Strategic Cacophony: Examining the Role of Interpretive Dissonance in Organizational Change and Strategic Implementation

[1]Hakim Ishmael Yakubu*., [2]Lois Dadzie

[1]Adventist University of Africa

[2]Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Traditional methods continue to disregard the communicative and interpretive intricacies that regulate whether strategies are comprehensively understood and efficaciously enacted, yet emphasize on the execution of plans dwelling on strategy, alignment, and system efficacy. The concept of strategic cacophony, understood as the interpretive dissonance that results when organizational stakeholders originate conflicting meanings from strategic instructions and change initiatives is clearly presented in the paper. Thus, well-designed strategies usually fail, not merely because of technical errors. The presence of institutional dissonance could cause well-designed strategies errors, but due to disjointed sense making procedures within pluralistic and intricate organizational situations. The central thesis of this paper indicates that interpretive dissonance, instead of insufficient strategy, often weakens strategic execution. The paper used sensemaking theory, institutional pluralism, and discourse analysis to develop a conceptual framework that aligns interpretive dissonance as a serious basis of strategic achievement. It revealed the essence of leadership agility, organizational discourse, and stakeholder sensemaking in extenuating strategic cacophony and accomplishing a unified implementation. This paper suggested five theoretical grounded propositions to guide future empirical research and strategic diagnostics. These propositions claim that strategic alignment and change readiness is dependent on the ability of leaders to decisively manage meaning, varied concession interpretations, and align narratives across stakeholder groups. Theoretically, the research bridges fragmented conversations across strategy, leadership, and communication disciplines. It practically guides how institutions could improve inclusive communication, sensemaking, and agile leadership approaches. The paper recommends the drift from perceiving strategy as a directive plan to shared and evolving narrative.

Keywords: Strategic Cacophony, Interpretive Dissonance, Organizational Change, Strategy Execution Failure, Leadership Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurial and Organizational cultures are enabled by the interconnection between maneuvering resources, societal dynamics, or evolving innovative business environment (Brar et al., 2024; Diwanti et al., 2021; Lertpiromsuk et al., 2024; Liu, 2024; Monir & Geberemeskel, 2025). The intricacies of the institutional environment in the modern era, dealing with change, and executing strategy efficaciously is a concern (Obeng, et al., 2024). Change initiatives are often unsuccessful because of inadequate coherence and misalignment (cacophony or noise) in how change is communicated, understood, and executed across the organizational structure, and stakeholders, not merely the lack of strategy (Acciarini et al., 2024; Avdeeva, 2022; Dong, 2023; Koptieva & Kulyk, 2024; Kozhevina & Salienko, 2022; Pesotskiy & Snetov, 2022; Rudenko et al., 2024; Sabaruddin et al., 2024).

Though outdated change theories use direct levels of strategy and execution; they often disregard the intricate social methods through which plans are understood, disputed, and formed by varying stakeholders. Regardless of the numerous studies on planned leadership and change, some institutions face alteration catastrophes not

because of a lack of strategy, but due to an unpredictable understanding of strategic determination between members of the organization (Evans, 2022). Thus, strategic cacophony (SC) is usually submerged in strong problems of meaning-making, individuality, and structural sense-making. In essence, organizational cacophony (OC) is not merely a consequence of poor communication.

Addressing leadership agility and resilience in recent strategic intricacies disrupted by different interpretations (globalization, competitive advantage, strategic adaptability, and stakeholder demands) is crucial (Ogundeji et al., 2023; Putra, 2022; Rizki et al., 2023). There are limited explored aspects of theory. Thus, filling this gap in literature by proposing how conflict in interpretations affect change rendezvous by integrating interpretive complexity into strategic leadership communication; juxtaposed existing theories like sense-making, institutional pluralism, and discourse analysis that discuss multiplicity in meaning (cacophony) is pertinent (Cf. Day et al., 2023; Holt & Wiedner, 2024; Mills et al., 2023; Whittle et al., 2023; Yeomans & Bowman, 2021).

