# Strategy emergence as wayfinding

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**Abstract.** Strategy researchers increasingly recognize that in many organizations strategic coherence can emerge inadvertently from local coping actions and decisions taken "on the hoof". However, how this actually happens in practice has not been sufficiently examined and explained. We draw from the "practice turn" in social theory to show how strategy can emerge through a process of wayfinding involving local adaptive actions taken guided by an internalized habitus or *modus operandi.* Small iterative changes made oftentimes at operational levels can generate positive unintended consequences that ultimately contribute towards the emergence of a coherent and viable strategy. We empirically investigate the case of a high-end gourmet restaurant in the extremely structured field of haute cuisine, examining everyday practices, actions and ongoing improvisations made in relation to the individuals concerned, their professionally socialized selves, the unique set of organizational circumstances they face, and the institutional and environmental demands placed on them. We show how strategy as a consistent pattern of actions can emerge from this synergistic interweaving of local coping actions and their unintended consequences. We thus contribute to strategy research by proposing a model of strategy emergence as wayfinding that considers the actors' social embeddedness, their internalized habitus and how that predisposes them to respond by itinerantly interweaving seemingly small coping actions to unexpectedly produce a coherent strategy.

**Keywords:** strategy emergence, wayfinding process, practice, haute cuisine restaurant, purposive, habitus

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## INTRODUCTION

> "We have a strategic plan. It's called doing things."
> (Herb Kelleher, Co-founder, Southwest Airlines)

Strategy practice and process scholars recognize that many organizations become successful not because they have pre-established strategic plans but because a viable strategy often emerges inadvertently (Chia, 2013) as a coherent "pattern in a stream of decisions" (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985: 257). As a consequence, to explain the process of strategy-making and to highlight the phenomenon of strategy emergence, some scholars have redirected attention away from the content of strategic planning to the activities, actions, processes and practices occurring within organizational life (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl & Vaara, 2015; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas & Van de Ven, 2013; MacKay & Chia, 2013; Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Pettigrew, 1985, 1992; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Van de Ven, 1992). Advocates of this emergent strategy approach call for more research on *how,* even in the absence of clear prior intentions, a strategy as a coherent and consistent pattern of

actions can actually emerge (Tsoukas, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012); how can strategic coherence emerge non-deliberately?

This paper addresses this question by bridging practice-based approaches to strategizing and strategy process research (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Kouamé & Langley, 2018; Mirabeau, Maguire & Hardy, 2018) through the notion of "wayfinding" (Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009), which relies on a crucial distinction between "purposive" and "purposeful" action (Chia & Rasche, 2010); "purposive" action is conscious but non-deliberate while "purposeful" action is conscious and_deliberate. The overwhelming tendency in the social sciences to assume that action is necessarily deliberate, that "thinking should precede action…[and] that purpose should be defined in terms of a consistent set of pre-existent goals" (March, 1972: 419) is deeply embedded in the western culture (Jullien, 2004: 4). It remains a formidable challenge for strategy research (Mintzberg, 1990; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014: 1203; Tsoukas, 2010). This, despite the reality that in many facets of ordinary organizational life, people regularly act non-deliberately without having a clear objective or longer-term outcome in mind. Everyday actions can be "purposive without the actor having in mind a purpose" (Dreyfus, 1991: 93). This distinction between purposiveness and purposefulness (Dreyfus, 1991; Chia & Holt, 2009: 108; Chia & Rasche, 2010) is crucial for our understanding of strategy emergence. By acknowledging the possibility of purposive action, we show that strategy can emerge unintentionally as a consistent pattern through the mediation of habitus, which frames perceptions and possibilities for action (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus, then, is what accounts for the possibility of inadvertent strategy emergence as wayfinding.

