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Deliberate and emergent strategies, and a classification of strategic drivers
Revisiting organisational strategic management (3)
by Alan Stretton

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Deliberate and emergent strategies, and a classification of strategic drivers[1]

By Alan Stretton

INTRODUCTION

This is the third of a series of articles which revisit some aspects of organisational strategic management – prompted, at least in part, by the current VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) environment which has been so dramatically exacerbated by the Covid-19 virus. To date we have discussed (in Stretton 2020l, 2020m):

- A recursive organisational strategic management model, and responsibilities for managing various stages;
- Augmenting the recursive strategic management model to help manage changes impacting outcomes and benefits

This somewhat exploratory article first looks at strategic drivers in the context of deliberate-to-emergent types, and then in another mode proposed by Booth 2018, which includes the internal or external origins of the drivers. I will also be introducing some new materials on strategic drivers from other sources, to try and build up a kind of checklist of types of strategic drivers which might be useful in dealing with the accelerated VUCA conditions of the Covid-19 era.

DELIBERATE, EMERGENT, INTERNAL & EXTERNAL STRATEGIC DRIVERS

Mintzberg & Waters' strategic continuum from "deliberate" to "emergent"

As I first discussed in Stretton 2017k, Mintzberg & Waters 1985 had the following to say on the results of ten years of researching the process of strategy formation.

> Comparing intended strategy with realized strategy, as shown in Figure 1, has allowed us to distinguish deliberate strategies – realized as intended – from emergent strategies – patterns or consistencies realized despite, or in the absence of, intentions.
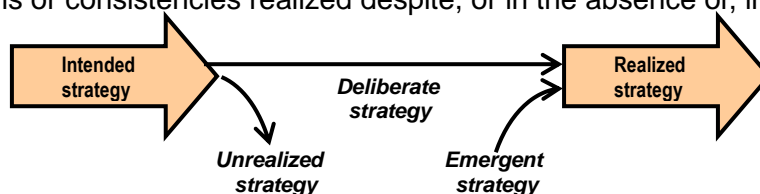
Figure 3-1: Based on Mintzberg & Waters, Figure 1. Types of strategies

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Their paper explores "the complexity and variety of strategy formation processes by refining and elaborating the concepts of deliberate and emergent strategy". They say
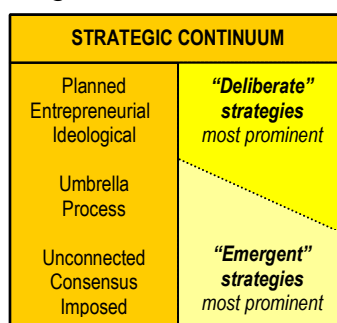
> Deliberate and emergent strategies may be conceived as two ends of a continuum along which real-world strategies lie.

Mintzberg & Waters identify eight strategies in this continuum, shown in a slightly abridged form in Figure 3-2.

STRATEGY	MAJOR FEATURES
Planned	Strategies originate in formal plans: Precise intentions exist, formulated and articulated by central leadership, backed up by formal controls to ensure surprise-free implementation in benign, controllable or predictable environment; Strategies most deliberate
Entrepreneurial	Strategies originate in central vision: Intentions exist as personal, unarticulated vision of single leader; ......; Strategies relatively deliberate but can emerge
Ideological	Strategies originate in shared beliefs: Intentions exist as collective vision of all actors; ....; Strategies rather deliberate
Umbrella	Strategies originate in constraints: Leadership .... defines strategic boundaries or targets within which other actors respond .....; Strategies partly deliberate, partly emergent and deliberately emergent
Process	Strategies originate in process: Leadership controls process aspects of strategy, ...leaving content aspects to other actors; Strategies partly deliberate, partly emergent (and again deliberately emergent)
Unconnected	Strategies originate in enclaves: Actor(s) loosely coupled to rest of organization produce(s) patterns in own actions........; Strategies organizationally emergent whether or not deliberate for actors
Consensus	Strategies originate in consensus: Through mutual adjustment, actors converge on patterns that become pervasive ....; Strategies rather emergent
Imposed	Strategies originate in environment: Environment dictates patterns in actions either through direct imposition or through implicitly pre-empting or bounding organizational choice; Strategies most emergent, although may be internalised by organization and made deliberate

