Strategy in Advertising

Strategic communication is at the center of communication studies, whether we link strategic communication to intentionally motivated purposes or define the strategic aspect as an inherent part of every communication. In either case, we face an attribution, we make an assessment relating to our observations, and we assign a specific value to communication. Then again, defining strategic communication in the realms of organizational communication is by nature a deliberative operation: the purposeful use of communication to fulfill an organization’s mission (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2007). However, regardless of the impact of strategic communication in terms of ethical considerations, the nature of the term strategic reveals one aspect in particular: Strategic communication provides legitimacy for actors to achieve specific goals. More specifically, beyond the attribution of strategic purposes in communication, and beyond the suspicion towards communication as strategic intent, there is a transparent field of application—in corporate communications, public relations and, especially, advertising—whose raison d’être is accounted for by the expectation that goals will be achieved: A mission has to be accomplished for communication to be effective. Strategic communication is thus always related to actor groups who are in charge of doing strategy.

Doing strategy brings one face to face with issues that define, not only strategy per se, but also what it means to take conscious action by doing strategy to fulfill an organization’s mission. Considering the overriding topic of this chapter, it is hardly necessary to define advertising as a specific form of strategic communication, which does not make any secret about its strategic intentions with regard to effectiveness and economic purposes. Nevertheless, advertising and advertising strategy cannot be detached from corporate organization’s overall strategic considerations: thus we have to address hierarchies of strategies.

Ordinarily, classifications of advertising from a business point of view place advertising under the aegis of marketing planning, and doing strategy in terms of marketing planning routinely ends up with textbook definitions that tend to describe organizations’ strategic objectives on a formal level, rather than the practice of doing: “[B]ases for strategic planning are the global analysis of the potential of a corporation’s success and the development of ideas in order to safeguard the corporation’s future in the long run” (Berndt, 1996, p. 7—our translation). A definition of strategy itself fails to appear. Nevertheless, management theory, at least, has undertaken efforts to define strategy in a paradigmatic attempt. For example Furrer, Thomas and Goussevkaia (2008) carried out a content analysis, investigating strategic management journal articles over a 26-year period (1980–2005). Within the data...
corpus of 2,125 articles published in the *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)*, *Academy of Management Review (AMR)*, *Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)* and *Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)*, Furrer et al. identified 26 main keywords associated with strategy definitions and strategy modeling. The most common keyword, appearing in 777 articles, was *performance*, which included sub-categories like *risk, wealth creation, profitability,* and so on. Other frequent keywords were in the following order: *environment* (543 articles), *capabilities* (518 articles) and *organization* (492 articles). Although the authors were able to show an interesting evolution of management theory that traces a paradigmatic shift in economics’ understanding of the term strategy—towards a more organizational theory-oriented approach—most of the evolutionary stages of strategy perception tend to atomize strategy from a corporate-based view. “Therefore, future research questions should be related to the integration of corporate and competitive strategies and its implication for firms’ performance and competitive posture” (Furrer et al., 2008, p. 16). These competitive strategies are defined as socially complex competitive resources such as trust, change and choice, capability and, in particular, *creativity.*

The question is: How do we implement these varying statements of strategic intent? How, and under which conditions, is strategy done? As David Seidl (2007) remarked, “[u]nder the label ‘strategy as practice’ there have recently been increasing calls for closer attention to the ways in which strategizing in organizations is influenced by ‘macro-social’ structures” (p. 197). Seidl’s critical review of paradigmatic accounts in strategy research that disregard the multitude of strategy discourses is a suitable point of departure. Beginning with Seidl’s assumption that strategy can be defined neither as a cohesive procedure of action nor as a unified field of research and scientific discourse, we turn towards another hurdle that enters the limelight: the aforementioned hierarchy of strategies. Understanding strategy as practice on the one side—as proposed by Seidl’s re-description of the entire field of strategy as an ecology of strategy discourses—may cast a light on the manifoldness of practices in doing strategy, but on the other side these practices refer to differing rationalities. As Zerfass (2008) stated with regard to corporate communications’ efforts to integrate communication activities:

This suggests itself as a sensible idea inasmuch as these component areas of corporate communication do [. . .] contribute in distinct ways to the realization and effective execution of strategy. A separation of this sort is also current amongst service-providers and agencies [. . .]. Hand in hand, however, with this necessary specialization goes, again and again, the danger that the view may be lost of the common reference of communication to the strategy as a whole.