To this end, we investigate the case of a small company in a highly structured environment: a high-end gourmet restaurant (Champagne Gourmet Restaurant-CGR) in the field of haute cuisine. We focus on the everyday practical coping actions and small purposive changes made and analyse them in relation to the individuals concerned, their professionally socialized selves, the unique set of organizational circumstances they face, and the institutional and environmental demands placed on them. We show how, through the initiation and intertwinement of a variety of small uncoordinated iterative changes, in their search for novel ways of improving service and dining experience to appease a very demanding clientele, CGR was able to "wayfind" its way towards strategic coherence and to distinguish itself from its competitors with significant consequences. Our study contributes to the emergent strategy school of thought by showing how strategy emergence can be explained well through a wayfinding perspective underpinned by the practice turn in social theory with its important focus on habitus as the generator of purposive, practical coping action. More broadly, our study contributes to strategy research by empirically showing that the immanence of underlying social practices is what unifies the relationships between the micro and macro levels in emergent strategy. We also add to the understanding of the dynamics of emergent strategy by highlighting how the unintended consequences of small coping actions taken, and the itinerant interweaving of these actions and their consequences, can iteratively and cumulatively produce a coherent strategy.

In what follows, we begin with the notion of emergent strategy and how a practice-based perspective inspired by the notions of purposive action and wayfinding can help advance our understanding of how a strategy can emerge as a coherent pattern. The next section details the research method adopted for empirical investigation of the CGR case. In the third section, we detail the changes that occurred at CGR over a period

of some four years and analyse them within the perspective of the actors' habitus and trajectories, the local restaurant and the centrality of haute cuisine. Finally, we discuss the study's findings.

## EMERGENT STRATEGY, PRACTICE AND WAYFINDING

EMERGENT STRATEGY

Several decades ago, Henry Mintzberg and colleagues (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) pointed to a theoretical gap that existed between the notion of planned strategy and that which actually happens in organizations. Mintzberg (1990: 182) especially criticized the strategy design school for its unwarranted presumption that thought must always precede action and that strategy formation is above all a conception process, rather than one of iterative learning. For him and his colleagues, organizational strategies often emerge as partly unplanned consequences of human actions and interactions so that strategy can be understood as "a pattern realized despite, or in the absence of intentions" (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985: 257). Emergent strategy is "in essence, unintended order" (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985: 271), that is, a matter of both appearance and of consistency. Tsoukas (2010: 53) observes that with emergent strategy "we talk about strategy ex post facto [...;] practitioners do not necessarily have the sense that they strategize – this is, usually, researchers' attribution [or that of] practitioners themselves when they retrospectively make sense of what they do".

Ever since these initial insights and notwithstanding a wide acknowledgement of the notion in contemporary strategy literature (MacLean & MacIntosh, 2015: 74), only a small number of studies have directly focused on emergent strategy per se (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014: 1202). Most of these studies, some of which are very well known, were aimed at either theoretically or empirically substantiating the concept. Theoretical developments (e.g. Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) essentially elaborated nuances along the continuum opposing emergent types of strategy to intended ones. As for empirical investigations (Kipping & Cailluet, 2010; Mintzberg, 2007; Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985; Mintzberg & Rose, 2003; Mintzberg, Taylor & Waters, 1984; Mintzberg & Waters, 1982; Pascale, 1984), some have validated the notion by longitudinally tracking the organizations' realized strategies and, within this frame, contrasting the realized strategy with the initial plans, and deliberate strategy with emergent strategy. Very few studies have directly addressed the underlying generative mechanisms that make emergent strategy possible or thus far detailed some of its intricacies. There are those that have especially outlined the central role of middle management; for example, in telling the story of Honda's entry into the US market on the basis of the employees' retrospective account, Pascale (1984) showed that what fundamentally forged Honda's eventual strategy was in fact the local responses of perplexed managers directly engaged in the field.

