

2016

## Strategy/Enterprise Discourse Bounds in Business Talk.

Brendan O'Rourke

*Technological University Dublin*, [brendan.orourke@tudublin.ie](mailto:brendan.orourke@tudublin.ie)

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### Recommended Citation

O'Rourke, Brendan, "Strategy/Enterprise Discourse Bounds in Business Talk." (2016). *Articles*. 134.  
<https://arrow.tudublin.ie/buschmarart/134>

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**Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)**

**Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome) : Strategy/Enterprise discourse bounds in business talk.**

**Dr. Brendan K O'ROURKE,**

**College of Business Lecturer**

**Chair and Director of Business, Society & Sustainability DIT Research Centre**

**<http://www.dit.ie/bssrc/>**

**Co-Founder and Co-Chair Discourse Analysis Group**

**<http://www.dit.ie/researchandenterprise/researchgroups/dag/>**

**Room 3-043, School of Marketing, College of Business, Dublin Institute of**

**Technology, Aungier St., Dublin D02 HW71,**

**IRELAND. Tel. +353-1-4027097**

**Email [Brendan.Orourke@DiT.ie](mailto:Brendan.Orourke@DiT.ie)**

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## **Abstract**

Corporate strategy emerged as large non-owner managed firms became economically important (Knights and Morgan, 1991). Strategy became the substitute for the earlier enterprise discourse, which depended on the dominance, in entrepreneurial capitalism, of owner-managed firms. The discourses of strategy and enterprise developed as separate academic areas and as logics of two very different economic domains. From the late 1970s however, large organizations (Kanter, 1983:27) and governments have been urged to be more entrepreneurial (Klein *et al.*, 2010; Osborne and Gaebler, 1993). Meanwhile, small firms were encouraged to be more strategic (Carr, 2000). This article looks at evidence from small owner-managed firms to examine how strategy and enterprise discourse are related in the talk of practitioners, arguing that are good reasons to view them as a single integrated entity, bound together by some commonalities but more importantly by paired opposites reminiscent of ideological dilemmas (Billig *et al.*, 1988).

Key words strategy, enterprise, discourse, dilemma.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The rise of the great corporation, the separation of its management from its ownership and the recognition that controlling these large corporations requires the visible hand of the professional manager (Chandler, 1977) are conditions that lie at the very origin of corporate strategy (Knights and Morgan, 1991:258). Enterprise discourse had been the way to talk about organizations in the age of entrepreneurial capitalism, for the age of managerial capitalism strategy discourse offered the alternative that was needed to talk about the non-owner managerially controlled organization which had risen to such prominence (O'Rourke,

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2010;2014). Strategy and enterprise were alternatives to be used in very different contexts: they were, to borrow Gould's (1997) metaphor, two distinct and non-overlapping magisteria.

Yet since the loss of faith in strategic planning in 1970s, this bipolar application of these models of economic governance, whereby large organizations were subject to the logic of strategy and smaller firms are subject to the logic of enterprise, has been fused and confused. Large organizations, including public ones, have been urged to become more entrepreneurial (Klein *et al.*, 2010; Osborne and Gaebler, 1993). Small firms, meanwhile, have been the subject of policy that has required them to be more strategic (Carr, 2000). Enterprise and strategy no longer have clearly separate domains. Yet the academic disciplines of enterprise and strategy have generally remained quite distinct as evidenced by the exceptional nature of occasions when they are drawn together (Baden-Fuller, 1995; Ireland *et al.*, 2003 ).

The question arises as to what is now the nature of the relationship between strategy and enterprise. This is important not only to understand how these academic fields are related in practice but because discourses do not merely describe but constitute subjects and objects (Ezzamel and Willmott, 2004:45). This article therefore addresses the relationship between strategy and enterprise discourse. It does this by next looking at the academic literature on the features, both shared and individual of these discourses. This is followed by outlining the context in which the empirical relationship between strategy and enterprise discourse is investigated in this work. Some data is then reported on with illustrative interview extracts interpreted in detail. This interpretation gives rise to a metaphor for understanding of the interaction of strategy and enterprise discourses. The implications of this metaphor for study of strategy and enterprise are then discussed in the conclusions.

