This article proposes a design perspective on strategizing by presenting a Model of Positive Strategic Sensemaking for Meaningfulness. Theory elaboration is used drawing from three related disciplinary fields; strategizing, sensemaking and design. It is proposed that positive and human-centred design facilitation enhances strategizing as an ongoing embodied and material activity where meaning changes in strategy and vision may emerge. By viewing strategizing as a socially constructed evolving phenomenon the model adopts sensemaking and critical theory perspectives where the consequences of decisions for human beings and environment guide further activities. Designers as co-strategist may support or challenge an existing strategic direction resulting in incremental or more radical meaning changes among those affected by, and affecting, the emergence of strategies.

Keywords: Sensemaking, meaningfulness, HCD, strategizing, design research

Introduction

This article proposes a new design perspective on strategizing by presenting a model of Positive Strategic Sensemaking linked with broader considerations for strategy and changes of meanings that are facilitated by design professionals. It is proposed that positive strategic sensemaking that is facilitated by design contributes, firstly, to how new, even radical meanings, may emerge (Verganti, 2008; Verganti & Shani, 2016, pp. 104-105) and business opportunities can be explored. Secondly, the article creates links between design that is action oriented, strategy as practice and open strategy discussions. Thirdly, the article contributes to both sensemaking and strategizing as material and embodied phenomena. These three aspects will have an impact on the evolving role and requirements for future design professionals and their education. There is a paradigm shift in which designers gain increasing importance in addressing strategic questions (Åman, Andersson, & Hobday, 2017; Brown, 2009; de Mozota, 2017; Liedtka, 2015; Muratovski, 2015).

Dealing with uncertainty and discovering opportunities in multiple alternative futures are the domains where designers mostly feel at home. The aim of this article is to pay attention to the impact design professionals have in strategic sensemaking, which means exploring vision and interpreting its potential in organizations. This leads to new meaning discoveries for organizations and actors. The model presented in this article draws from design streams in human-centered design (HCD), (van der Bijl-Brouwer & Dorst, 2017), and positive design (Desmet & Pohlmeyer, 2013), and links them with streams of research that address sensemaking and strategy. Johansson and Woodilla (2017) encourage design researchers to expand from the prevailing functionalist view to other paradigms (pp. 461-465). It is in this vein that the article reflects upon what a change towards human-centered design-driven strategic processes may entail. Attention may shift towards the responsibility of broader consequences (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012, p. 30) of the decisions in organizations.
concerning their meaning for users, employees, citizens and the environment. This article can be linked with Critical Theory (Burrell & Morgan, 1980, pp. 298-299).

Earlier research has pointed to creative actions that facilitate organizational learning (Beckman & Barry, 2007; Cousins, 2018; Ford & Oglivie, 1996, p. 4), which in turn aims at, for example, enhanced adaptability (Argyris, 1999, p. 1) needed in uncertain conditions. Learning is believed to increase flexibility and enhance organizational knowledge creation (Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000, p. 6-7). This article proposes that new meanings for products and concepts emerge from learning through a broadening frame (Dorst, 2015; Paton & Dorst, 2011) through sensemaking that can be facilitated by design professionals.

Following the threads of strategy as practice (SAP), (Jarzabkowski, Spee, & Mets, 2013, pp. 41-44), and open strategy (Whittington, Cailluet, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011, p. 532), the paper yields insights in design professionals working in strategic sensemaking contexts. The framework presents a way of understanding how the impact of design may enable more inclusive and embodied strategic involvement in design-driven organizations. As a result, the design function itself may reach a higher impact at strategic-level decisions. Consequently, the values and practices of designers may transform the way organizations and people in organizations understand and modify their own core meanings and values that drive organizational life. The term strategizing refers generally to activities that lead to the creation of organizational vision and strategies (cf. Vaara & Whittington, 2012) including devising and thinking of strategic issues.

