



SWP 6/95 THE PROCESSES OF STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

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PROCESSES OF STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Andy Bailey & Gerry Johnson

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the processes by which strategy is developed within organisations. It builds on research into the nature of strategy development being undertaken within the Centre for Strategic Management and Organisational Change at Cranfield School of Management. Initially the process of strategy development is discussed, a number of explanations of the process are presented and an integrated framework is developed. This framework is subsequently used to illustrate the strategy development process operating in a number of organisations. The implications for the strategic management process are discussed.

Research in the field of strategic management has typically been divided between the investigation of "content" or "process". Much of the research in the field, though, has concentrated on issues relating to the content of strategy (see for example Porter, 1980; Hamel & Prahalad, 1989). While strategy content research is important for the investigation of strategic management, the process by which strategy is developed is of equal importance. Indeed, if the process of strategy development is to be effectively managed, for example to effect strategic change, then the processual aspects of strategic management are especially important. This paper concentrates on the process of strategic management with the intention of providing a broader, more realistic picture of the way in which strategy is developed in organisations.

The early works of writers such as Ansoff (1965) and Andrews (1980) and the books of the 1970s, in particular on corporate planning, emphasised the importance of strategy and have guided thinking in the area; thinking which has been dominated by the view that strategies are developed through a particularly analytical and intentional process. The basic framework which this 'rational' planned view offers suggests, that through the application of appropriate analytical and systematic techniques and check-lists, organisations are able to secure their own success. Moreover such an approach allows assumptions to be made about the future, assists in the reduction of uncertainty and facilitates the systematic development of strategy. This view and its associated frameworks have become deeply entrenched within strategic thinking, while the prescriptive and normative modes so generated have significantly influenced the approach to strategy formulation in practice, in education, and in research.

To view strategy development in this logical and rational manner is appealing and it is not surprising that this view has enjoyed such prominence. In management education, strategic texts have traditionally emphasised the rationality of analysis, planning, and implementation as a step by step process. Within organisations this school of thought suggests that formal strategic planning processes and mechanisms can operate in a rational and objective manner to allow the comprehensive analysis of the internal and external environments, the development of alternative strategies, the selection of an optimum strategy, and the production of objectives, goals, budgets, and targets to guide implementation. In short this rational planning approach is often what is regarded as 'good practice'.

However, the processes of strategy development which exist in organisations cannot typically be explained in such ways. Organisations are open to an array of influences both from inside and outside when developing strategy. Consequently, the strategy development process of an organisation is likely to reflect the mix of influences which come together to direct how strategy emerges. The seminal work of Allison (1971), in the context of policy studies, demonstrated that the process of

strategy development could be accounted for not only in terms of a rational framework of understanding but also in terms of both political and organisational frameworks. The strategy development process of an organisation may then result from, and be influenced by, the broad social, political, and cultural aspects of the organisation or from external pressures as well as from a planned approach of the organisation to its environment.

The Emergence of Strategies

A natural assumption of the rational planned view of strategy development is that strategies are formulated and implemented in a linear manner and that an organisation's *intended* strategy will be implemented in its entirety to become *realised* as actual strategy. Here strategy is conceived of as being formulated, perhaps through some planning process, resulting in a clear expression of strategic direction, the implementation of which is also planned in terms of resource allocation, structure and so on (route 1 in figure 1). However this may not always be the case. Unexpected shifts in the environment, unforeseen problems in implementation or limitations in the process can operate to restrict the efficiency of strategy development and its realisation. The result of this may mean that an organisation's intended strategy is not realised as actual strategy (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). In effect much of what is intended follows route 2 in figure 1 and becomes *unrealised*. There may be all sorts of reasons for this, and the rest of the paper helps explains some of these.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The fact that a planned, intended strategy is not realised does not mean that an organisation has no strategy. Strategy can be seen as the direction an organisation actually pursues over time, intended or not. As such strategy development can be conceived of as an *emergent* process (route 3 in figure 1).

The distinction between what is intended and what is realised may not be so defined and the two may interact. A strategy which starts as intended may alter and become more emergent as it is implemented, while an emergent strategy may become formalised and more deliberate as it enters the accepted wisdom of the organisation and is encapsulated within its longer-term strategy. Indeed, an intended strategy which appears to have come about through a planning mechanism may still be of an emergent nature. For example, the planning process may perform the role of monitoring the progress or efficiency of an emerging strategy. On the other hand it may do little more than pull together the views and "wisdom" of management or industry experts which has been built up over time. As such a planning system may merely operate to support and justify the received wisdom within, and general direction of, an organisation (route 4 in figure 1). This route has inherent dangers given that the firm appears to be taking a pro-active, systematic approach to strategy development, and this may mask a somewhat complacent view of the situation the organisation is in.

Strategies may also come about in opportunistic ways (route 5 in figure 1). Changes may occur in the operating environment which may be taken advantage of in an opportunistic manner and as such lead to changes in the realised strategy of an organisation. Finally, strategy may be imposed (route 6 in figure 1). For example government legislation may force an organisation to alter its operations whether because of the need to comply with new environmental regulations or the privatisation of public utilities. Similarly, a down turn in the economy may force an organisation to follow a strategy of retrenchment, with divestments and the cutting of costs. The response to such pressure may be dealt with through planning mechanisms within the organisation; or it may be through some other mechanism,

such as individual decision making by senior executives. In any event such imposed strategy development can result in significant long term changes for an organisation.

Explanations of Strategy Development

This next section reviews in more detail the different explanations of how strategies may develop. While these explanations are not novel or indeed definitive, they do represent meaningful classifications of the process which make intuitive sense to managers and are understandable. It is important to stress that it is most unlikely that any one of the explanations given accounts entirely for the processes at work in an organisation: strategy development needs to be understood in terms of a mix of processes.

The Planning Dimension

Strategic planning is perhaps the most traditional view of how strategy is developed in organisations. The dimension indicates that strategy development is a distinctly intentional process involving a logical, rational, planned approach to the organisation and its environment. Further it implies that through the application of appropriate analytical and systematic techniques the 'right' decision can be taken.

The strategies which develop are the outcome of sequential, planned and deliberate procedures and are often the responsibility of specialised departments. Clear and well defined strategic goals and objectives are set by the senior members of an organisation. These goals may reflect the desires of the shareholders or potential threats and opportunities which the organisation becomes aware of through its constant monitoring of the business environment. As a goal or strategic issue is defined, the organisation and its environment (both internal and external to the organisation) are systematically analysed in terms of, for example, strategic position, the position of competitors, organisational strengths, weaknesses, and resource availability. The information collected is assessed and strategic options capable of attaining the goal or resolving the strategic issue are generated.

These strategic options, or courses of action, are systematically assessed against the criteria of the strategic goals and objectives to be achieved. This evaluation incorporates an assessment of both the estimated consequences of the alternative courses of action, for example in terms of risk versus return, and the value of these consequences. Similarly the long-term potential of the options are estimated. The option judged to maximise the value of outcomes, best fits the selection criterion and presents competitive advantage is chosen. The selected option is subsequently detailed in the form of precise plans and programmes and is passed from the top downwards within the organisation. Throughout this process strategies are determined and guided by those decision makers in senior management positions and are implemented by those below who act on but are unlikely to decide on strategy.

In line with the systematic development of strategy, the resources required for implementation are determined and appropriately allocated, and similarly the systems for monitoring and controlling the new strategy are determined. A strategy developed through this planned, sequential routine should then be implemented fully and in a 'surprise free' manner.

While this planned intentional notion of strategy development is appealing it is not without its problems and inherent dangers. In particular it lacks consideration of the less 'objective' aspects of the organisation and their critical influence on strategy development. Indeed, this dimension of strategy development could be seen as devoid of personal emotion or political activity (Etzioni, 1989). Consequently, the

strategy developed will not reflect the interests of any particular group or be restricted by the organisation's traditions.

However, regardless of the problems, the discipline and techniques of planning approaches can be useful because they may provide a framework for strategic thinking. The elements of the planning process represent a useful means of analysing and thinking about complex strategic problems and if managers also address the problems of managing strategy within the social, cultural and political world of organisations, then such thinking can be very helpful.

The Incremental Dimension

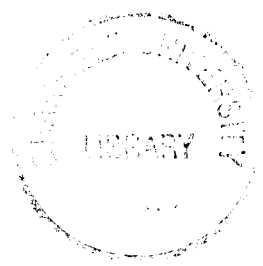
In the late 1950s Lindblom (1959) suggested that managing strategies through logical, sequential, planning mechanisms was unrealistic. He argued that given the complexity of organisations and the environments in which they operate, managers cannot consider all possible options in terms of all possible futures and evaluate these against pre-set, unambiguous objectives. This is particularly so in an organisational context in which there are likely to be conflicting views, values, and power bases. Rather, strategic choice takes place by comparing options against each other and considering which would give the best outcome and be possible to implement. Lindblom called this strategy building through 'successive limited comparisons', but argued that it took place in the everyday world of managing, not through planning systems.

Strategy development as characterised by this incremental dimension involves an adaptive response to the environment. Strategy is therefore seen to be worked through in action, and does not follow the neat sequential model of analysis, choice and implementation. Unlike the planning dimension, this model of strategy development does not operate to identify *a priori* the best or optimal solution (Mintzberg et al, 1976). Rather managers can be thought of as having a view of where they want the organisation to be in the future and try to move towards this position in an evolutionary way (Quinn, 1980).