Figure 3-2: Types of organizational strategies – derived from Mintzberg & Waters 1985 Table 1

It can be seen that the first three strategies are predominantly deliberate, in that they originate in formal plans. In a somewhat similar way, the last three strategies in Figure 3-2 are predominantly emergent, and are readily associated with projects that are initiated in more opportunistic or ad hoc ways. The remaining two strategies in the middle have substantial elements of both deliberate and emergent strategies. I have summarised these attributes in Figure 3-3 below.

Figure 3-3: Summary representation of the strategic continuum

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Booth's four-type strategic drivers

As I first discussed in Stretton 2018d, Booth 2018 demonstrated how drivers for developing a strategic plan can differ according to an organisation's individual situation, examples of which he gave as shown in Figure 3-4 below, which is adapted from Booth's Figure 1.
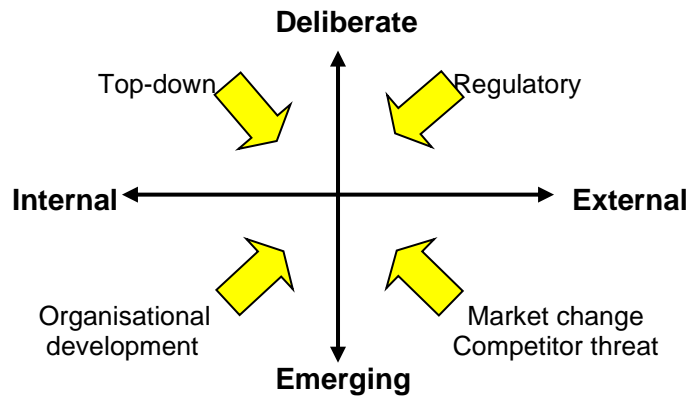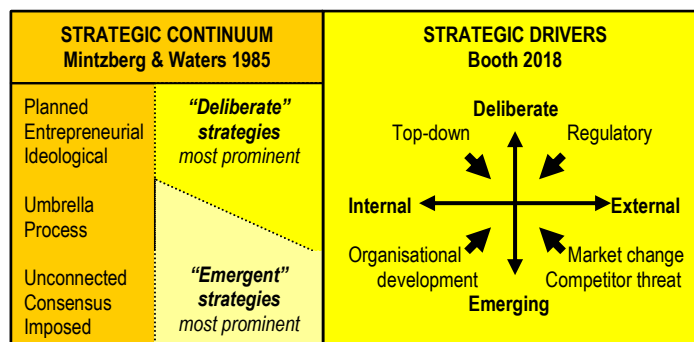

Figure 3-4: Drivers for developing a strategic plan – adapted from Booth 2018, Figure 1

It can be seen that Booth has four main strategic driver axes. In this VUCA environment we are particularly concerned with the *Emerging* section of the Deliberate/*Emerging* axis, and with the *External* component of the other axis.