Meanings may change gradually, yet a radical rewiring of core values is not excluded. A parallel can be found from innovation management perspectives: Verganti (2008) has pointed to incremental and radical innovations in contexts in which playing with new materials and technologies is conducive (pp. 444 & 450). Designers are not the only meaning-makers; rather, this article depicts the designer as a co-strategist and facilitator embedded in social situations enabling and triggering meaning exploration. However, human beings who are ultimately the losers or winners of decisions taken within and amongst organizations lie close to the hearts of designers. Radical meaning change, or a change in vision, can have its origins in unknown circles (Verganti & Shani, 2016, p. 104-105). When the conventional management view on the rational consumer who seeks economic advantage is replaced by a broader view of the plural contexts of humans, the consequences of production (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012, p. 30) for the natural environment in which people live gains importance. People seek meaningfulness and seek to emphasize the positive. Vuori, San and Kira (2012) link sensemaking with the need to understand. For meaning-making to occur, the authors explain that people at work seek to create positive order. Thus, this article adopts the presupposition that meaningfulness is the driver of human action.

The article contributes to research discussions on 1) meaning and meaningfulness through design 2) positive design and human-centred design in strategizing and 3) strategizing as a material and embodied design supported activity. These lead to a) a reconsideration of the strategic role of a designer; b) design impact on more inclusive strategizing; and, c) design facilitation contributing to new meanings for products, services and society.

The article uses theory elaboration (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999) and aims at making sense of what is occurring, and what might occur in the future, when a design professional is embedded in organizational strategizing. It draws from the design expert’s perspective and combines it with theoretical insights towards a new cross-disciplinary theoretical model suggesting meaning changes that are influenced by design’s enactment in strategic sensemaking. The model suggests that the search for new meanings within company-level and profit-based views may not be the only factor producing positive meaning changes. Challenging current strategies may open up radical changes towards meaningfulness in all stakeholders. However, theory elaboration typically does not present hypotheses (Lee et al., 1999, p. 164).

Next, methodological considerations are presented, followed by the theoretical framework leading to the model of Positive Strategic Sensemaking (Figure 1).

**Methodological considerations**

This article utilizes pre-existing conceptual ideas derived from the fields of sensemaking, strategizing and design. It reviews some of this literature with the aim of theory elaboration. As Lee et al. (1999) explain theory elaboration occurs when pre-existing conceptual ideas or producing a preliminary model is the driving factor of the research. Fisher and Aguinis (2017) refer to horizontal theory borrowing as a form of theory elaboration (p. 455), in which an existing theory can be adapted in new contexts across disciplinary fields. The
elaboration of theory in this research results from a combination of a cross-disciplinary literature review and overarching themes forthcoming from a longitudinal research on the evolving role of the design profession in organizational settings. These aspects form the core of the proposed model of Positive Strategic Sensemaking. 

This article takes largely a sensemaking perspective, yet with a critical perspective by being concerned with consequences (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012) of strategic decisions. Reflexivity is part of qualitative research (Lee et al., 1999, p. 163). The article makes a first elaboration on a theoretical model narrowing the gap concerning the partly overlapping fields of strategizing, sensemaking and designing. Hypotheses and theory testing, however, as Lee et al. (1999) confirm, are not the aim of theory elaboration. Typical for design research, however, is the exploration of what might be. This article has extended this prospective sensemaking aspect into its research approach.

The longitudinal research focuses on experienced professional designers in middle or senior management positions in companies ranging from large technology driven international manufacturers to some specialized renowned design consultancies. The participants represent a range of design disciplines closely linked to service design, such as interaction, industrial, graphic, HCI, UX and experience design. Initially, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilized. It became evident that the overarching themes identified during the analysis required to continue research by employing theoretical elaboration, thus forming the following step across disciplinary borders as part of the ongoing longitudinal research. The research concentrates on exploring how the designers make sense of their professional approach and its contribution to the organizations they work for. The ongoing research considers interdisciplinary interactions as part of the context in which designers work.

Theoretical framework

This article proposes a Model of Positive Strategic Sensemaking. The focus of design is shifting from implementation of existing strategies towards increasingly exploring possibilities of new and fundamentally different meanings and opportunities. Designers are hence becoming co-strategists. In this approach, sensemaking and strategizing are intertwined, becoming one ongoing activity. The model forms the theoretical understanding of meaning change through positive and human-centred strategic sensemaking (Figure 1).

The proposed model draws from and combines three theoretical streams: strategizing, sensemaking and positive HCD. By viewing this triad as one core the model suggests a process in which design embedded in an organization co-acts in continuous sensemaking which is strategic and positive. Aiming at positive change and following the ethos of designers, it considers reflection on the consequences (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012) of future alternatives as a key element in developing and facilitating alternative views in co-creation with participants. Ultimately, any technology, product or system is translated into experiences that either have positive or negative consequences for humans and the environment we all share. The discussion on consequences should thus not be separated from any discussion on profits and innovations. Finally, meaning changes, incremental or radical, and steps towards meaningfulness may remodify the core of the organization towards a better future.

