Article

As in the Composition of a Fugue:
Capturing the Flow of Strategic Business Activities

Mona Ericson
Jönköping International Business School
Jönköping, Sweden

Abstract

Drawing inspiration from classical music, the author introduces in this article a musical metaphor, the fugue, to capture a flow of strategic activities, highlighting the motion aspect. This particular metaphor connotes dynamism, constituted in themes that are repeated, expanded, and varied through human voices and their communication. By giving voice to people who share and participate in globalization, internationalization, and customization related to the efforts of a company to grow continuously, elevating movements inherent in these activities, a fugue is composed. As argued in the article, there is potential in "musicking" interpretation of human activity. The fugue metaphor could assist our efforts to methodologize strategy process as dynamic multidirection and multivoice construct. While directing more attention to a musical, arts-based form of communicating research, we could be able to listen more carefully to the moves inherent in a flow of human activity.

Keywords: musical metaphor, movement, voice, flow, Bach

Author's note: The names of the people referred to in this article are used with their permission.

Introduction

Noticeably lacking in strategy process research is an alternative that devises a way of deepening our understanding of continuous and inseparable streams of past- and future-oriented activities conveyed by human voices. Strategy process theory is mainly based on "an explanation of how and why an organizational entity changes and develops" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p. 512). Process denotes change, and explanations of change mostly account for organizational strategies and organizational moves. The anthropomorphized organization acts as a willful and purposeful entity (Hambrick, 2004) with limited attention directed to individual strategic actors and the moves inherent in the activities they engage in. Explanations mainly derive from phase-by-phase analyses, underlying which are concepts of linear and causal relationships (Van de Ven, 1992). The irreversibility characteristic of time (Ghemawat, 1991) is also emphasized in relation to path dependency, which assumes future strategic choices of an organization to be shaped by the path the organization "travels" over time (Booth, 2003). Path dependency suggests a process perspective that elevates the evolutionary and systemic nature of an organization's life (Barnett & Burgelman, 1996; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) but does not allow for a closer look at the individual level. Path dependency has become simplified by the "history matters mantra," as Lamberg and Parvinen (2003) have remarked.

The strategy process is future oriented (Legge, 2003) with the "looming presence of the heavy hand of the past" (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 341) locking in the behavior of an organization. The past and the emerging future are shaped by antecedent conditions largely ignorant of the occurrence of past- and future-oriented movements and their simultaneity in time. When we empirically shift our focus away from the organizational level, where a panoramic view merely encompasses linear phases and milestones in the organization's life, a more complex picture emerges, with human activities suggesting a nonlinear extension in time. This has implications for our conceptualization of process.

There is a need to complement existent strategy process research by directing attention to the individual level and describing activities and movements that constitute a process. Drawing inspiration from classical music, in this paper I will introduce a musical metaphor—the fugue—to capture a flow of strategic activities, highlighting the motion aspect. The fugue is an arts-based form of communication with the potential to provide a vocabulary through which an increased understanding of processual dynamics with regard to flow and movement can be gained. My sincere interest in and my lived experience of classical music has made me aware of the richness of the fugal form for communicating dynamics. As with Nachmanovitch (1990), "Each piece of music we play, each dance, each drawing, each episode of life, reflects our own mind back at us, complete with all its imperfections" (p. 25).

Metaphors, commonly employed in organization and management theory, primarily spur theoretical advances. As Daneke (1997) has pointed out, "A significant methodological shift usually awaits a good deal more proof in the pudding, as it were" Metaphors create valuable insights into different phenomena (Abel & Sementelli, 2004; Morgan, 1997) while mainly theorizing a way of constructing new meaning through an interactive process of "seeing-as" (Cornelissen, Kofouros, & Lock, 2005).

The metaphorical use of music has developed in relation to the role and the impact music has in work environments (Prichard, Korczynski, & Elmes, 2007). In studies more concerned with methodology, rock music has been used for understanding work and organization (Rhodes, 2007), rap and hip-hop for exploring entrepreneurship (Sköld & Rehn, 2007), and jazz for legitimating experimentation that managers tend to engage in when faced with unstructured and ambiguous

problems (Barrett, 1998). Especially the jazz metaphor conveys a sense of motion, taking into account four hierarchical levels: interpretation, embellishment, variation, and improvisation. Interpretation means keeping to the plan, whereas embellishment suggests rephrasing the plan. Variation allows for unplanned actions, and improvisation, reached at the fourth level, implies a radical deviation from the original plan (Weick, 1998). Improvisation, depicted as a form of "planned serendipity," permits creativity and inspiration (Mirvis, 1998).

A commonly shared definition of improvisation is one that focuses on the temporal distance between conception and execution (Cuhna, Cuhna, & Kamoche, 1999). In the organizational context, improvisation presupposes a set of resources on which variation can be built (Orlikowski & Hofman, 1997; Weick, 1998). It both departs from the organization's current routines and knowledge and builds on the routines and the knowledge, as Cuhna et al. have remarked. Apparently, improvisation proposes one type of movement, namely a movement of deviation from original plans, current routines, and knowledge. As Peplowski (1998) asserted, "In jazz music we are always deliberately painting ourselves into corners just to get out of them" (p. 560).

The fugue metaphor as applied here to the strategy process does not direct the interest specifically to improvisation. As opposed to the jazz metaphor, it is not concerned with the identification of a point of departure from original plans, current routines, and knowledge. In the world of practice referred to in the article, it cannot be denied, though, that there could be many occasions for improvisation, in particular with regard to the founder of the business and the entrepreneurial activities he immersed himself in when faced with different challenges. Improvisational processes permeate entrepreneurial activity, according to Baker, Miner, and Eesley (2003), who sees the founding process representing "an exceptionally promising context in which to study the potential occurrence of strategic improvisation" (p. 256). The empirical material drawn on in this article places the emphasis on more recent activities, with little emphasis on entrepreneurial activity and on deviations from current strategy and business concept. There is hardly room for improvisation when activities performed by individuals are governed by a certain strategic course outlined by top management. Deviation is limited when top managers deliberately call for the development of a concept that meets the customers' specific needs and requirements. Restrictions in terms of customer needs and requirements are imposed on practice, hindering the practitioner's engagement in spontaneous activities and creating new practice on the spot. "Improvisation involves playing extemporaneously without a script. Music is composed and performed simultaneously with no rehearsal or chance to work out the ideas in advance. Playing on the spur of the moment means that good improvisers are risk takers," as Barrett (1998, p. 283) purported. Endeavoring to realize a business concept requires of managers and employees to comply with reliable guides for present and future actions.

