees of transparency and inclusiveness, from modest to radical, found empirically, while recognizing how openness can shift from one end of the dimension to another, or even being totally reversed.

For a better understanding of the two dimensions, the main definitions, or forms of identification of transparency and inclusion, highlighted in the studies on Open Strategy, are evidenced in Table 1.

Table 1 - Definitions of transparency and inclusion in Open Strategy studies

Autores	Transparência	Inclusão
Appleyard and Chesbrough	Free access to project results by outsiders	The dependence of assets outside the limits of the company

(2017)		
Baptista et al. (2017)	Greater access to content and information	Wider involvement of stakeholders
Gegenhuber and Dobusch (2017)	Transparent communication of relevant information	Dialogue (asking users for opinions and conversation) and including (involving external audiences in making decisions).
Hutter et al. (2017)		Virtual participation has two types: active, for example, message posting, and passive, for example, just reading information.
Luedicke et al. (2017)		Practices radically open, without barriers to participation: configuration of the distributed agenda, substantial participation and consensual decision-making.
Mack and Szulanski (2017)	The visibility of the information about the strategy of an organization, during the formulation process and in relation to the strategy finally produced	Participation is about increasing the contribution of stakeholders to decisions; Inclusion is about creating and sustaining a community of stakeholders that interact
Malhotra, Majchrzak and Niemiec (2017)		Online crowdsourcing collaborative process to allow the integration of various external stakeholders
Yakis-Douglas et al. (2017)	Public announcements during mergers and acquisitions, both "mandatory" and "voluntary".	

Source: Adapted from Hautz et al. (2017)

The definitions presented in these recent Open Strategy studies make clear the applicability of the concept. In the study by Baptista et al. (2017), for example, the concept was investigated from a social media perspective, replacing traditional approaches for developing strategies based on paper communication and face-to-face meetings. Considering the relevance of the reflexivity necessary for the adaptation of companies to this new form of interaction, which has pressured organizations to learn how to manage and leverage feedback as a useful resource, the authors suggest the inclusion of this concept (reflexivity) as a third dimension of Open Strategy. Gegenhuber and Dobusch (2017), in turn, analyzed how new enterprises use Open Strategy to manage impressions over time.

Hutter et al. (2017), studied Open Strategy through virtual participation, in the form of submitting ideas, commenting on the suggestions of others and evaluating contributions. With this, the authors intent to identify the sense of belonging (or inclusion) of the individuals to a virtual community, as well as the organizational sense of the community. The findings show that different forms of participation have divergent effects.

How practices and activities in the process of open strategies vary according to the level of centralization of decision making, based on the distinctions between "participation" and "inclusion", was the central question in the study by Mack and Szulanski (2017); while, Luedicke et al. (2017) explored the practices and results of radically open strategy, based on a case study of the German collective Premium Cola.

The probability of organizations making mergers and acquisitions involving Open Strategy and the likely results of such strategies were the hypotheses tested by Yakis-Douglas et al. (2017). Whilst, actions that can mitigate the risks of knowledge gaps - as risks of conflict and self-promotion - by using online ad hoc crowds for the formulation of open strategies were the basis of the research by Malhotra et al. (2017).

The continuum of openness, which may exist in different moments and organizations, in terms of the amount or level of inclusion of participants, as well as the level of availability and access to information by the internal and external public, although the two dimensions are not necessarily correlated (Whittington, 2011) is also evidenced in recent Open Strategy studies. Appleyard and Chesbrough (2017) discussed the possibility of strategic change, in the sense of greater or lesser openness. According to the authors, in the early stages, when there are many newcomers, open strategies attract customers faster. In later phases, as the market matures and there are few new clients to attract with an Open Strategy, the reversal to a more closed strategy becomes attractive.