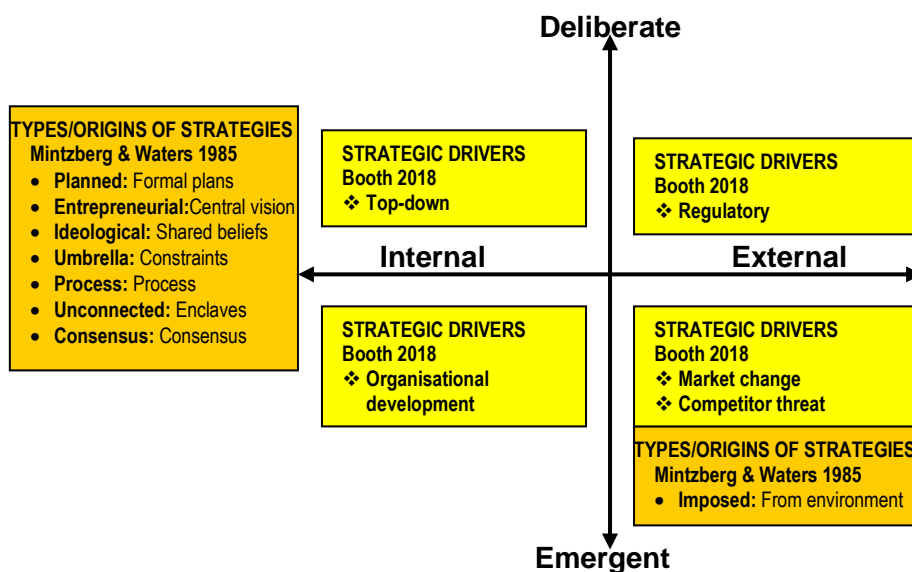## Summarising and aligning the Mintzerg & Waters and Booth models

Clearly, the Mintzberg & Waters representation covers the Deliberate/Emergent continuum in more detail than Booth – but essentially they are both concerned with the same range of strategic dimensions. We now put these side by side, as shown in Figure 3-5.

Figure 3-5: Aligning two sets of deliberate-to-emergent strategic descriptors/drivers

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Allocating the Mintzberg & Waters strategic categories into Booth's model

Figure 3-6 recasts the components of Figure 3-5 – notably the Mintzberg & Waters eight strategic categories – into Booth's basic format. It can be seen that the origins of seven of the eight Mintzberg & Waters strategic categories are primarily internal to the organisation, and I have endeavoured to position them appropriately in relation to the *Deliberate/ Emergent* axis, as indicated in Figure 3-6. The eighth category – *Imposed: From environment* – clearly has external origins, and I have located it in the *External/Emergent* sector, and in the *Emergent* sector, as shown.

Deliberate

| TYPES/ORIGINS OF STRATEGIES |
| Mintzberg & Waters 1985 |
| • **Planned:** Formal plans |
| • **Entrepreneurial:** Central vision |
| • **Ideological:** Shared beliefs |
| • **Umbrella:** Constraints |
| • **Process:** Process |
| • **Unconnected:** Enclaves |
| • **Consensus:** Consensus |

STRATEGIC DRIVERS
Booth 2018
❖ **Top-down**

STRATEGIC DRIVERS
Booth 2018
❖ **Regulatory**

Internal ──────── **External**

STRATEGIC DRIVERS
Booth 2018
❖ **Organisational development**

STRATEGIC DRIVERS
Booth 2018
❖ **Market change**
❖ **Competitor threat**

TYPES/ORIGINS OF STRATEGIES
Mintzberg & Waters 1985
• **Imposed:** From environment

Emergent

Figure 3-6: Locating the Mintzberg & Waters categories within the Booth model

ADDING SOME RESEARCH FINDINGS ON KEY STRATEGIC DRIVERS

I now propose to draw on a research paper by Crawford & Cooke-Davies 2010 on strategic drivers. Their Figure 2: Key Strategic Drivers, lists the following strategic drivers, which the authors sorted by frequency of citation from their research questions, as follows.