Using the fugue metaphor, with its strong connotations to motion and variation, it is possible to chisel out both past- and future-oriented movements inherent in streams of strategic activities. Rather than emerging from hierarchical levels of interpretation, embellishment, variation, and improvisation, the fugal process emerges from multiple human voices constituting an exposition passage, which is followed by passages that develop and return to the theme introduced in the exposition passage (Mann, 1917/1987). Fugue, which literally means "flight," originates in a theme defined as "a recognizable entity" that can be repeated and varied in the course of a process (Drabkin, 1980). In a composition by Bach (1685-1750) fugue denotes the interweaving of themes that are played out in to-and-fro movements of alternating voices that are chasing, imitating, and answering each other.

In the following, I direct the reader's interest to the current state of strategy process research, briefly presenting how the strategy process is looked at from various perspectives and what these

perspectives have in common.[1] I then illustrate empirically a flow of activities associated with the strategic issue of business growth. The procedure for generating the empirical material is also presented and the human voices accessed in the material are introduced. With the focus centering on globalization, internationalization, and customization activities, "fugal" movements emerge. Before closing the article, I further emphasize the potential of a "musicking" interpretation of strategic human activity.

Strategy process research: the current state

The current state of strategy process research can be described along six perspectives: the rational-mechanistic, the cognitive, the upper echelon, the middle-management, the organic, and the micro perspective (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006). From the rational-mechanistic perspective, strategy process is outlined as a sequential, rational, and analytic activity concerned with the identification of the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization and the opportunities and threats in the external environment (Ansoff, 1965). The cognitive perspective, closely related to the upper echelon perspective, sees strategy as a mental process reflecting the manager's perception and evaluation of a strategic issue (Schwenk, 1988). According to the upper echelon perspective, top managers are the key actors shaping the course of the firm (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The middle-management perspective holds that middle managers know which strategic issue to attend to. Their closeness to the market makes them key actors in the strategy process (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). The organic (evolutionary) perspective takes into account how the organization develops over time using path-dependent models to illustrate variation and selection within and among organizations (Barnett & Burgelman, 1996). The micro (practice-oriented) perspective is concerned with the individual level. In combining praxis, practices, and practitioners the perspective provides an overarching structure that links micro phenomena to macro phenomena. Praxis refers to the actual activity, whereas practices denote shared routines of behavior, including traditions, norms, and procedures. The practitioner is the strategist who performs praxis and carries practices (Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Whittington, 2006).

The six perspectives, the product of a review of 227 studies that cover the past two decades, reveal that process unfolds in and is shaped by the outer environmental and the inner organizational environment (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006). The process consists of three main elements, namely the strategist, the strategic issue at hand, and the sequence of actions. A distinction is thus made between the process and the individual or group of individuals whose perceptions will affect the diagnosis of the strategic issue dealt with in the process. The characteristics of the process determine the outcomes. Mainly originating in applied systems theory (Daneke, 1997), much strategy process research builds on the assumption that the process consist of different interacting elements and that the organization responds to changes in the external environment. The relationships between strategist and action, organization and environment provide a conceptual distinctiveness and a dualistic separation.

The strategy process, inherently linear, suggests a progression of change that divides organizational life into distinct phases (Greenwood & Hinings, 1988). An understanding of the sequence and flow of events over time is a crucial requirement for the process scholar (Pettigrew, 1997). Even if an alternative, narrative approach is employed, the narrative delivers a description as to why an organization performs well using chronology as a central organizing device. It makes apparent focal actors and relations between actors and actions with the successive events indicating the importance of those preceding them (Pentland, 1999). Due to the strong teleological underpinnings, strategy process scholars often direct their attention to questions about

the antecedents and consequences of the process (Garud & Van de Ven, 2002). A teleological process approach suggests a movement of the organization toward a final goal or end state without questioning the sequential arrangement between the past, the present, and the future. The linear progression of an organizational entity that changes and develops makes accessible the dualism of stability and change in relation to a temporal before and after (Ericson, 2004). This dualism parallels a distinction between the past and the future implicated in the linear progression of strategy process. A state of change is followed by a state of stability with little recognition of continuous and inseparable streams of past- and future-oriented activities.

The musical fugue provides an alternative conception of strategy process, complementing the existing research that emphasizes the irreversibility feature of time. Because process studies are fundamental to gaining an appreciation of dynamic organizational life (Van de Ven & Huber, 1990), one needs to inquiry into this dynamics and question the taken-for-granted character of time-spaced sequences. Hereby a crucial question is how to expose process and what vocabulary to use. An analysis of process producing explanation of how an organization change and develops can be locked into a vocabulary of static states (Pettigrew, 1997) and dualisms. A process vocabulary has to be grounded in moves.

Human voices are at the heart of the fugue, constituting a process through the moves inherent in the activity themes voiced. The fugue does not list activities in a chronological order but interconnects different activity themes. The voices tie activity themes together and provide a thread of continuity and indivisibility. As argued, the fugue metaphor has the potential to open up an interpretation that can help deepening our understanding of continuous, inseparable, and even nonlinear streams of strategic activities.

Moving beyond a panoramic view

The empirically oriented illustration draws on annual reports, internal documents, interviews, and notes from meetings included in a study of business growth related to the company Nefab AB. The annual reports provide a panoramic view of Nefab, chronologically presenting different phases and milestones. In 1923 Sigurd Nordgren set up a carpentry shop at his home in Hälsingland, manufacturing mainly breadboxes. This laid the bricks for the "modern-day Nefab," formed in 1949 to satisfy the increasing demand for breadboxes from the Swedish grocery market. Since then, Nefab has grown in terms of exposure on international and global markets. In 2006 Nefab had more than 1,800 employees involved in operations in 30 countries. Nefab, also called "the Group," offers complete packaging solutions to international industries. Of particular importance are the telecom equipment and the automotive industries. To ensure that customers receive complete packaging solutions "promptly and efficiently," operations are organized in a matrix structure on the basis of the five market regions: Nordic; central Europe; southern Europe, Brazil and Great Britain; North America; and Asia region. The market regions interact with three staff functions: customer solutions, operations, and finance and economy.