Managers accept the uncertainty of their environment because they realise that they cannot do away with this uncertainty by trying to know factually about how the environment will change. Instead they seek to become highly sensitive to environmental signals through constant environmental scanning.

Strategy development is therefore an iterative process, encompassing feedback loops to previous phases where problem and solution may be redefined or redeveloped (Lyles, 1981), following exposure to the business environment. Commitment to a strategy is therefore kept tentative and subject to review during the early stages of its development. There is also a reluctance to specify precise objectives too early as this might stifle ideas and prevent the sort of experimentation which is desired. Objectives are therefore likely to be fairly general in nature. Over time those strategies which are successful are retained by the organisation while those that are inappropriate are eliminated. This ensures that the strengths of an organisation are maintained as changes in the environment are matched with changes in procedure, without excessive risk to the organisation.

In comparison to the planning dimension, this adaptive approach removes from top management and the corporate centre the sole responsibility of the task of strategy development, those in the lower levels for the organisation become actively involved. Indeed it is the organisation's sub-systems, each of which is concerned with different strategic issues (for example acquisitions or major reorganisations), which raise the awareness of potential strategic problems.



Further different strategic decisions should not be seen as entirely separate (Quinn, 1980). Because of the interplay between an organisation's sub-systems, each manager will know what his colleagues are involved in, and will be able to interpret their actions and requirements. The managers are in effect, learning from each other about the feasibility of a course of action in terms of resource management and its internal political acceptability. Together with the constant readjustment and limited commitment, this knowledge and understanding allows the long-term direction of the organisation to be monitored and the organisational mix of resources and skills to be altered in reaction to environmental changes. The process thus broadens the information base available, builds organisational awareness and increases the active search for opportunities and threats not previously defined.

Such a process is seen by managers to have benefits. Continual testing and gradual strategy implementation provides improved quality of information for decision making and enables the better sequencing of the elements of major decisions. It also encourages managerial flexibility and creativity and increases the possibility of creating and developing commitment to change throughout the organisation. Smaller changes, developed by managers throughout the organisation, are less likely to face the same level of resistance as that faced by major changes, imposed by the organisation's executives.

The Political Dimension

This dimension reflects strategy development which is dependent on power and influence. Organisations are political entities and, as such, powerful stakeholders or interest groups influence the inputs into decisions and the strategies followed. These stakeholders, ["any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Freeman, 1984)], which could include customers, banks, shareholders, government, trade unions and organisational members, each have different concerns. Concerns which may be in conflict; there may be differences between groups of managers, between managers and shareholders, or between powerful individuals. These differences are likely to be resolved through the processes of bargaining, negotiation, or dictate. The result is that goals and objectives, strategic issues and even strategies are derived from this political process and not from an analytical neutral assessment and choice. For example, the decision to adopt a strategy will not be solely based on merit, rather it will be shaped by the power of the group proposing and sponsoring the strategic option.

The level of influence or power these stakeholders are able to exercise differs (Heller et al, 1988) and is often conditional upon the organisation's dependency upon these groups for a resource (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and the potential difficulty in replacing the present stakeholder as the source of that resource (Hinings et al, 1974). Similarly the influence of a stakeholder is not constant from decision to decision. The decision situation determines the level of stakeholder involvement and both their level of influence and the dynamics of that influence throughout the process. For example, the influence of top level decision makers decreases as a strategy enters the implementation stage, while the influence of lower level managers increases.

Influence over decisions may also be gained through the provision of information. Information is not politically neutral, but rather a source of power, particularly for those who control that which is seen to be important. Information can be distorted, intentionally or not, to advance the interests of particular groups. These distortions may result from the provision of information which reflects the interests of the provider or through the provider operating to restrict the flow of information both of which can legitimize the desires of the interest groups (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

It would be wrong therefore to assume that the identification of key issues and even the strategy eventually selected emerge in a politically neutral environment. Strategic options and strategies will be championed, not only on the basis of the extent to which they offer benefit to the organisation, but because they have implications for the status, influence, and vested interests of particular groups. Only through a political process of compromise and mutual adjustment will a generally acceptable strategy emerge (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Final adoption will be dependent on the strategy's acceptability to both those stakeholders influencing the decision-making process and those who must implement the strategy, and not solely because it fulfils objective criteria.

The Cultural Dimension

The cultural dimension represents a "way of doing things in the organisation" which impacts on the strategy followed. As such organisations faced with similar environments will not necessarily respond in the same way. The strategy they choose to pursue will not result from a precise planned response to their environment, but from the attitudes, values, and perceptions which are held in common among the members and stakeholders of that organisation. Further, management cannot be conceived of simply in terms of the manipulation of techniques or tools of analysis. Management is also about the application of managerial experience built up over many years; and often within the same organisation or industry. Their experience is not only rooted in individual experience, but on group and organisational experience built up over time, for rarely do managers work in isolation. It is important therefore to recognise the significance of cultural aspects of management in the development of strategy. Indeed, strategy may be seen to result from a learned response to a particular strategic stimuli based on what the organisation holds as taken-for-granted (Schein, 1985).

Strategy development as explained by the cultural dimension is very much about the past, about managerial experience and expectations, and about the assumptions and beliefs of an organisation. As such managerial action, within the strategic process, is likely to be based on taken-for-granted frames of reference which are brought to bear by a manager, or group of managers, and which will affect how a given situation is perceived and how it is responded to. Indeed, the search for strategic solutions and the development of strategy will be directed by past experience, similar situations and the organisation's history.

Given that future strategy is driven to a large extent by a way of doing things in the organisation, then the associated taken-for-grantedness is likely to be handed on or inherited over time within a group. That group might be, for example, a managerial function such as marketing or finance; a professional grouping, such as accountants; an organisation as a whole; and more widely an industry sector, or even a national culture. Just as these frames exist at the organisational and sub-unit level they also exist on an industry wide basis (Spender, 1989), or indeed at a national level. Managers, then, are influenced by many frames of reference when developing strategy. However, especially important for the strategic management of most organisations is the organisational frame of reference - its specific set of assumptions - or the organisational paradigm (Johnson, 1992).

The paradigm comprises the deep rooted beliefs and tacit assumptions of the organisation and relates to the way things are done and what is done. These assumptions and beliefs are rarely talked about, and are unlikely to be made consciously explicit by managers. Examples might include the deep rooted assumption that banks are about secure lending; local newspapers are about purveying local news (i.e. as more their *raison d'être* than advertising); that

universities are about doing research; and so on. As such, these deep rooted assumptions can play an important part in strategy development.

The paradigm, then, represents a collective experience without which managers would have to re-invent their world afresh for circumstances they face or decisions they need to take; as such it enables new situations to be perceived in a way which is not unique (Schon, 1983) and provides a shared framework through which the world the organisation operates within can be interpreted (Schwenk, 1988). In this way it allows the experience gathered over years to be applied to a situation so that managers can identify strategic issues, direct the search for strategic solutions, decide upon relevant information, assess the strategic solution or course of action as to the likelihood of success and so develop the "appropriate" course of action. In short, it provides a mechanism through which managers can respond to a situation in the "right" way and develop the "right" strategy as defined by the other managers in the organisation.

An organisation's paradigm is, then, built up from different influences such as history and past experience (both personal and organisational), industry sector, and professional ethos. The strength of these influences will depend on a number of factors. For example an organisation with a relatively stable management and a long term momentum of strategy is likely to have a more homogeneous paradigm than one in which there has been rapid turnover of management and significant change forced upon it. Organisations with a dominant professional influence, perhaps an accountancy firm, are likely to demonstrate a homogeneous paradigm. Industry influences may be particularly strong if the transfer of staff between firms is limited to that industry, as it often is in engineering or banking for example or the environmental constraints are very dominant and commonly experienced as they are for example in public sector organisations.

Thus an organisation's strategy will develop in accord and within the confines of its culture and dominant paradigm. The cultural influence operates to orientate the definition and solution of a strategic problem internally ensuring a strategic response is based within the domain of the organisation (Schwenk, 1988) and the history of its members (Nutt, 1984). Strategies outside the frame of reference of the organisation, which are novel and new are likely to be resisted. As such strategic decision making reflects a future and shared direction which perpetuates an organisation's history and routines.

The Command Dimension

Here a particular individual is seen to have a high degree of control over the strategy followed. As such the organisation's strategy is primarily associated with a central powerful figure (for example the chief executive or a similar figure with institutionalised authority). Perhaps less commonly it may relate to the power of a small group of individuals at the top of the organisation.

The determinants of the strategic aspirations and the strategy followed may emerge from a vision, which represents the desired future state of the organisation. As such, a vision may result from the intuition and innovation of its originator and be developed from both intuition and a rational understanding of the organisation's strategic problems; an understanding which enables innovation to be made. The vision may be based on radical ideas and may challenge accepted norms, contradict established principles and paradigms, and go beyond familiar experience and knowledge (Trice & Beyer, 1986).

A more mundane explanation is that strategic aspirations may simply be the result of a strategy transferred from one organisation and context to another. This may come about because a new executive applies his or her existing frame of reference from

another context to the new organisation to which they have been appointed. For example some of the new chief executives appointed to the newly privatised UK industries in the 1980s came from private sector companies. They brought with them frames of reference from competitive environments in which profit motivation was taken as given. What was normal and obvious to them, was often seen as new and visionary in the organisations they moved into.