The paper is a propositional paper that proposes directions for further exploration based on theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It does not include empirical methods. The purpose of the paper is to delve into how change developments could be disrupted by sense disintegration (interpretive dissonance), regardless of properly developed strategic plans. This reveals the social communicative and cultural aspects of plan implementation in the context of leadership agility and inclusive discourse practices that could foster coherence (cf. Arnold, 2021; Damaschin, 2023; Deng, et al., 2021; Gruzina & Pererva, 2022; Mzembe & Idemudia, 2023; cf. Al-Azab, 2025; Ali et al., 2022; Allio, 2024; Gottardello & Karabag, 2022). The study bridges the gaps between strategy, change, leadership, and communication (cf. Hidayatullah & Toni, 2023; Rudenko et al., 2024; Verghese, 2021). It will also guide scholarly theory and applied leadership (Biswas et al., 2024; Bujor & Bichel, 2024; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2021; Sabino et al., 2021), since traditional methods regarding strategic alignment and balanced planning sometimes fail (Austin, 2022; De Sousa et al., 2022; Girma, 2022; Mendes-Da-Silva & Albertin, 2024; Smith & Thomas, 2023; Twum, 2021; Velykykh, 2024).

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The propositional paper used conceptual research methodology to create theoretical framework and testable propositions about strategic cacophony. The study used recent peer reviewed literature (2021 – 2025) from Google Scholar, Scopus, Semantic Scholar, and Web of Science about strategic management, leadership, and organizational communication to integrate sense-making theory with institutional pluralism and discourse analysis to explain how interpretive dissonance disrupts strategy execution. The study employed narrative synthesis to identify gaps in existing models while mapping conceptual relationships between leadership agility and stakeholder sensemaking and discursive alignment. The research method produced five theoretically grounded propositions together with a conceptual model to present a new perspective on social strategy and change construction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Central Thesis

This paper contends that institutions do not basically fail because of strategic plan errors, but instead, due to interpretative disintegration. Thus, successful change execution is less about controlling processes and more about managing meaning. Leaders must act not just as planners but also as sense-makers who engage with divergent narratives, facilitate collective interpretation, and establish shared understanding through dialogic communication (Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati, 2021). This thesis reframes the attention of strategic administration from mechanical implementation to meaning alignment. Thus, revealing the communal structure of strategy, the diversity of stakeholder viewpoints, and the vital role of leadership communication.

Theoretical Foundation

Sensemaking Theory

Karl Weick suggested a sense-making theory that describes establishments as grounds where actors persistently interpret obstruct proceedings through social paradigms. Sensemaking denotes the process where

persons give meaning to their experiences, mainly during indecision or change. This construct presents strategy implementation as how diverse members come to understand making sense of strategy within their local authenticity. Not just executing predefined plans. The emphasis is on the individual, the change phenomenon, and their social reality (Kumar & Higgins, 2024). Current developments in sensemaking theory underpin its application to change contexts.

Sense-making is not a constant gathering mechanism. Commotion could be an industrious means of sense, particularly in tempestuous settings where conventional logic is not sufficient. The restating of order to foster dual meaning, which is essential in environments featured by interpretive, from restoration of order to facilitation of plural meaning, is particularly vital in environments characterized by ID (Holt & Wiedner, 2024). This means that structural change rendezvous that do not help members of the group to construct sensemaking could meet confrontation, detachment, or unintentional consequences.

Institutional Pluralism

Organizations that practice institutional pluralism maintain multiple conflicting logic systems that operate simultaneously within their structure. The different organizational logics shape how people decide which actions are suitable or valid thus creating different interpretations of strategic targets (Mills et al., 2023). The presence of multiple logics does not automatically create problems but it can result in strategic confusion or drift unless proper management is applied. Multiple stakeholders within these environments interpret a single strategic narrative differently because each group follows its unique institutional logic.

Leadership execution of strategy requires a style that accepts pluralism instead of attempting to eliminate it (Kumar & Higgins, 2024). The paper explains how stakeholders develop different interpretations which cause interpretive dissonance when ignored; thus, producing SC. Strategic alignment became possible through the intervention of mediators who managed opposing viewpoints thus mirroring organizational leadership during change management.

Discourse Analysis

The study of discourse analysis provides organizations with a method to observe how language creates real-world effects. According to this view, meanings exist as products of language-based construction and ongoing disputes. Strategic communication functions as a discursive process that determines how organizations understand and implement change through its framing mechanisms (Whittle et al., 2023). Thus, Language functions at two levels of operation which include cognitive and social dimensions to create framing schemas while forming intersubjective meanings and controlling sensemaking processes. By this, narrative and rhetorical elements along with discursive positioning serve to either unite or divide stakeholder meaning systems.