The panoramic view shows three generations sharing in the growth of the business, with the majority ownership lying with the family until September 2007, the time at which the investment company Nordic Capital acquired Nefab. During the period 1983 to 2007 majority share holding remained in the hands of Ing-Marie Nordgren and her husband, Jochum Pihl, representing the third generation of owners. However, in accordance with the agreement with Nordic Capital, Nordgren and Pihl will still be able to exert some influence over maintaining the so-called Nefab spirit.

The panoramic view based on annual reports linearly ordered along the time line displays activities performed by Nefab. With the inclusion of meetings and dialogues with people associated with the company, a more complex picture emerges, however, indicating not only ups and downs, as represented by profit figures, but also to-and-fro movements of growth, reflected in activities related to globalization, internationalization, and customization. Nefab people witness these movements. The "company" is a world of practice that emerges through the activities in which individual practitioners engage.

Managers, assistants, secretaries, employee representatives, and board members were interviewed during the period 2002 to 2006 during my visits to the headquarters in Jönköping, Småland, in the southeastern part of Sweden, and to the largest production plant, Nefab Emballage AB, in Hälsingland, in the northern part of Sweden. They brought to the study interesting insights into business growth activities. Twenty-three face-to-face interviews lasting from 30 minutes to 120 minutes took place. A doctoral student conducted one interview referred to in the article, and I conducted the rest. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Through e-mail, information was also generated from the principal owners and the managers living abroad. The interviews mainly took the form of dialogues that were initiated by questions posed in an open-ended fashion. The dialogues focused on a broad range of activities associated with, for example, customer relations, organizing, generation shift, teamwork, internationalization, and globalization.

By attending six international meetings, I had the opportunity to take notes while directing my attention to the strategic and organizational issues that the members of the Group management team dealt with. Managers located in different parts of the world communicated by the means of video conferencing with the headquarters at those meetings, which were led by the president and CEO of Nefab. Through juxtaposition of the interview material with material from the international meetings and an extensive number of annual reports and internal documents, activities related to growth are described. Growth-related activities repeatedly referred to verbally as well as in writing have served as the basis for marking out closely interwoven activities, sorted out as themes.

When removing the veil placed on activities by a panoramic view, I found that a sequential arrangement of activities becomes insufficient for a presentation of a strategic growth process. Therefore, I communicate my understanding and interpretation of the material using the musical metaphor, the fugue, which entails a style of composition that is able to capture various movements exposed by human voices. While approaching the complex study of the fugue (Mann, 1917/1987), I borrow a few concepts that could prove suitable for an interpretation and understanding of the dynamics of strategy process. The fugue serves as a guiding metaphor during the reconstitution, interpretation, and understanding of the empirically oriented material that focuses on globalization, internationalization, and customization activities conveyed by human voices.

Tuning in

The fugue opens by presenting the principal theme, which should be readily recognizable. In the opening passage, called the exposition, a number of voices announce the principal theme, which then recurs from time to time through the voices that might enter in different keys. After the exposition passage, the movement of the fugue thus continues through the appearance of other themes, which could be announced as countersubjects or subsidiary subjects (Sadie, 1980).

The various versions of the principal theme instigate to-and-fro movements. As the fugue theorist Fux declared in *Gradus ad Parnassun*, published in 1725, the voices need only occasionally be heard together (cited in Sadie, 1980). One might accordingly direct attention to other themes without reproducing the principal theme. Various styles can be combined in the spirit of Bach. A multivoice fugue can be composed with business growth conceived of as the principal theme, continuously expanded and transposed into different keys. In the theoretical language of a fugue (Mann, 1917/1987), business growth servers as the basic melodic theme from which the other themes derive.

The presentation henceforth draws on excerpts from the business growth study, depicting "business growth" as the principal theme that allocates in the versions of the globalization, internationalization and customization activity themes.[2] The globalization theme grants first entry, followed by other themes that echo the principal theme. Globalization refers to present ongoing activities and serves as the point at which the fugue tunes in. The voices of the themes "compose" a fugue inherently dynamic. The voices that makes themselves heard belong to

>   Bo Angelstrand, director of sales and marketing,
>   Elisabet Boström, personnel manager,
>   Anders Burvall, goup competence coordinator,
>   Susanne Holmgren, project leader,
>   Lars-Åke Junevik, personnel assistant,
>   Hans Nilsson, member of the board of directors,
>   Ing-Marie Nordgren, principal owner and member of the board of directors,
>   Kurt Nordström, facilities manager,
>   Anders Mörk, corporate telecom coordinator and key account manager,
>   David Mörk, director of operations,
>   Jochum Pihl, principal owner and member of the board of directors,
>   Tommy Pudas, product manager,
>   Lars-Åke Rydh, president and CEO, and
>   Anna Stålenbring, chief financial officer.

The titles that the practitioners are assigned in the list refer to the positions held at the time of the study (2002-2006).

In the exposition passage: the voices of globalization

In the exposition passage of the business growth fugue, the voices of the globalization theme announce future-oriented activities associated with the moves into the Chinese market. For a company that wishes to achieve a global presence, the Chinese market is crucial, as Lars-Åke Rydh, president and CEO, argues. The attractiveness of this particular market echoes with the experience of Jochum Pihl, who went to China acknowledging "the fast growth in place." Still another voice agrees with the president and CEO on the prospects of rapid growth in China. Tommy Pudas, product manager, who also witnessed an "explosion in opportunities" when paying a visit to China, says,

>   In marketing language we talk about "Open Window," which should correspond to
>   the possibilities. In China I would say that the wall is open. Sometimes I wish more
>   resources from Nefab outside China would be connected to this growing market.