However these strategic aspirations are determined, they are associated with an individual to the extent that the individual becomes the representation of strategy. It is the individual who becomes the tangible link to strategy and the perceived source of that strategy for the organisational members. As such the individual is perceived to determine strategy. While an individual's vision may represent the organisation's strategic direction, it does not need to be commonly shared throughout the organisation. Rather the strategy and future strategic direction are characterised and determined by the "commanding" individual.

Whether the power of the central figure is achieved through the generation of an idea and "vision", through the organisation's history, or by virtue of position it inevitably places enormous strategic control and power in the hands of the individual who gains the capacity to translate intention into a sustainable reality (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

The influence of the command mode of strategy development is likely to relate to a particular time phase, for example a crisis situation, and may overwhelm objective analysis of the organisation's position. The history of organisations reveals that the command capacity has been an important influence on strategy development, and there are examples of organisations in which influential leaders have been effective in turning their organisation around. However these influences have then continued at times when a cooler examination of the business situation would have suggested that their influence and future aspirations for the organisation were becoming inappropriate.

The Enforced Choice Dimension

This dimension suggests a process of strategy development in which an organisation's external environment operates to limit strategic direction and choice. Indeed, this fits well with the view of some writers on management who argue that organisations have little or no control over the choice of strategies they follow. Factors in the environment impinge on the organisation in such a way as to encourage - even determine - the adoption of organisational structures and activities suited to that environment (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). These external constraints operate to prescribe strategies and limit the role organisational members play in their selection (Aldrich, 1979). Equally the strategies an organisation can follow tend to be common to all organisations within an industrial sector or market. In short, the success of an organisation is due to a fit between strategy, structure and environment directed by external pressure rather than any rational and intentional choice.

Barriers in the environment operate to restrict the strategies which can be followed and reduce the level of intentional strategic choice. Indeed, strategic change which does occur is likely to be instigated from outside the organisation. This is a responsive rather than a proactive move resulting from external pressure, for example, within public sector organisations from pressure brought to bear by the government. These limitations are such that influence over the environment is likely to be very low; rather the organisations in this instance may have to buffer themselves from the environment.

A number of allied assumptions are associated with this dimension. These centre around the notion of fit between an organisation and its environment. If fit occurs an organisation will survive. If the organisation becomes mismatched with its environment then it must adapt or else die. However, the ability to intentionally change is exceptionally limited. It has been suggested that changes occur within an organisation through variations in its processes, structures, and systems. While the process of organisational innovation and variation may occur as a rational intentional response to the environment, they may occur equally unintentionally, through conflict over control of resources; ambiguity of organisational reality; accident; errors; tactical moves; or luck. It is these variations, however they occur, which produce the potentially advantageous or dangerous innovations for an organisation. Those variations which fit the changes in the environment and which are appropriate and beneficial to the organisation produce advantage and so contribute to the chance of an organisation's or sub-unit's survival. (Aldrich and Mueller, 1982). These successful variations are retained and subsequently disseminated throughout the organisation and across its generations through culture, symbols, socialisation, administration and training.

The view taken in this paper is that for some organisations the impact of the environment is, indeed, very large; and that degrees of managerial latitude are severely reduced: however, this is not so in all environments; and that even where those pressures are severe, it is the job of managers to develop the skills and strategies to cope with the situation.

Integrating Views of Strategy Development

Each of the above dimensions, described in their singular and archetypal forms, is capable of explaining some aspects of the strategy development process. However, given the complexity of both the strategy development process and of the organisation in general, it is unlikely that one dimension would adequately describe the process operating in all organisations, in every situation, and at any point in time. Rather, it is probable that the dimensions and the processes they describe are not mutually exclusive but occur in combination. Indeed, in most organisations managers see strategies developing through a mix of such processes.

As such, this paper does not aim to identify the dimension which "best" describes strategy development across all organisations or prescribe the mode of strategy development which should be utilised. Rather it aims to demonstrate that organisations differ in their process of strategy development. Research has indicated that different processes of strategy development or strategic decision-making occur across organisations (Mintzberg, 1973; Shrivastava & Grant, 1985) and even within the same organisation (Johnson, 1987) and that the process operating can and does change. Indeed, given the complexity of strategic decisions it is unlikely that strategy development can be explained from a unitary viewpoint; the strategy development process is likely to be multifaceted (Fredrickson, 1983). Consequently, although valuable in explaining components of the strategy process, narrowly focussed or unitary frameworks may simplify the process and not take sufficient account of managerial understanding. The complexity of the process is therefore more likely to be conveyed by a comprehensive framework of explanation than through the application of a narrowly focussed framework (Derkinderen & Crum, 1988).

The research on which this paper is based has thus adopted an approach combining all of the above mentioned dimensions of strategy development into an integrated and comprehensive framework. It is an approach which we suggest can facilitate a clearer understanding of the strategy development process and its complexity. This understanding is aided through the use of strategy development profiles, the construction of which is described below.

The Strategy Development Profile

The alternative explanations or views of strategy development, identified above, were operationalised to identify characteristics singularly attributable to each of the dimensions. Based on these characteristics statements were developed for use in a self completion questionnaire, which was administered to senior managers, from a cross section of industries. They were required to indicate the degree to which the statements were characteristic of their organisation. Through the analysis of their responses, managerial perceptions of the organisation's process of strategy development were revealed. The numerical representation of these perceptions were subsequently plotted to develop Strategy Development Profiles of the separate organisations. It is important to note that these profiles represent how managers see the process of strategy development within their organisations.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Interpretation of the Strategy Development Profile is based on distance from the mid point ring (highlighted in bold). This mid-point represents the standardised mean of all those individuals we have sampled, so points moving away from this ring towards the outside of the profile (accompanied by a positive score) represent the degree to which the dimension is seen to be characteristic of the strategy development process of the organisation. Points moving inwards towards the centre (accompanied by a negative score) represent the degree to which the dimension is seen to be uncharacteristic of the process. Points at zero or low positive or negative scores indicate that the attributes associated with that view are not particularly characteristic or uncharacteristic of the organisation.

Strategy Development Process In Action

Using the integrated framework and strategy development profile discussed above, the following cases explore the different patterns of strategy development which exist in organisations. The potential advantages and problems these combinations present are discussed. In addition an example of differences in the perceived process from within the same organisation will be explored to show the potential conflicts which may be surfaced and the impact these may have on the acceptance of strategic change.

Case A - The Planning Commander

The strategy development profile for this engineering organisation indicates that whilst strategy is seen to develop through an intentional planned response to the environment it is under influence from an individual with centralised power. As discussed above, only in very rare circumstances will a single explanation for strategy development exist.

The organisation is seen to have definite and precise strategic objectives and to be developing a number of strategic options capable of attaining these objectives. The options are assessed against the objectives to be achieved before the "best" option is selected. Precise procedures are subsequently developed for the attainment of the objectives with the strategy being made explicit in the form of precise plans used to communicate the strategy throughout the organisation. Strategy development then is seen to be based on a systematic analysis of the business environment.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

However whilst this process is characterised by the planning dimension it is not the sole influence over strategy development. Rather influence is also seen to emerge

from a senior figure as characterised by the command dimension. Here strategy is seen to be associated with powerful groups taking strategic decisions though within the confines of both the planning process and a shared "vision" of the organisation's future. Indeed while this vision is particularly associated with the chief executive it is also seen to be commonly shared across the organisation. As such it represents a commonly shared view about the strategic direction which should be pursued.

The relationship between the notion of command and vision with the existence of a defined planning process raises a number of questions. These centre around the extent to which one influence moderates the other or the extent to which they actually operate in conjunction. Is the planning process driving the definition and communication of the strategic direction of the organisation, with the vision or mission simply supporting this commonly shared view of the future? Conversely, is the chief executive's vision the driving force behind the strategy with the planning process operating to justify and validate this vision providing the numbers and specific actions needed for its achievement?

In any event, the processes at work appear to have led to the development of a strategy which is commonly agreed upon. The low political influence confirms that there is little need for bargaining and negotiation between groups in order to secure acceptance of the strategy. Also barriers in the environment are not seen to restrict the strategies which can be followed, nor is the strategy imposed by those external to the organisation.

This low level of environmental influence suggests one of three scenarios. Firstly, it may indicate that the organisation's planning processes are such that they enable the organisation to keep ahead of the business environment, and so instigate any changes before being forced to. Alternatively, the process depicted may represent an external business environment which has little impact on the organisation, and thus requires little attention. This latter scenario is potentially dangerous if the operating environment were to change and become more influential, catching the organisation unprepared. Also of potential danger is the third explanation which is that the powerful executives who influence strategy have failed to recognise the impact of their business environment.

Case B - The Logical Incrementalist

The strategy development process seen to be in operation in this major leisure service organisation is characterised by an incremental approach to the operating environment though under influence both from the formal process of planning and from the impact of the organisation's culture.

The strategy the organisation develops, emerges gradually as the organisation responds to the need to change. It is a highly adaptive process with small scale changes being made to strategy in order to match changes which occur within the operating environment and the market place. Indeed there would seem to be some level of experimentation with the consequences of various strategic options being tested out through exposure to the business environment. Here then strategic change is likely to build from, and on, the strategy the organisation is currently following. It is unlikely that major, radical changes will occur.