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## **THE DISCOURSES OF STRATEGY AND ENTERPRISE**

### **Characteristics of strategy discourse**

A key characteristic of strategy discourse is its holistic and integrative nature. Hendry (2000:970) notes: ‘Strategic discourses are characterized by a generality that is absent from discourses associated with the functional areas of management ...’ while Lilley (2001: 75) points to the holistic nature of strategy. This holistic view means that strategy ‘can identify, formulate and communicate one stable common goal that the entire organization should reach’ (Clegg *et al.*, 2004:24).

Strategy’s holistic view then enables a whole organization to be treated and directed as one. Strategy stresses direction (Samra-Fredericks, 2003), rule-following (Ansoff, 1968:106), and hopes to steady the organization through stormy waters. Since strategy is about setting direction for the whole organization there must be a certain passivity in the organization (Clegg *et al.*, 2004:22). If the organization is portrayed as passive in its willingness to be shaped by strategy, then strategy and those who wield it are powerful. Strategy discourse is masterful in the sense that it implies an active, powerful, intentional masculine agent who drives and shapes the world (Knights and Morgan, 1991:267; Lilley, 2001:73).

From the literature on strategy discourse, it quickly becomes apparent that strategists’ use of power must be rationalized and explained. Accountability is a key feature of this discourse, for as Knights and Morgan (1991:258) stress strategy discourse as emerging to fill a gap where ‘... a discursive space has opened up – the corporation has to explain what it is doing and why it is doing it.’ This need to justify and account to others shows that strategy is not an individualized affair, but rather its logic has the collective and the corporate at its centre (Crouch and Basch,

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1997). Strategy, in order to act as a discourse that can explain professional management action, must – at least in its traditional forms – make the most of ‘its roots in rationalist reference points (i.e. logic, objectivity, technique) and abstractions (i.e. modeling, simplification)’ (Grandy and Mills, 2004: 1157). Strategy’s language is therefore analytical in nature (Crouch and Basch, 1997). Knights and Morgan (1991:263) see strategy as having the effect of allowing management to rationalize both success and failure so that ‘...everything is explicable in the end’.

Strategy’s imperative to explain drives an attempt to make uncertainty calculable. Strategy is ‘... the means of transforming uncertainties in the environment into calculable risks’ (Knights and Morgan 1991:270). From the start this activity of ‘attaching some estimate or risk to the discernible alternatives’ (Andrews 1997 [1971]: 53) has been recognized as a key to the logic of strategy.

Optimism seems, too, to be central to strategy discourse. Grandy and Mills (2004: 1157-1158) point out that there is ‘... the “grand narrative of progress” that is inherent within mainstream accounts of strategy ... with the prime purpose of this discourse serving as a means to justify...’ the actions of managers. This optimistic element of strategy discourse can function in strategists’ accounts of their stewardship of organizations, evidenced, for example, in the ‘Pollyanna effect’ in company reports following disappointing company performance (Rutherford 2005).

To maintain optimism, accountability and masterfulness the strategist must be dedicated and determined. Porter (1996:77) talks of the strategist being subject to ‘constant pressures to compromise, relax trade-offs, and emulate rivals’. While disagreeing with Porter on many issues, Mintzberg (1973:29) characterizes the life of the manager as one of ‘Much work at unrelenting pace’ and it is this typical manager who, he observed, ‘... juggled a large number of strategic

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issues; [and it is] the manager not the group [that] made the strategic decisions’ (Mintzberg 1973:257). The strategist must be dedicated enough to get up and act, if not feel, like a strategy machine (Clegg *et al.*, 2004).

### **Characteristics of enterprise discourse**

Enterprise discourse shares some features with strategy discourse. Like strategy, enterprise discourse is holistic, concerned as it is with expressing an overall grasp of the situation. Kanter (1983:27) ‘found that the entrepreneurial spirit producing innovation is associated with a particular way of approaching problems that I call “integrative”.’ Enterprise is also as masterful as strategy:

The entrepreneurial myth remains resolutely male. The entrepreneur is still the active seducer, aggressor, pursuer, rather than an object of affection or action. He bridges worlds, bends time with an ‘unquantifiable, limitless’ impact on the world around him.