Contextual variables favourable to such strategy emergence have also been identified, such as interactive control (Osborn, 1998) or the development of projects that are misaligned with or peripheral to the existing strategy (Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985). For example, Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) have shown that autonomous strategic behaviour plays a key role in strategy emergence. These authors nonetheless call for researchers to "further develop the emergent strategy concept by focusing on iterated processes of deploying material and symbolic

resources" (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014: 1228). Given this limited number of studies and despite the notion being widely acknowledged in strategy literature, emergent strategy, its intricacies and generative dynamics therefore remain undertheorized. In particular, while previous studies have shown that strategy can emerge despite or in the absence of clear intentions, they have not adequately explained how such emergence of an internally consistent pattern is made possible through largely uncoordinated local actions. How can a strategy emerge as a coherent pattern despite or in the absence of clear intentions?

## PRACTICE PERSPECTIVES ON STRATEGY AND STRATEGY EMERGENCE

To date, studies directly dedicated to further investigating *how* strategy emergence is possible remain scarce. While Mintzberg and colleagues' pioneering work initiated an alternative, processual (e.g. Burgelman, 1996; Langley, 1999; Langley et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 1985, 1992; Van de Ven, 1992) and practice-based (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) approach that indirectly addressed the question of emergent strategy, this question of how that is possible remains unanswered. In order to disentangle strategy-making and to capture some of its dimensions, such as time, agency or context, scholars have adopted more micro approaches to the phenomenon and have progressively shifted (Chia & MacKay, 2007) the focus from strategy to strategizing and to identifying what socially embedded organizational actors actually do (Whittington, 2007: 1582). Within such perspectives, to date, scholars have been able to highlight several facets of strategizing (thus, though indirectly, of strategy emergence), such as the role of middle management (e.g. Mantere, 2008), the role of projects inductively emerging at the organizational periphery (Regnér, 2003) and the discursive (for example Samra-Fredericks, 2003) and material (for example Arnaud, Mills, Legrand & Maton, 2016) dimensions of strategizing.

Recently, scholars have further reassessed the fruitfulness of these approaches to studying strategizing (Kouamé & Langley, 2018; Mirabeau et al., 2018). In particular, their potential to unveil the intricacies and dynamics of emergent strategy is claimed to be twofold. First, they can highlight "the potential significance of micro-level details for concepts [...] that are often described empirically at a much higher level" (Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 302) and provide "insight into how lower-level processes and practices engaged by individuals and groups connect to broader organizational-level processes and outcomes including strategy" (Kouamé & Langley, 2018: 560). Second, they can fully account for the social embeddedness of actors and how that affects their responses (Chia, 2013; Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Elbasha & Wright, 2017; Langley et al., 2013; Tsoukas, 2010; Whittington, 2007).

The advocates of the practice-based approach, however, acknowledge that further work needs to be done (Carter, Clegg & Kornberger, 2008) to better relate strategy emergence to other forms of strategizing (Avenier, 1999; Mirabeau et al., 2018) and, most importantly, to unveil the inner workings of emergent strategy (Tsoukas, 2010: 49; Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 313). In particular, they argue that most practice and process strategy research has so far directly addressed mainly formal and purposeful strategizing activities (Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 313), and that despite the significant advances made over the last decades, the existing research still does not explain how a myriad of micro-local adaptive actions and decisions can come together to form a coherent strategy. How do

seemingly inconsequential local actions taken *in situ* and often *sponte sua*, at the coalface of a business eventuate into a coherent pattern that we then retrospectively recognize as being essentially strategic? This question remains unanswered by both process and much of the current practice-based approaches to strategy and strategy emergence. Our contention here is that the full import of the "practice turn" in social theory has not been sufficiently realized in current strategy theorizing. Following the practice turn in social theory, our study explores and examines this question. In the next section, we introduce our conceptual framework in more detail.