First, sensemaking, strategizing and positive design will be discussed, after which the proposed model will be introduced (Figure 1).

Sensemaking

Sensemaking is an interplay between action and interpretation (Weick, Sutcliff, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). Designers are involved in positive sensemaking embedded in social and discursive, but also material and embodied contexts which can support strategic sensemaking. Designers guided by their ethos may challenge existing organizational values and suggest new meanings. For example, service designers’ specific values are holism, empathy, and co-creation (Fayard, Stigliani, & Bechky, 2017, p. 282). Consequences for humans and environment as guiding principles of design may yield surprising new meanings for participants and users.

Weick (2001/2011) proposes that people act in ways that create value and give meaning to their action, groups act their values to their identities and organizations to their mission (pp. 3-4). Sensemaking unfolds retrospectively during an actual event while uncertainty prevails. In retrospect, events seem to make sense for participants. Weick suggests that micro behavioral commitments can have macro consequences with a social basis (pp. 14-15). The language of goals implies collective justification (p.7). When designers participate in
strategic sensemaking, different perspectives are voiced and visualized. Designers mediate between the values of users, management, stakeholders and other participants. Environmental values and individual meaningfulness can be part of design facilitation. Normal rational routines are broken and allow more space for human sensemaking, beyond profits as the starting point.

Ravasi and Stigliani (2012) examined designers supporting conversational practices by exchanging, combining, and constructing interpretations collectively (p. 1232), and in prospective sensemaking in future oriented group processes (Goia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994), such as strategy making or new product development. Change can be understood as a change in the strategic position or in the cognitive perspective (Mintzberg, 1981, p. 319-324). The participants made sense of their situation for themselves and others, while simultaneously acting both as influenced and influencing actors in uncertainty and ambiguity (Gioia et al., 1994, p. 376). Prospective sensemaking occurs when participants make attempts to see future consequences of their actions as a way of understanding their present situation (p. 378). Key symbols and metaphors were central to the construction of meaning. Symbols formed the means for participants to express their preferences and served as an impetus for influence and action.

Designers’ positive sensemaking utilizes material symbols supporting cognitive interactions (cf. Weick & Roberts, 1993) and knowing in practice (Orlikowski, 2002). Participants are engaged in sensemaking by joint action such as by prototyping items that are not judged on their aesthetic features. Rather, collective understandings and meaning-making are facilitated (D’ellera & Verganti, 2010, p. 125; Krippendorff, 1993a, p. 21; Krippendorff, 1993b, p. 35; Norman & Verganti, 2013, p. 89). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) in their study of a strategic change refer to sensemaking and sensegiving (p. 442). Sensemaking is connected with “meaning construction and reconstruction by the involved parties as they attempt to develop a meaningful framework for understanding the nature of the intended strategic change” (p. 444). Sensegiving occurs in attempts to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred organizational reality. These findings resemble design processes as they, following Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), took place in an iterative, sequential, and reciprocal fashion. Meaning is socially constructed, while the creation of things is also about interpretation and meaning making. Meaning is always co-created (Ind & Coates, 2013, p. 87).

The current research supports the view that sensemaking processes are anchored in and engage with material settings (Bakke & Bean, 2006, p. 1). These authors transcend the cognitive, intersubjective or communicative approaches and propose materiality as the basis of sensemaking suggesting that both sensemaking and design have an influence on future actions through material elements. Sensemaking studies may hence gain insights from design studies. There is an emergent perspective of organizations as social, discursive, and material systems. Individual identities are formed as cognitive, emotive, and corporeal entities where organizations shape, and are shaped by, individuals, other organizations or societies. In the context of designers’ positive strategic sensemaking, materiality presents itself in specific design units and creative spaces or labs as is evident in the current research. Materiality of thoughts, however, is not limited to the spaces devoted to creative activities. For designers, the material and the cognitive are interlaced and form a design space, both physically and mentally. The material and the embodied are embedded in the social and the cognitive and vice versa.