(Nicholson and Anderson, 2005:161)

In common with the rest of business discourse, including strategy, enterprise discourse is optimistic and progressive (Nelson, 2000). Enterprise discourse demands dedication from those positioned as entrepreneurs. According to Bygrave (2004:5-6), most entrepreneurs ‘are totally dedicated to their business, sometimes at considerable cost to their relationships with friends and families. They work tirelessly’.

There are also differences between the features of enterprise and strategy discourses. In enterprise discourse there is stress on the unaccountable individual and the independent pursuit of that particular person’s goals (Hendry, 2004:55). This contrasts with the collective and corporate nature of strategy discussed above. The unaccountable nature of the entrepreneur is a clear clash

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with strategy's stress on accountability. Enterprise has, in place of accountability, 'the values of individualism, personal achievement, ambition, striving for excellence, effort, hard work and the assumption of personal responsibility for actions' (Chell, 2007: 8). Enterprise discourse ties in with a broader ethic '... of the enterprising self: work on yourself, improve the quality of your life, emancipate your true self, eliminate dependency, release your potential' (Rose, 1992:152-153). For many exponents of enterprise, it is adherence to the kind of planning inherent in the corporate strategy of large centralized organizations that is the road to evil from which individualized entrepreneurial decision-making provides the escape (Hayek, 1986 [1944]).

Where strategy stabilizes and gives overall direction to the organization, enterprise disrupts and destroys. For Schumpeter (1976 [1942]), enterprise is the creative wave so destructive of those who wish for a quiet life of no change. A key enterprising attribute expected of all entrepreneurs seems to be a drive towards business growth (Landström and Sexton, 2000:441). Even small-business proprietors who sacrifice the growth of the firm for an easy life may well be shorn of their entrepreneurial identity: 'Those who choose a model of "small and stable business" (called trundlers) over a model of "fast growth business" (called gazelles) are less likely to be recognized and accepted as entrepreneurs' (Lewis and Llewellyn, 2004:7). Though strategy favours growth, it is about handling such change and managing, in a rational and explicable way, the risks involved. Enterprise is about pushing beyond the comfort zone of competence, into uncertainty: 'Entrepreneurs – and entrepreneurial organizations – always operate at the edge of their competence, focusing more of their resources on what they do not yet know (e.g. investment in R & D) than on controlling what they already know' (Kanter, 1983:27). In contrast to the staid analytical control of strategy, enterprise can be playful and creative (Hjorth, 2002).

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## **The unclear relationship between strategy and enterprise discourses**

While there seems to be much agreement in the literature on the features of enterprise and strategy as individual discourses, there is less agreement on how they interrelate. Knights and Morgan (1991: 260) clearly contrast enterprise and strategy discourse when they write: ‘... managers may cling to some sort of entrepreneurial ideology in which conformity to the “top down” demands of a strategic plan are anathema.’ Those promoting enterprise in large organizations do seem to agree that this implies a revolution in the traditional strategic control of organizations (Kanter, 1983; Osborne and Gaebler, 1993). On the other hand, enterprise and strategic discourses do seem at times to go together (Carr, 2000). Perhaps enterprise incorporates strategy as an element of it, as Carr (2000:99) seems to suggest. Alternatively, perhaps it is strategy that can encompass all the features of enterprise: Heracleous (2003) argues strategy can become creative. Perhaps the combination of enterprise and strategy can become something new that is a narrower version of both (Armstrong, 2005:217).

There is, therefore, a variety of views on the relationship between strategy and enterprise discourse. *A priori* it seems possible that they overlap harmoniously in a coherent and consistent ideology. It is also possible that one might drive out the other, with perhaps one of the discourses seen as in error, as irrelevant or merely as a straw man which shows the superiority of the other. It is possible that one discourse might be used to incorporate the other. There are numerous possibilities and this research aims to carefully examine the discourse material chosen so as to add to knowledge on this issue. The question then is how are the discourses of strategy and enterprise used in relation to each other in the talk of practitioners?