WAYFINDING THROUGH PURPOSIVE ACTION

In this empirical study, we adopt Chia and Holt's (2006, 2009) practice-based perspective on strategizing as wayfinding. Among the rich set of concepts and features of strategizing that Chia and Holt (2009) introduce, we specifically selected the following key notions: purposiveness, habitus, small changes and unintended consequences arising from practical coping actions taken. Wayfinding largely builds from the prior distinction made between purposefulness and purposiveness (Chia & Holt, 2009: 105; Dreyfus, 1991; Tsoukas, 2010: 59). In purposeful action, cognitive representations mediate between thought and action, while in purposive action, humans "relate to the world in an organized purposive manner without the constant accompaniment of representational states that specify what the action is aimed at accomplishing" (Dreyfus, 1991: 93). These two distinct forms of action are intimately related to two modes of existence, namely, building and dwelling (Heidegger, 1971: 60). Building is characterized by the distancing of individuals from their lifeworld through cognitively driven activities, such as designing, planning and goal setting (Ingold, 2011: 10). Dwelling, on the other hand, entails the immersion of beings in their lifeworld such that actors are characterized by an "absorbed intentionality" (Dreyfus, 1991: 104); the world does not appear ready-made but takes on significance through its incorporation into our everyday activities (Ingold, 2000: 3-5).

When understood thus, much of human everyday activity can be described without necessarily relying on the cognitivist language of deliberate planning and intention, and intelligent behaviour is possible without mental representations (Dreyfus, 1991). As Chia and Holt (2009) and Tsoukas (2010) argue, this distinction between dwelling and building as two contrasting modes of engaging with the world crucially enables us to appreciate how immersed, *purposive,* practical coping differs from deliberate, *purposeful,* rational-calculative action in organizations (Tsoukas, 2010: 59). Whereas in the former perspective, the designer/producer is assumed to bear prior intentions and to act *purposefully* by planning to achieve his/her pre-conceived (cognitively-represented) end goals, in the dwelling mode, the agent acts *purposively* by drawing on what is directly available from within the specific set of circumstances in which s/he finds her/himself, to deal effectively with the predicaments and obstacles s/he immediately faces. Purposive action is practical coping action taken *in situ* and often *sponte sua* to fix problems and overcome immediate impediments or obstacles without necessarily having any longer-term consideration in mind (Chia & Holt, 2009: 108-111). Chia and Holt (2006, 2009) and Tsoukas (2010) maintain that acknowledging the primacy of purposive action and skilled practical coping enables us to give an alternative account of the phenomenon of strategy emergence without resorting to the language of deliberate intentions, goals, plans and pre-

thought strategies or even the language of structures and universal logic. This is not to deny the value or the existence of deliberate strategy. Rather, it is to insist that there is *always already* strategic coherence immanent in the practical coping actions taken to deal with problems faced *in situ*. Strategic planning, purposeful goal setting and navigational maps are only possible because such purposive orientation and practical coping ability is already in place as a necessary skilled substrate.

From a practice point of view, an individual's sensitivities, tendencies, predispositions and hence spontaneous responses are significantly shaped by the socialization (often unconsciously) process into a set of collectively accepted practices that Bourdieu (1990) calls habitus. Practices, therefore, are not simply about what individual actors deliberately do as autonomous agents. Rather, practices constitute a socio-historical shared repository of established ways of engaging with the world and dealing with social and professional situations in a manner that is deemed appropriate and acceptable by the community concerned. Practices tie the individual, collective and societal levels together. Practices are "embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity" organized around "shared practical understanding" (Schatzki, 2001: 2). They are sedimented forms of "collective action" (Barnes, 2001), "collective meaning-making, identity forming, and order-producing activities" that are essentially "primitive and foundational" (Nicolini, 2013: 7): they precede individuality (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Dreyfus, 1991). Our "practices embody pervasive responses, discriminations, motor skills, etc., which add up to an interpretation of what it is to be a person, an object, an institution, etc." (Dreyfus, 1991: 17). As socially acquired and historically shaped tendencies, practices have wide-ranging organizational implications in terms of how they shape and influence organizational processes and outcomes (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Nicolini, 2013; Rasche & Chia, 2009).

