Rethinking Strategic Planning Part I: Pitfalls and Fallacies

Henry Mintzberg

Planners have tended to blame the problems of so-called 'strategic planning' on a set of 'pitfalls'—notably the lack of top management support and organizational climates not congenial to planning. But planning may well have discouraged the very support its proponents claim to need, and itself may have generated climates uncongenial to effective strategy making. The real problems may, therefore, lie deeper than these pitfalls, in a set of what can be called 'fallacies', notably about the capabilities of predicting discontinuities, about being able to detach strategists from the subjects of their strategy making, and about being able to formalize the strategy making process in the first place. Part one of this two part article thus concludes that 'strategic planning' is an oxymoron.

SO CALLED 'STRATEGIC PLANNING' ARRIVED on the scene in the mid 1960s with a vengence, boosted by the popularity of Igor Ansoff's book *Corporate Strategy*,[1] published in 1965. Now, three decades later, if the concept is not exactly dead, it has certainly fallen from its exalted pedestal. Yet, in my opinion, the reasons for this are still hardly understood, which means that similar costly misadventures are likely to take place, under other labels.

In the first of two articles on the rise and fall of strategic planning, based on a book by that title, I consider what went wrong and what we can learn from that experience, both about our management processes and about ourselves. The second article then considers the lessons of this for planning, for plans, and for planners.

An expert has been defined as someone who avoids all the many pitfalls on his or her way to the grand fallacy. Planners are experts of a sort, and some of them have written extensively about the 'pitfalls' that undermine the practice of planning. I believe we have something to learn from these pitfalls, but not as they have been depicted in this literature. My intention, instead, is to turn them around, to show that planning may be the very cause of the problem its proponents have tended to blame on everyone else. That will free the way to address a set of fundamental fallacies that I believe have undermined strategic planning, which together reduce to that one grand fallacy.

Planning's Presumed Pitfalls

A number of well publicized studies over the years have identified the 'pitfalls' of planning. Best known, perhaps has been Steiner's survey of several hundred mostly large companies.[2] Here, as in other studies, two pitfalls stood out: the absence of top management support for planning and a 'climate' in the organization not congenial to planning. Table 1 lists Steiner's ten main pitfalls; arguably, six or seven of them relate to these two (numbers, 1, 2, 4, 7, 10 and perhaps 9 to the first, 6 to the second).

In a way pitfalls are to planning what sins are to religion: impediments to be brushed aside, cosmetic blemishes to be removed, so that the nobler work of serving the almighty can proceed. Except that the planning pitfalls are committed mostly by 'them', not 'us'. Inattentive managers and dysfunctional organizations are the sinners, not the planners themselves or their systems. To quote Abell and Hammond, 'The underlying causes of [the] problems [of making planning work] are seldom technical

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Table 1. The pitfalls of corporate planning

	Description
1.	Top management's assumption that it can delegate the planning function to a planner.
2.	Top management becomes so engrossed in current problems that it spends insufficient time on long-range planning, and the process becomes discredited among other managers and staff.
3.	Failure to develop company goals suitable as a basis for formulating long-range plans.
4.	Failure to assume the necessary involvement in the planning process of major line personnel.
5.	Failing to use plans as standards for measuring managerial performance.
6.	Failure to create a climate in the company which is congenial and not resistant to planning.
7.	Assuming that corporate comprehensive planning is something separate from the entire management process.
8.	Injecting so much formality into the system that it lacks flexibility, looseness, and simplicity, and restrains creativity.
9.	Failure of top management to review with departmental and divisional heads the long-range plans which they have developed.
10.	Top management's consistently rejecting the formal planning mechanism by making intuitive decisions which conflict with the formal plans.

Source: G. Steiner

deficiencies with the planning process or the analytical approaches. Instead they are human and administrative problems', and 'have as their source the nature of human beings'.[3] What this seems to mean is that 'the systems would have worked fine if it weren't for all those darn people'. But unless organizations are willing to get rid of the people for the sake of planning, we had better find other ways to explain planning's problems.