## **THE EMPIRICAL CONTEXT OF THIS DISCOURSE ANALYTICAL STUDY**

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A suitable context in which to analyze practitioner use of strategy and enterprise discourses and the how they might be interrelate can be found in form of the owner-managed small young firms of the business magazine sector in late celtic-tiger Ireland. Whereas young small firms offer a context where the original condition (non-owner management) for the emergence of strategic discourse is less likely to be present, small-firm owner managers are likely, from a rationalist perspective, to seek the results that strategy promises. Although enterprise has drifted far from its mythical origins in the discussion of firm formation, the small and young firm remains central to enterprise discourse. Small and young firms are therefore also a likely source of enterprise discourse. Ireland too provides an interesting site, given the influence of both Anglo-American and more mainland European influences on its business practices. The general business magazine is a suitable sector for a number of reasons. In the first place the magazine industry is particularly strategically challenging as it faces great technological change Cox and Mowatt (2008), a complex supply chain (Picard, 1989) and a particular dependence on the macroeconomic environment (Picard, 2001). Secondly, the magazine sector is thought to be a particularly entrepreneurial environment (Commission of the European Communities, 2005:73). The third reason to chose the sector is the likely familiarity, with the strategy and enterprise discourses of those involved with business magazines: as business magazines are a key distributor of business discourses (Van der Wurff, 2005:143).

Researcher-involved interviews were chosen to generate the empirical material. An interview is more of a complete interaction, a single event that is discrete and bounded in time than other interactions. Though appropriately critiqued as over-used and frequently misused method (Atkinson and Silverman ,1997), more recently the researcher-involved interview has been viewed more favourably (O'Rourke and Pitt, 2007; Ten Have, 2002). The trick to the use of

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the researcher-involved interview in discourse analysis is to harness the insight that ‘... discursive mediation should not be viewed as a source of contamination but rather as a crucial source of insights into both interviewing processes and the social worlds they seek to document’ (Briggs, 2003: 496). Both researched and researcher know a lot about the nature of the interview and how to use it. That is the silver lining to Atkinson and Silverman’s (1997) interview society. If an interviewee wishes to say a number of things, all of which depend on each other, the interviewee has a reasonable idea of the time available to balance out the intended discourse. Such completeness in interaction is particularly useful in examining at the relationship between two discourses.

From the variety of discourse analytical approaches a method most appropriate to this question is in the tradition of Potter and Wetherell (1987), Cohen *et al.* (2004) and others who combine an attention to the detailed nature of interactive data with a sensitivity to the wider context to build data-constrained interpretations.

### **EMPIRICAL STRATEGY/ENTERPRISE TALK**

#### **An overview of the data**

In late celtic-tiger Ireland (2000-2007) there were 19 publishers involved in general business magazines. These 19 companies were evaluated, using the criteria of length of time the publisher was involved with particular titles and the relevance of their publications to a broad management readership in Ireland. Those companies aged over five years and those whose publications targeted specialist audiences were excluded. This left six companies for further analysis.

Company websites, annual accounts, media coverage and industry informants were consulted in an effort to understand the industry. Audio recordings of 13 interactions with key individuals involved in the six companies were examined. For further analysis only the first

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formal research-provoked interviews with each company's 'lead entrepreneur' (Ensley *et al.*, 2000) were chosen. Only formal interviews were used as they gave a greater opportunity for the interviewee to control the overall impression created. Just the first of the formal interviews were selected for analysis because where second formal interviews were carried out, their examination suggested they did not add much to the potential for further relevant analysis. The 'lead entrepreneur' of each firm was selected because strategy is the language of leaders (Clegg *et al.*, 2004, p.23) and because in other interviews the 'lead entrepreneur' was frequently deferred to. All the 'lead entrepreneurs' had been founders, were the biggest shareholders in the company, were the highest ranking managers of the organizations concerned and, using other interviews as a resource, were spoken of as the leader or the boss.

The processes above reduced the interviews down to six. Such a focused set of empirical material cannot claim to tell us much about the distribution of discourses in any population general enough to be of enduring interest. However this data can demonstrate *how* strategy and enterprise discourse are used in these interactions. Furthermore the focused nature of the data means that the interpretation offered here has been disciplined by the confined nature of data, as with this limited data it is hard to ignore bits of data that challenged the coherence of any proposed interpretations.