As evidenced in previous studies, based on different research problems, database and methodologies employed, inclusion and transparency can refer to the sharing of knowledge, information and points of view, of actors and with actors, internal or external to organization. Therefore, when using the terms inclusion and transparency, in this text, it is the inclusion of individuals in strategic issues and the transparency of organizational actions and information, respectively. It should be noted, however, that Open Strategy does not represent a democracy in decision-making (Whittington, 2011). As well as not being necessarily a good thing (Hautz et al., 2017). Greater transparency and inclusion also present characteristic problems and several dilemmas that can be identified in the daily life of the organization, that is, in the context of strategy as practice.
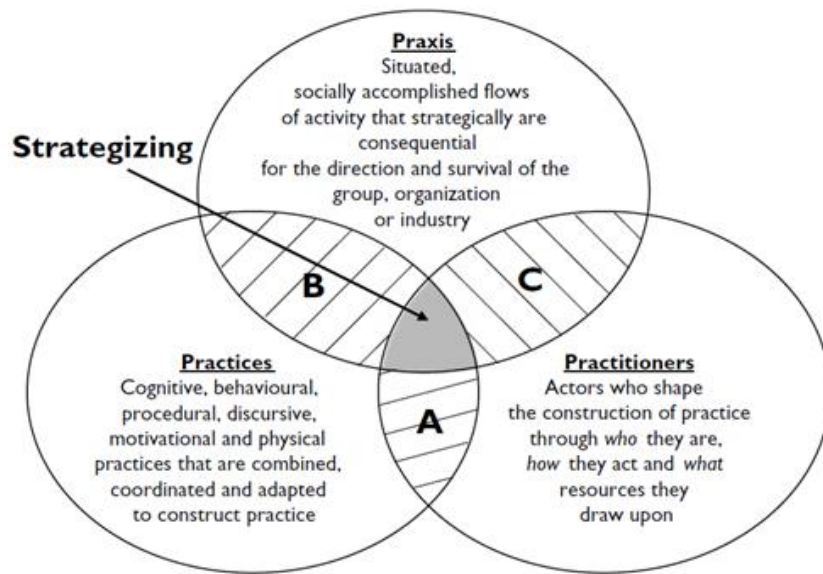
Strategy as practice

Strategy as practice is the result of broader studies of social theory, which have gained momentum since the 1980s and has seminal authors such as Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau (Whittington, 2006). According Whittington (2006) the new approach of social theory seeks to overcome the dualism between the individual, which neglects the macro phenomena, because it places too much importance on individuals, and "societism", that, on the other hand, values the great social forces, without looking at the micro. The study of practice should therefore resist the choice between micro and macro; at the same time that the activities of individuals cannot be separated from society, since it provides the rules and resources for their action, society derives from this action.

The interrelationship between individual activities and society are central to strategy as practice, by allowing the understanding of three central themes related to

the theory of practice: (i) how social practices that guide and enable human activity are defined; (ii) the actual activity of the subjects (in practice); and, (iii) the actors, their abilities and initiatives, who does the activities. Whittington (2006) translates these questions into three central concepts for understanding strategy as practice: practices (A), praxis (B) and practitioners (C), respectively. Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) schematized (Figure 1) the concepts brought by Whittington (2006), in order to show that by joining these, it would result in the strategizing, that is, the strategy being done.

Figure 1 - Conceptual framework for analysis of strategy as practice
Source: Jarzabkowski et al (2007)

The concepts practices and praxis have their origin in the double understanding given the practice in social theory, as something that guides the activity and as the activity itself (Reckwitz, 2002). Practices, in the context of strategy as practice, refer to shared routines of behavior, including traditions, norms and procedures for thinking, acting and using "things", the latter in a broad sense; while praxis concerns real activity, what people do in practice (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Practitioners, in turn, are the actors of strategy, those who do the work, devise and execute the strategy; these are seen as the critical connection between praxis within the organization and organizational and extra organizational practices (Whittington, 2006). Research on strategy as practice has therefore brought human actors, their actions and interactions to the center of strategy research (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

Unlike the traditional chain of strategy research, which focused on top management, in the perspective of strategy as practice, lower-level employees have also become strategic actors (Lavarda, Canet-Giner, & Peris-Bonet, 2010). This is consistent, once, strategy does not refer only to the conception of an idea (strategy formulation), but also in translation into actions (implementing ideas) (Vieira et al., 2013).

Thus, the actions of the individuals responsible for "making the strategy", and what directs them, become central (Johnson et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Whittington, 2006; Regnér, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

With this approach it is possible to reflect on new issues that encompass organizational strategies, such as the level of inclusion of external and internal individuals in the company in the strategic discussions and the level of disclosure – transparency – this information (Open Strategy), the degrees of acceptance or rejection of the strategy by the implementers, which reflect this in their actions, often translated into informal strategies and in some cases individual - such as covert tactics - and joint discussions, that allow to interrelate different strategic practices.