The term discursive misalignment in strategic cacophony (SC) describes when multiple strategic narratives conflict with each other to weaken the intended meaning of change initiatives. The use of inconsistent or ambiguous language by different department leaders and external partners leads to the breakdown of coherence (Shaw, 2021). Organizational meaning-making occurs through discourse which functions as both the communication tool and the site where meaning conflicts take place. Leaders who disregard this dimension will experience misalignment because their strategy fails to create a unifying narrative that connects with various interpretive communities.

Synthesis and Implication for Strategic Cacophony

These theories validate the main argument of this paper which indicates that organizations fail to execute their strategies because of fragmented meaning interpretation. The sense-making theory demonstrates how people process change through both mental and social interactions while institutional pluralism shows the various perspectives that exist and discourse analysis reveals how language affects the development or breakdown of coherence. Leaders need to function as sense-makers instead of decision-makers to handle SC by combining different narratives while navigating institutional logic and directing discourse to create shared meaning. The

integration of these perspectives leads to a more flexible and people-oriented method for executing strategy in intricate organizational settings.

Conceptual Foundation

Interpretive Dissonance and Organizational Cacophony

Definition and Significance. Interpretive dissonance (ID) is the contradictory understanding of tactical intent that develops across varied institutional structures and stakeholders. It is ingrained from deviating intellectual schematics, structural cultures, and communication activities. When leadership does not resolve this dissonance strategic cacophony (SC) occurs – a state where several, unaligned accounts contend for lawfulness, causing misperception and discouraging coherent actions (Babenko & Dyvynska, 2024; Khalid & Manaf, 2024). Organizational cacophony (OC) suggests the unsuccessfulness of leadership in harmonizing meaning systems in diverse and dynamic settings (Acharya, 2024; cf. Verghese, 2021). This prevents change moves by nurturing vagueness, distrust, and creating confrontation. Institutions that fail to resolve different stakeholder voices often collapse in communication implementation, especially the ones connected to high-stakes and technological changes.

Thus, from a critical perspective inadequate communication is not necessarily the result of dissonance, rather it is structurally rooted in the way divergent aspects make sense of change. For example, the frontline ministers in the West-Central Africa Division (WAD) may interpret the reorganization of Unions and Conferences as a strategic move for growth and expansion, whereas the licensed ministers and elders may perceive that as an opportunity to distribute and enjoy positions. These perspectives could co-occur silently until they crash during execution.

Strategic Change, Execution, and Failure

It is absurd to see strategic leadership evolve, yet properly developed strategies appear to be failing at the implementation level, raising vital questions of why calculated strategies fail at the execution stage. This trend challenges the traditional perspective that ascribes organizational letdowns to lack of planning, limited resources, and defective nursing systems: a device that has been suggested by scholarship as shallow. Rather a nuanced view is emerging that suggests that misalignment of meaning and interpretation across organizational stakeholders could cause failure (Austin, 2022; Varis, 2024; Valiyev, 2024; cf. Winn, 2021). The anti-crisis strategic framework demonstrates that execution flexibility and resilience stand as vital elements for success in complex operational environments.

The interpretive encounters entrenched in change enterprises of institutions are usually underrated. Managers and leaders may coherently communicate strategic objectives, but those messages are filtered through varied individual, departmental, and social lenses within the institution. This most certainly could make comprehensive strategies risk misapprehension, discriminating execution, or inactive resistance. Thus, plans from this perspective are a social construct needing incessant configuration of understanding across members.

Leadership Agility and Resilience

Leadership agility stands as an essential capability for organizations operating in fast-changing diverse environments. Traditional leadership methods based on control and consistency now give way to adaptive approaches that emphasize empathy collaboration and iterative learning (Olcott, 2021; Westover, 2024; cf. McNeill & Nienaber, 2023). Analyzing these perspectives, it is obvious that adaptive leadership that emphasizes open communication, employee engagement, and leader resilience in dynamic work environments is crucial to move past directive behavior to inspire, facilitate, and sense-shift during times of ambiguity. In this case agility, cultural empathy, and judgment during difficult times represent vital leadership capabilities for leading initiatives at the same time ensuring strategic rendezvous and disruption.