### **The interpretation**

Across these interviews there was a lot of variability in the use of enterprise and strategy discourse, for example in how these discourses were used in relation to other discourses such as those of being a professional. More relevant here was the way in which the enterprise and strategy discourses seemed to act in concert, in particular how the rising of strategy discourse

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always seemed to be balanced by a subsequent decline in that discourse together with a compensating rise in enterprise discourse, and vice versa. Below this pattern is illustrated, here of how an initial rise of enterprise discourse is followed by a rise of strategy discourse to replace it. The data is more extensively detailed in [A reference to a 2009 work available through the internet is excluded to facilitate blind review of this article]. The various symbols in the transcript are based on the Jeffersonian transcription often used in discourse analysis (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). The specific meanings attached to the symbols here are specified in Appendix A.

The interviewee here called, Una is the founder and owner of a small publishing business magazine, which was about four years old at the time. An email sent to Una prior to the interview declared that the research was ‘on strategic thinking’ that involved ‘unstructured interviews with directors of small to medium-sized enterprises.’ The interviewee lasted a total of 76 minutes and involved over 700 turns.

Extract I presents a section in the interview where enterprise talk is dominant.

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INSERT EXTRACT I ABOUT HERE  
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Una attributes the start of her company (here named TronCom) to her being ‘given contact management software to play with’ (Turn 34). This not only signals the creative, playful element of enterprise talk (Hjorth, 2002: 65) but also illustrates Una’s ability in being so casually

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able to grasp such technological skills. It also portrays an element of luck that makes Una's performance as interviewee authentic (O'Rourke and Pitt, 2007). In Turn 39, in an effort to give some space for Una to discuss any difficulties that she might have encountered in becoming a manager, the researcher inadvertently but usefully stimulates Una to point out how autonomous she has been in her career when she declares : 'I was] never of an employee anywhere, I was always on my own' (Turn 40). This is quite an assertive correction by Una: her statement starts before the interviewer's turn finishes and she focuses on correcting the error which had been stated in any case in quite a mitigated way ('You had been a kind of employ- employee if you like, you were working as a journalist', Turn 39). Here, Una is asserting an autonomy of the sort associated with enterprise (Down, 2006). The assertive way this is done is somewhat in tension with the passive position of being an interviewee (O'Rourke and Pitt, 2007), and the fact that Una goes to the effort of overturning this norm of passivity shows the importance of this illustration of her autonomy.

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INSERT EXTRACT II ABOUT HERE  
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The interaction shown in Extract II above follows directly from interaction of Extract I. Returning to the more passive role of the interview Una addresses the question asked by the researcher in Turn 39 (Extract I) and acknowledges as new the increase in responsibility that came with having her own company: 'but what did feel strange was hiring another journalist to write stuff for me, for my own project because I had been used to hiring freelancers to write for

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other publications that I was editing (...) as a freelance editor but what it was actually a journalist writing stuff for me' (Turn 46). The fact of it being her company seems to make it more of her 'own project' – she stresses her control (note how she emphasizes and repeats 'me') – than talk of her roles as editor working for other companies. Turn 48 continues this focus on Una's personal concerns and thinking with continued use of 'I', 'me' and 'myself' as would be expected in enterprise talk (Hendry, 2004:55). In Turn 48, Una also describes her 'brain wave': Clearly a creative disruption typical of enterprise talk (Schumpeter, 1976 [1942]). As Turn 48 draws a close and Una's entrepreneurial credentials have been well established, there is some disfluency in 'I was writ I was writing' and in ' a lot of eh' as more strategy language is introduced: 'analyst reports' and 'internet strategy' (Grandy and Mills, 2004: 1157).

Extract III follows almost immediately after Extract II with only ten short turns (excluded from presentation to avoid identification) separating the extracts but the shift from enterprise to strategy talk is confirmed.

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INSERT EXTRACT III ABOUT HERE  
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In Turn 60 strategy talk continues to rise while enterprise talk has gone down, as Una declares: 'But from the very beginning I want to make clear that, well what TronCom does is we publish a series of publications under our brand and under our client's brand' (Turn 60). Here the company is very much emphasized as a separate corporate entity from Una the individual: the language moves from 'I' to 'We', from 'my project' to 'our brand'. The company is referred to as a separate corporate entity: 'what TronCom does is' (Turn 60) and it possesses 'divisions' (Turn

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66). This reification of the company is what would expect from a strategy discourse that developed to provide legitimization for the professional manager (Knights and Morgan, 1991). By using this more strategic language, Una is balancing the personal and individualized way in which the company that had been discussed in the earlier entrepreneurial talk of Extract I and Extract II. Una does this by portraying here the more formal strategic aspect of the company where some things were clear ‘from the very beginning’ (note that this phrase is used both in Turn 60 and in Turn 66) and where the impersonal corporation is to the fore.