More has been heard about the top management support pitfall than any other. Yet surely no management technique has ever had more top management support than strategic planning. At the General Electric Company, for example, the best known strategic planning system in America was scuttled in the early 1980s when Jack Welch took over as chief executive. Did Welch know something that Steiner, Abell and Hammond did not? Indeed, had strategic planning previously had *too much* top management support at General Electric?

As for that climate uncongenial to planning, might such a climate not sometimes be congenial to overall organizational effectiveness? Can a climate, for example, be congenial to important change yet hostile to planning? Put differently, is a climate conducive to strategic *planning* necessarily one conducive to effective strategic *thinking* and *acting*?

In pursuing these alternate themes, I shall use a rather narrow definition of planning, necessary in my view. I define planning as formalized procedure to produce articulated result, in the form of an integrated system of decisions. In other words, planning is about formalization, which means the decomposition of a process into clearly articulated steps. Planning is thus associated with 'rational' analysis.

Of course, the word planning is often used more broadly than this. To some people, going off to a mountain retreat to talk about strategy is planning. There is no problem with this, in principle, except that when planning is defined so broadly that it becomes synonymous with management, why is there need for the separate word? As Wildavsky put it in the title of an article, 'If Planning is Everthying, Maybe It's Nothing'.[4] In practice, however, there is a serious problem. Implicitly, when not explicitly, there is an underlying sense of formal rationality to the word. Call it 'planning' and suddenly things get systematized—agendas get set, processes get decomposed ('We shall discuss goals in the morning, strengths and weaknesses in the afternoon'), schedules get established ('Corporate Strategy by 5 p.m. Tuesday, Business Strategy by noon on Thursday'). Thus strategic planning does not mean *strategic* thinking so much as formalized thinking about strategy—rationalized, decomposed, articulated. With this in mind, let us reconsider the pitfalls of planning.

The Commitment Pitfall

The issue is not simply whether management is committed to planning. It is also (a) whether planning is committed to management, (b) whether commitment to planning engenders commitment to strategies and to the process of strategy making, and (c) whether the very nature of planning actually fosters managerial commitment to itself. I propose to answer each of these questions in the negative.

Compare a *committing* style of management with a *calculating* style.[5] The former engages people in the journey. It finds a route, and develops enthusiasm in travelling it. The latter fixes on the destination and calculates back. It is often less than engaging, because to be objective, as someone once remarked, all too often means to treat people as objects. If anyone has doubts about which style planning tends to favour, consider how Igor Ansoff described it back in 1964:

> The underlying methodology is a succession of difference reduction steps: a set of objecives is identified for the firm, the current position with respect to the objectives is diagnosed, and a difference between these (or what we called the 'gap') is determined. Then a search is instituted for an operator (strategy) which can reduce the gap. The operator is tested for its 'gap reducing' properties. If the properties are satisfactory (the gap is essentially closed) the operator is accepted; if the gap is partially closed the operator is provisionally accepted and an additional operator is sought; if the operator is marginal or negative in its ability to close the gap, it is rejected and a new one is sought.[6]

What is sometimes not appreciated is that there is no such thing as an 'optimal' strategy, calculated via some formal process. Intended strategies have no value in and of themselves; to paraphrase the classic words of Philip Selznick, they take on value only as committed people infuse them with energy.[7]

The very purpose of strategic planning, no matter how much lip service has been paid to the contrary, is to reduce the power of management over strategy making. This is the effect of formalization, and it is revealed most clearly in the way intuition has traditionally been put down in the literature of planning. To quote its most prolific contributor, George Steiner: 'If an organization is managed by intuitive geniuses there is no need for formal strategic planning. But how many organizations are so blessed? And if they are, how many times are intuitives correct in their judgements?'[8] Close behind Steiner in sheer volume of publications is Peter Lorange. He has written that 'the CEO should typically not be . . . deeply involved' in the process, but rather be 'the designer of [it] in a general sense'.[9] If this is how top managers, and especially processes critical to them, are viewed by the best known writers in the field, then how is anyone to expect planning to engender the commitment of top management?