Focusing on advertising agencies, as a relevant service-provider in corporate communications, the concept of strategy as a whole is challenged more than ever. Corporations’ marketing divisions and advertising agencies operate on varying grounds that differ in organizational cultures, and yet both take responsibility for corporations’ brand management. In order to incorporate versatile aspects of strategy as a practice, we have to start with a thorough engagement in communicator research focusing on the advertising system and the conditions under which advertising is planned, produced, and finally distributed. As a result we talk about *doing* strategy because we want to stress that in advertising, strategy has become a somewhat taken-for-granted omni-relevant concept, organizing the manifold activities within the whole advertising process.

**Doing Strategy in Advertising**

**Rival Conceptions of Advertising**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century we face two principal conceptions of what professional advertising should be: (1) the ‘technical’ and the (2) ‘creative’ conception of advertising
(Zurstiege, 2001). The technical conception of advertising draws on reason and sound judgment on the basis of standard measures helping to appraise efforts within the process of the planning, production, and distribution of advertising objectively. Siegert and Brecheis (2010, p. 116) have argued, in view of Zurstiege’s (1998, 2005) systems theoretical approach to a theory of advertising, that research deciphers the distinct codes applied by the economic system, on the one hand, and the media system, on the other hand. Similarly, the sociologist Cronin (2004) has suggested that drawing on research fulfills a specific function in the relationship between the advertising practitioner and the advertiser and, moreover, between the brand manager and his superiors: “Indeed, research data can be used as a kind of alibi by those brand managers to justify to their superiors’ decisions they have made about the campaign. In this way, brand managers can deploy research as a way of negotiating their (relatively powerless) position in the management structures of client firms, rather than as any benchmark of actual consumer preferences” (p. 350). What is the optimum advertising budget (Jones, 1999)? Which compensation system will motivate the advertising practitioner to provide best service most efficiently (Spake, D’Souza, Crutchfield & Morgan, 1999)? What are the most significant testing methods that help to appraise advertising effects? Does the use of advertising agency consultants lead to a more successful relationship between the advertiser and the advertising practitioner (Beard, 2002)? These are but a few of the generic problems investigated from this perspective. To answer these questions one must exercise sound judgment, and deliver good reasons for which one might be held accountable.

The creative conception of advertising, on the contrary, draws on artistic license and thus establishes a strong tie between art and advertising. Despite the fact that most practice-oriented research assumes that the appreciation of applied creativity was sparked off by the creative revolution of the 1960s, the creative conception of advertising is much older. Marchand (1986) indicated that—since the beginning of the twentieth century—art has become an instrument of advertising in order to accomplish a cultural uplift. Modern art offered an “aura of both rarefied aesthetic quality and an up-to-date tempo” (p. 140). Even though many authors have complained that research in advertising creativity has received insufficient empirical attention (Stewart, 1992; Zinkhan, 1993; Reid, Whitehill, King & DeLorme, 1998; West & Ford, 2001; Koslow, Sasser & Riordan, 2003; 2006), at least as many authors again have dealt with creativity in advertising by approaching this subject matter from a broad range of perspectives. The individual characteristics of the creative personality have been scrutinized as well as the creative decision process or the (creative) philosophy of advertising agencies (West, 1993; West & Ford, 2001). Organizational influences on the creativity of agency personnel (Ensor, Cottam & Band, 2001; Pratt, 2006) have been under discussion, as well as changes in creative advertising, monitored over time (Reid, Whitehill, King & DeLorme, 1998).