**Strategizing**

Strategy as practice (Jarzabowski et al., 2013) uses the verb strategizing to place emphasis on the strategic practices by practitioners (p. 41). Designers often are involved in strategizing, although this is not always explicit. Strategy as practice extends beyond rational strategy analysis, but involves the social and the material (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Spee and Jarzabowski (2011) reconceptualized strategic planning as a communication process (p. 1219). Referring to Ricoeur’s recontextualization (Thompson, 1981), they show the cyclical and evolving nature of strategic planning where the plan itself is the result of the process of reinterpretations. The relationship between text and talk forms the basis of their analysis. In the current paper, design influences such strategizing by more versatile elements than only text and talk (p. 1238). Additionally, the SAP approach (Jarzabowski et al., 2013) resonates well with the conception of socially constructed meaning in strategizing and the call for research on materials (pp. 41-43).

Strategy can be viewed as situated, socially accomplished activity through the actions and interactions of actors (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Design experts act as co-strategists by embedding design knowledge into organizational and inter-organizational contexts. Designers are co-strategists who facilitate learning and learn themselves during the process, while helping others to simultaneously experience and learn (Orlikowski, 2002) from the experiences that designers facilitate. Collective positive sensemaking enabled by designers in
strategy-making involves the framing and re-framing of divergent views. Drawing from the present research, it is suggested that design experts facilitate sensemaking in strategic context by hands-on collaboration with multiple stakeholders and by altering between thoughts and material prototypes or other artifacts. Iterative cycles of positive sensemaking allow design experts to support and concretize collective future-oriented sensemaking as a mode of strategic way-finding (cf. Jacobs & Wintrob, 2016, p. 45). Strategic renewal can be viewed as continuous innovation (Ravasi & Lojacono, 2005, p. 54).

Strategizing as a verb and continuous activity enables learning by empowering organizational members to experiment and reinterpret unfolding events. However, the learning school of strategy underlines that strategies balance between deliberate planning and emergent more spontaneous forms of becoming. The emphasis between the two fluctuates over time, yet emergent strategies are connected with more flexibility and better suited to coping with complexity in environments. Important for organizations is the ability to learn and become self-aware of the effects of actions (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Mintzberg, 1987) when predictability of future events is difficult (p. 69). Sensemaking, like strategizing, can be viewed as an ongoing activity where strategies unfold. The two form a unity. Not the planning, but rather the joint action and reflection describes strategizing. Both Weick and Mintzberg are thus intrigued by the connection of action and thought in organizations (cf. Argyris, 1999, p. 9) and suggest that action itself is to make sense. This implies an ongoing flow of iterative interpretations amongst participating actors who learn from each event. Mintzberg (1987) implies that intentional strategies may remain unrealized (p. 68), and advises organizations to avoid rigidity by fostering a more creative approach.

By viewing sensemaking and strategizing as an ongoing unfolding activity aiming at a positive goal, the current research proposes that design may have an important role in extracting cues and facilitating the emergence of new positively charged meanings, leading even to organizational transformation. Design activities are fragmented, yet often embedded in events, creating opportunities for collective understandings and meaning-making (D’ellera & Verganti, 2010, p. 125; Krippendorff, 1993a, p. 21; Krippendorff, 1993b, p. 35; Norman & Verganti, 2013, p. 89). Mintzberg (1987) speaks of crafting a strategy by comparing a company strategy to the strategy of a pottery maker (p. 66-68). Crafting might better capture how strategies come to being. The potter as a crafts-person “must also resolve one of the great challenges the corporate strategist faces: knowing the organization’s capabilities well enough to think deeply enough about its strategic direction” (Mintzberg, 1987, pp.66-68). What matters is learning continuously by experimenting. Elsbach and Stigliani (2018) suggest that experimental design thinking tools (cf. Liedtka, 2015; Tripp, 2016) and organizational cultures are tightly linked. They suggest design thinking tools support the development of the values, norms and assumptions that form an organizational culture. For example, organizations using design thinking tools were more open to experimentation and collaboration and had a culture that valued human-centeredness and collaboration.

The present article suggests that design professionals act as co-strategists in organizational contexts. Especially making as meaning negotiation (Groth, 2017, p.82) can be linked with strategic sensemaking. Design methods (cf. Fayard et al. 2017, pp.292-296) share some similar ideas by placing stakeholders into a situation where making and thinking merge. Experimentation guides further action, learning takes place in cycles. An obsession with control and planning may lead to risk aversion. In such a case, reluctance emerges towards creative ideas or quantum changes. Both of them are unpredictable and beyond control. (Mintzberg, 1993, p. 33.) Balogun and Johnson (2005) suggest that strategy development should be seen as an emergent process instead of as a top-down model (p. 1573). Mintzberg proposes that organizations utilize more visionary approaches and learning through experimentation (Mintzberg, 1993, pp. 37-38). This line of thought brings design approaches close to the ideas of strategizing.