The up and down pattern of enterprise discourse being replaced by strategy discourse (or in other instances vice-versa) evident in these extracts from the interview with Una was typical of Una’s interview in general, and of the other interviews analyzed in this study.

### **A modest generalization**

Taking account of the particular national, sectoral, interactional and chronological context in which these interviews were conducted [This reference to a 2009 work available through the internet is excluded to facilitate blind review of this article] it is possible to suggest a model, to serve as a modest generalization (Payne and Williams, 2005), of how enterprise and strategy discourses are used by small-firm owner-managers. This model is presented in Figure 1.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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Figure 1 is designed to portray Strategy/Enterprise discourse as operating in a way analogous to a seesaw. The figure gives a lateral view of the basic seesaw structure. The play of the seesaw involves one child pushing up and thus the opposite child going down, followed by

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the action of gravity and of the opposite child taking a turn in pushing up and the first child being pushed down. Much amusement can be had in the resulting action-reaction cycle. The seesaw provides a good metaphor for the way elements of Strategy/Enterprise discourse were found to operate in this research: when particular elements of enterprise discourse were raised in an interviewee's talk, they would then decline to be replaced by the raising of a matching 'opposite' of strategy discourse. As with the seesaw, strategy and enterprise discourses, even when going in opposite directions, seem to operate as part of the same structure. The enterprise and strategy discourses certainly share some elements in common, which are portrayed in Figure 1 as being analogous to the base that forms the triangular base of the seesaw. However, there are also elements of the strategy and enterprise discourses that seem, like the seesaw, to move in opposite directions, and invoke their opposite in response.

Note how the seesaw works as an analogy better than, say, an elastic band: the response of a rise in enterprise talk is not to snap back into shape but rather to evoke an almost opposite response in the strategy pole. The precarious nature of the seesaw also highlights the fact that the roles that small-firm owners are often asked to play can result in them experiencing discomfort if these roles are not kept in the required balance. Such owner-managers can find themselves like a child hitting the ground hard, then being flung into the air (with the accompanying exhilarating and/or frightening feelings and the danger of a rough landing) if the work is applied in an unbalanced way.

While the poles of the seesaw are where all the action happens, the base as the fulcrum plays a vital role. So it is with Strategy/Enterprise discourse. Since the up and down between the enterprise and strategy poles generates the discourse, it is all down to the firm foundation of the

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common elements of Strategy/Enterprise that have been built and are further secured during the interaction.

The seesaw analogy is also useful in that it highlights that to keep the whole Strategy/Enterprise seesaw moving requires work on both sides. This work can result in mere amusement, as in the seesaw as a plaything. However, the Strategy/Enterprise seesaw is more like those seesaws that are put to work converting the up-down forces generated by the activity at their poles to drill wells, pump water and generate electricity. The work of the Strategy/Enterprise seesaw that can be seen in the detailed analysis of the interviews included the generation of plausible roles for owner-managers; the positioning of employees, other directors and outsiders in relations with the owner-manager; the justification of value distribution, and the representation of the societal function of the firm concerned.

There are, of course, ways in which the Strategy/Enterprise seesaw is not like a seesaw. Indeed the machine metaphor of the seesaw is somewhat at odds with the general metaphor at work in discourse analysis. In contrast to the seesaw, each interviewer often provided the work required at both ends of the Strategy/Enterprise pole, alternating between ends during the interview. At times the researcher provided counterweight, but generally the up-and-down movement was between elements of the talk rather than between individuals. The seesaw analogy also breaks down in so far as the individual elements that make up the poles of enterprise and strategy seem to have links to particular elements in their polar opposite. For example, talk of risk-managing seems to provoke not only enterprise talk in general but, of risk-taking in particular as this seems to be its particular polar opposite.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