Elsewhere in the corporate hierarchy, the problem becomes more severe, because planning has often been used to exercise much more blatant control over middle and lower levels of management. Even Ansoff has commented on that 'strangely naïve prescription' that, 'If managers [at lower levels] do not plan willingly, threaten them with the displeasure of the big boss and tell them he loves planning'.[10] No wonder the head of General Electric's major appliance group spoke so vehemently to a *Business Week* reporter after the Welch changes about 'grabbing hold' of his business from 'an isolated bureaucracy' of planners.[11] All he wanted was personal commitment to his own strategy, for which he had to fight the planners!

The Change Pitfall

A climate congenial to planning is considered to be one congenial to serious change in an organization. The reality, however, may well be that planning impedes more than promote such change, thereby destroying the very climate it claims to require.

The purpose of a plan is to render things inflexible, that is, to set the organization on a course of action. Plans may not engender human commitment, but they do commit organizations. A 'flexible plan', like a Progressive Conservative (or a civil engineer?), is thus an oxymoron:

> . . . planning by direction has to be inflexible. Once the planners have made the thousands of calculations that are necessary to fit the plan together, and have issued their directions, any demand that any of the figures be revised is bound to be resisted. That plan once made must be adhered to simply because you cannot alter any part of it without altering the whole, and altering the whole is too elaborate a job to be done frequently.[12]

Even the process of planning itself tends to evoke resistance to serious change in organizations. That is because of its need for decomposition, which tends to happen in terms of the established categories of the organization—for example, the existing levels of strategy (corporate, business, functional) or the established product types (defined as 'strategic business units'), overlaid on the current units of structure (divisions, departments, etc.). But real strategic change generally means the rearrangement of categories, which must often leave planning behind, concerned only with incremental change.

In fact, planning tends to promote change that is generic rather than creative, simply because the process is analytic while creativity requires synthesis. Put another way, it is creativity, by definition, that rearranges the established categories; planning, in contrast, by its very nature uses and so preserves these categories. There are certainly creative planners around—that is, creative people with the title planner—but that has nothing to do with the technology or processes of planning.

As a result, a reliance on planning tends to promote strategies that are extrapolated from the past or copied from others. 'In science, as in love', someone once quipped', a concentration on technique is likely to lead to impotence'. Search all those strategic planning diagrams—all those interconnected boxes that supposedly give you strategies—and nowhere will you find a single one that explains the creative act of synthesizing ideas into a strategy. Everything can be formalized except the very essence of the process itself.

Moreover, despite its claims, planning tends to favour short term change over long, simply because, as I shall discuss later, its methods of forecasting, especially of discontinuities, are weak. Visionaries can sometimes look far and wide; planning techniques, in contrast, can see neither very far ahead nor easily off to either side. In addition, the very fact of having to tie strategic planning to budgeting, as called for in the models, focuses attention on the short term. The long term simply does not count in most real-world planning, figuratively as well as literally.

The Politics Pitfall

A climate of political activity messes up the orderly world of planning, according to a conventional pitfall. In fact, however, planning does its share to breed certain political activities, while other political activities sometimes do their share to foster progressive change in organizations, despite planning!

Planning is typically described as objective. But that, in fact, proves to be a biased form of objectivity. For one thing, planners are biased like the rest of us—in their case about planning itself and about their own influence over strategy making, to be sure, but also about the goals that they implicitly favour in the organization. A bias in favour of objectivity, for example, means, as we have already seen, the favouring of analytic processes over intuitive ones—those that can be formally decomposed, articulated, and so formally replicated and verified. Moreover, as already discussed, planning introduces a bias in favour of incremental change, of generic strategies, and of goals that can be quantified (so that, for example, in one study of capital budgeting, typically, hard-to-quantify costs and benefits were excluded from the financial analysis').[13] Thus, the popularity of strategic planning may well have favoured so-called cost leadership strategies over ones of product leadership, simply because innovative design or high quality are more difficult to measure and formalize then straight cost cutting.