Among the different contributors to this field of research there is a strong mutual agreement that stressing applied creativity means that in advertising, for example, as distinct from art, creativity is not employed for its own sake, but rather, to achieve some other (commercial) end. Yet, as research has indicated clearly, in order to enhance creativity it is essential that the creative personnel of the advertising agency perceive encouragement by their co-workers, supervisors, and high-level superiors to take risks. Practically speaking this means a high degree of operational autonomy on the job, liberating the creative personnel from the advertiser’s restraints (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby & Herron, 1996; Ensor, Cottam & Band, 2001). Therefore, whoever establishes a strong tie between art and advertising places emphasis on good sense rather than sound judgment, mutual trust rather than rational inter-subjectivity, inspiration rather than reason, and autonomy rather than control. The creative conception of advertising presupposes a more co-operative business-building relationship between the advertiser and the advertising practitioner.

Fostering research in regard to these rival conceptions of advertising admittedly faces some constraints. Fröhlich (2008) has stated: “representative research concerning occupational structures
within the German advertising industry [. . .] is not available.” (p. 18: our translation). Without limitation the same holds true for representative communicator research concerning the German advertising industry. Due to this fact, within the German-language research context little is known about the question of how and under which conditions advertising is planned, produced, and distributed. Yet, this interplay between actor groups within the advertising industry, and their respective struggles for power, authority and professional identity, are of considerable importance for the functionality of the media system.

Biting the Bullet or Pulling Together? Power, Authority and Professional Identity in the Advertising Industry

The relationship between the main actor groups can be observed most clearly by asking two different, yet related questions: What are the cornerstones of professionalism in advertising, and what are the key features of best practice in co-operative work between the actors involved? Contributions concerning the first question have put strong emphasis on the latent—or, as the case may be, manifest—conflicts between the members of the different actor groups involved in the planning, production, and distribution of advertising. Taking account of these conflict-laden relationships within the practice of advertising, one of the first thorough investigations was made by the sociologist Tunstall (1964). If the scientific community had appreciated Tunstall’s comprehensive analysis properly then he could have been called the founder of this research tradition. This, however, has not been the case until today. If referred to within the field of advertising research at all, Tunstall’s pioneering study is usually mentioned in connection with the notion that the effects of advertising and subsequently, the efficiency of advertising are hard to appraise because advertising is but one factor among many others determining the advertiser’s business success (1964, p. 16). This is a recurrent theme both in advertising practice and in advertising research.

Tunstall’s (1964) interest in advertising research, however, far exceeded the question of how to appraise advertising effects. Instead, he concentrated on another subject: the problem of how the different actors within the advertising business operate in the midst of such uncertainty. On the basis of research subsequent to Tunstall’s early contribution it may be stated that at all stages of the advertising process, uncertainty and, moreover, the management of the conflicts accompanying this uncertainty, are a characteristic, if not a vital feature, of the advertising business.

In view of Tunstall’s enlightening research we turn to the implications of different actors and differing rationalities within the advertising business.

Implementing Strategy in Advertising Agencies’ Services

The implementation of strategy in advertising agencies allows for three relevant lines of argument within this field of research, as follows.

- Power. Advertising agencies and their clients struggle for power in their mutual relations. The problems arising from this constellation have often been scrutinized, for example from the perspective of agency theory: Who gains power in the relationship, and what are the means, respectively, to gain or to check, power?

- Complexity. The production of advertising is a complex process executed by experts who belong to different intellectual “milieus,” as pointed out from an organization theory standpoint by Chris Hackley and Arthur J. Kover (2007), among others.

- Integration. This complex process needs, on a personal level, people who can span the boundaries between these different milieus. The complex process also needs, on a rather conceptual level, an organizing idea.
In the last few decades discussion has covered two main organizing ideas: creativity and efficiency. Currently, we can observe the gradual coming forth and consolidation of a third organizing idea, and this idea is epitomized by the somewhat vague term strategy.

**Filling a Gap—the Origins of Planning**

Reflecting on advertising agencies’ strategic impact on communications compulsorily leads to a brief retrospection of account planning. ‘Fireside tales’ of account planning in advertising often render a historic plot, enclosing two outstanding figures in British advertising in the 1960s, namely Pollit and King, and without any doubt, their ‘midwifery’ plays a vital role in establishing planning within agency cultures. However, establishing and assertiveness in a business context represent a whole other world. First, there was no sweeping success for account planning within Britain’s 1960 advertising agencies; second, as Fletcher (2008) rightly remarks, account planning is a “lousy name” (p. 102), as there has always been planning in advertising, and third, the ambition of ‘early stage planners’ is anything but consistent.