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This work contributes by making linkages between the macro-level analysis of strategy discourse and its use by owner-managers of young, small-firms. At the macro-level, strategy discourses have been subject to some studies of both its historical emergence and its societal effects (for example Knights and Morgan, 1991). By contributing to the link between macro (also known as big ‘D’ ) and micro (also known as small ‘d’ ) discourses in both strategy and enterprise by drawing on a detailed empirical examination of micro discourses this work answers the call for ‘carefully thinking through discursive material in relation to its production before turning discourses into Discourse’ (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000: 1144). In this way it adds to a growing body of work on the micro discourses of strategy (Ezzamel and Willmott, 2008; Kohtamäki *et al.*, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2004; Vaara *et al.*, 2004)

The work here also contributes by expanding our understanding of the link between the operation of strategy discourse and that of enterprise discourse. Barry and Elmes (1997: 430) remark: ‘... it seems that entrepreneurs and senior executives tell very different tales’. However, in this limited sample, small-firm owner managers who are entrepreneurs incorporated the strategy discourse that originally emerged for big-firm senior executives, into their Strategy/Enterprise talk. Thus this work makes it clear that it is profitable to view strategy and enterprise as part of a single discourse. Clearly this was evidenced in this work in the context of small firms, but, given the increased stress on enterprise in larger organizations, the lesson might be extended.

The notion of the ideological dilemma (Billig *et al.*, 1988) is central to this understanding of, Strategy/Enterprise as a dichotomous unity. The importance of dilemmas and paradoxes is not unknown in the discussion of strategy. Quinn (1988: xv) attempted to move both management practitioners and academics ‘... closer to an understanding of the paradoxical dynamics that

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underlie effectiveness, mastery, and excellence’. Poole and van de Ven (1989) outlined the ways in which researchers could manage paradoxes to enhance their theories. Pitt (1998) examined the dilemmas at the heart of particular personal theories of action. This work supports Pitt and others, in their celebration of paradoxes. However, there are differences in the way dilemmas are seen to work here. For example, the dilemmas here are not, in contrast to Pitt’s, seen as ‘... what the individual sees as a logical and intractable opposition ...’ (Pitt, 1998: 397). The importance of the insight that individual thinking may be characterized by polar opposites (Kelly, 1963) is not disputed. However what is highlighted here is the constructive work done through dilemmas available as part of the socially available discourses of strategy and enterprise. While the individuals used the dilemmas highlighted in their talk, these dilemmas were treated less as core personal beliefs of the individual than as the up and down rhythm that moved the talk along. In particular, what this work illustrates is Billig’s insight about the productive power of dilemmas in a discourse: ‘Without contrary themes, individuals could neither puzzle over their social worlds nor experience dilemmas. And without this, so much thought would be impossible’, (Billig *et al.*, 1988: 2).

Whereas tensions between business discourse may weaken their power in other contexts (McCabe, 2008) the dilemmatic nature of Strategy/Enterprise discourse, as observed in its operation in the empirical encounters of this research, facilitates its use in generating talk that the interviewees used to achieve so many effects. The idea of a business discourse deriving strength from its dilemmatic or paradoxical nature, in the way enterprise-discourse has been seen to do in this research, has been raised by some scholars. Oswick *et al.* (2002) point to how ‘oppositional dyad constructs’ such as ‘loose-tight’ structures and ‘flexible specialization’ are successful because they have the power to allow new ways of thinking in the face of conventional wisdom.

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This article adds to our understanding of how a discourse structured like Strategy/Enterprise discourse allows its users to be creative while simultaneously constraining those users within the discourse that they to some extent reinforce by using. Cohen and Musson (2000:46) argue that to maintain its vitality and dynamism ‘...the discourse of enterprise (and any other discourse, for that matter) must not be seen as unitary, but as diverse and changeable’. This article adds to Cohen and Musson’s (2000) insight by showing that some of the vitality of enterprise discourse may be drawn from the tensions that some of its elements have with polar opposites in strategy discourse. The dilemmatic structure of the Strategy/Enterprise discourse is what allows its subtle application and variation while preserving the overall structure. This partly answers calls for further studies of how the discourse of strategy operates ideologically and persists while other discourses fall out of fashion, since this work makes available the understanding of strategy discourse as part of a dilemmatic pairing with enterprise discourse (Thomas, 1998). There is no suggestion that humans can never escape a discourse that is structured as a dilemma. Rather, the claim is merely that in using such a discourse it is often easier to limit one’s creativity within the space bounded by its dilemmas. Talking about food in terms of sweetness and bitterness and of saltiness and sourness may mean there so much variation can be talked of that there may be no time to go outside the bounds of such attributes for a mention of *umami*, of spiciness, of colour, of calorific value or of fragrance.