The covert tactics in the Open Strategy context

Strategy as practice studies, through a micro-organizational analysis, indicate that middle- and lower-level employees are important strategic actors (Lavarda et al., 2010). This is because, these actors are responsible for implementing (or not) the strategy formulated by senior management, and the resolution of specific problems, which often did not have formally planned solutions (Cardoso & Lavarda, 2015; Iasbech & Lavarda, 2018).

In this argumentative line, Proterius (2016) brings a discussion, which is not new in the strategy literature, for contemplating an example of an emerging or informal strategy, but for evidencing the relevance of such topic through the expressions of individuals who experience the difficulties of implementing the organizational strategy, which for them often represents only a discourse without meaning or relation to the reality experienced. When this occurs, the formal strategy may not be the true strategy, because others informal "strategies" (covert tactics) tend to emerge and dominate the formal strategy among implementers.

The concept of covert tactic according to Proterius (2016) is one of disagreement (inconsistency) between what the strategy intends to do and the actions that practitioners actually perform. This describes the existence of misalignment between the three core concepts for understanding strategy as practice pointed out by Whittington (2006) and Jarzabkowski, et al. (2007): practice (what should be done), praxis and practitioners (effective actions of practitioners). This situation means that the actions of individuals do not reflect the strategy of the organization – even because the strategies are not translated by individuals, thus leading them to the actions they understand that will 'collaborate' with the strategy or effectively solve a given situation.

An alternative to minimize the occurrence of this issue, suggested by Proterius (2016), would be the insertion of the strategic message in the micro-organizational situation, through the participation of the actors responsible for implementation. Mack and Szulanski (2017), however, highlight an important issue related to the key term of the alternative proposed by Proterius (2016), although 'participation' includes practices that are apparently similar to 'inclusion', there are differences between the terms regarding the content and aspects of the strategic process.

While participation refers to the practice oriented to increase the contributions to the decisions and to organize highly participative processes, that involve the invitation of participation for many people, making the process widely accessible and repre-

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sentative of the general public, to collect the contribution of the community and use it to influence policy decisions, the inclusion refers to the practice oriented to make connections between people, in all the questions, using differences in a productive way (Quick & Feldman, 2011). Else participation, in inclusion, participants are encouraged to exchange ideas, appreciate the perspectives of others and generate new understandings during the discussion; there is also less emphasis on replicating the power of specific stakeholders to control the engagement process and a continuous renewal of associations and interactions between different stakeholders and perspectives; a continuous renewal of associations and interactions between different participants and perspectives (Feldman, Khademian, Ingram, & Schneider, 2006).

In other words, inclusion in the form of active comments and evaluation of ideas contributes to the creation of a sense of community among the employees involved, (Whittington, 2011; Hautz et al., 2017). In this sense, inclusion is apparently the appropriate term to minimize the occurrence of covert tactics, rather than participation, which sums up mere submission of ideas, has few effects on employees' sense of community, or even negative effects (Whittington, 2011). It is from the effective and continuous inclusion of the different organizational actors that the strategy tends to be understood, to make sense to all the participants (responsible for the formulation and implementation of the strategy) and to take root in the micro-organizational actions.

Inclusion is one of the dimensions of Open Strategy. If Open Strategy is considered as a whole, that is, to embrace transparency, one could still discuss other benefits for the reduction or elimination of covert tactics in organizations. For, according to Proterius (2016), one of the main reasons for this is the informational asymmetry, which allows the agent with more information to behave opportunistically. When information is disclosed at all levels, therefore, the chances of access to inside information decrease, thus reducing informational asymmetry and individual behaviors

The Open Strategy represents, therefore, a series of benefits for the organizations, since it broadens the search for strategic ideas and improves the commitment and the understanding in the implementation of the strategy, The Open Strategy allows the extraction of knowledge from all parts of the organization, facilitates the interaction of organizational actors, tends to change the attitudes and / or behaviors of these actors, for the effective implementation of the strategy adopted through the collective sense (Whittington, 2011; Birkinshaw, 2017). Therefore, as the first proposition (P1) of this theoretical essay, it is understood that:

P1) Open Strategy, through the dimensions of inclusion of individuals and transparency of actions and information, minimizes the occurrence of covert tactics.