Moreover, the voices of the globalization theme announce future-oriented activities associated with the formation of an organizational structure that combines local support with a global offering of complete packaging solutions. The voices indicate that bridging markets and coordinating the organizational units, functions, and operations, by the means of the matrix structure, is a prerequisite for achieving globality. Lars-Åke Rydh points out that the matrix structure aims at stimulating contacts and interactions among people in the Group:

> The days when a plant's only task was to serve the local market are gone . . . the matrix organization with the various control groups is a method to create focus on the local markets, on the product areas and the selected segments . . . the organization model is also a way to build networks, which stimulate contact between key personnel in the company.

In response to this, the heads of the regional subsidiaries report to a local board when serving as the Group management's "tools" for controlling and ensuring that operations on the local markets align with the overall business concept and strategy.

The coordination aspect of organizational structure is further enhanced in the appointment of Major Group Account coordinators, who are assigned the task to bridge markets and customer requirements, forming global customer segments. The implications of this assignment Anders Mörk, corporate telecom coordinator and key account manager, voices. Like a spider in a web, he provides linkages between people responsible for accounts such as Ericsson, Nokia, Siemens and Alcatel:

> This is where I come in, like a spider in a web, linking together people who are responsible for the accounts, providing information across the accounts. This is an ongoing process and a very demanding task, which requires of me as global coordinator to get involved in operations on different markets while, simultaneously, influencing and linking the operations together.

In the restatements of the Chinese market potential and the importance of bridging markets and coordinating organizational units, functions and operations, and customer requirements, the human voices seem to use the same tone, falling in harmonious cadence. A cadence refers to musical punctuation that separates phrases and prepares the ground for the transition into new phrases (Mann, 1919/1987).

Global coordination is an ongoing future-oriented process with the tonality of the exposition passage remaining relatively unchanged since the theme gravitates toward the central "pitch," that is, globalization. Nefab people expend increased effort on coordinating functions and operations on a global level. Thinking globally intimates to them acting locally. Strongly advocated in the future-oriented movement proposed by the theme is the need to dismantle the product-oriented organization to enhance the ability to fill the local factory while simultaneously delivering the solution requested by the global customer. Repeatedly voices emphasize that the entire logistics chain, from producer to end user, must be covered regardless of national boundaries.

> Earlier we focused on physical products . . . Today Nefab offers both services and physical products. (Bo Angelstrand, director of sales and marketing)

> Our vision is to be the global partner for complete packaging solutions. (Anna Stålenbring, chief financial officer)

While "listening" to the multivoice globalization theme, one notices also that global coordination turns the attention toward the past. The voices of the theme highlight the role the Nefab spirit plays in creating the feeling of "we." The dimension of we attributed to the Nefab spirit aims to overcome the distance between the subsidiaries, production units, and sales offices scattered around the globe. According to Ing-Marie Nordgren, principal owner and member of the board of directors, the Nefab spirit is "the glue that ties us together and prevents us from doing things in a non-Nefab way."

In the voice of Kurt Nordström, facilities manager, the dimension of we repeats in association with the actions of the founding family:

> In a small company like Nefab a special we-spirit emerges . . . its founder strongly influenced the company and the employees' ways of acting . . . the Nordgren-Pihl family cares very much about the place where the business once started . . . they try to maintain a positive Nefab spirit through their simple down-to-earth way of living.

What appears to be repeated in other Nefab voices as well relates to the geographical place in Hälsingland and the importance it has in connection with the Nefab spirit.

> The heart of Nefab is in Hälsingland . . . I think that many companies in the world very much depend on the people there. (Anders Mörk, corporate telecom coordinator and key account manager)

> The Nefab spirit is about simplicity . . . much of it derives from the safe northern province of Hälsingland. (Susanne Holmgren, project leader)[3]

> Customers from all over the world visit the plant in Hälsingland so there is really a strong feeling for the province. (Elisabet Boström, personnel manager)

Here the theme comprises a time interval that provides a space for dynamic repetition in a vibrating tone that reflects bygone activities and a spirit associated with the geographical place where the business started up. Globalization activities, proposing movements forward and backward, interrelate with internationalization activities. The moves onto more global markets emanate from marketing activities; in the 1970s Nefab people initiated activities outside of the national borders. In the creation of global customer segments, the globalization voices thus make themselves heard in resonance with the voices of the internationalization theme. In the downbeat of the globalization theme a modulation occurs. The principal theme (business growth) "plays" again but in a varied form, with the globalization theme transposed into the "key" of the internationalization theme.

Transposing into the "key" of internationalization

The internationalization theme proposes a backward movement when portraying activities of the past but also a forward movement when creating opportunities for moving onto more global markets. The voices of the theme direct the interest to the past when informing about activities conjoined with the efforts during more than two decades of entering new markets in different parts of the world, making of contacts, and the setting up of sales offices and production plants.

In the 1970s marketing efforts focused on industrial segments in Norway, Denmark, and Finland with meetings held with Norwegian, Danish, and Finish representatives. In parallel with these efforts, Nefab received many proposals from representatives of different European packaging

companies who were eager to collaborate with Nefab, as Jochum Pihl reveals:

> Examples are Some KG in Germany, Emilliana Imballaggi in Italy, Egolf in Switzerland, and Niab in France. Mostly, people had seen the product in work. Some had seen them in trade shows or advertising at the earlier stages in a Scandinavian environment.

In the 1980s activities on the European markets were directed through agents, distributors, agreements, joint ventures, and wholly owned subsidiaries. Through the voice of Pihl, internationalization appears in a crescendo, to borrow a musical term. A crescendo denotes here the gradual increase in interest in meeting the mobility in the European Community's free market, working one's way into leading export companies in the sectors of telecom equipment, automotive, defense, engineering, and electronics. As Pihl informs us,

> A number of years ago Nefab took the first steps to establish itself abroad. We can now state that this decision was the right one. Growth and profitability within the Group's EC-units are very good. In those countries where we have local production the growth has been thirty to fifty percent a year.