King, who could claim authorship of the term “account planning” in 1968 (Treasure, 2007), started the institutional deployment of strategic thought at J. Walter Thompson (JWT) in order to integrate the consumers’ perspective into the creative strategy, as he claimed that JWT’s “objective must be a certain state of mind in the potential buyer, not a certain type of advertisement” (p. 14). On this note, in 1964 King introduced the T-Plan (Target Plan) in order to orientate the most creative personnel towards brand planning requirements required of potential buyers. Interestingly enough, the deployment of account planning at JWT is not the ‘genesis’ of strategic thought within the agency’s history. According to John Treasure, who became director of research and marketing at JWT in 1960, it mirrored the preceding years’ organizational dysfunctions. At that time 27 executives were working for the department. In November 1962, the number of executives had increased to 42, and although Treasure has no doubt that research and marketing executives ‘planned’ JWT’s advertising strategies for clients, they did this duty alongside other tasks. “I can certainly remember that they all were very busy but it is difficult even for me now to understand (given the size of JWT at that time) why we needed so many people” (p. 13).

Pollit, co-founding an agency—Boase Massimi Pollit (BMP)—in 1968, focused mainly on strategic aspects of planning within the intra-agency context in terms of mediating marketing requirements within a creativity-focused environment. Pollit’s approach had already taken shape in 1965 when he became responsible for the research department at Pritchard Wood Partners, his former employer.

At just this time there was a considerable increase in the quality and quantity of data that was relevant to more professionally planned advertising such as company statistics, available consumer and retailer panel data and so on. This posed a paradox as more data relevant to sharper advertising planning were becoming in, more and more people qualified to handle it were leaving the agencies.

Pollit, 1979/2000b, p. 5

Comparing King and Pollit’s initial situation reveals significant differences in their approach to personnel expenditure in a changing market. Whereas King, as Treasure depicts, discovered a situation where personnel capacities were inefficiently allocated, Pollit hints at a reverse situation: a sudden lack of qualified personnel to fill a gap originally triggered by clients’ own efforts to integrate market research and marketing departments into their corporation’s hierarchy. Thus, the erosion of advertising agencies’ own research departments presents two sides of the same coin. In agencies with an abundance of staff, the added value of research departments was jeopardized. Reduction in staff, however, led to the implementation of an increasing amount of externally produced research data, whose counterpart could no longer be produced within the advertising agencies.
Albeit that the paths followed by BMP and JWT might be seen to differ when they are appraised in detail, they seem pertinent examples in an illustration of the history of planning in advertising agencies. In this respect, it seems misleading to render account planning as a commonly agreed inception of strategic thinking, planning and development of advertisements and campaigns. Rather it stands to reason that the ‘renaming’ of planned advertising creation should be considered in the light of changing markets, which thereafter changed business models and logics, and not least, advertising agencies’ resource-based reactions to these modifications of their business segment. As Fletcher (2008) stated, the consequences of marketing departments’ relocation to the client’s side included a rigid regime of success metrics, which suited advertising creation only to a limited extent but filled the needs for the reporting standards of agency clients.

More importantly, as the new breed of client marketing specialists extended their territorial powers, they began to draw up inflexible rules, disciplines, and evaluation systems for their advertising. These were usually based on simplistic research tools, the best known being ‘Day After Recall’ (DAR), used by Procter & Gamble, the world’s largest advertiser. [. . .] If its recall is worse than average, the new commercial will be taken off air and either tweaked or ditched. DAR is the basis of ‘tracking studies,’ today’s standard means of monitoring campaigns [. . .]. But it cannot be carried out until after a commercial has been made and transmitted.

Consequently, the logic of measurement did not suit quality requirements for the process of creating advertisements anymore; rather it had been installed to justify marketing budget spending and budget allocation, which went hand in hand with the shifting of research in the aftermath of changes in advertisement production.