INSERT FIG 4 ABOUT HERE

The process is seen to be adaptive in nature, driven by both planning and cultural elements. The organisation has defined strategic objectives which are pursued and made explicit through precise strategic plans. A well developed procedure for the assessment of potential strategic options exists: a procedure which is likely to combine the processes of "rational" and incremental assessment through the constant

testing of these options in the environment. Defined procedures exist for the development of the organisation's strategy, which is undertaken in a systematic manner.

Cultural influences are also an important dimension. These are seen to relate to a particular way of doing things in the organisation which has developed over the years, impacting on the strategies developed and pursued. As such the search for strategic issues and their solution is directed by what has occurred previously within the organisation. There also exists across the organisation a strong sense of shared beliefs and assumptions based around what the organisation is about, what the future direction should be, and what constitutes threats or opportunities. While these shared beliefs are anchored in the organisation's past they are also changeable, and do not just represent a perpetuation of the way things were.

Given that strategy development is adaptive in nature it is interesting to question what is the interplay between the cultural and the planning dimensions? To what extent is the planning process operating to challenge the assumptions and influence of culture? Is it merely operating to provide data to support strategy development within the confines of the current culture? Alternatively is the planning process operating to reorientate the organisation away from a reliance on the taken for granted? In this scenario the strategy changes required may still be filtered through the organisation's existing culture to reduce the potential for resistance and non implementation. Indeed, the shared assumptions and beliefs may even form a readily accessible and effective means through which required change can be communicated and achieved.

Case C - The Professional Service Firm

In comparison to the above case, the process of strategy development in this professional service partnership is seen to be primarily driven by its political and cultural processes and an adaptive or incremental response to an influential environment.

Unlike many corporations where an individual's involvement in decision making at an operational level may be strongly influenced by role and function, partnerships operate much less rigidly. Decision outcomes are more likely to reflect the level of power and influence held by various individuals and interest groups, the strength of which may change given different issues. It is interesting to find that such decision making forces are also reflected at a strategic level.

Within this organisation the firm's strategies, which are strongly related to the desires of interest groups, are likely to be developed by powerful individuals and groups through negotiation, debate and compromise. In this manner strategic problems are defined, and strategies which accommodate conflicting interests, are developed. Participation by interest groups, in the process is determined according to the issue involved; the same individuals or groups may not be involved in each decision. The strategy developed, then, reflects the interests of groups within the organisation.

INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

Equally the firm's long professional history and associated culture is likely to influence the identification of issues and options, and mediates the choices of strategies. Further the cultural beliefs and assumptions are likely to allow the various power groups to relate to each other within routines which are taken for granted. Within this culture, the strategies pursued emerge in an adaptive manner through a series of continual small scale changes and steps which those in the organisation believe enables the firm to keep in line with the business environment.

In addition the firm, which does not generally seem to be in a position to influence the environment in which it operates, appears to respond to environmental influences rather than making strategic decisions unprompted by external forces. Indeed strategies are not seen to develop in any systematic planned manner; little in the way of set procedures for the development of strategy exist.

The danger is that this lack of planning may prevent the partnership looking forward in a proactive manner; there may be too much reliance being placed on reactive responses to changes in the environment. Ultimately this may lead to difficulties for the partnership, for whilst the prevailing strategic direction may reflect past successes, it may not entirely fit the requirements for sustained success in the future. The root cause of this problem is that there may be little to challenge, and no questioning of, the taken for granted.

However the appointment of a new chief executive changed this situation as illustrated in figure 6. The process of strategy development was no longer characterised by a logical adaptive approach. Rather strategy is seen to relate primarily to the power of the "big man". It is the aspirations for the future of the organisation which this individual has, which is seen to provide the focus for strategic direction.

INSERT FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE

Although influence over strategy development here is still seen to be closely related to political processes, particularly those associated with the possession and utilisation of power, the importance of this dimension has diminished. Similarly, the influence of the organisation's culture on strategy development has also been subdued by the power of the managing partner.

However the relationship which exists between these three influences is of great significance. The professional ethos which permeates the organisation and its members provides a common understanding and an established power structure through which political activity can be exercised. Indeed the command figure has emerged from this structure. Thus, even though the managing partner is seen to have ultimate control, his power is moderated. In addition, as this individual has developed and progressed through the same professional and organisational structure as his colleagues, so he is likely to hold a similar view of the world and the strategic issues faced. This in turn is likely to reduce the level of conflict within the organisation, particularly at a senior level.

Looking to the future it is interesting to consider whether the authority of the new senior figure will prevail, or whether in fact the cultural and political dimensions will once again dominate the strategy development process.

Case D - The Archetypal Public Sector Organisation

This example is a common configuration of processes seen within the public sector. It is a process of strategy development which is characterised by the dominant external influence of the environment and by the internal influence from cultural and political forces. This local government division sees its freedom of strategic movement to be severely limited by central government legislation, expectations and financial control. Indeed the external environment is such that overall strategy is imposed by those outside, with internal power bases having little influence in this.

However, political activity in the form of negotiation and bargaining within the organisation are important factors in issues concerning the implementation of the strategy, for example in the prioritisation of strategic tasks, and or in the allocation of financial resources. In fact in this part of the process the highly influential and

deterministic external environment directly impacts on the internal power structure of the organisation. It is those groups who deal with the external environment and who operate as boundary spanners (Jemison, 1981), who attain greatest influence over the operational aspects of the strategy. Controlling externally derived resources and information, much of which is likely to relate to the external environment, it is these groups who could ultimately restrict or delay the implementation of the preset strategy.

INSERT FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE

The process of strategy development in this organisation could present substantial problems for change. It appears that what strategic change there is, is dictated by forces outside the organisation and through internal power struggles or political negotiation. Such a combination does not bode well for repositioning strategy if the operating environment were to change rapidly, for example by becoming more competitively oriented. There are however organisations that have faced such circumstances who have appeared to change the processes that drive the strategy within their organisation.

INSERT FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE

Figure 8, showing the profile of an organisation in transition between the public and private sector is an illustration of this. Under these conditions the strategy development process is perceived to be related to the planning and incremental dimensions though still under influence of the external environment as depicted by the enforced choice dimension.

In particular, planning is perceived by the organisation's members to be a major influence over the process of strategy development. This is seen to relate particularly to the existence of definite and precise strategic objectives and the assessment of potential strategic options against the explicit objectives to be achieved. However, planning in this instance is seen to be moderated by an adaptive approach to strategy development. New strategies deliberately build on existing strategies, with small continual changes to strategy ensuring that the organisation keeps in line with its business or operating environment. Indeed strategy is seen to emerge gradually as the organisation responds to the need to change and adjusts its strategy to match the changes which occur in its market place.

Such contrasting patterns from two organisations operating in a similar environment poses interesting questions. Do the forces shown to be dominant in the transitional organisation represent what the members feel are the forces which will facilitate a smooth transition into the private sector, rather than a reflection of the processes actually at work? Do the organisation's members perceive that with an archetypal planning process in place any potential problems associated with transition can effectively be planned out: for example that planning processes somehow diminish the political forces so typical of public sector organisations? Unfortunately, however appealing and traditionally acceptable the implementation of a planning system may be, this approach may well prove inappropriate if strategy development is driven by alternative forces, for example by the organisation's culture or its political processes. Alternatively, executives may have been brought in from a different environment to effect the change, who do not appreciate the strengths of the cultural and political dimensions. If this is the case it is likely that problems emanating from the long established ways of doing things will be encountered upon the implementation of a new strategy.

Example of Differences in Process

While the above examples of the strategy development process occurring within organisations presents the process as commonly agreed upon, differences between organisational groups have been identified. In the following case differences in terms of the process will be highlighted between board and senior level managers.

Case E - Executive and Senior Manager

Within this international manufacturing organisation there are two distinct groups which consist of those based in the organisation's executive and those who are its senior managers. The organisation's executive see the process of strategy development to be characterised by a planned intentional response to the organisation's environment but within an adaptive or incremental approach. Indeed, defined strategic objectives are seen to be developed based on a systematic analysis of the business environment. These executives believe that specific procedures are followed both in the analysis of the environment and the development of potential solutions. However, this assessment is not solely captured within the planning procedures; rather strategies are modified through implementation. The resulting exposure to the business environment is not unintentional or haphazard, rather it is deliberate. There is also seen to be a clear view of the future which the organisation is progressing towards and which provides both the executive and other decision makers with a self contained criteria against which potential actions can be assessed.

INSERT FIGURE 9 ABOUT HERE

This is not a view of strategy development shared by the organisation's senior managers. While both groups see strategy developing in an adaptive manner, what constitutes the driving force of the process differs. Here strategy is seen to develop from the internal political activities of the organisation. Indeed, strategy is seen to be defined within the organisation by those groups with power. As such the strategies which are pursued are seen to reflect the interest of particular groups as opposed to the organisation as a whole.

The idea of the organisation following defined and systematic procedures in defining its strategic direction is not seen by the senior managers. Neither are plans which communicate the strategy and the mechanisms for its achievement seen to exist. Rather influence over the process is attained through the control of critical resources and information.

While there is disagreement on the major influences of strategy development, the two groups do agree on the relatively low influence of the external environment, the absence of any senior figure setting the strategic direction, and the minimal influence of the organisation's culture over the process, a factor not surprising given that the organisation has recently been through major change including its acquisition by another corporation.