In addition, the crescendo refers to the intensified efforts of launching activities on the North American and the Brazilian markets, as the voices of Jochum Pihl and Lars-Åke Rydh indicate.

The establishments on the European market paralleled the moves into the North American market, where a production plant was built. The company Nefab Vikex was formed in 1984 in Peterborough, Canada.

> Even though we wished to move on to a new market we were fairly well aware of the fact that the North American market was huge and complex . . . a licensing agreement was negotiated with representatives of a firm that we considered liable to match our expectations. The licensee was a Canadian firm. (Jochum Pihl)

A few years later a sales company was established in Chicago to strengthen the ties to the multinational customers Motorola and General Electric.

> The main sales office is being established in Chicago, not only because of the city's excellent communications facilities but also because of its proximity to the "heavy industry" belt in the US. Chicago's location permits convenient access to the Canadian market and the factory in Peterborough. (Lars-Åke Rydh)

The Brazilian market also attracted the interest of Nefab's board of directors. Hans Nilsson, a board member, learned from a six-year stay in Brazil that to gain entrance into Brazilian business life, one needs to use specific contacts, the so-called "Network."

> Without good entrances in the Brazilian business life, our establishment could be delayed and the introduction period could become full of risks. Therefore, we have chosen to invite a minority owner, represented by three very experienced businessmen who will own thirty percent of the company. (Hans Nilsson)

A factory was set up to be operated in collaboration with a local business partner in the state of São Paulo, where Nefab's customers in the telecom equipment and automotive industries were represented. The president and CEO saw great potential for Nefab's products in Brazil, where Nefab customers had already built factories.

The "melodic line" of the theme, constituting the tones that voices employ, seems to allow for a number of changes with intervals that could be "measured out" in reference to the different cultural contexts from which the voices originate. Multiple separate voices exchanged information and brought up subjects that most likely led to cadence on different modes.

The "financial freedom" gained through the introduction of Nefab shares on the Stockholm Stock Exchange in 1996 further encouraged the launching of international activities, mainly in Asian countries, as Rydh informs. By following suit its major customer Ericsson, Nefab expanded geographically. Through additional investments in production capacity and an increased focus on sales activities, Nefab people prepared for establishment on the Chinese market. When global customer segments began to form because of customers' changing preferences and requirements, the internationalization theme prompts a future-oriented movement. Activities clearly proved a stronger focus on globalization with the internationally dispersed activities integrated. Internationalization activities pave the way for globalization activities. Eventually, the internationalization theme decelerates in a diminuendo, allowing the globalization theme to accelerate to a crescendo. The musical term *diminuendo*, then, indicates the gradual softening of the voices that earlier on encouraged growth through international operations.

The voices of the internationalization and the globalization themes make themselves heard in resonance with each other but also in resonance with the voices of the customization theme, which attracts the interest next. Hence, both themes conjoin in the transposition into the "key" of the customization theme, which suggests past-oriented as well as future-oriented movements. The principal theme (business growth) "plays" again, in a varied form.

In resonance with the voices of customization

The voices of the customization theme propose a past-oriented movement, bringing to mind customization activities of bygone days. Here the theme comprises an interval that delineates a space for dynamic repetition of past activities. Customization, a quality deeply promoted in the organization, gives voice to the past. Ever since Sigurd Nordgren started up the carpentry shop back in 1923, it has been of paramount importance to adapt to the needs and requirements of the customers. Customer orientation is an essential characteristic of the organization, as Anders Burvall, group competence coordinator, purports:

> My first impression as a consultant in Nefab in 1989 was that Nefab was extraordinarily customer-oriented. Everyone seemed to understand the value of placing the customer in the front seat. The management literature announced customer orientation, highlighting the need to focus on the customer. In Nefab, without relying on the recipes provided by the management literature, customer orientation appeared to be a natural thing; a deeply promoted quality and characteristic of the organization.

Customer orientation is further strengthened through the voice of Lars-Åke Junevik, personnel assistant. An extraordinary loyalty is expressed toward the customer, Junevik remarks. In obedience to the loyalty principle, which says that the customer comes first, future-oriented customization currently builds on long-term and trustful cooperation with the customer.

The commitment of Nefab people to developing packaging and packaging solutions to meet the customers' needs and requirements today and in the future and to attempting to move up the customer's value chain is situated in past activities. Commitment is similar to the playing of notes in harmonious unison using the same "pitch." The contacts with the main customer, Ericsson,

established in the early 1960s, exemplify long-term and trustful cooperation. Ing-Marie Nordgren, explains that the strong connection to the historical relations with Ericsson is a major reason for Nefab's moving up in Ericsson's value chain:

> Ever since our first contacts with Ericsson in the mid-60s we have worked in partnership with them. This, in combination with the traditional style of Nefab behavior like the humbleness and honesty in customer relations or the eagerness of being a perfect supplier, has created the trust that has given us new business opportunities.

The establishment of partnership presupposes a mode of tonality expressed in a way that sounds pleasing to both partners. It seems that the partners use the same tone, falling in harmonious cadence. Nefab's endeavor to be regarded as a link in the customer's value chain prompts a future-oriented movement of the theme. By providing the customer with the "complete need," Nefab moves up the value chain. The customer of today is a company that operates worldwide and requires a broad range of services.

> By providing the customer with *his* complete needs of packaging we add value to the customer. In this way we can move up in the value chain. (Lars-Åke Rydh)

Alliances formed with leading players in the packaging industry aim to meet the various needs of customers that manufacture high-value, transport-sensitive, and theft-prone products. Arguably, several voices rise in a crescendo advocating the need to keep pace with customer expectations and develop into a global supplier of complete packaging solutions.

The vision that Nefab shall be the global partner for complete packaging solutions places the customer at the center. The customer is the one who verifies Nefab's business concept, states David Mörk, director of operations. While inevitably pointing to the future, the vision also emphasizes high-level expertise in customized packaging solutions, implying that Nefab will be a reliable global organization with local service facilities.