On the other hand, Open Strategy does not necessarily involve the final transfer of decision rights, that is, although Open Strategy refers to the sharing of knowledge, information and points of view, it does not represent a democracy in decision making (Whittington, 2011). This tension between openness and control leads to the discussion of Open Strategy's dubiety. In this sense, Hautz et al. (2017) highlight five dilemmas that need to be considered, the dilemma of (i) escalation; (ii) process; (iii) commitment; (iv) disclosure; and, v) empowerment.

The escalation dilemma refers to the fact that, once organizations begin to open up their strategy process into selective dimensions and domains, pressures are created for other dimensions and domains to be opened as well, i.e. openness tends to be increasing. As highlighted by Whittington (2011) and Hautz et al. (2017), the Open Strategy is a continuum, the contingencies of each organization are decisive for the level of openness, which in some cases needs to be limited, or even recede. This means that the opening may become less effective or even dysfunctional (Appleyard & Chesbrough, 2017), causing different dilemmas. Thus, it is important for companies to find the optimal opening level for their business, allowing the actors involved in the implementation to be able to understand the formal strategies and the relevance of their work and alignment, in order to achieve the desired results. Based on this, the second proposition (P2) refers to:

P2) the loss of control of the organization over the ideal level of openness, in the dimensions of transparency and inclusion, results in a greater probability of process dilemmas occurring, commitment, disclosure and empowerment, which is reflected in covert tactics.

The process dilemma (ii) refers to the greater involvement of organizational actors, which enable access to different sources of knowledge. On the other hand, engaging broader audiences reduces speed and control over the decision-making process, which in some cases may even prevent the organization from making any decision. Thus, although inclusion is suggested as a way of resolving the organizational gap that leads to covert tactics, if such inclusion gets out of the organization's control, resulting in an employee's commitment to collaborate, which will not be reflected in organizational strategy, or implemented in a very long time, can lead employees not to understand the formal strategies adopted by the organization and why they need to spend their time (also discussed in the empowerment dilemma) to share ideas that are not considered by top management. Thus, the second proposition (P2) of the study is amplified in the sense that:

P2a) speed reduction and control over the decision-making process (process dilemma), reduces employees' motivation to include themselves in the strategic discussions, which is reflected in covert tactics.

In the same sense, the commitment dilemma (iii), also refers to the greater involvement of organizational actors in the development of a new strategy, which has shown to have positive motivational effects and increase commitment to the outcome of the strategic process. However, this methodology may have the opposite effect, due to the challenges in processing participants' contributions, which often lead to frustration and dissociation from strategic discussions. As participants expect recognition for their participation, they become frustrated when their ideals are not valued and they are discouraged when they are excluded from actions stemming from their ideas. This can generate subsidies so that the employees begin to develop actions with a little bit of "malice", seeking to harm the organization, even if it is for the purpose of showing that it was right, or that its idea should have been implemented -

although evil does not govern the development of covert tactics, it is possible (Proterius, 2016). In addition, when the ideas submitted to the organization are excluded from the actions, employees may choose to omit the continuity of the inclusion process, not participating in the strategy formulation process, not understanding the relevance of the strategic day-to-day activities and acting according to what "feels right". In this way, it is proposed that:

P2b) the difficulty in processing participants' contributions (commitment dilemma), leads the employee to feel devalued and excluded from strategic discussions, which reflects in the covert tactics.

The disclosure dilemma is related to greater transparency, which, in addition to reducing problems with information asymmetry, increases legitimacy in the face of new social norms and regulatory requirements on transparency (Whittington., 2011) and functions as a means of managing impressions (Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017). On the other hand, when the company discloses information, it cannot control how they will be interpreted (Yakis-Douglas et al., 2017; Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017), especially if the volume of information is relatively large. With this, the actors can begin to act according to their interpretation of the information, with what they deem to be relevant to the situation itself. This type of behavior is even more common among senior team members, who feel more secure and certain, to act on what they understand to be correct. For this reason, they should receive even more attention than employees who are new to the organization and who tend to seek to more carefully understand the organization's strategy before undertaking actions. In this sense, it is suggested, from the second proposition (P2), that:

P2c) the lack of control over the interpretation of the disclosed information (the dilemma of the disclosure), leads the employee - mainly senior - to act according to what he / she understands as correct, which reflects in covert tactics.