Social practices give rise to habitus, a "system of durable, transposable dispositions […] which generates and organizes practices [...] without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu, 1990: 52). Habitus is a *modus operandi* that ensures a consistency in the orchestration of action without necessarily implying the need for prior intention. Local orientations and everyday practical coping actions, adjustments and improvisations are attributable to this underlying habitus. Yet, habitus is by no means deterministic or mechanical, nor does it sanction an unbridled voluntarism. It is as opposed to the "mechanical necessity of things without history as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects without inertia" (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). Habitus allows us to steer a middle way between construing actions as the making of deliberate free choices or as inevitably determined by underlying structures and/or universal logic. It creates a theoretical space for understanding the significance and value of local adaptations and improvisations and for appreciating how purposive coping actions taken locally without any longer-term plan can have wider, and oftentimes surprising, ramifications in the fullness of time. In other words, everyday social practice and practical coping imply a "relational complicity" between actors and the broader social world (Chia & Holt, 2009: 91). A fundamental promise of the practice turn in social theory, therefore, is its ability to potentially overcome the micro–macro, process–content dualisms that continue to plague much of social scientific theorizing and, by extension, strategy theorizing.

Conceiving of strategy emergence in social practice terms, therefore, enables us to see how the consistency and the congruence of

individuals' actions within an organization can arise almost inadvertently and unintentionally. First, as practice is relational and interconnects levels of analysis, wayfinding represents a useful frame to account for the dynamics between individual responses to local conditions, on the one hand, and broader organizational and field characteristics on the other hand. Second, in practice theory, as a set of immanent "deeply embedded internalized tendencies distributed throughout the organization and acquired through socialization/ acculturation" (Chia & Rasche, 2010: 41), social embeddedness and habitus make the unintended convergence and coherence of actions possible. In other words, the phenomenon of strategy emergence can be better understood from within a wayfinding framework that derives from a dwelling-based practice perspective (Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009), where habituated purposiveness of action helps explain how organizations continuously reach "out into the unknown" (Chia & Holt, 2009: 159). It follows that wayfinding openly acknowledges the real possibility of unintended consequences (both positive and negative) arising from actions taken as an organization wayfinds its way through as-yet uncharted terrain. Surprise, uncertainty and unintended consequences are the natural order of the day in such practical coping circumstances. In this perspective, "strategies are secondary stabilized effects of culturally transmitted practices" (Tsoukas, 2010: 49).

Altogether, adopting a genuinely practice-based view of strategy emergence as wayfinding leads to an emphasis on the following: the purposiveness of action; the importance of habitus in predisposing organizational actors; the significance of small incremental coping changes in bringing about major transformations; and therefore, the inevitability of both positive and negative unintended consequences arising from such actions taken. These are the key features of the wayfinding approach that we adopt to understand strategy emergence. Nevertheless, the wayfinding perspective proposed by Chia & Holt (2006, 2009) does not detail how these various concepts pan out in actual practice. Although the proposed theoretical perspective intends to account for a dynamic phenomenon, the theoretical developments to date do not consider nor delve into possible loops and combinational effects and, in particular, into the intricacies of how actions taken and their unintended consequences intertwine together to nourish the emerging order. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, the wayfinding framework has not been empirically employed in strategy research to date. This paper attempts to flesh out empirically this strategizing-as-wayfinding model.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Empirically examining emergent strategy as wayfinding required us to constantly oscillate from the behaviours and trajectories of the individuals, to the organization and the social, institutional and competitive fields it operates within (Chia & Holt, 2006: 638; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Nicolini, 2013; Tsoukas, 2010). Our study is thus based on a single unique longitudinal case that enabled us to closely observe the people, their work and self-understandings, their local and social circumstances, and their predicaments; the case also enabled us to appreciate how these individuals cope with ongoing problems from within the situations they find themselves in. The study involves the examination of a small company, the Champagne Gourmet Restaurant (CGR), a Michelin-starred restaurant, over a four-year period from 2005 to 2009. We selected this case for three main reasons. First, the company faced competitive challenges and multiple concerns about its future, thereby offering a context of special