The present- and future-oriented focus of customization takes into account that ways of approaching and cooperating with customers differ significantly throughout the world. In Europe a center in each country has been established for cultivating the markets, but in the United States and Canada Nefab cooperates with local suppliers to gain access to the customers. According to Lars-Åke Rydh, it is absolutely essential to be close to the customer. Here the "local voice" makes itself heard in resonance with the "global voice."

"Playing" again, the principal theme (business growth) exposes and manifests itself in the customization theme, the voices of which refer to activities that prompt to-and-fro movements. Present activities interlink with customer contacts and relationships established in the past. Among the voices of the theme are voices that bring up customization activities of bygone days and voices that direct attention to the future.

The constitutive openness of the fugue allows it to play indefinitely. Its polyphonic[4] character makes possible different voices to be heard continuously, echoing the principal theme.

Striking a "final" chord

The current state of strategy process research as described in the introductory part of this article delineates a process that consists of different elements. The strategist, the strategic issue at hand,

and the actions, sequentially ordered, make up the process, which unfolds in an organizational context that shapes and is shaped by the external environment. A key question for future research includes how strategy process should be designed to help develop the organization's dynamic capability, as Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst (2006) have argued. They believe that dynamic capabilities in terms of the organization's ability to integrate and develop internal and external competence are at the heart of strategy process, which means that the focus must center on the leverage of human capital and on how the organization integrates and develops internal and external competence. As indicated in this article, however, a key question might very well be to provide a more performative flavor (Bagley, 2008) while mediating, through the metaphorical sound of a fugue, a strategy process.

When dealing with an increased complexity of strategic operations, researchers suggest a view of change "as nested sequences of events that unfold over time in the development of individuals, organization, and industries" (Garud & Van de Ven, 2002, p. 206). Strategy scholars then combine contextual analysis with process analysis, exploring the links between the context and content of the process and their interconnectedness through time (Johnson, 1987; Melin, 1989; Melin & Hellgren, 1994; Pettigrew & Whipp, 1991). Multidimensional perspectives proposed open to "a river basin where there may be several streams all flowing into one another" (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 340). A river metaphor is introduced in an attempt to capture the dynamic and complex nature of strategy process, complementing the path-dependency conception adopted in prior research as a means of coping with occurrences in the past (Lamberg & Parvinen, 2003). Yet the strategy river directs its flows merely forward, as does the process analysis combined with the contextual analysis. The conception of strategy process underlying these analyses permits only limited recognition of human voices and their crescendos and diminuendos expressed in a future- and past-oriented flow of activities.

When analyzing strategy processes that are embedded in the inner and outer contexts of an organization, the chronology of time is followed. Through the examination of sequential flows of events one hopes to "catch reality" while seeking conditions that link features of context and process to outcome. The past is thought to be alive in the present, being the "shaper" of the emerging future (Pettigrew, 1992). Even if the more recent, practice-oriented perspective of organizing and strategizing allows the strategist the freedom to be unpredictable or creative (Legge, 2003), scholars applying this view tend nevertheless to take for granted that the arrow of time always points to the future. As Dummett (1964) has posited, "There is indeed an asymmetry in respect of past and future in the way in which we describe events when we are considering them as standing in causal relations to one other" (p. 338). The consequences that follow from a fugal process insight indicate a movement toward a nonlinear conception of time. Albeit studies incorporate different types of temporal relationships, accounting for feedback loops, speed-ups, overlapping, backtracking, dialectic, and recurrent cycles (Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985; Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Théorêt, 1976; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985, Van de Ven, 1992; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995), notably lacking is a multivoice focus. Mostly a monovocal and analytical focus is chosen, placed at the center the organization.

Strategy process scholars point to the usefulness of drawing on knowledge from different perspectives (Cummings & Wilson, 2003) but do not pay much attention to musical arts-based forms. The strong connection between process research and qualitative approaches (Hinings, 1997) is concerned with data collection techniques (Dawson, 1997). This indicates a way of looking at the world as if it could open up for observation for obtaining evident data. The research design in the form of the frequently employed case study that has to meet the requirements of being logical, systematic, and easy to replicate (Fox-Wolfgramm, 1997) tends to imitate quantitative ideals for collecting, coding, and analyzing data (Alvesson, 2003). Research

participants are not static objects to be studied. Research is concerned with "processes of encounters" and the "in-betweens" that account for a space in which questions related to one's own lived experience can be related (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008). Arts-based research provides performative sensibility, which means that this type of research should be appreciated for its illuminating effect, that is, its ability to open up to qualities that otherwise would be ignored (Bagley, 2008). With reference to Dewey (1934), Bagley underlines that "the arts remove the veils that keep the eyes from seeing" (p. 325).

The fugue is a style of composition that captures a flow of activities in reference to globalization, internationalization, and customization. The globalization theme grants first entry, followed by other themes that echo the principal theme. The movements of the fugue continue through the appearance of the internationalization and the customization themes. It is not a question, then, of including more factors along the time line, taking into account more contextual levels and streams of water in the strategy river, or using the organization as a context for leveraging human capital. Underpinning the fugal process conception is an understanding that individuals engage in activities in a way that makes it difficult to discriminate between actor and activity and that individual and world are interrelated through the individual's lived experience of the world. Implied in this (nondualistic) understanding is that the strategy process constitutes itself in various activities and movements as voiced by individuals.

The voices introducing the fugue carry the principal theme in the guise of globalization, followed by alternating voices that allocate the principal theme in the versions of internationalization and customization. Business growth, depicted as the principal theme, thus recurs from time to time through the voices continuously announcing the different themes. While making themselves heard in resonance with each other and by decelerating in a diminuendo, permitting other voices to accelerate to a crescendo, the themes are linked together. The voices of the globalization theme directed toward the future appear to answer each other when repeatedly emphasizing the importance of moving on to the Chinese market, bridging markets, and coordinating customer requirements and organizational units. In addition, globalization voices direct attention to the past when bringing up the dimension of *we* associated with a particular spirit. The voices of the internationalization theme continuously rise in a crescendo when pronouncing the need to meet the increased mobility on the European market and intensifying the international efforts outside Europe. When getting gradually softer, these voices give way to the voices that are more interested in forming global customer segments. The voices of the customization theme, holding both future- and past-oriented movements, repeatedly place the customer at the center. "Voices" refer to the voices of individuals accessed in the empirical material. They are "language users" associated with the Nefab world, allowing a process to unfold dynamically styled similar to that of a fugal composition inspired by the writing of Bach.