The Coevolution of Strategic Planning

Under these conditions, the installment of account planners in the 1960s appears as an unavoidable necessity that above all filled a gap that advertising agencies’ partially created by the downsizing of internal research departments, a process that Lewin and Volberda (1999) outlined as organizations and environments’ coevolution. Coevolution, as the authors state, characterizes the “joint outcome of managerial intentionality, environment, and institutional effects” (p. 526). The point of departure for Lewin and Volberda’s concept of coevolution is founded in the very basic assumption that change is mainly a phenomenon derived from interacting populations of organizations: an observation which similarly finds use in systems theory in the description of system–environment relations (Luhmann, 1999). “Change can be driven by direct interactions and feedback from the rest of the system. In other words, change can be recursive and need not be an outcome of either managerial adaptation or environmental selection but rather the joint outcome of managerial intentionality and environmental effects” (Lewin & Volberda, 1999, p. 526).

Doing strategy in advertising, at least from a research perspective, is therefore a challenging process. Doing strategy is also rewritable as a dynamic process that gears towards conditions that secure advertising agencies’ significance in a competitive market environment in which the roles filled by providers of strategic advice, such as brand agencies, strategy consultancies, public relations professionals, and court clients’ marketing departments are constantly synchronizing. Along these lines, one of the main factors for pressing ahead in strategic planning within advertising agencies is standing ground. Day and Wensley (2002, p. 101) explain this thus: “[T]he positioning of each firm within a market space (relative to rivals) over time, [emphasis added] is a second level of evolutionary process. Individual firms make constraint positioning choices, and these choices develop over time to become what we may label individual market strategies”.

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These considerations imply that strategy—above the operative workflow of strategic planning in advertising creation—is a core benefit-promise and the one organizing idea concerning the service being provided by the advertising practitioner, as well as the advertising agencies’ external stakeholders. In what follows, we expound on how advertising practitioners define the term strategy (defining strategy), why and to which ends strategy is possibly gaining its central role within the advertising business (positioning complexity), and how drawing on strategy may serve to manage the relation between the advertising agency and the advertising client (implementing strategy). Finally, we address how drawing on strategy serves to manage the relation between the different professionals within an advertising agency, and how advertising agencies demonstrate their strategic commitment in terms of the justification of advertising efficiency.

The Operationalization of Strategic Planning in Advertising Agencies

Defining Strategy

To review how strategic planning fits into the workflow of advertising agencies, we interviewed agency CEOs, board members, and senior executive personnel in advertising agencies (Meitz & Zurstiege, 2012). In this context, it seems timely to arrive at a working definition of strategy, and of strategic planning or the synonymic notion of account advertising practitioners, insofar as these terms apply to advertising practitioners. “Perhaps ironically, several times in the last few years at the AAAA [American Association of Advertising Agencies] Account Planning Conference participants and presenters have struggled to explain exactly how to define account planning and how one does it” (Koranda, 2007, p. 627). Such ‘voiceless-ness’ holds true for the term strategy itself: How do advertising practitioners define the term? In brief, the answer is: They don’t! Although both within advertising agencies and externally, strategy is highlighted as a means by which clients’ expectations of advertising efficiency can be met, strategy definitions are not available. Executives’ attempts to develop definitions ad hoc betoken self-justification—for example, explaining the diversification of the professional field as a shortcoming. Against the background of these statements it is obvious that the term strategy is at least as cloudy as the term creativity, which is still functioning as the most important organizing idea within the advertising practice. Despite this fact, however, we maintain that the term strategy functions as an ‘organizing idea,’ as it were, within the advertising business.

Why and to what end, however, does strategy possibly gain this central role within the advertising business? Most decision makers draw a clear distinction between the classic and the new digital era of advertising, and most interviewed executives leave no doubt about the fact that the proliferation of channels and media has changed the advertising business profoundly under these new conditions of what one might call multi-channel options. Advertising executives display their uncertainty concerning the question of how to reach target groups effectively. In this situation strategic planning promises to represent the intractable target group, which has left the TV couch and hit the road in order to undertake countless digital adventures. Talking about strategy means talking about all possible channels, and this means talking with all possible channel-managers. For instance, when asked what strategic planning meant to him, an executive officer pointed out: “we try to implement a vision of the campfire: people, come together, come together, come together!” (Meitz & Zurstiege, 2012, p. 47).