Strategic dexterity is a significant dimension for accomplishing success in industries. Thus, a successful leader fosters an industry ecosystem that ensures teamwork and appreciates ambiguous circumstances to maintain strategic objective alignment with practical alteration, especially in technological initiatives (Mokkapati et al.,

2023). In essence, leadership agility is an important capability that helps adaptive methods across varied circumstances to lessen Interpretive Dissonance (ID) and foster mutual meaning in change.

Stakeholder Multiplicity and Communication Challenges

Dühring and Zerfass (2021) suggest that communication plays a three-fold mechanism in agile institutions by altering internal processes and forming operational flexibility while controlling eternal stakeholder requirements. In the recent era, organizations function in the context of complex systems that include pluralistic stakeholder teams. For example, workers, stakeholders, and community lawmakers possess distinct manners of comprehending things. The implementation of plans needs structural management of conflicting perspectives and fostering mutual understanding within the team.

A model of agility is suggested by Chanda and Ray, (2021) through communication strategy roles that ensure adaptive narrative methods, rather than fixed outputs The study reveals how organizations with punitive or bureaucratic cultures prevent essential open dialogue needed to achieve interpretation alignment. Execution challenges stem from ownership gaps together with communication breakdowns and insufficient stakeholder participation in change initiatives Girma, 2022). There is therefore the need for continuous evaluation and discursive unity in the environment checking priorities and interpretations regularly. Strategic project failure occurs primarily because organizations maintain rigid administrative systems and fail to adjust to changing stakeholder expectations. By implication, the success of execution depends heavily on the ability of organizations to build strategic narratives that unite different parts of the organization.

Conceptual Framework
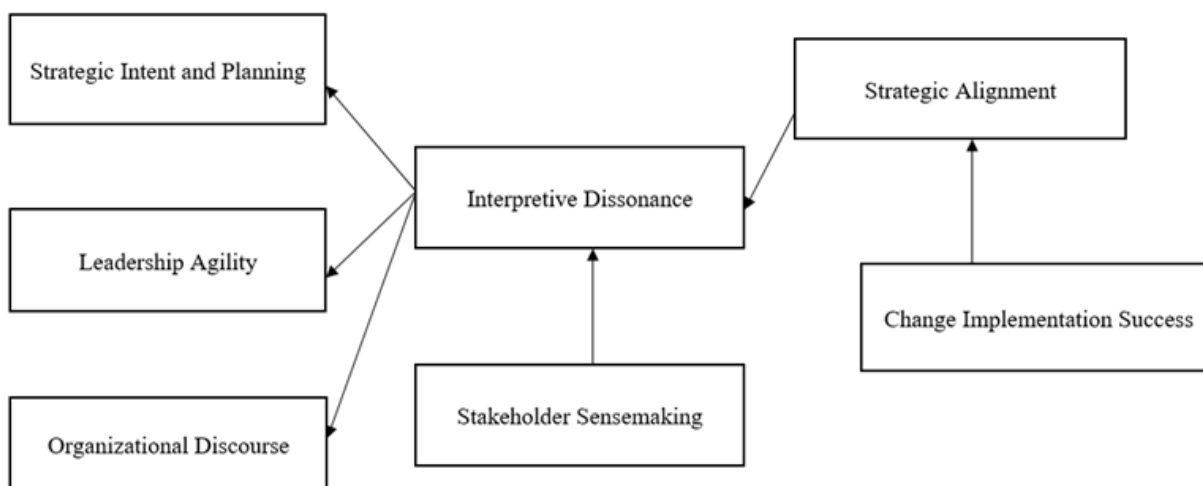

Figure 1. Strategic Cacophony and Interpretive Alignment in Change

The Model and Relationship between the Constructs

The conceptual framework demonstrates that successful strategy implementation requires more than formal planning because it depends on leadership actions and stakeholder interpretation and effective communication. The initial direction of change from Strategic Intent & Planning becomes effective only when stakeholders understand and execute it throughout the organization. Leadership Agility functions as a key factor for converting strategic objectives into actions that suit specific contexts through message interpretation and reframing and alignment for various groups. The way stakeholders perceive change and their level of resonance with internal and external stakeholdeIJRS depends on Organizational Discourse which includes language and communication practices and narratives.