relevance for studying strategy emergence. Second, the moderate size of the firm represented an opportunity to collect data at various levels: from the micro practical coping activities of agents to the situations they are collectively immersed in, to the macro-strategic evolution of the firm. It also allowed us to investigate a small company, whereas most studies on strategy emergence have focused on large organizations. Finally, the specific activity of CGR was also an advantage: gourmet restaurants are engaged in a highly structured field (haute cuisine) in which institutional forces profoundly shape expectations and self-understandings and in which influential guidebooks' ratings structure competition around cooking issues. Not only has such structured context already proved relevant to management and strategy research (e.g. Durand, Rao & Monin, 2007; Gomez & Bouty, 2011; Gomez, Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2003; Rao, Monin & Durand., 2003; Svejenova, Mazza & Planellas, 2007, Svejenova, Planellas & Vives, 2010), but, more importantly, it has also enabled us to consider both the contextual influences on our case and haute cuisine as the social practices in which all actors at the restaurant are engaged.

EMPIRICAL SETTING: HAUTE CUISINE AND CGR RESTAURANT

*Haute cuisine field*

Contemporary haute cuisine is characterized by the meticulous preparation and careful presentation of food at a high price and usually accompanied by rare wines. It is the field in which high-end gourmet restaurants compete. Originating initially from Italy during the Renaissance but subsequently developed and refined within the French context, haute cuisine (or literally high food) refers to cuisines of fine-dining establishments (Goody, 1998: 40). During the Renaissance, the differentiation of manner and approach to food consumption increased rapidly, and ostentatiousness in food presentation and consumption became of great social importance. With the political, economic and cultural upheavals of the French revolution and the bourgeoisie's desire to raise its social status and ostentation up to its economic standing, culinary discourse developed as the codification of culinary and eating knowledge (Ory, 1998; Parkhurst-Ferguson, 1998, 2004). The post-revolution "migration of the best cuisines from the tables of court and nobility" and from the aristocratic homes to restaurants (Goody, 1998: 138-139) provided the basis for contemporary French fine-dining restaurants.

The perception of excellence within this culinary sector is nowadays heavily influenced by gastronomic guidebooks (Durand et al., 2007; Rao et al., 2003) through their restaurants' rankings that, in turn, shape customer's expectations (Karpik, 2010). These guidebooks evaluate restaurant performance, structure competition and provide legitimacy, as well as document acknowledgement and credit by peers (Durand et al., 2007). Last, they are also important to third parties, especially high quality product suppliers and financial partners. Of these important guidebooks, the Michelin Guide is indisputably the most dominant (Karpik, 2000, 2010; Parkhurst-Ferguson, 1998); its rating has therefore been universally adopted to delineate the sector in strategy literature (e.g. Durand et al., 2007; Gomez and Bouty, 2011; Rao et al., 2003; Svejenova et al., 2007).

The Michelin Red Guide rates restaurants on two dimensions: forks (none to 5), to reflect the overall comfort of the restaurants, and stars (none to 3), to indicate the gastronomic quality of the food served. Today, stars have become the criterion most valued in the field by all actors, (Karpik, 2000, 2010), regardless of whether they are competitor

restaurants, chefs or other stakeholders (clients, partners or media). Stars reward the gastronomic quality and creativity of restaurants: one star reflects "very good cooking", two stars mean a restaurant is "worth a detour", and three stars single out restaurants serving "exceptional cuisine worth a special journey" (as specified in each Red Guide issue).