Open strategy trends have become of interest in strategy research (Whittington et al., 2011, p. 532). Openness is not only connected to innovations and external actors but is also a trend concerning the degree of participation by internal actors (p. 535). Large corporations face new pressures for both greater inclusion and transparency. Strategizing becomes less exclusive and elitist. From a sensemaking point of view, participants with less formal power are nevertheless able to construct meaning resonating with others. This meaning may turn out to be the one enacting an environment (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 572). However, even holding formal power does not automatically lead to a dominant position in constructing meaning as people interpret the given meanings individually. Action follows from collective justification (Weick, 2001/2011).

Many design-driven organizations utilize participatory approaches and co-creation (Degnegaard, 2014; Frow, Nenonen, Payne, & Storbacka, 2015) while designers shift from designing form and function towards participation in strategies concerning services and systems development in, for example, digitalizing...
environments. The designer or design team is mostly embedded either in an organization, or guiding an organization from outside in a facilitating role, as a strategic design thinking unit, or as a consultant. However, the designer context, as earlier notions confirm (Verganti, 2008, p. 444), extends beyond the organizational borders.

**Positive and human-centred design**

The focus on human happiness is central to the world of design. Positive design aims at engagement in meaningful activities; some designers, for example, believe to be able to design happiness (Desmet & Pohlmeyer, 2013, p. 6). Supporting the emergence of new meanings, and meaningfulness is an asset that designers can utilize in their activities. Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) point to optimistic sensemaking effects on organizations and their members where positive statements emphasize possibilities for actors to enact their futures in post-crisis change situations (pp. 555-556). Meaning is not given; rather, it is co-constructed among participants (cf.Mattelmäki, Brandt, & Vaajakallio, 2011). Desmet and Pohlmeyer (2013) use "positive design" as ´an umbrella term for all forms of design, design research and design intention in which explicit attention is paid to the effects of design on the subjective well-being of individuals and communities´ (p.6). It is additionally concerned with the side-effects of consumption. Van der Bijl-Brouwer and Dorst (2017) explain how HCD can support exploring deeper insights of the human needs and assign this ability to design expertise built over long term practice. Verganti (2008) suggests that radical changes in meanings imply radical change in sociocultural regimes and can be understood by taking a broader view on long term phenomena (p. 442).

Positive strategic sensemaking has its foundation in the positive attitude often found amongst designers. (Michlewski, 2008, p. 386-387; Brown, 2009, pp. 76 & 242). Michlewski’s (2008) views support the idea that designers are well suited to strategizing; they focus on future and see reality as pliable. Assertion instead of evidence guides their work. Designers may combine the rational, emotional and aesthetic, prefer novel ideas and may stimulate change due to their generally positive attitude towards change (p. 386-387). Especially service design with participatory approaches and empathy (Fulton Suri, 2003) connects with “the human turn” in business and service development. This broadens the scope of service design well beyond services as its only application field and points towards strategic opportunities. Positive design aims at engagement in meaningful activities. The willingness and even enthusiasm to accept constrains is the very foundation of design thinking (Brown, 2009, p. 18). Finding a balance between organizational constrains such as feasibility, viability and desirability contributes to strategic sensemaking (p. 18-21).

Designers’ ethos may well guide an organization towards a future where climate change or other social challenges need broader understanding. With a firm belief in making positive change with good consequences for human lives and nature, designers suggest new strategic meanings and facilitate other people’s voice being heard. Sometimes they may be channeled through designers’ ethos. This research has some links with Sonenshein and Dholakia’s (2012) three meaning-making dimensions explaining employee engagement with strategic change (p. 16). These dimensions (strategy worldview, benefits finding and positive affective meaning) may resonate with positive design facilitation, thus supporting strategic change. Employees’ interpretations of strategic change play an essential role in determining how they ultimately implement such change (p.16). Yet, the model did not discuss radical bottom-up initiated meaning change. Importantly, the content of meaning-making proved essential in understanding employees’ responses to change. The research involved social psychological viewpoints in strategic change implementation.