Indeed this latter point may account for some of the differences. The process as perceived by the executive may reflect a new process which is being developed, even imposed as a result of the acquisition but which has not yet permeated to those at the level below. However regardless of the mechanisms through which the differences have emerged, they require careful management in terms of increasing the involvement of all relevant parties in the strategy development process.

Conclusion and Implications

The cases in this paper have indicated that strategy is not developed in an identical manner in all organisations. Rather the process is seen to differ. Indeed numerous configurations of strategy development have been identified between managers across industry sectors and between different organisations within the same sector. Furthermore the cases have also shown that the configurations of strategy development do not necessarily, or even usually, encompass the archetypal planning process, where strategy evolves as a result of a rational analytical approach.

The consequence of this is that a unitary dimension to understanding strategy development is ineffective in conveying the complexity of the processes seen to exist. However, the approach discussed in this paper overcomes this problem through an integrated framework, combining six explanations of the strategy development process.

In dealing with these six processes, as they are to be found in organisations, this paper has been descriptive and not prescriptive. There is no suggestion here that because such processes exist, this is how strategy should be managed. However it is important to understand the reality of strategy making in organisations, not least because those who seek to influence the strategy of organisations do so within that reality. There is little point in formulating strategies which may be elegant analytically without having an understanding of the processes which are actually at work. Although there has been no suggestion within this paper that any one mix of strategy development processes is superior to another, this would be an interesting area to be addressed by research. Could a number of optimum process configurations be found to exist in given competitive conditions? Indeed this type of question is becoming of increasing interest amongst researchers (Meyer, Tsui and Hinings, 1993).

In the meantime, there are many practical benefits to managers in this work. Through the use of this integrated framework a clearer understanding of the strategy development process can be achieved and the process occurring within organisations can be surfaced. This understanding in turn acts to stimulate discussion and exploration by senior executives of the strategic development process in operation.

This is of vital importance when an organisation faces a change in strategy, for if a change is to be successfully achieved, it is essential that the processes which are driving strategies are understood and managed. Moreover within an organisation it is possible that different perceptions will exist as to what these driving processes are: to ensure that strategy is implemented effectively managers need to understand the strategy development process as seen by their colleagues. The level of conflict typically encountered in strategy development may, then, be reduced and the efficiency of the process improved.

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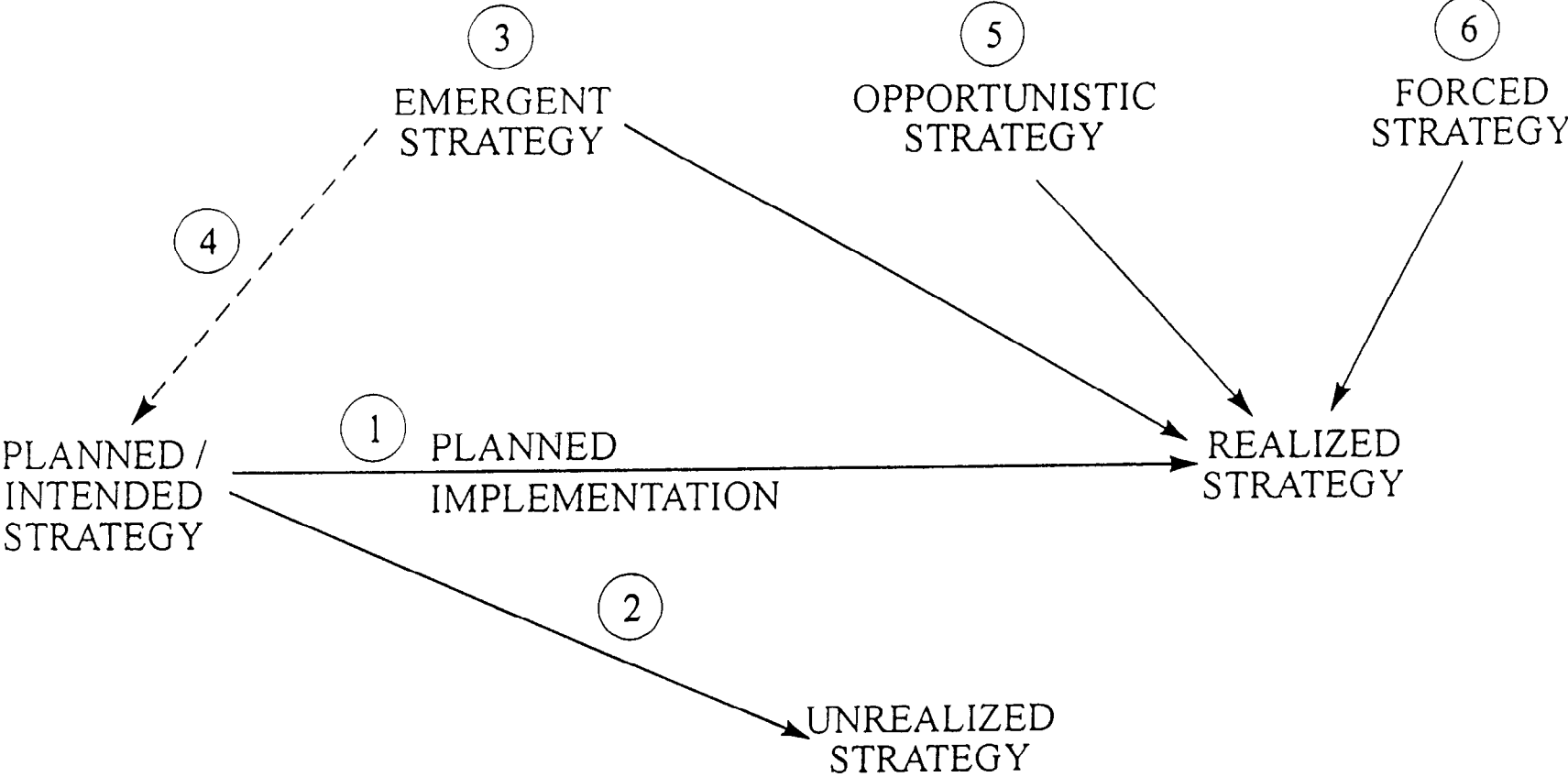
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FIGURE 1



STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROFILE

Figure 2

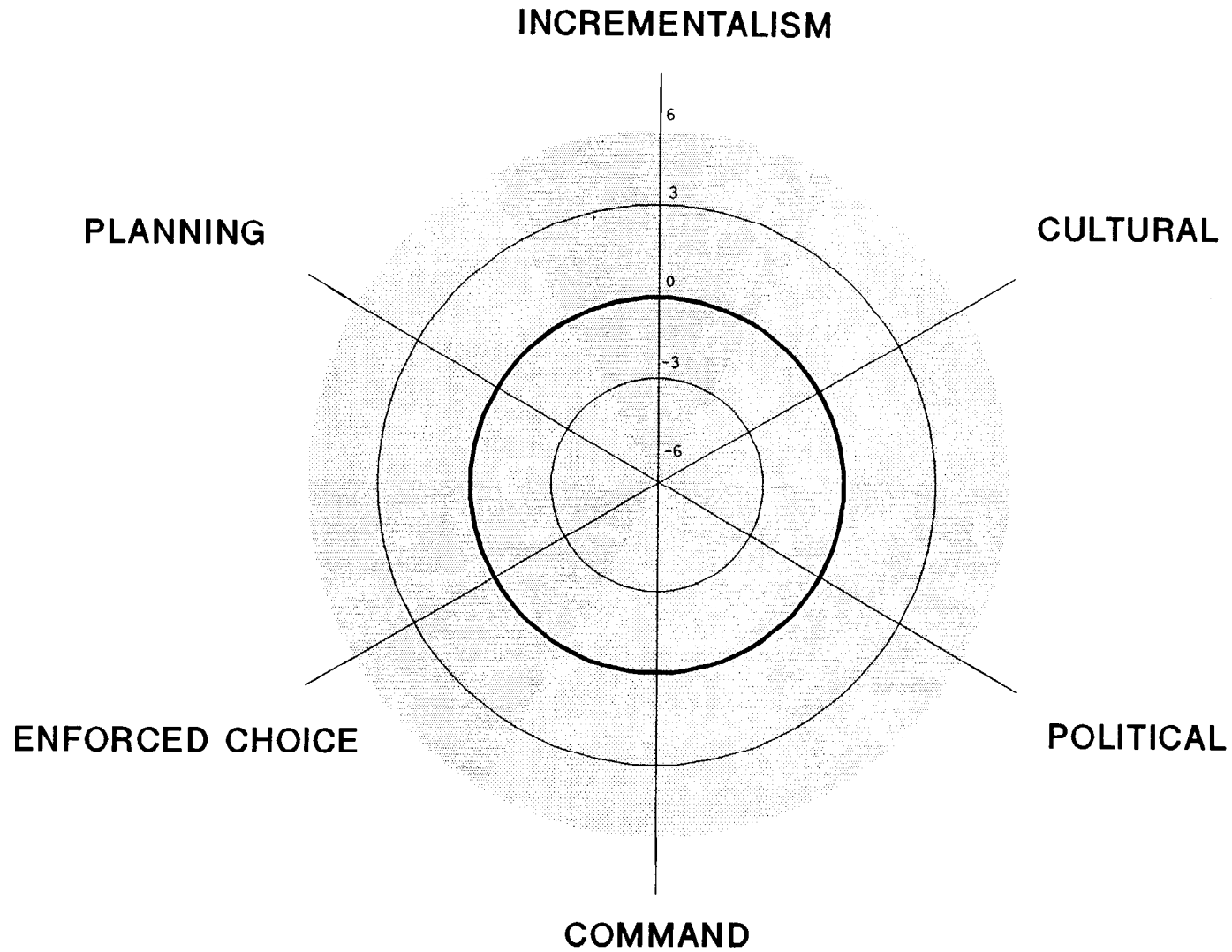
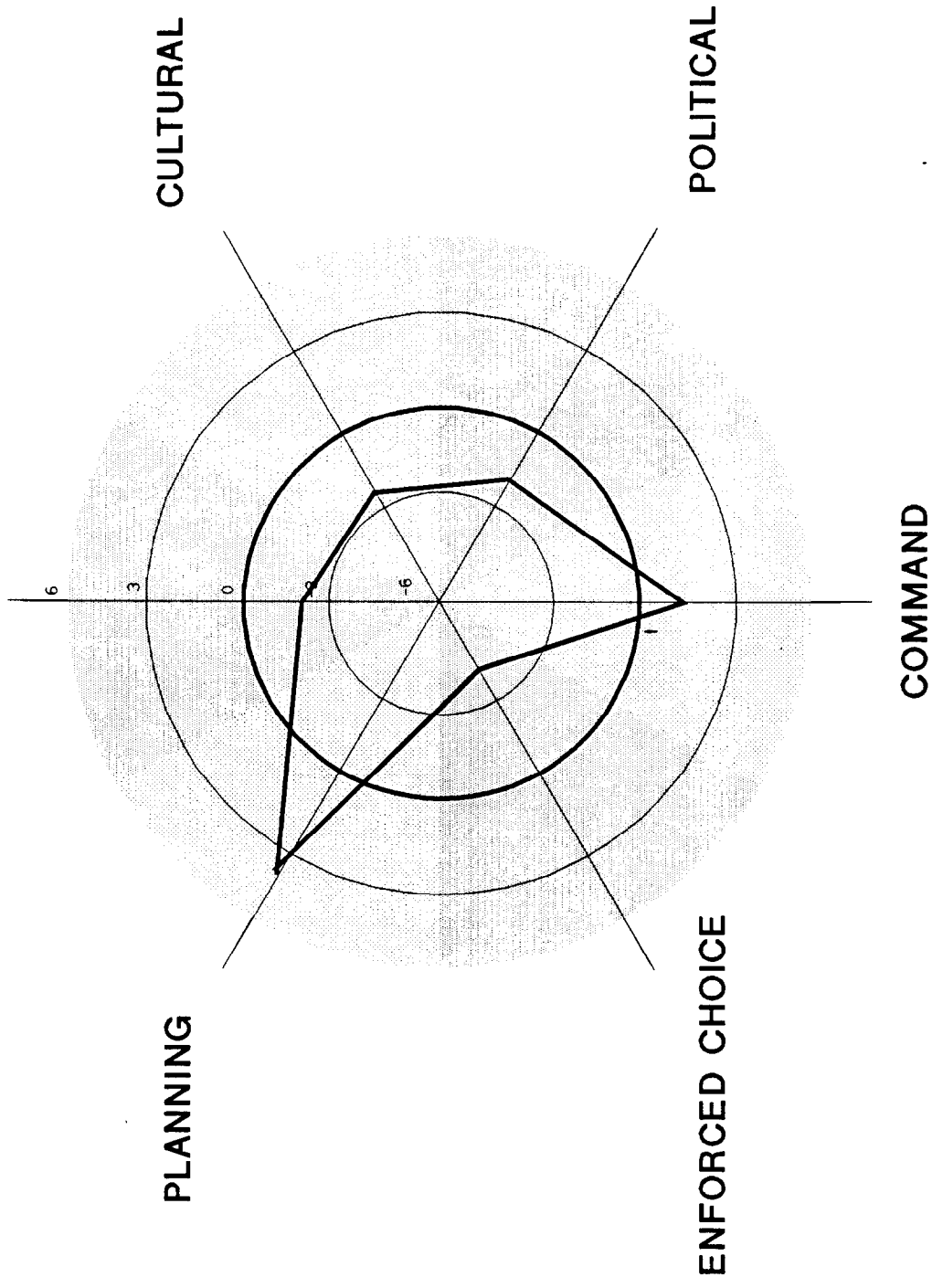