Financial performance
Execution performance
Innovation
Predictability and meeting commitments
Cost efficiency
Customer satisfaction
Adding value for customers
Meet customer expectations
Growth
Ability to deliver strategy
Market awareness
Reliability of end product

Figure 3-7: Key strategic drivers in order of citation frequency
Adapted from Crawford & Cooke-Davies 2010

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I have divided these strategic drivers into three groups, to place them within the Booth framework where they appear to be most appropriately located. Within each of the three groups I have retained the authors' frequencies of citation, in descending vertical order.
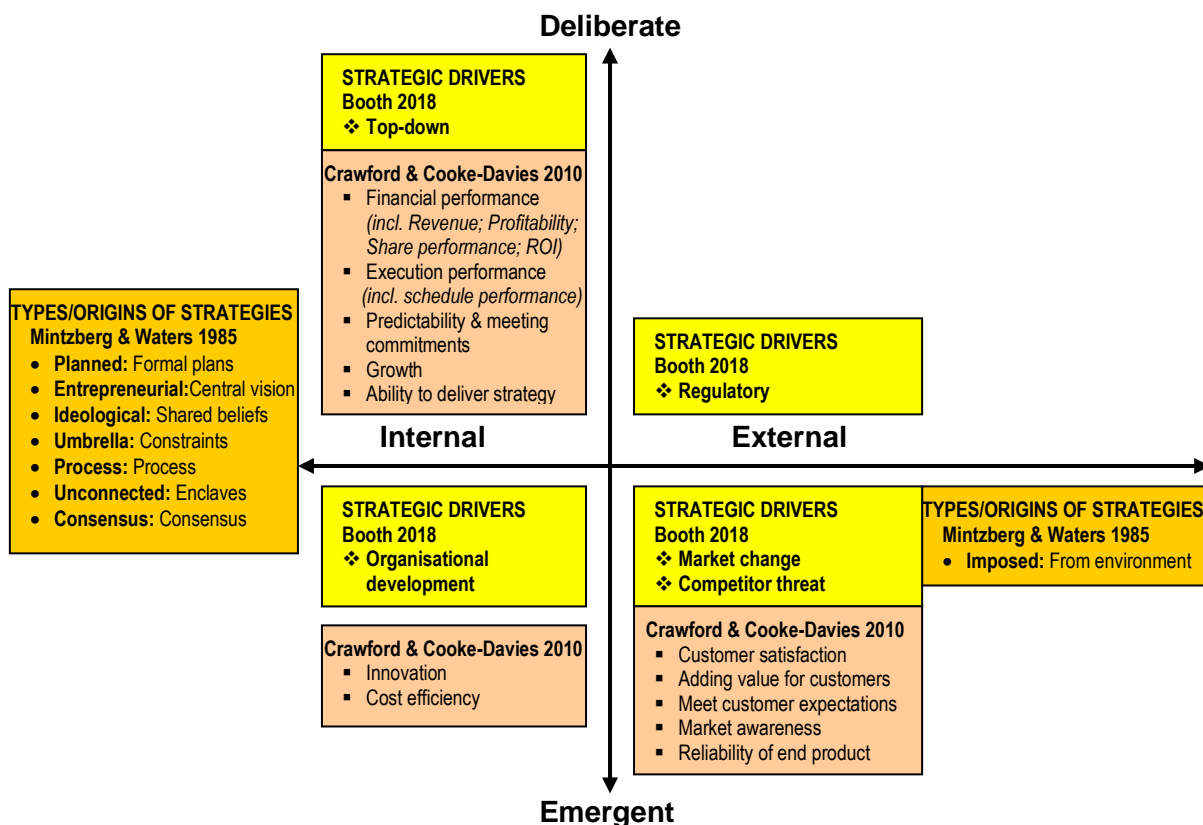

Figure 3-8: Adding strategic drivers from Crawford & Cooke-Davies to Figure 6

With regard to the *Deliberate/Internal* sector, I have appended the Crawford & Cooke-Davies strategic drivers directly under Booth's *Top-down* entry, as the latter appears to also cover these new entries rather well. Crawford & Cooke-Davies comment that

> It is not particularly surprising that financial performance and execution performance were most frequently cited as key strategic drivers across all sectors.

In the *Internal/Emergent* sector I have separated the new entries from Booth's Organisation development entry, because they cover somewhat different ground.