If planning is biased, it is bound to breed political resistance, if only from people who represent other beliefs—for revolutionary change, for example, or creative strategies, or innovative product designs . . . or simple good old-fashioned intuition. When planners put down the informal processes of managers, when they discourage commitment in favour of calculation, when they act as watchdogs for the 'correct' practices of middle managers, they aggravate the classic political conflict between line and staff. Thus can they promote the very climate they find so uncongenial to planning.

Finally, politics itself can sometimes have a positive effect on an organization, despite planning. When planning favours something close to the status quo, while the organization needs radical change, then political challenge of planning and other set procedures may be the only way to get it. Put differently, politics, like intuition, can be a viable and even preferable alternative to planning for getting things done in organizations.

These, to my mind, are the true pitfalls of strategic planning. But its real problems lie deeper. I shall discuss three, in particular, as 'fallacies', in conclusion, reducing them to that one grand fallacy.

The Fallacy of Predetermination

To engage in planning, an organization must be able either to control its environment, to predict its course, or simply to assume its stability. Otherwise, it makes no sense to set the inflexible course of action that constitutes a plan.

Igor Ansoff wrote in *Corporate Strategy* in 1965, that 'We shall refer to the period for which the firm is able to construct forecasts with an accuracy of, say, plus or minus 20 per cent as the *planning horizon* of the firm'.[14] A most extraordinary statement from one of the most popular books on planning ever! For how in the world can any firm know the *period* for which it can forecast with a given accuracy, let alone be so sure of doing the forecasting itself?! How, in other words, can predictability be predicted?

The evidence on forecasting is, in fact, quite to the contrary. While certain repetitive patterns (e.g. seasonal) may be predictable, the forecasting of discontinuities, such as technological innovations or price increases, is, according to Spiros Makridakis, a leading expert in the field, 'practically impossible'. In his opinion, 'very little, or nothing' can be done, 'other than to be prepared, in a general way, to . . . react quickly once a discontinuity has occurred'.[15] And if such events cannot be predicted, the only hope for planning is to ensure that none of consequences will occur and so simply to forecast by extrapolation. But that hope does not amount to much given another conclusion of Makridakis, in a review article with Hogarth, that, 'Long-range forecasting (two years or longer) is notoriously inaccurate'.[16]

Of course, informally, certain people can sometimes 'see' things coming. That is why we call them 'visionaries'. But they create their strategies in a very different way, more personalized, or intuitive. Strategy here takes on the sense of a broad perspective, a general (and not too precisely articulated) vision of direction.

The problem with planning is that it needs that articulation and precision—of strategy as well as of the conditions in which it is embedded. It has to have not only predictability following, but also stability during strategy making. In other words, the world is supposed to hold still while the planning process proceeds. Hence those lockstop planning schedules that have strategies appearing on, say, the first of June, to be approved by the board of directors on the fifteenth. One can just picture the competitors waiting for the sixteenth (especially if they are Japanese, and do not much believe in such planning!).

In fact, the concept of strategy itself implies stability, whether in the plans intended or the patterns realized.[17] Planning fits quite well with this, as it too is designed to stabilize behaviour. But the subject here it not strategy so much as strategy *making*, and that takes place precisely when the world does not hold still, or has not held still. This, in other words, is a dynamic process, associated with change, and usually significant and discontinuous change at that—the very conditions most uncomfortable for planning.

Strategies are not developed on schedule, immaculately conceived. They can appear at any time and at any place in the organization, typically through processes of informal learning more than ones of formal planning. If strategies represent stability, then strategy making is interference, and no amount of protest by planners about 'management by crisis' will ever change this. The simple conclusion, to which we shall return, is that strategic planning is actually incompatible with serious strategy making.