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## APPENDIX A: THE JEFFERSON-STYLE TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION USED

Symbol            Meaning

.            A stopping fall in tone firmly understood as a full stop

,            A brief pause understood as a comma

-            Indicates a sudden stop understood as breaking with previous sense

(.)          A brief but noticeable pause.

(#)          A timed pause where # is the number of seconds

↓            A falling tone

?            A rising inflection understood as a question

↑            A rising inflection not understood as a question

>text<      enclosed speech was delivered more quickly than usual

<text>      enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual

...          Deliberated excluded talk within a turn

[text]      Square brackets enclose overlapping speech

ALL CAPS    Shouted or increased-volume speech

°text°      Enclosed speech is noticeably softer than surrounding

Underlined text      Speaker is stressing the underlined speech.

( text )      Enclosed is transcriber's best guess of unclear speech.

(( text ))    Enclosed is a report of non-verbal activity, deliberate replacement of speech, or an inserted clarification.

Note This transcription notation is based on the notation developed by Gail Jefferson as described in Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

## **Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)**

EXTRACT I From an interview between Una and Researcher

34 Una: ... I was given some contact management software to play with by a friend of mine and it was a revelation to me at that time that you could put together a web site and not have to handwrite every page

35 Researcher: Yeah sure.

36 Una: that it would populate an archive and sort things and um, you know, have a rolling headlines on the

37 Researcher: Ah okay

38 Una: front page and everything. Um so that's how I started with TronCom and the business kind of

39 Researcher: Yeah and did that, was that an intimidating start for you? You had been a kind of employ- employee if you like, you were working as a journalist and you were going into being a journalist entrepreneur or manager or whatever you, business person(.) [was that

40 Una: I was] never of an employee anywhere, I was always on my own.

41 Researcher: Okay.

**Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)**

Source: Transcript from 76-minute interview between ‘Una’ and Researcher [A reference is to a 2009 work available through the internet is excluded to facilitate blind review of this article].

## **Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)**

EXTRACT II From an interview between Una and Researcher

42 Una: Um and I, and I found that I worked well on my own and I didn't feel isolated working at home other some freelancers do

43 Researcher: Uh-huh.

44 Una: but what did feel strange was hiring another journalist to write stuff for me, for my own project because I had been used to hiring freelancers to write for other publications that I was editing

45 Researcher: Mm.

46 Una: as a freelance editor but what it was actually a journalist writing stuff for me

47 Researcher: Mm.

48 Una: I remember having a real, having just this brainwave thinking if the website is growing, people are looking for more news on the website and I have some people who are willing to buy this newsfeed from me, but I can't write it all myself. At the same time I was writ I was writing a lot of eh analyst reports for companies on their internet strategy

49 Researcher: Right, yeah.

**Source:** Transcript from 76-minute interview between 'Una' and Researcher [A reference is to a 2009 work available through the internet is excluded to facilitate blind review of this article].

**Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)**

**Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)**

## Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)

EXTRACT III From an interview between Una and Researcher

60 Una: But from the very beginning I want to make clear that, well what TronCom does is we publish a series of publications under our brand and under our clients' brand. So going back to that original consulting part of TronCom where I was writing strategy reports for people I was also doing one of the first email newsletters for a company in Ireland, for ((a prominent Irish company)), I was doing a printed publication about internet banking for (( a prominent Irish bank)), all that

. [corporate

61 Researcher: so they were licensing] the content?

62 Una: No - all original content for those people

63 Researcher: Okay.

64 Una: so corporate publications.

65 Researcher: Okay.

66 Una: From the very beginning TronCom has had those two divisions. We've- essentially we publish and we publish things under our own brand or under our clients' brands so those two strands have all, always moved along together.

**Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)**

Source: Transcript from 76-minute interview between ‘Una’ and Researcher [A reference is to a 2009 work available through the internet is excluded to facilitate blind review of this article].

**Working Paper (Please do not quote without permission – comments welcome)**

**FIGURE 2 A see-saw model of strategy/enterprise discourse**