Regardless of the actual outcomes of these ‘campfire talks,’ however, one can say as a first line of argument that the terms strategy and planning implement as it were a medium of consent, the “operative fiction” (Schmidt, 1996) which means that despite the proliferation of options the advertising process can be organized around one central idea. The second line of argument, concerning the central role of strategy, also affects the matter of integration, but in this case it does not focus on the processes within the advertising agency but in the relation between the advertising agency and its
client. “In the moment that is my approach to strategy, I think, we work much more backstage and try to make connections for our clients they don’t see” (Meitz & Zursteiege, 2012, p. 47).

Reading the statements of decision makers in advertising agencies closely, it becomes apparent that advertising agencies’ promise to deliver strategy can be understood as a strategy itself, to fill in a blank position within the hierarchies of the agencies’ corporate clients and thus to gain power in the relationship: a blank position that is situated above the marketing department and that in the past has been filled by consulting.

**Implementing Strategy**

The essential task for an agency in order to regain influence within a client’s decision-making processes is the integration of experts in a client’s decision-making process. Insofar as the basic application of strategy in client–agency relationships implies alignment with executive decision makers, strategy is an alignment in order to regain visibility. There is no general attempt to implement strategy in order to draw customers’ attention to the offered planning services. The processes of strategy implementation are mainly driven by factors that are likely to be described in Mintzberg’s (1979; and Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985) organizational concept of *adhocracy*, which they describe as “an extraordinary flexible organizational form specialized for ad hoc tasks.” At this point our argument could be summarized thus: There is no planned management of strategy issues in client–agency relationships. Nevertheless, this ‘lack of concept’ is mainly caused by predominating daily business concerns and the limited amount of power held by agency professionals’ counterparts.

Considering these constraints, agencies have developed alternative paths to ensure executive decision makers’ awareness of the issue of strategy. Three such paths can be identified, illustrating the advertising agency’s exclusive competence with regard to strategy implementation:

1. Networking into a client’s hierarchy: To support the agency’s interests in networking with the client, for example, agencies seem to favor workshops as a means of establishing a visible framework for the customer’s executive decision makers in order to draw attention to the agency’s range of services as well as to maintain a get-together atmosphere. But networking can also be regarded as a long-term face-to-face engagement, whereby an agency member tries to support his or her direct counterpart on the client’s side in order to lift him or her up within the organizational hierarchy and finally benefit from his or her professional advancement. These processes refer to the second factor with influence to regain or expand agencies’ influence in customer’s decision-making processes: sustainability.

2. Sustainability in relationships: An agency seeks to persuade executive decision-makers of the agency’s strategic potential by performing a steady progression of strategic tasks. “As a matter of course [account planning] also is a customer-loyalty-tool … for the agency, in terms of a long-term planning with the customer” (Meitz & Zursteiege, 2012, p. 48). While clear focus on the strategic impact of the agencies’ work is missing, the evidence of the necessity and success of strategy is finally often seen in the creative output.

3. Post-rationalization: constructing a ‘vision of strategy’ whose impact is verifiable by the agency’s creative output. This means that when an agency is dealing with the complexity of client–agency relations, the conception level and inter-relation of “creativity and efficiency” have a special quality. As senior advertising executives unanimously report, efficiency originates from strategic planning but is in itself concealed to the client’s view. Therefore, in order to provide a ‘vision of strategy,’ agencies tend to define a campaign’s success or at least customer satisfaction with the creative output of a project: the *coming alive* of a strategy’s effectiveness. Strategy comes alive by post-rationalizing the creative workflow: “[A]s a matter of course, an agency will always
be evaluated by creative awards. And I dare to claim that planning has a considerable proportion on what keeps creative excellence relevant [...]” (Meitz & Zurstiege, 2012, p. 50).