Michelin ratings impact competition because they define positions and the strategic groups in which restaurants compete (Durand et al., 2007). Currently, approximately 2,000 restaurants are awarded between one and three Michelin stars in Europe, and fewer than 70 have achieved the ultimate three stars. In each instance, the number of stars awarded directly impacts a restaurant in terms of its clientele and its revenue. According to Johnson, Surlemont, Nicod and Revaz (2005: 179-173), moving from a two- to a three-star rating would result in a 30 percent increase in revenue, and losing a star could cost as much as a 50 percent fall. This is because a three-star restaurant is expected to offer a superior, more sophisticated and artistic cuisine than a two-star one; a difference that clients willingly accept would be reflected in the price they have to pay. Therefore, losing or gaining a star also implies potentially changing targeted clients because underlying expectations themselves would change. Furthermore, margins are often low in gourmet restaurants: 5 percent at best according to Johnson et al., (2005: 291). The low margins are due to the high level of fixed costs: in three-star restaurants, the fixed costs amount to approximately 45 percent of an average menu price (*L'Expansion*, 2011), with an average ratio of employees to guest per sitting usually one to one. Therefore, restaurants frequently develop a wider activity portfolio or search for greater differentiation that can be reflected in even higher prices.

Michelin ratings also shape the field in terms of the expectations and aspirations of chefs and restaurants. With the "nouvelle cuisine" wave from the 1970s, creativity by chefs became a central stake in haute cuisine (Rao et al., 2003), while technical excellence turned into a mere prerequisite. Accordingly, three-star chefs are now significant high profile individuals known in their restaurants and French society at large for their own often idiosyncratic styles; they are viewed as famous personalities who are expected to regularly further advance gastronomy and delight their clients with relentless culinary innovations (Bouty & Gomez, 2015), and their names are therefore attached to the restaurant's rating. This is part of the professional habitus of haute cuisine chefs (Gomez & Bouty, 2011). In addition, and in more strategic terms, this means that the chefs' cuisines are central to the restaurants' strategies and that strategy-making in haute cuisine restaurants largely revolves around the chef and the kitchen.

A highly formalized work organization, excellence requirements in every fine detail and a greater number of cooks than in other ordinary restaurant typify these haute cuisine kitchens. Work is organized by station (e.g. meat, fish, vegetables and pastry). Each station is under the responsibility of a station chef who supervises two to four cooks. Each dish is the result of collective efforts from different stations, and sous-chefs are responsible for their coordination. They manage the timing and rhythm among stations so that the different elements composing the dish are concomitantly ready to be put together on the plate. The head chef supervises the whole kitchen and ensures coordination between kitchen work and the dining room. In particular, s/he makes sure that all guests at a table are served at the same time at each stage of their meal. S/he also manages the rhythm at the kitchen/dining room interfaces such that guests are neither kept waiting too long nor hurried. This, too, is the professional habitus into which all aspiring haute cuisine chefs are initiated.

*CGR Restaurant*

CGR is a French high-end gourmet restaurant deeply anchored in the Champagne region. It is located in a luxury castle and park, near many of the internationally renowned Champagne producers with whom it has habitually maintained close and cordial relationships. In 2009, CGR employed approximately 70 employees and served up to 75 guests at each sitting. It comprised a (flagship) gastronomic two-Michelin-star restaurant, a brasserie restaurant and a small luxury hotel. Clients at the gourmet restaurant were mostly composed of international tourists, Champagne traders, and some wealthy elite locals or politicians; the brasserie targeted more local customers for less sophisticated, though high quality, meals at lower prices (approximately €50 a menu against €200 at the gourmet restaurant). In late 2009, as the chef was about to leave and relocate for family reasons to another country, critics and the press celebrated CGR and its chef's achievements, qualifying them as "high profile" (press article LF2009-0901[1]) and agreeing that they deserved to be rewarded by a third Michelin star (press articles LF2007-0120; LF2008-0222; LM2008-1002: S2009-0313). Some four years earlier, however, the overall situation at CGR was significantly different, as synthetized in Table 1