The Fallacy of Detachment

Marianne Jelinek developed the interesting point in a book titled *Institutionalizing Innovation* that strategic planning is to the executive suite what Frederick Taylor's work study was to the factory floor—a way to circumvent human idiosyncracies in order to systematize behaviour. 'It is through administrative systems that planning and policy are made possible, because the systems capture knowledge about the task . . .' Thus, 'true management by exception, and true policy direction are now possible, solely because management is no longer wholly immersed in the details of the task itself'.[18]

If the system does the thinking, then thought has to be detached from action, strategy from operations (or 'tactics'), formulation from implementation, thinkers from doers, and so strategists from the objects of their strategies. Managers must, in other words, manage by *remote* control. Thus Jelinek refers to 'the large-scale coordination of details—planning and policy-level thinking, above and beyond the details of the task itself'.[19]

The trick, of course, is to get the relevant information up there, so that those senior managers on high can be informed about those details without having to enmesh themselves in them. But that poses no problem: strategic planning is driven by 'hard data'—that famous information technology—comprising quantitative aggregates of the detailed 'facts' about the organization and its context, neatly packaged for immediate use. To return to Jelinek, 'the system generalizes knowledge far beyond its original discoverer or discovery situation'.[20] With all the necessary data packaged conveniently and delivered regularly, senior managers need never get off the pedestal that planning puts them on, nor need planners leave the comfort of their staff offices. Together they can formulate—work with their heads—so that all the other hands can then get on with the implementation.

I maintain that all of this is dangerously fallacious. Detached managers together with abstracted planners do not so much make bad strategies; mostly they do not make strategies at all. Look inside all those companies crying for a strategic vision, amidst all their strategic planning, and you will mostly find executives who are detached from the very things they are supposed to make strategy about. They are doing exactly what planning tells them to do.

The popular metaphor is that managers have to see the forest rather than the trees. But from a helicopter a forest looks like an artificial carpet of green, not the complex living system it truly is. Even timber company managers have to get down on the forest floor to look carefully at individual trees. A better metaphor, therefore, may be to find the diamond in the rough. In other words, real strategists get their hands dirty digging for ideas, while real strategies are built from the occasional nuggets that are uncovered in this way. Put differently, effective strategists are not people who abstract themselves from the daily detail but quite the opposite: they *immerse* themselves in it while being able to abstract the strategic *messages* from it. The trouble with the distinction between strategies and tactics is that it becomes clear only *after* things have happened—just ask that general who lost the battle because of the nail in his horse's shoe. Again the arbitrary categories of planning impede effective strategy making.

At the infamous World World I Battle of Passchendaele—described as 'strategically desirable' but 'tactically impossible'—the 'great plan' that 'was complete' before the battle began failed to account for the steady rains that subsequently came. And so a quarter of a million British troops fell. 'No senior officer . . . it was claimed, ever set foot (or eyes) on the . . . battlefield during the four months that battle was in progress . . . Only after the battle did the Army Chief of Staff learn that he had been directing men to advance through a sea of mud'.[21] What is it about planning that so blinds us to unfolding events?

It turns out that hard data—for example, the formal reports of the Passchendaele battlefield, which were 'first ignored, then ordered discontinued'—can have a decidedly soft underbelly. They take time to harden, which often makes them late; they tend to lack richness, for example excluding the qualitative, which can render them ineffective for purposes of diagnosing the cause of problems; and they tend to be overly aggregated, which can cause them to miss important nuances.[22] These are the reasons why managers who rely on formalized information (such as marketing research reports, opinion polls, and the like, as well as accounting statements), tend to be detached in more ways than one, and why effective managers have been shown in study after study to rely on some of the softest forms of information available, including gossip, hearsay, and various tangible scraps of information.

In fact, it is planning's very predisposition to hard data that detaches planners from strategy making—as it does those senior line managers who take it seriously. As already noted, strategy making is really a visionary as well as a learning process. But vision is unavailable to those who cannot 'see' with their own eyes—who cannot observe the world directly, as it is, instead of having to look at it through filters. And learning is inductive: it happens when details are uncovered from which general conclusions can be inferred—those trees in the forest, that diamond in the rough. The 'big picture', in other words, has to be painted by little strokes, many of them initially fuzzy.