**Bridging the Gap—the Role of Boundary-Spanners**

The interplay of strategic planning as the trigger for efficiency that is borne out by creative excellence, on the one hand, and the creative potential of an agency, on the other hand, is not only an external alliance, referring to customers. By definition, boundary-spanners bridge distinct spheres of interest. They notoriously “wear two hats,” as it were, and are therefore as important for the advertising process as they are susceptible to role ambiguity. Focusing on the advertising system there are mainly three fields of action in which boundary-spanners serve their function: (a) the relationship between the advertiser and the advertising practitioner, (b) the relationship between the creative personnel and the management personnel, and (c) the relationship between the advertising practitioner and the media marketer.

In the first field of action the account executive serves as a boundary-spanner, mediating between the personnel of the advertising agency on the one hand and the advertiser’s marketing manager on the other hand. Account executives accomplish their mediating function on the basis of their proficiency in the advertiser’s business as well as on the basis of their professional authority within the advertising agency. The account executive’s most important relationship is towards his boundary-spanning counterpart in the advertiser’s company: the marketing manager. Due to this fact—from the advertising agency’s perspective—it is highly important to establish a good personal relationship between the account executive and the marketing manager in order to acquire and maintain long-term, mutually rewarding relationships with their clients. Advertising agencies therefore typically consign to a given account those account executives that are similar in educational background and taste to the advertiser’s marketing manager (Ewing, Pinto, & Soutar, 2001; Crutchfield, Spake, D’Souza, & Morgan, 2003). Thus, it can be said that account executives and marketing managers fulfill their respective functions because an emphasis has been placed on role-correspondence.

In the second field of action the account planner and other “connectors,” informally called “runners,” serve as boundary-spanners with a view to reconciling differences between the highly specialized experts of account management, the creative department and experts for special services (Kover & Goldberg, 1995; Steel, 1998; Hackley, 2000; 2003a; 2003b; Morrison & Haley, 2003). Account planners help to bridge the gap between the two different milieus within an advertising agency: the liberal arts milieu and the scientific milieu of management (Hackley & Kover, 2007, p. 65).

Summarizing briefly, boundary-spanners by definition bridge distinct spheres of interest composed by members who conform to different standards and norms. The research topic underlying this function of boundary-spanners, of course, is that of a conflict between the members of the different actor groups involved in the planning, production, and distribution of advertising. The internal role of professionals in strategic planning units thus goes far beyond that of classical “ad tweaking” (Pollit, 2000a); it is a profession of facilitating between account management as mainly driven by economic ratio and the ‘artists’ of the creative units. On that note, boundary-spanning refers to the implementation of strategic planning as an internal ‘translation-service’ within agencies that negotiates the terms of collaboration between different intellectual milieus.

**Unequal Conditions and Strategic Rituals**

The attempts and efforts within the advertising agencies in order to regain clients’ awareness—as we have shown—are driven by the integration of techniques and knowledge as well as social
alignment processes. However, it remains whether these efforts echo in clients’ organizational patterns. Likewise, it is doubtful if clients are able to incorporate agencies’ strategic offers within their organizational structures, if they are able to mirror agencies’ adhocracy from a structural perspective, and if they deem the revaluation of advertising practitioners in decision-making processes a necessity.

Yet, focusing on intra-organizational aspects of strategic planning in advertising, strategy in itself has a utility value, a ritual function that bridges the interests of differing intellectual milieus. “We get a hint of what may be the deeper function of the art, cult and ritual of various occupations. They may provide a set of emotional and even organizational checks and balances against both the subjective and objective risks of the trade” (Hughes, 1958/1981, p. 97).

Verifying Strategic Performance

Regardless of strategy’s ritualistic value for balancing these milieus, it still serves as a legitimate benchmark in order to justify advertising budget allocation and spending. Advertising must not happen without a cause, and for this reason efficient accounting for expenditure naturally escorts the notion of strategy in advertising. As we have pointed out already, the legitimization of the creative outcome of advertising campaigns is consistently accompanied by post-rationalizing decisions as strategic, which is expressed in terms of research measures in order to verify campaigns’ effectiveness.

As advertising awards mark a central indicator for advertising campaigns’ success, researching for evaluation measures in the context of award-submissions for professional awards or prize-winning campaigns appears quite logical (Raupp, 2008). With reference to the primary implication of research data, we refer once back to Pollit:

>The main problems that arose in the use of all these measurements, despite their essentially common-sense origins, have been that they have produced results, which have been very difficult to reconcile with any reasonable judgment expectations about particular advertisements and campaigns. They did not provide common-sense answers.