Figure 3

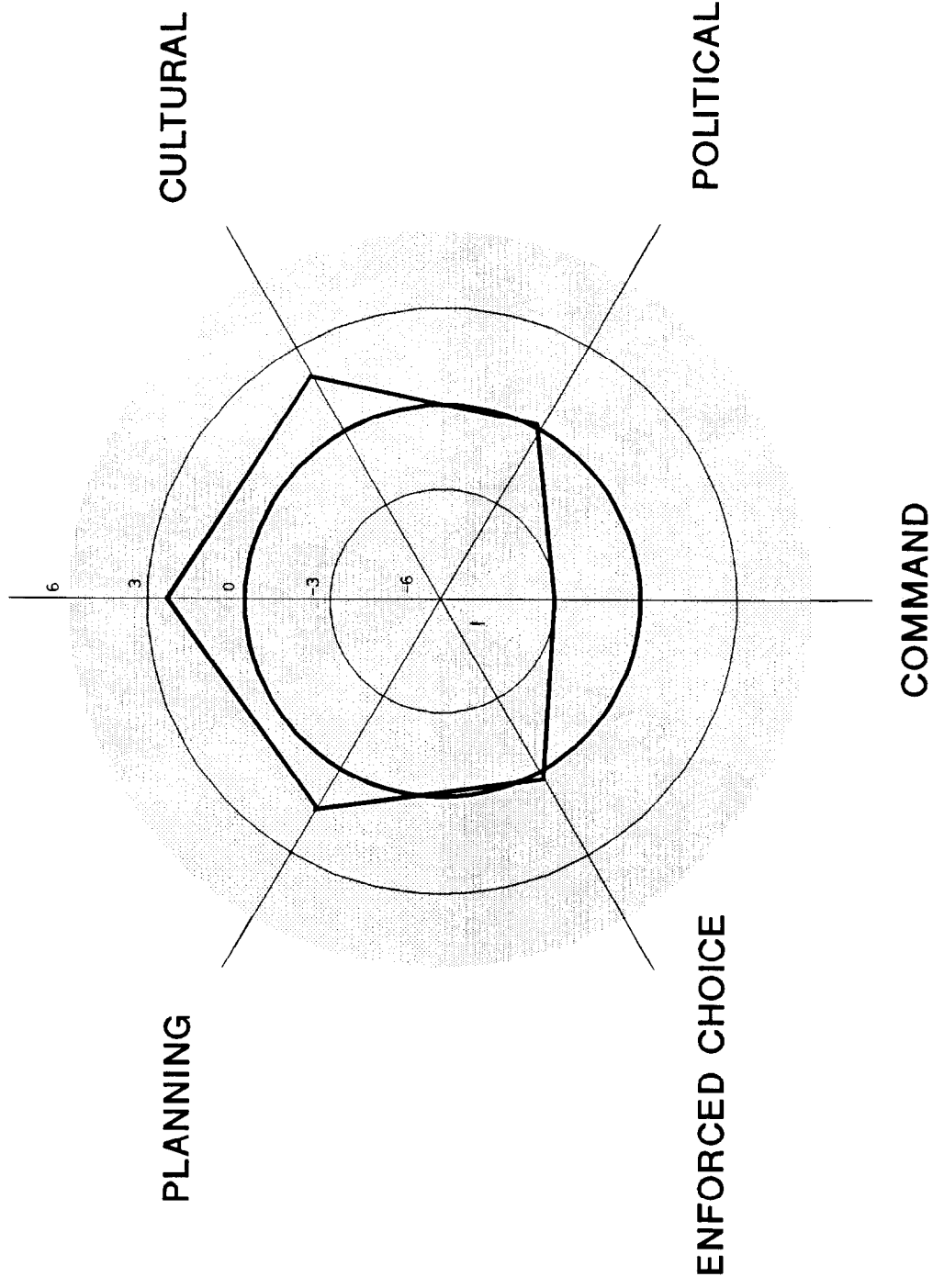
INCREMENTALISM



Case A - The Planning Commander

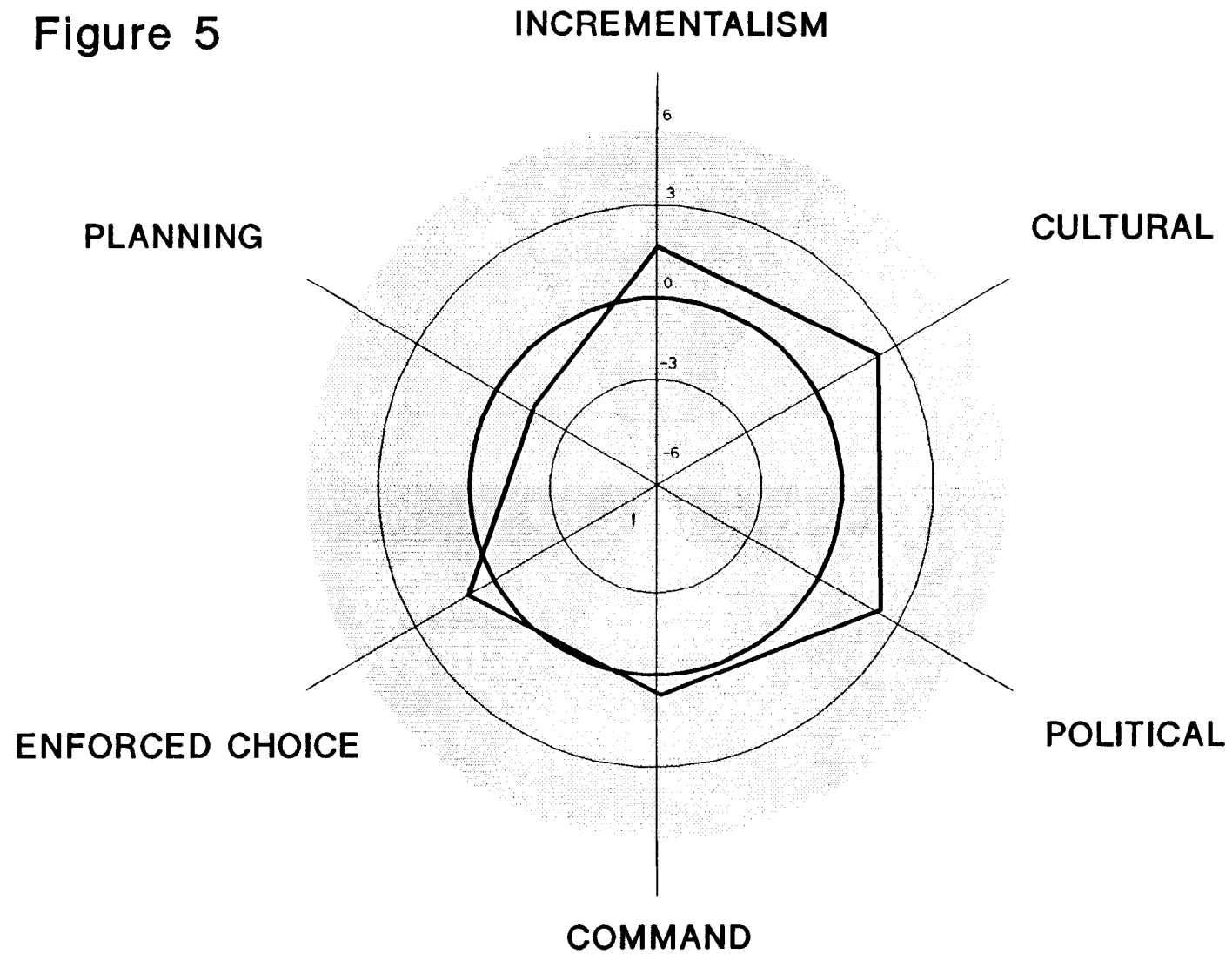
Figure 4

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Case B – The Logical Incrementalist

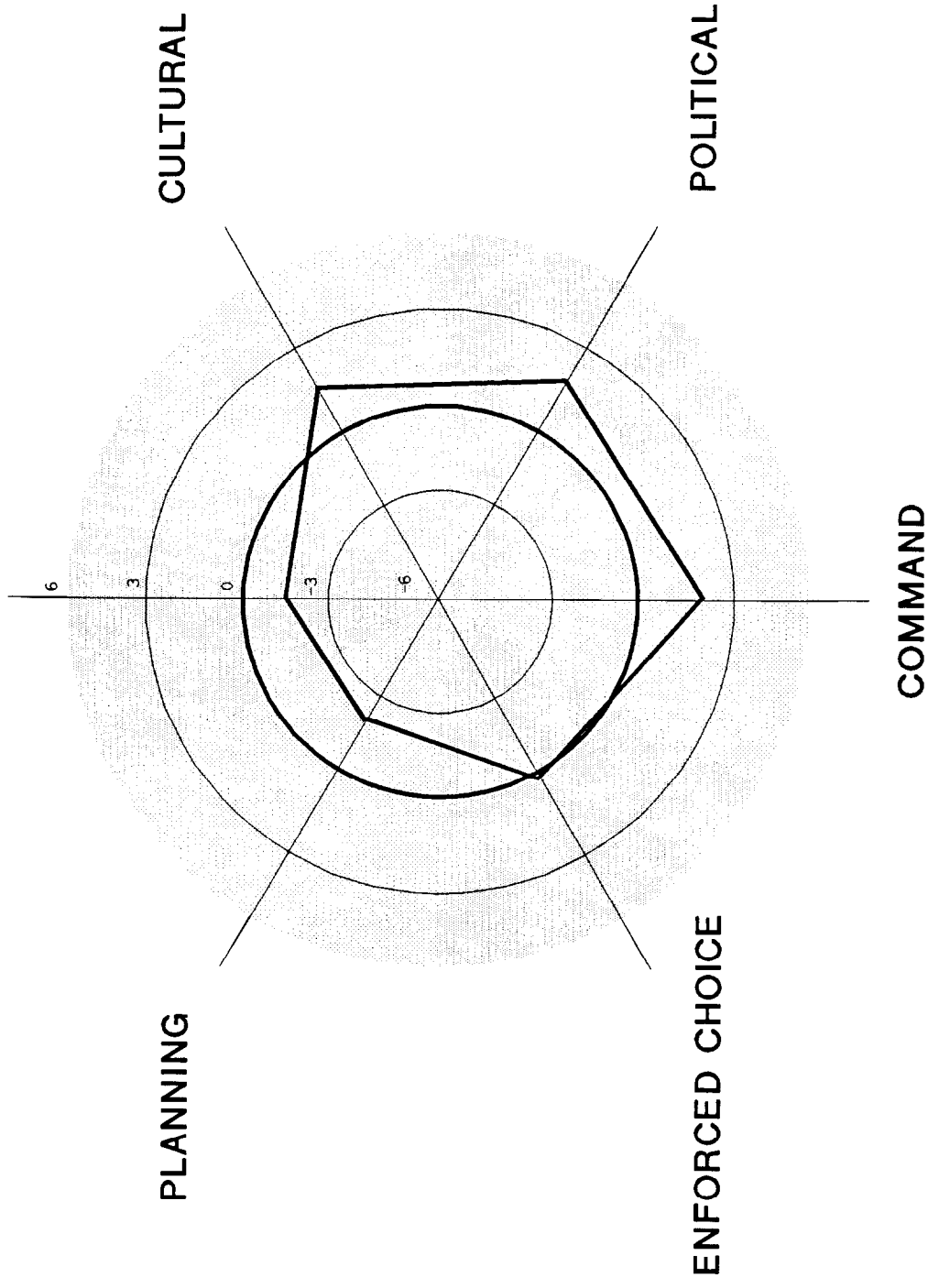
Figure 5



Case C – Professional Service Firm (1)

Figure 6

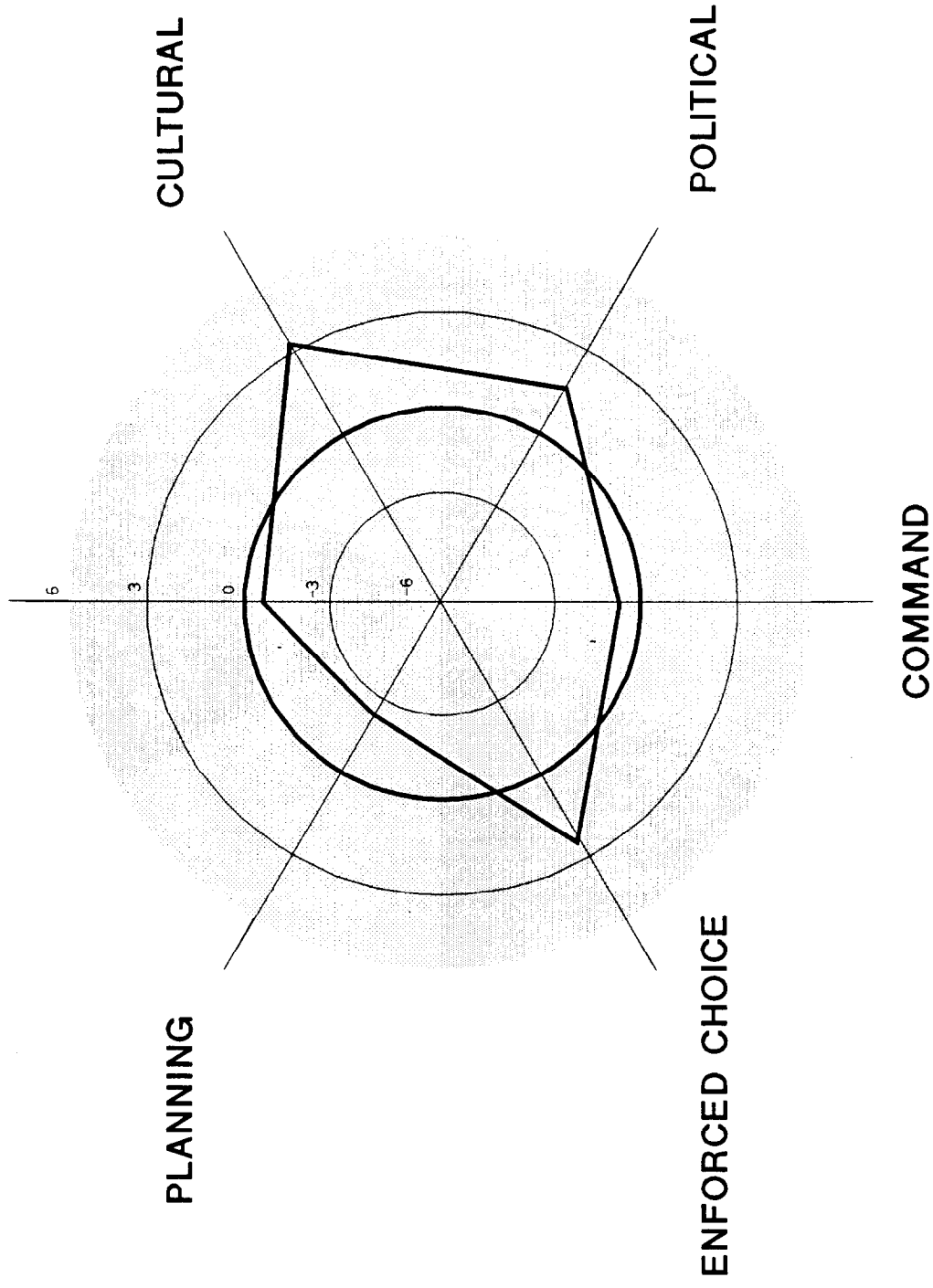
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Case C – Professional Service Firm (2)