Effective strategy making thus connects acting to thinking which, in turn, connects implementation to formulation. We think in order to act, to be sure, but we also act in order to think. We try things, and when something works, our experiments gradually converge into viable patterns that become strategies. This is not some quirky behaviour but the very essence of the process of strategic learning (that even some more progressive planners have come to favour).[23]

The whole thrust of the strategic planning exercise is to separate formulation from implementation, thinking from doing. Senior managers aided by planners and their systems think while everyone else does. Then when the strategies fail, as they so often do, the thinkers blame the doers. 'If only you dumbbells understood our beautiful strategy . . . ' But if the dumbbells were smart, they would reply: 'If *you* are so smart, why didn't you formulate a strategy that we dumbbells could implement.' In other words, every failure of implementation is also, by definition, a failure of formulation.

But I would argue that the true fallacy goes beyond this: it is the failure of the very separation between formulation and implementation, thinking and doing. It lies in the misguided metaphor, so popular in the planning literature but in fact dating right back to Frederick Taylor, that organizations have heads, or 'tops', by which to think, and bodies or 'middles' and 'bottoms' by which to act.

In contrast, the visionary and learning approaches to strategy making break down this dichotomy by allowing implementation to inform formulation. This can happen in two ways, one more centralized, the other more decentralized. In the former, the formulator, namely the visionary, connects him or herself intimately to the implementation, managing many of the details personally as they unfold, so as to adapt and elaborate the vision *en route*. In the other, the so-called implementers become formulators, by pursuing the strategic consequences of their specific experiments. Either way, the process of strategy making becomes less artificially detached, more richly interactive. Thus, when we are talking about the process of creating viable strategy, we had better drop the phrase strategic planning altogether and talk instead about strategic thinking connected to acting.

The Fallacy of Formalization

Can the systems in fact do it? Can 'strategic planning', in the words of a Stanford Research Institute economist, 'recreate' the process of the 'genius entrepreneur'?[24] 'I favour a set of analytical techniques for developing strategy', Michael Porter wrote in *The Economist* more recently.[25] But can analysis provide synthesis?

Note that strategic planning has not generally been presented as an *aid* to strategy making, or as *support* for natural managerial processes (including intuition), but *as* the former and *in place of* the latter. It is claimed to be proper practice—to borrow Frederick Taylor's favourite phrase, the 'one best way' to create strategy.

There is an interesting irony in this, because planning missed one of Taylor's most important messages. Taylor was careful to note that work processes have to be fully understood before they can be formally programmed. His own accounts dwell on this at great length.[26] But where in the planning literature is there a shred of evidence that the authors ever bothered to find out how it is that managers really do make strategy? Instead it was merely assumed that strategic planning, strategic thinking, and strategy making were all synonymous, at least in best practice. The CEO 'can seriously jeopardize or even destroy the prospects of strategic thinking by not consistently following the discipline of strategic planning', wrote Lorange in 1980 with no support whatsoever.[27]

The facts are, first, as already noted, that none of those fancy planning charts ever contained a single box that explained how strategy is actually to be created—how the synthesis of those genius entrepreneurs, or even ordinary competent strategists, is to be recreated. Second, a great deal of study, much of it by researchers favourable to the process, that sought to prove that planning pays, never did prove anything of the kind.[28] Indeed a great deal of anecdotal evidence in the popular business press suggests exactly the opposite conclusion. (And who ever met a middle manager enthusiastic about the experience: 'Boy, was that strategic planning fun: I can't wait to do it again next year!')

One well-known observer of the public sector, Aaron Wildavsky, has concluded that PBBS, Robert McNamara's famous effort at strategic planning in the US Government, 'failed everywhere and at all times'.[29] But that may be no less true of business, certainly if the experiences of General Electric and Texas Instruments are typical.[30] How deeply ironic, then, that at the very same time that American business was so critical of Communism, a political structure rooted in centralized planning, it was so enamoured of that very same process, and for the very same reason—the vain hope that systems could do in overgrown organizations what detached managers could not.

Third is the main argument I wish to pursue here. Formalization has not done it—'innovation' has never been 'institutionalized'. Quite the contrary in fact: strategic planning has more often ruined strategic thinking.