Pollit, 2000a, p. 30

Certainly, Pollit’s remarks pertain to the early 1960s when market research divisions were still an integral part of advertising agencies. The outsourcing of market research divisions in the course of the professionalization of market research, however, did not remove the barrier to understanding research-data and creative workflows; nor did the advertising industry’s attempt to establish its own internal research cultures, which are prominently labeled as strategic or account planning in advertising agencies, lead to independency from market research measures. The professionalization of market research and the establishment of internal research cultures, however, did nurture the distinction between varying intellectual milieus, and functional fixedness with regard to concurring rationalities.

However, this distinction is at risk when strategic planning follows the task of post-rationalization, a task that unambiguously aims at meeting the requirements of accountability. To consider the question of whether internal research cultures play a pivotal role in this regard, it seems apposite to take a closer look at one of the prestigious efficiency-led awards within the advertising business: the Effie Awards. Effie Worldwide licenses its award scheme to national associations. If the implementation of research is a key factor for agencies’ success with regard to receiving awards, the case studies of short-listed agencies provide revealing information. Based on case-studies for the German Effie Awards in the period 1995–2011 (N = 666), discrete research achievements of strategic planning departments within advertising agencies are nearly insignificant. Concerning strategic planning’s own contributions, post-rationalization relies—at least when edited and graphically displayed for these case studies—on the ‘usual suspects,’ namely the major players in market research (Table 24.1).
Such results indicate that the success of agencies’ efforts to establish research-based strategic planning is somewhat doubtful, all the more so as the commissioner of these research datasets in most cases can be identified as the agency’s client. On this note, agencies simply align their clients’ benchmarks of success to the requisite standards, although measures like revenue, turnover, or even brand likeability are very rarely suitable markers to employ in verifying the accomplishment of strategic planning.

As a last point, the re-introduction and institutionalization of market research displays similarities to the historical development of public opinion research. As Raupp (2007) stated, more recent history of the public opinion research market has shown vivid indications of an increasing internationalization and concentration of the market. Raupp traced the recent history of Emnid, an established German enterprise that delivers public opinion research for Germany’s mass media. “From 1990–1997 Emnid predominantly belonged to the French Sofres-Group. Since the merger of the French Sofres-Group with the British market-research enterprise Taylor Nelson AGB, London, Emnid belongs to the TNS-Group” (p. 132 our translation).

The historical similarities between public opinion research and advertising-related market research are barely surprising and are evident if we pursue Raupp’s line of enquiry: In 2008 the TNS-Group was acquired by Kantar, owner of Added Value (comprising Added Value, Icon Brand Navigation and Diagnostic Research), and rebranded as TNS Global Research. Kantar in turn is a consultancy division of WPP, an enterprise-network that displays itself as “world’s largest communications services group” (WPP, 2011), pooling such illustrious advertising-agency names like Bates, Grey, J. Walter Thompson (JWT), Ogilvy & Mather, Scholz & Friends, Young & Rubicam, and so on. Based on that balance of power in market research and advertising, the progressive concentration in the business sectors is worth mentioning, not least as asking who is watching the watchdogs in the process of advertising efficiency evaluation becomes a matter of delicacy.

What we finally face by these processes of internationalization and market consolidation is apparent as the convergence of research cultures. It is not that we persist in saying that certain methods of market research and consumer behavior research are disappearing but that a specific perception in regard of research and its relevance in general is pre-shaped by the daily experience of advertising agencies when market research data are delivered on behalf of clients. This specific perception is mainly driven by agencies’ expectations and anticipations towards clients’ ideas of advertising efficiency. Except for Pollit’s objection in regard to these data-sets’ “numeracy” (2000a, p. 31), the convergence of research cultures influences advertising agencies if the effect of advertising communication is taken into account. Once again, doing strategy in advertising shows up as a process that maintains the gap between creativity and efficiency—the proof of the concept, the verification of the creative production’s effect is ordinarily accomplished by post-rationalization.
References