On the other hand, in the *External/Emergent* sector I have appended the Crawford & Cooke-Davies strategic drivers directly under those of Booth, as they are all similarly industry/ market/ customer-related.

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ADDING EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT DRIVERS

In the context of the accelerating VUCA environment, and the Covid-19 era, it can be seen that the *External/Emergent* sector in Figure 3-8 has only one strategic driver which is not market/customer-related, namely Mintzberg & Waters' *Imposed: From environment*. It is clear that there will be many VUCA-related strategic drivers beyond market/customer-related in this sector, but I have not come across any listings which specifically nominate external influencers as strategic drivers.

There are, however, any number of listings of external influencers that can be reasonably described as external strategic drivers. I am going to look at two such listings. The first is from Pells 2009b, in which he lists nine *disruptive events*, many of which he had also discussed in previous papers concerned with organisational and project responses to significant global changes (e.g. Pells 2009a, 1999, 1998). The second comes from Ingason & Jonasson 2019, with a listing which derives from their *Figure 5.1 – Schematic illustration of the external environment of an enterprise.*

Both lists are summarised in Figure 3-9 below, together with a list of key strategic drivers broadly derived from these, as shown in the right hand text box.

Pells 2009b: DISRUPTIVE EVENTS – CATEGORIES FOR CONSIDERATION	Ingason &Jonasson 2019: EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	KEY EXTERNAL STRATEGIC DRIVERS
New technology – technological development	Technological stakeholders	Technological drivers
Significant economic events	Economic stakeholders	Economic drivers
Human health and social factors	Social stakeholders	Social/health drivers
International geo-political changes Disruptive governmental or political changes	Political stakeholders	Political drivers
Extreme weather and natural disasters Manmade disasters or disruptions	Environmental stakeholders	Environmental drivers
Legal and regulatory changes	Legal stakeholders	Regulatory & legal drivers
Industry or market changes or disruptions	} Existing/prospective/clients/users } Direct/indirect competitors } Comparable organisations	Industry & market drivers Other external drivers

Figure 3-9: External disruptive events & stakeholders, and derived key external strategic drivers

It will be noted that I have bundled quite a substantial number of stakeholders such *existing and prospective clients/users, direct and indirect competitors,* and *comparable organisations*, into the one *Industry & market driver* category.

I propose to do the same with Booth's *Market change* and *Competitive threat*, and with the five Crawford & Cooke-Davies bullet-pointed items immediately under them, all of which relate directly to *Industry & market drivers.*

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CONSOLIDATING AND SUMMARISING THE ABOVE STRATEGIC DRIVERS

With the above provisoes, we can therefore identify the following internal and external strategic drivers from Figures 3-8 and 3-9.

CITED INTERNAL STRATEGIC DRIVERS	KEY EXTERNAL STRATEGIC DRIVERS
Financial performance	Technological drivers
Cost efficiency	Economic drivers
Execution performance	Social/health drivers
Predictability & meeting commitments	Political drivers
Ability to deliver strategy	Environmental drivers
Organisational development	Regulatory & legal drivers
Growth	Industry & market drivers
Innovation	Other external drivers

Figure 3-10: A summary of identified internal and external strategic drivers

It should be noted here that which internal strategic drivers emerge in practice, and the priorities given to them, will depend very substantially on how the organisation sees the importance of various external drivers, and how it chooses to respond to the latter. This can be expected to be an increasingly dynamic set of processes in the accelerating VUCA environment, and particularly in the Covid-19 era.

DISCUSSIONS ON RELEVANCE TO THE COVID-19 ERA

> *Possibly the only certainties at present are that no-one knows what the world will be like after COVID-19 nor when 'after' will be.*   (Karen Thompson, in Ozguler 2020)

What we can be reasonably sure of is that organisational strategic drivers will change, probably in respect of both the nature of the drivers, and the priorities that are ascribed to them. What we can only speculate on is the nature of these strategic drivers, and the priorities given them.