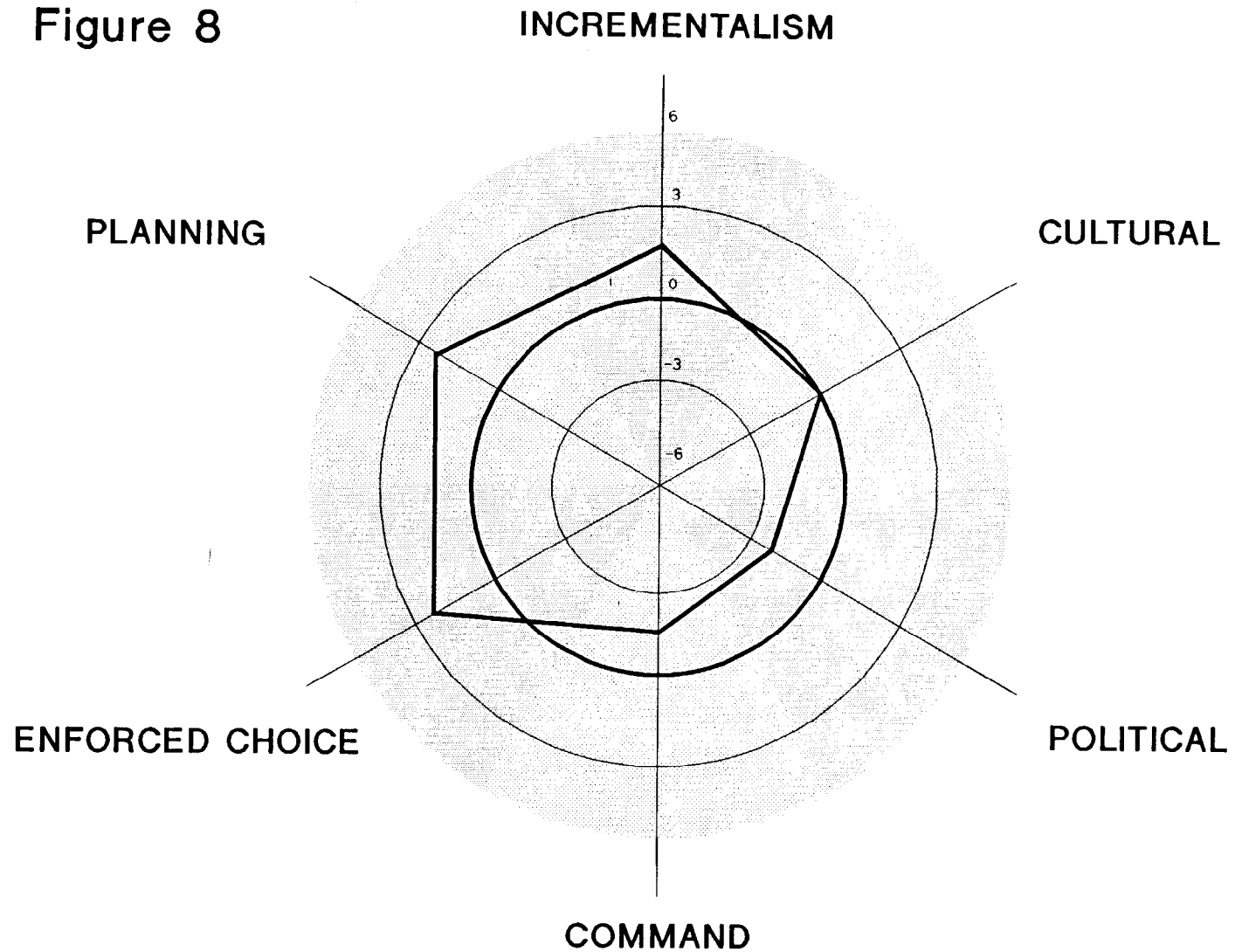
Figure 7

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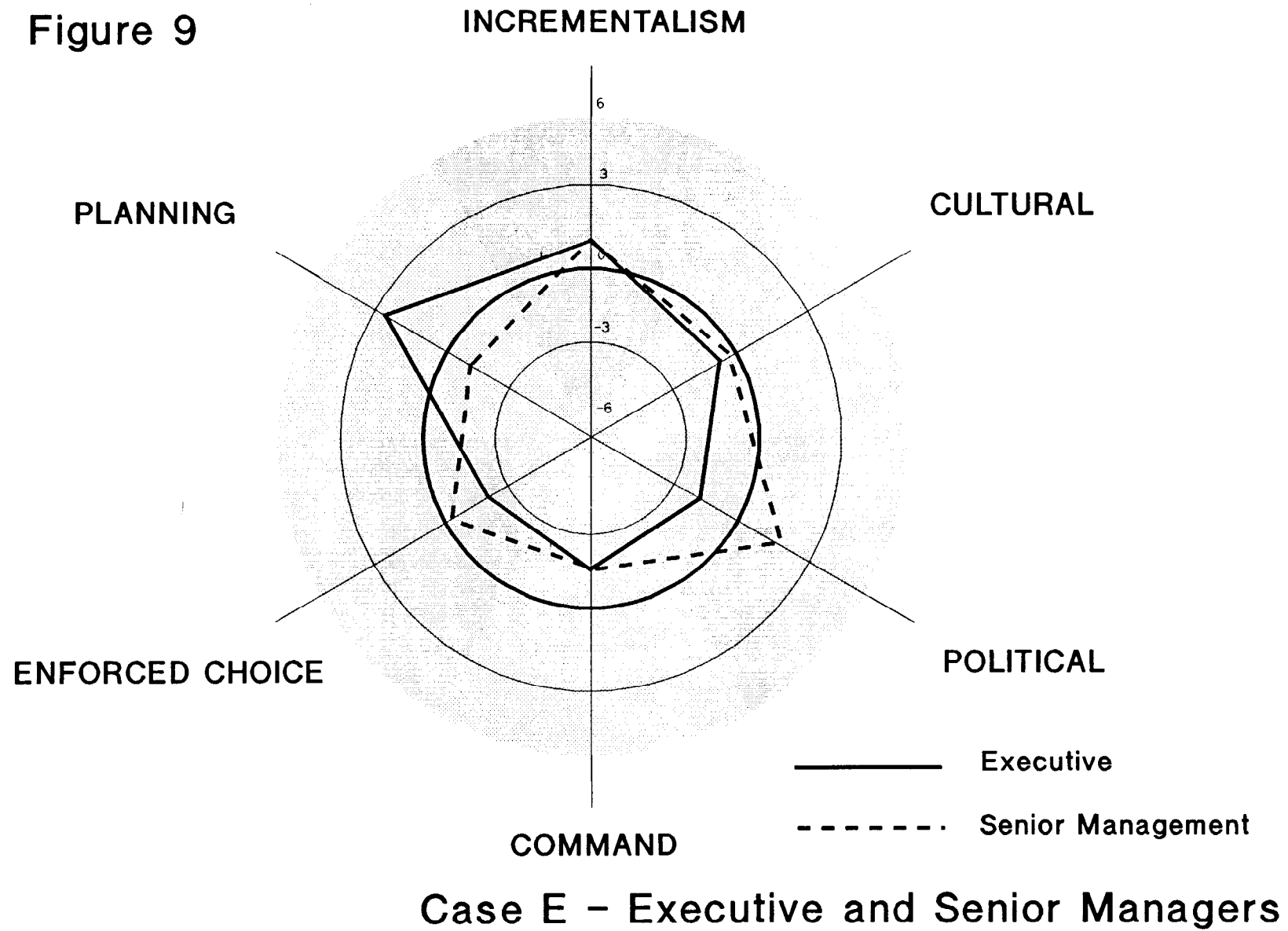
Case D – Archetypal Public Sector Organisation

Figure 8



Case D – Transitional Public Sector Organisation

Figure 9



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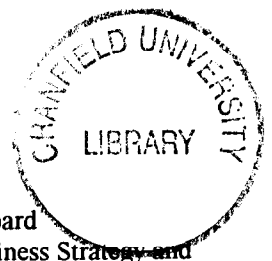
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