The musical metaphor of the fugue connotes dynamism, constituted in themes that are repeated, expanded, and varied through the human voices. By giving voice to people who share and participate in globalization, internationalization, and customization, elevating movements inherent in these activities, a fugue can be composed. Worth noting is that there is no mathematical formula for presenting the "fugal" process. "There are, to be sure, standard kinds of things to do—but not so standard that one can merely compose a fugue by formula" (Hofstadter, 1999, p. 9). The different types of fugues that composers have developed over time expose one theme in various guises or in rhythmic changes with the inclusion also of nonthematic counterpoints.[5] Bach composed a great number of fugues combining a variety of styles, weaving together ideas and forms in which playful double meanings and subtle allusions were commonplace, as Hofstadter has pointed out. The monothematic and contrapuntal characteristics of Bach's fugues imply no fixed structure.

One productive way of doing social research is, according to Bradbury-Jones, Irvine, and Sambrook (2006), through discourse analysis. Language is embedded in discourse, which generally denotes a critical study of talk and texts (Crowe, 2005). To enrich the substance of language, one could draw on a dialogue with music, as suggested in this article. "Like language, music is said to be a species-specific trait of man" (Schmukler, 2002, p. 422) and cannot be ignored in human activity. Music plays an essential role in the establishments and expression of social relations (Bull, 2000). It is a significant part of the everyday life of a human being (de Nora, 2000).

There is potential in "musicking" interpretation (Prichard et al., 2007) of human activity. While directing more attention to a musical, arts-based form of communicating research, we could be able to listen more carefully to the moves inherent in a flow of human activity. One's interpretation and understanding of the strategy process depends on becoming attuned to the "sound" of its fugal dimension. Through the metaphorical sound of a musical fugue we might not risk missing something of fundamental importance and, like Narcissus, fall "victim to the deadly fascination of vision, having ignored the warning cries of the sonorous nymph, Echo" (Corbett, 2003, p. 275). Predicated on the idea of dialogical openness, the fugue directs interest to communication among individuals who consider each other's voices. Language, subject to an understanding of dynamism in human activity, thus extends, reflecting the movements of a fugue. The fugue metaphor could help us *seeing* better while *listening* better to the moves inherent in flows of human activity. The fugue metaphor could assist our efforts to methodologize the strategy process as a dynamic multidirection and multivoice construct. The fugue metaphor could enrich the strategy vocabulary, opening up for a more colorful and dynamic interpretation and understanding of strategy process.

> *For last year's words belong to last year's language*
> *And next year's words await another voice.*
> (T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 1943)

Notes

1. The article is based on my book *Business Growth: Activities, Themes and Voices*, published in 2007.
2. The business growth study includes also the solutions-providing and the box-producing themes, presented and discussed elsewhere (Ericson, 2007).
3. The interview with Susanne Holmgren was conducted by a doctoral student.
4. The oldest surviving example of performed polyphony is the Winchester Tropers from about the year 1000 (Van der Werf, 1997). The term *polyphony* means "many voiced." Bakhtin extended the concept of polyphony to literature by addressing Dostoyevsky's authorship (Hazen, 1993).
5. Lewis, Sullivan, and Michalson (1984) described a cognitive-emotional fugue, arguing that emotion and cognition are elements of a continuous and inseparable stream of behavior, like parts of a fugue. Their study builds on observations of infants in a contingency learning situation.

References

Abel, C. F., & Sementelli, A. J. (2004). Evolutionary critical theory, metaphor, and organizational change. *Journal of Management Development*, *24*(5), 443-458.

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review*, *28*(1), 13-33.

Ansoff, H. (1965). *Corporate strategy.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bagley, C. (2008). Educational ethnography as performance art: Towards a sensuous feeling and knowing. *Qualitative Research*, *8*, 53-72.

Baker, T., Miner, A. S., & Eesley, D. T. (2003). Improvising firms: Bricolage, account giving and improvisational competencies in the founding process. *Research Policy*, *32*, 255-276.

Barnett, W.P., & Burgelman, R. A. (1996). Evolutionary perspectives on strategy. *Strategic Management Journal*, *17*, 5-19.

Barrett, F. J. (1998). Managing and improvising: Lessons from jazz. *Career Development International*, *3*(7), 283-286.

Booth, C. (2003). Does history matter in strategy?: The possibilities and problem of counterfactual analysis. *Management Decision*, *4*(1), 96-104.

Bradbury-Jones, C., Irvine, F., & Sambrook, S. (2006). Unity and detachment: A discourse analysis of doctoral supervision. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *6*(4), 81-96. Retrieved June 30, 2008, from http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/

Bull, M. (2000). *Sounding out the city: Personal stereos and the management of everyday life*. Oxford, UK: Berg.

Corbett, M. J. (2003). Sound organization: A brief history of psychosonic management. *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization*, *3*(4), 265-275.

Cornelissen, J., P., Kofouros, M., & Lock, A. R. (2005). Metaphorical images of organization: How organizational researchers develop and select organizational metaphor. *Human Relations*, *58*(12), 1545-1578.

Crowe, M. (2005). Discourse analysis: Toward an understanding of its place in nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *51*(1), 55-63.

Cuhna, M. P., Cuhna, J. V., & Kamoche, K. (1999). Organizational improvisation: What, when, how and why. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *1*(3), 299-341.

Cummings, S., & Wilson, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Images of strategy*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Daneke, G. A. (1997). From metaphor to method: Nonlinear science and practical management. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, *5*(3), 249-266.

Dawson, P. (1997). In at the deep end: Conducting processual research on organizational change. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *13*(4), 389-405.

de Nora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Minton, Balch.

Drabkin, W. (1980). Theme. In S. Sadie (Ed.), *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians* (p. 736). New York: Macmillan.

Dummett, M. (1964). Bringing about the past. *Philosophical Review*, *73*(3), 338-359.