I will venture a comment on the most conspicuous of the key strategic drivers from Crawford & Cooke-Davies, as listed in Figure 3-7, namely *Financial performance*.

In their Figure 2, the authors separately coded a number of aspects of *Financial performance*, namely *Revenue, Profitability, Share performance* and *ROI*, in descending order of frequency of citation.

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Dalcher 2020 had the following to say about *Financial performance* and Covid-19.

> Crisis Management may be able to support the "business" bottom line in the face of rude surprises, future shocks and inconvenient truths: however, the wider dimensions of the crisis are often missing. The recent epidemic challenges the sole business focus on shareholder value and the primacy and the prioritisation of owner value. The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the need to create a more resilient, inclusive and just economy…..

Perhaps Dalcher is right, but even if this happens I doubt that it would be maintained in the longer term. We have had occasions in the past when shareholder value did not dominate the business scene to quite the extent it has since the 1980s. Indeed, I still have an internal paper I wrote in Lend Lease in the mid-1970s which discussed a multitude of contributions from very reputable sources which gave a more balanced stakeholder view of the role of business organisations – views that had long dominated in Lend Lease – as is recorded in some detail in Clark 2002.

However, these quite widely-held and more balanced perspectives didn't last long. I suspect that this may be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that, in Australia, and many other countries, the law gives shareholders dominant rights when "push comes to shove" – as has been amply demonstrated in this country during economic slowdowns and recessions. I believe we have yet to see the real economic impacts of Covid-19, and wonder if the common good would continue to prevail over the law if these impacts are as profound as I suspect they may be.

I will conclude this section with a more forward-looking strategy-related quote from Nieto-Rodriguez in Ozguler's (2020) *Insights report: Project management after Covid-19.*

> And the best way to do it (address the current and future needs of our planet) is through inspirational projects and strategic initiatives that will help organisations and individuals navigate through the crisis and transform to come up stronger.

Let us hope that organisations can harness the most appropriate strategic drivers in undertaking such new strategic initiatives and projects.

CONCLUDING

The next article in this series will include incorporating the internal and external strategic drivers identified in Figure 3-10 into the recursive organisational strategic management model developed in the first two articles of the series.

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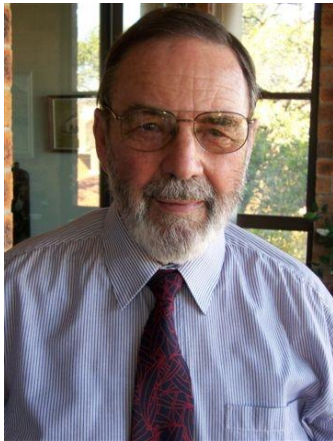*Revisiting organisational strategic management (3)*
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Alan Stretton is one of the pioneers of modern project management. He is currently a member of the Faculty Corps for the University of Management & Technology (UMT), USA. In 2006 he retired from a position as Adjunct Professor of Project Management in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), Australia, which he joined in 1988 to develop and deliver a Master of Project Management program.   Prior to joining UTS, Mr. Stretton worked in the building and construction industries in Australia, New Zealand and the USA for some 38 years, which included the project management of construction, R&D, introduction of information and control systems, internal management education programs and organizational change projects.

Alan has degrees in Civil Engineering (BE, Tasmania) and Mathematics (MA, Oxford), and an honorary PhD in strategy, programme and project management (ESC, Lille, France). Alan was Chairman of the Standards (PMBOK) Committee of the Project Management Institute (PMI®) from late 1989 to early 1992. He held a similar position with the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM), and was elected a Life Fellow of AIPM in 1996. He was a member of the Core Working Group in the development of the Australian National Competency Standards for Project Management. He has published over 200 professional articles and papers. Alan can be contacted at alanailene@bigpond.com.au.

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