**A Model of Positive Strategic Sensemaking leading to meaning change**

The model of Positive Strategic Sensemaking thus draws from the three theoretical streams presented, and combines them: strategizing, sensemaking and positive human-centered design. The intertwined ongoing interplay between the three elements yields a different perspective on strategizing and the role of designers supporting or initiating these activities. Instead of describing a strictly controlled managerial process, the model stresses joint action for meaning construction. The model suggests an ongoing activity with diverse participants and perspectives joined for finding a meaningful focus. This perspective stresses the core of the vision and meaning of organizational life rather than implementation of a distant strategic goal that is given top-down by an organization. Positive Strategic Sensemaking implies an ongoing search for cues that are meaningful enough for actors to change course and, at times, challenge an existing strategy or clarify its content. The strategy is in a constant state of becoming and evolving in an iterative fashion.
Allowing even critical views on strategy to surface and be articulated and elaborated on, may yield insights and energize substantial change. This paper proposes that positive strategic sensemaking through the design perspective opens up opportunities for meaning change and increased meaningfulness for participating actors. Incremental meaning changes as Verganti (2008) suggests, follow the existing strategic route and modify it to some extent, yet maintaining the course of the existing strategic direction. In the case of radical meaning change, the direction and basic values of the organization are rewired towards genuinely striving to increase well-being of individuals and communities. It also positively challenges organizational actors to reconsider consequences of consumption and environmental effects on the long term. Ultimately, the support rendered by positive design may transform the organization into a radically new positive direction.

Consequently, meanings cannot and should not be forced. Even when proposed, ultimately, the interpretation cannot be managed. What can be beneficial, is ongoing reflection following each move. Paradoxically, challenging the current strategy may thus not be directed to criticizing management, or is not a matter of power play; rather, it can be viewed as a joint positive force in a world that, according to many design perspectives, does require change towards meaningfulness.

The professional designers mentioned some examples of meaning changes. A manufacturing company changed the core of their strategy from a supplier of technology towards understanding their role in enhancing health and well-being at home. New visions around sharing economy have emerged, challenging the traditional conceptions of ownership. Early phase probing, earlier than any prototypes or testing, is an example of continuous extracting of cues that further builds design knowledge available for use in specific situations. Becoming a service company entails support for the crucial role of the employees who provide the promised service experience. A software company focuses on users who generally dislike the software they need to use. Many of these examples changed the strategic understanding of the organization where the designers worked. However, more research is needed to find out if radical changes extend to the less evident aspects such as genuine environmental protection, choice of materials that are sustainable and ethically sound production site conditions. Meaningfulness gains importance on the long run and has value for human beings who form the core of organizations. While these changes cannot be managed, their emergence, perhaps, can be cultivated.

Discussion and Limitations

As to radical innovations (Verganti, 2008; Norman & Verganti, 2014, p. 88-89; Verganti & Shani, 2016), the radical new meaning may become the core of the strategy and transformation inspired by design ethos and support. Designers work in multidisciplinary interactions. Strategizing is not only open to more participants,
but allows insights other than those given or chosen exclusively by conventional management. Radical new meanings need not take quantitative data as the first or only criteria. Other cues and opportunities may guide action such as health, well-being or equality concerns. Reducing cognitive load is a challenge that is not yet solved. One might ask if robots are needed in elderly care and if so, whether children in a few years will be taken to robotic daycare. Regarding the increase of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in service industries, the replacement of mechanical and analytical tasks is estimated to take place rapidly. Instead, intuitive and empathetic skills and creative thinking will offer sustainable and lasting advantages to human service employees. Ultimately, the AI revolution in the service economy is a realistic threat to all employment in the sector. (Huang & Rust, 2018.)

Strategizing is continuous sensemaking. With designers’ values and ethos, there is scope for meaning changes with a broader impact. While design managers gain power, the research encourages them to give voice to those who will be impacted by their designs. Designers are both capable of supporting and challenging existing strategies. The latter can take place with designers supporting and triggering change by focusing on consequences for society and people. Material, embodied interactions by design facilitation support learning and create involvement. By finding meaningfulness strategizing makes sense.

Limitations
This preliminary theory elaboration is a first attempt to link sensemaking, strategizing and the positive enabling aspects of design into a theoretical model supporting meaning change. It is meant to serve as inspiration and insight for further exploration and elaboration both among designers and design, strategy and sensemaking scholars. However, Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) found warning examples of too much optimism where routine actions cause blindness preceding crisis situations (pp. 555-556). Strong positive statements made the event look ordinary and participants neglect the signs of danger. Design-driven organizations and their sensemaking processes on individual and collective levels require further clarification.