Research of my own and others tells us that strategy making is an immensely complex process involving the most sophisticated, subtle, and at times subconscious of human cognitive and social processes. We have found that strategy formation must drawn on all kinds of informational inputs, many of them non-quantifiable and accessible only to strategists who are connected rather than detached. We know that the dynamics of the context have consistently blocked any efforts to force the process into a predetermined schedule, or onto a predetermined track. Strategies inevitably exhibit some emergent qualities, and even when largely deliberate, they often appear less formally planned than informally visionary. And learning, in the forms of fits and starts, discoveries based on serendipitous events, and the recognition of unexpected patterns, inevitably plays a key role, if not the key role, in the development of strategies that are novel. Accordingly, we know that the process requires insight, creativity, and synthesis, all the things that formalization discourages.

The failure of strategic planning is the failure of formalization—of systems to do better than or even nearly as well as flesh and blood people. It is the failure of forecasting to predict discontinuities, of programming to provide creativity, of hard data to substitute for soft, of scheduling to handle the dynamics. It has become clear that the systems have offered no improved means to deal with the information overload of human brains; indeed, often they have made matters worse. The mechanical combination of information did not solve any fundamental problem that existed with human intuition. All the promises made about 'artificial intelligence', 'expert systems', and the like never materialized at the strategy level. The formal systems could certainly process more information, at least hard information; they could consolidate it, aggregate it, move it about. But they could never *internalize* it, *comprehend* it, *synthesize* it. Analysis was never up to the job set for it. In a literal sense, planning never learned.

The problem in such planning systems is not any specific category so much as the process of categorization itself. No amount of rearranging of the boxes could ever resolve the problem of the very existence of the boxes (a conclusion that can well be extended to structural reorganizations too). Strategy making, like creativity (or as creativity), needs to function beyond boxes, to create new perspectives as well as new combinations. 'Life *is* larger than our categories', someone once quipped. Planning has not felt right because, as Karl Weick remarked, 'everyday thinking almost never presents a series of steps. . . . Even if people tried to implement [linear and step models], they would find them foreign to what they are trying to do'.[31]

De Monthoux has pointed out that 'Thought-Taylorism' is not the same as 'Thing-Taylorism'.[32] Frederick Taylor was determined to squeeze out whatever creative potential remained in the jobs he programmed. His concern was for mechanical efficiency in repetitive production, not for novelty or integration in human thought. By *pre*scribing the workers' procedures, he *pro*scribed their discretion. Strategic planning set out to do the same thing with line managers (its claims notwithstanding), and when it succeeded, the results were devastating. The process of strategy formation simply has different needs—for creativity and synthesis, which depend on the discretion of informed actors.

Humpty Dumpty taught us that not everything that comes apart can be put back together again. Of all the forms of reductionism in planning, therefore, the assumption that informal strategy making could be reduced to a series of steps proved to be *reductio ad absurdum*. Somewhere in the hemispheres of the human brain, between the hard techniques of planning on the left side and the soft images of managing on the right, synthesis got lost in analysis.[33]

The Grand Fallacy of 'Strategic Planning'

Thus we arrive at planning's grand fallacy, a composite, in fact, of the three fallacies already discussed. *Because analysis is not synthesis, strategic planning has never been strategy making.* Analysis may precede and support synthesis, by defining the parts that can be combined into wholes. Analysis may follow and elaborate synthesis, by decomposing and formalizing its consequences. But analysis cannot substitute for synthesis. No amount of elaboration will ever enable formal procedures to forecast discontinuities, to inform detached managers, to create novel strategies. Thus planning, far from providing strategies, could not proceed without their prior existence. All this time, therefore, 'strategic planning' has been misnamed. It should have been called 'strategic programming', and promoted as a process to formalize, *when necessary*, the *consequences* of strategies already developed. Ultimately the term 'strategic planning' has proved itself to be an oxymoron.

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Henry Mintzberg is Professor of Management at McGill University in Montreal and Visiting Professor at INSEAD in France. This article is based on his new book *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, Prentice Hall International and Free Press, 1994.

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