The last dilemma highlighted by Hautz et al. (2017) addresses the empowerment dilemma. If, on the one hand, greater inclusion gives participants a say in strategy thus giving them more power in the organization (Mantere & Vaara, 2008), on the other hand, this subjects participants to the burden of strategy work, which means that in addition to the regular tasks performed, the organizational actors should invest extra time and effort in the strategy work. As a result, employees tend to feel more overburdened, being able to understand the inclusion proposed by the organization as a way to increase the workload without benefits to their routine. In order for inclusion to actually have the expected result in the reduction of covert tactics, it is necessary for the company to be able to motivate its employees to participate, making them feel, in fact, important in their daily tasks, for the implementation of the strategy, jointly elaborated. Otherwise, micro-organizational actors, rather than feeling relevant in this process, will feel discouraged and even used by the organization, generating again, motives for the development of malicious actions against the organization. Based on this, we propose that:

P2d) the additional work burden brought about by participation in strategic discussions (empowerment dilemma) leads the employee to feel overwhelmed and used by the organization, which is reflected in covert tactics.

The dilemmas discussed require continuous re-evaluation and rebalancing of the extent and mix of applied practices to ensure that rather than inhibiting the occurrence of covert tactics, they do not encourage them. However, it is undeniable that the people involved in the strategy are transformed into subjects that ensure their sense of meaning, identity and reality through participation in strategy discourses and practices (Luedicke et al., 2017), and that, therefore, Open Strategy can bring significant results to the micro-organizational actions, coherently integrating the practices, praxis and practitioners, which results in the planned strategy being carried out.

Final considerations

The objective of this study was to understand how covert tactics interrelate with Open Strategy from the perspective of strategy as practice. Based in Whetten (2006), we tried to relate the different themes (covert tactics and Open Strategy) to answer the objective outlined and to indicate propositions for future research that aim to approach such subjects together.

Theoretical discussions indicate that the strategy research has been moving from a macro perspective, to the micro-organizational level, seeking to analyze how the strategy is effectively done (strategizing). In analyzing the strategy as a practice, in addition to the formal strategy, informal or emergent strategies can be observed that originate in the organization's day-to-day. A "kind" of informal strategy, observed by Proterius (2016), in his organizational experience, was covert tactics, which refer to the gap between what formal strategy proposes and what is actually done. Considering Proterius's (2016) reflections on how to solve this question, this study suggests that Open Strategy - also contemplated by strategy as practice studies - can be pointed out as an alternative to minimizing the occurrence of covert tactics, provided that it is appropriately employed in the context of the organization.

The Open Strategy proposes a greater level of inclusion and transparency in the strategic process of the organization. Emphasizing, however, that each organization must adopt the process of opening according to its contingencies and with caution so that it does not generate dysfunctional results. In this sense, Hautz et al. (2017) highlight central dilemmas of Open Strategy. Such dilemmas are related to the dubiousness between organizational openness and control, which needs to be considered in aspects of escalation, process, commitment, disclosure and empowerment, before defining the levels of transparency and inclusion (openness) of the company.

The contribution that stands out with this theoretical essay concerns how different themes related to strategy as practice can be analyzed jointly, as is the case of covert tactics and Open Strategy, generating a theoretical gain by the additional reflection that it brings to the area, allowing new advances to the line of research (Whetten, 2003). In addition to the propositions presented in the course of the research, which indicate specific investigations about Open Strategy and covert tactics, future agendas

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can contemplate the uncertainties between the opening of the organization and a decision-making process that is not based on democracy, as well as the use of organizational controls, in face of higher levels of inclusion and participation.

Given the limitation of the study, which presents a discussion of Open Strategy involving only the internal public to the organization, since covert tactics are centered on this, it is indicated that future lines of research and new studies will also try to identify whether inclusion and extended transparency to external actors may result in some effect on micro-organizational actions.

Finally, it is understood that the study of strategy as a practice allows identifying the reflection of different actions promoted by the organization in the daily life of those who, effectively, form the strategy. It is not research centered on what the organization expects, but on the reactions it actually generates.

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