One possible purpose of qualitative research is radical change. Following the Critical Theory path, the current paper makes a first elaboration on a theoretical model through which actors in organizations, through sensemaking and responsible reflection, may radically change the meanings of their actions. Such new meanings might guide organizational strategies towards change that benefits the environment and people. However, this research is limited to theory elaboration, instead of testing a hypothesis. Theory elaboration may lead to overly complex theories. Interdisciplinary theory elaboration risks being limited by the depth of scholarship in the field from which one borrows. The aim of theorizing in this article has been both to borrow yet also to contribute to the other fields of sensemaking and strategizing and bring design closer to these disciplines. As to the design field, the model is a step towards better capturing features of the design profession in the context of strategizing, in which the management perspective has been dominant. This research has limitations as to the interpretations made and it cannot exclude the assumptions held by the researchers with backgrounds in business and design fields. Perhaps the model proposed appears to be too optimistic in some cases. Further, the research takes the perspective of design experts’ views; a design knowledge perspective that has not gained much attention. In addition, cultural differences have an effect on the intensity of design use. Organizational learning may not always be a beneficent phenomenon and even its desirability as axiomatic can be questioned (Argyris, 1999, pp. 9-14). Neither have Open Strategy developments, so far, led to transfer of decision rights (cf. Hautz, Seidl, & Whittington, 2017; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Whittington et al., 2011), while the evolving role design experts play in organizational strategizing, requires further research.

Design as a discipline contains multiple streams. Many other design streams could have been included in the theoretical model supporting strategic impact on organizational questions of sensemaking. The model does not claim that designers are the only actors involved in positive change. Yet, reconsidering strategic direction is necessary in times of limited planetary resources and both design and other disciplines need to face this situation as a shared responsibility. Designers are there to support this change.

Conclusions
A Model of Positive Strategic Sensemaking was presented. It utilized the theoretical insights from sensemaking, strategizing and positive and human-centered design. Positive Strategic Sensemaking can be understood as an ongoing evolving sensemaking activity embedded in social and discursive, but also material
and embodied strategic contexts. Positive Strategic Sensemaking implies an ongoing search for cues that are meaningful enough for justification and joint action towards meaningfulness supported by design.

The article proposes that designers support positive strategic sensemaking as facilitators or co-strategists. Sometimes designers, interacting with others, support an existing strategy. At other times, they might challenge the strategy. In both cases meaning changes are made possible and new opportunities may be found. In the first case, meaning changes follow largely an existing strategy with minor changes in products and systems. In the latter case, radical meaning changes might emerge as a result of opening strategy to multiple interpretations among participants. Meaningfulness is a strong trigger for changes that may not be derived from managerial rationalism but from a sense of deeper meaning for human beings. Such genuine meaning changes reside in individuals and societies, waiting for a suitable moment to become active and visible. Radical meaning change, even a new vision leading to transformation, may emerge where designers’ ethos guides action.

The research opens new avenues for design to be closely aligned to and associated with strategizing. The current research suggests that positive support by inclusiveness and empathy allows diverse interpretations to be articulated and a broader understanding of issues influencing a future event be constructed. Communication is supported by materials and embodied activities encouraging different perspectives to be heard. The research is of importance to designers showing their strategic importance as facilitators and supporters of meaning change. This has implications for education of designers and managers alike, stressing the search for meaningful consequences as a positive force supported by design facilitation. Future research could, for example, look deeper into meaningfulness by considering the many perspectives involved as well as the enabling and hindering factors behind such attempts on individual, collective or organizational levels.

Social and material embodied design involvement offers space for further research. Research could look deeper into the ethos of designers interacting with other organizational actors enacting their organizational values towards meaningful futures. The research may interest those involved in SAP or open strategy research from design impact point of view. It contributes to the emerging sensemaking literature as material and embodied in addition to cognitive and discursive interpretations. In addition, there seems to be scope for research on strategy emergence, the role of materiality, and critical interpretations of strategy as Vaara and Whittington (2012) point out. This article has provided new insights regarding the role of design experts and their approaches in this context by combining positive design streams with strategizing and sensemaking as an ongoing phenomenon.

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