The core element of this dynamic process is Interpretive Dissonance or strategic cacophony which occurs when different stakeholders develop opposing interpretations of the same strategy. The absence of resolution for this dissonance results in confusion which leads to resistance and implementation failure. The process of inclusive Stakeholder Sensemaking enables the resolution of conflicting interpretations which results in

Strategic Alignment that supports unified decision-making and coordinated action. The effective management of these elements produces Change Implementation Success which includes strong engagement and minimal resistance and tangible progress toward strategic goals.

Propositional Development

The following section outlines five fundamental propositions which stem from the theoretical and conceptual frameworks to explain strategic failure by analyzing interpretive dissonance, leadership agility, and stakeholder meaning-making:

Proposition 1: The main cause of strategic failure stems from interpretive dissonance instead of poor planning

Context: Traditional strategy literature often attributes execution failure to weak planning or insufficient resources. The misalignment of meaning that stakeholders have about strategy emerges as a vital yet frequently ignored factor according to recent research perspectives.

Theory Link: The Sensemaking theory developed by Weick explains organizational behavior emerges from actors' interpretations of unclear environments. The failure of strategy execution occurs when different stakeholders develop conflicting interpretations.

Proposition Statement: The main cause of strategic failure stems from interpretive dissonance between stakeholders instead of inadequate strategic planning.

Rationale: The research by Stiles and Zhao (2023) demonstrates that sensemaking misalignment produces "disjointed collaboration" in international ventures through mutual strategy misunderstandings instead of strategy content problems. Performance calculation structures should facilitate interpretive approaches to accomplish internal balance (Bellisario et al., 2021).

Proposition 2: Sensemaking approaches advance interpretive alignment among stakeholder groups.

Context: Organizations are made up of varied stakeholders who understand strategic intents through personal functions and practice personal interests. The execution of group sensemaking methods enables stakeholders to accomplish balance in their interpretations.

Theory Link: Sensemaking theory shows that narratives and interpretations serve as vital instruments for organizations to control unclear circumstances.

Propositional Statement: Organizations that execute sensemaking mechanisms will achieve the best interpretative alignment between their stakeholder teams.

Rationale: Fahey and Saint-Onge (2024) indicated that strategic meetings help in concerted sensemaking aspects that explain goals and lessen ambiguity. Agile institutions accomplish the best results through mutual sensemaking practices which aid persons in comprehending the plan (Mollet & Kaudela-Baum, 2022).

Proposition 3: Leadership agility intercedes the connection between multiplicity and strategic consistency.

Context: Multiple value structures and stakeholder opportunities within an organizational pluralism leads to strategic disintegration. Agile leadership fosters the blend of varied perspectives into a coherent strategic system.

Theory Link: The interpretive connection between institutional theory and the pluralistic ecosystem grows through leadership agility due to flexible responses made in pluralistic environments.

Propositional Statement: The linkage between institutional pluralism and strategic implementation consistency is mediated by leadership agility.

Rationale: Westover (2024) shows how leadership agility ensures strategic flexibility in times of quick changes which helps organizations to ensure alignment despite multiple organizational logics. Leaders of multistakeholder institutions use sensemaking to combine varied stakeholder prospects (Radoynovska, 2024).

Proposition 4: Discursive placement lessens Organization Cacophony (OC) in change initiatives.

Context: Change initiatives often suffer from "noise" – varied communication, inconsistent clarification, and ambiguous communication. Reaching conversational aids decreases OC.

Theory Link: Discourse analysis highlights the role of language in determining how change is understood and ratified.

Proposition Statement: Organizations that accomplish discursive balance in times of change initiatives will experience lessened interpretive struggle and advanced implementation achievement.

Rationale: Hanson et al. (2024) argue that operative leadership relies on the capability to align discourse with strategic intent, forming mutual narratives across members. The clearness and unity of language used at the time of change largely determine stakeholder buy-in and understanding.

Proposition 5: Organizations with all-encompassing stakeholder involvement experience less interpretive conflict.

Context: Exclusionary decision-making upsurges the probability of confrontation and misinterpretation. Conversely, complete methods foster co-created understanding and joint ownership.