Eliot, T. S. (1943). *Four quartets*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace.

Ericson, M. (2004). *Strategic change: Dualism, duality, and beyond*. Malmö, Sweden: Liber/Copenhagen Business School Press.

Ericson, M. (2007). *Business growth*: *Activities, themes and voices*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Floyd. S. W., & Wooldridge, B. (1997). Middle management's strategic influence and organizational performance. *Journal of Management Studies*, *34*, 465-487.

Fox-Wolfgramm, S. J. (1997). Toward developing a methodology for doing qualitative research: The dynamic-comparative case study method. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *13*(4), 439-455.

Garud, R., & Van de Ven, A. H. (2002). Strategic change process. In A. Pettigrew, H. Thomas, & R. Whittington (Eds.), *Handbook of strategy and management* (pp. 206-231). London: Sage.

Ghemawat, P (1991). *Commitment: The dynamic of strategy*. New York: Free Press.

Greenwood, R., & Hinings, C. R. (1988). Design archetypes, tracks and the dynamics of strategic change. *Organization Studies*, *9*, 293-316.

Hambrick, D. C. (2004). The disintegration of strategic management: It's time to consolidate our gains. *Strategic Organization*, *2*, 91-98.

Hambrick, D. C., & Mason, P. A. (1984). Upper echelons: The organization as a reflection of its top managers. *Academy of Management Review*, *9*(2), 193-206.

Hazen, M. A. (1993). Towards polyphonic organization. *Journal of Organizational Change*, *6*(5), 15-26.

Hinings. C. R. (1997). Reflections on processual research. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *13*(4), 493-503.

Hofstadter, D. R (1999). *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An eternal golden braid*. New York: Basic Books.

Hutzschenreuter, T., & Kleindienst, I. (2006). Strategy-process research: What have we learned and what is still to be explored. *Journal of Management*, *32*(5), 673-720.

Johnson, G. (1987). *Strategic change and the management process*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Johnson, G., Langley, A., Melin, L., & Whittington, R. (2007). *Researching strategy as practice: Research directions and resources*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

La Jevic, L., & Springgay, S. (2008). A/r/tography as an ethics of embodiment: Visual journal in preservice education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *14*(1), 67-89.

Lamberg, J.-A., & Parvinen, P. (2003). The river metaphor for strategic management. *European Management Journal*, *21*(5), 549-557.

Legge, K. (2003). Strategy as organizing. In S. Cummings & D. Wilson (Eds.), *Images of strategy* (pp. 74-104). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Lewis, M., Sullivan, M. V., & Michalson, L. (1984). The cognitive-emotional fugue. In E. Carroll, J. Kagan, &. R. B. Zajonc (Eds.), *Emotion, cognition and behavior* (pp. 264-288). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Mann, A. (1987). *The study of fugue*. New York: Dover. (Original work published 1917)

Melin, L. (1989). The field-of-force metaphor. *Advances in International Marketing*, *3*, 161-179.

Melin, L., & Hellgren, B. (1994). Patterns of strategic processes: Two change typologies. In. H. Thomas, D. O'Neal, R. White, & D. Hurst, (Eds.), *Building the strategically responsive organization* (pp. 251-271). Chichester, UK: John Wiley.

Mintzberg, H., & McHugh, A. (1985). Strategy formation in an adhocracy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *30*, 160-197.

Mintzberg, H., Raisinghani, D., & Théorêt, A. (1976). The structure of "unstructured" decision processes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *21*, 246-275.

Mintzberg, H., & Waters, J. A. (1986). Of strategies, deliberate and emergent. *Strategic Management Journal*, *6*(3), 257-272.

Mirvis, P. H. (1998). Variations on a theme: practice improvisation. *Organization Science*, *9*(5), 586-592.

Morgan, G. (1997). *Images of organization*. London: Sage.

Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). *Free play improvisation in life and art*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Orlikowski, W. J., & Hofman, J. D. (1997). An improvisational model for change management: The case of groupware technologies. *Sloan Management Review*, *38*(2), 11-21.

Pentland, B. T. (1999). Building process theory with narrative: From description to explanation. *Academy of Management Review*, *24*(4), 711-724.

Peplowski, K. (1998). The process of improvisation. *Organization Science*, *9*(5), 560-561.

Pettigrew, A. M. (1992). The character and significance of strategy process research. *Strategic Management Journal*, *13*, 5-16.

Pettigrew, A. M. (1997). What is a processual analysis? *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *13*(4), 337-348.

Pettigrew, A. M., & Whipp, R. (1991). *Managing change for competitive success*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Prichard, C., Korczynski, M., & Elmes, M. (2007). Music at work: An introduction. *Group & Organization Management*, *32*(1), 4-21.

Rhodes, C. (2007). Outside the gates of Eden: Utopia and work in rock music. *Group & Organization Management*, *32*(1), 22-49.

Sadie, S. (1980). (Ed.). *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians*. New York: Macmillan.

Schmukler, R. (2002). Public administration theory as musical theory. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, *24*(3), 415-436.

Schwenk, C. R. (1988). The cognitive perspective on strategic decision making. *Journal of Management Studies*, *25*(1), 41-55.

Sköld, D., & Rehn, A. (2007). Makin' it, by keeping it real: Street talk, rap music, and the forgotten entrepreneurship from "the 'Hood." *Group & Organization Management*, *32*(1), 50-78.

Teece, D., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, *18*(7), 509-533.

Van de Ven, A. H. (1992). Suggestions for studying strategy process: A research note. *Strategic Management Journal*, 13, 169-188.

Van de Ven, A. H., & Huber, G. P. (1990). Longitudinal field research methods for studying processes of organizational chance. *Organization Science*, *1*(3), 213-219.

Van de Ven, A., & Poole, M. S. (1995). Explaining development and change in organization. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 510-540.

Van der Werf, H. (1997). *Companion to medieval and renaissance music*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Weick, K. E. (1998). Introductory essay: Improvisation as a mindset for organizational analysis. *Organization Science*, *9*(5), 543-555.

Whittington, R. (2006). Completing the practice turn in strategy research. *Organization Studies, 27*(5), 613-634.