Theory Link: Stakeholder theory and involved governance ensure inclusive strategic assets in intricated settings.

Proposition Statement: Institutions that involve stakeholders completely experience fewer occurrences of interpretive conflict in strategy implementation.

Rationale: Giusepponi (2023) suggests that stakeholder rendezvous, when symbolic rather than practical, frequently fails to diminish interpretive breaches. In contrast, comprehensive translucent engagement models allow smoother planned transitions and better alignment during systemic dangers.

Implications And Future Research

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study holds the potential to make a significant theoretical contribution by bridging currently fragmented scholarly domains: strategic management, leadership theory, and organizational discourse. By foregrounding the concept of interpretive dissonance as a key barrier to effective change, this research challenges linear strategy models and reframes failure as a problem of meaning-making, not planning. The incorporation of sensemaking theory, institutional pluralism, and discourse analysis helps a deeper comprehension of symbolic and social methods that underpin structural changes (Wohlgezogen, 2021). The union of these lenses shows how strategic catastrophe could arise from imbrication and occasionally contradictory established logic and stakeholder narratives. This method responds to calls for theoretical innovation in strategy execution outcomes.

The suggested model has a technical implementation for leaders, managers, and change agents maneuvering intricate strategic endeavors. First, it emphasizes the importance of strategic communication that does more than simply convey information. Leaders should be able to nurture interpretive alignment through all-encompassing dialogue and receptive sense-making routines, especially in settings made up of cultural diversity, vagueness, or resistance. Again, the model highlights the part of leadership agility, the ability to adaptively interpret, reframe, and re-communicate planned narratives as situations change (McNeill & Nienaber, 2023). Thus, leadership growth initiatives should blend competencies in discourse analysis, dynamic listening, and contextual framing.

Stakeholder mapping and involvement go beyond surface-level discussion to embrace deep participatory approaches. Organizations must expect diverse interpretations and co-create mutual understanding around strategy (Bogacz & Styk, 2022). This fosters buy-in, diminishes resistance, and ignites smoother execution

pathways. Leaders could maneuver tools like implementation mapping to grow more context-specific and socially informed strategic solutions (Hoskins et al., 2022). Finally, the model encourages the shift in strategic leadership from authority to facilitation, recognizing that change is more likely to prosper when leaders co-construct meaning rather than impose plans.

Directions for Empirical Testing

The proposition suggested in this paper, connecting interpretive dissonance, sense-making, and leadership agility, provides the basis for experimental inquiry. Future studies could explore these linkages through longitudinal research, ethnographic observation, or mixed-methods designs in varied sectors and cultural contexts. There is also the chance to transform and authenticate diagnostic tools for gaging interpretive dissonance and discursive disintegration within institutions. Such instruments could help practitioners identify misalignment before change efforts fail. In addition, examining the efficacy of leadership interventions that foster sensemaking, like enabling dialogues, storytelling, or visual mapping, could further appraise the best experiences for strategic execution. Strategy execution remains underexplored regardless of its intricacies and importance. Plotting its topography through interdisciplinary research is critical for building vigorous theoretical and practical models (Qutieshat & Madumuse, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This paper developed the argument that strategic failure in recent institutions is frequently less about faulty planning and more about interpretive dissonance, the misalignment of meaning among varied stakeholders. Examining various theories of sensemaking, institutional pluralism, and discourse analysis, the paper presented the perception of strategic cacophony to explain the misperception and disintegration that arise when strategic communications are interpreted incoherently across an institution. Responding to this intricacy, this paper proposed a conceptual framework that situates leadership agility, strategic communication, and stakeholder sense-making as crucial methods for reinstating interpretive coherence.

It contended that efficacious strategy implementation needs more than exceptional discipline; it warrants a participatory process of meaning-making where language, leadership, and logic systems meet. Strategic cacophony is necessary for institutions operating in a highly intricate, pluralistic environment. Leaders are to create both strategies and steward their interpretation fostering change efforts that resonate across varied organizational perspectives. This will help leaders and consultants to use more human-centered methods that acknowledge the socially constructed nature of change, rather than linear outcomes. This reconceptualization sets the stage for empirical research and experiential innovation, fostering successful change that is dependent on meaning-making to those expected to enact them, not what strategies say. Not only on what strategies say—but on what they mean to those expected to enact them.

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