| Prior to 2005 | 2005 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|
| Founder chef retired in 2003; sous-chef took over as head chef | New chef appointed in March 2005 | Chef resigns at the end of 2009 (family reasons) |
| 3 then 2 Michelin stars (3rd lost in 2004) | 2 Michelin stars | 2 Michelin stars; 3rd expected |
| Clients at gastronomic restaurant: international tourists and Champagne traders expecting exceptional cuisine | Clients at the gastronomic restaurant: locals expecting excellent cuisine | Clients at the gastronomic restaurant: international tourists and Champagne traders expecting exceptional cuisine |
| Approximately 100 dining seats & 100 employees | Approximately 100 dining seats & 100 employees | Approximately 75 dining seats & 70 employees |
| Includes the gourmet restaurant and a luxury hotel | Includes the gourmet restaurant and a luxury hotel | Includes the gourmet restaurant, a brasserie restaurant and a luxury hotel |

Table 1 - Contrasting situations at CGR

CGR was founded in the 1980s by a charismatic and internationally revered chef with whom over the years, many French and non-French elite chefs apprenticed. Already located in the same beautiful park and castle, it has been acknowledged as the epitome of classicism in French haute cuisine for both the food that was being served and the matching décor of the place. The gourmet restaurant had been awarded the maximum three Michelin stars ever since 1986. It could serve up to 100 guests at each sitting and employed about as many employees. When the founder chef retired in 2003, his former sous-chef took over as head chef of a team that he, therefore, knew well; as was the case for some other cooks and dining room staff, he was a longstanding employee of the restaurant. However, as a chef, he had trouble finding his own style and maintaining the culinary reputation CGR had acquired. Guidebooks, critics and the media questioned his culinary innovations, calling 2004 "a graceless year" (press article LM2005-0401); cooks at the restaurant questioned his management (interviews), and regular clients increasingly deserted the dining room. CGR lost its longstanding emblematic third star when Michelin downgraded the restaurant to two stars in 2004; making matters worse, the guidebook

1. Since most press articles include the name of the organization under scrutiny or other identifying details in their titles, in order to maintain anonymity, we refer to them by using a code name. Codes names are built from the name of the source and date of publication (SOURCEyear-date) so that readers can situate elements within the case timeline.

sanctioned the overall downward evolution by maintaining this rating the following year. By early 2005, the restaurant therefore faced a real tension. It had gradually drifted towards addressing a more local two-star clientele and was thus in danger of entering a different competitive market and encountering clients less willing to pay for the unremarkable gastronomical offerings served by the head chef who, unlike his predecessor, was not among those known and celebrated for their culinary skills and whose cuisine was not worth a special journey. Some cooks, longstanding employees of the restaurant, had resigned and left; others had given notice. In early 2005, another head chef was appointed, opening our window of study.

DATA SOURCES

We collected longitudinal data on CGR over almost 10 years, focusing especially on the 2005-2009 period, which, as highlighted above, corresponds to the time when CGR experienced a trajectory change under the guidance of a particular chef. We collected data from multiple sources, as synthetized in Table 2.

| Secondary data | Formal interviews | Direct observations |
|---|---|---|
| 159 press articles<br>Menus of the restaurant (2005-2009 and prior to 2005) | 7 interviews (total 10.5 hrs.) over the 2005-2009 period:<br>-head chef twice (2 hrs. and 1 hr.)<br>-two sous-chefs twice (2x1 hr.)<br>-dining room chef (1 hr.)<br>-one station chef (45 min.)<br>-sommelier (40 min.)<br>2 interviews before 2005:<br>-founding chef (2 hrs.)<br>-successor chef (1 hr.)<br>Additional informal conversations with cooks | 2 sets (total 13 hrs.) over the 2005-2009 period:<br>-full sitting in kitchen (7 hrs. from 6 pm to 1 am)<br>-partial sitting and full commented tour of the facilities with the head chef (6 hrs.)<br>2 sets (total 8 hrs.) prior to 2005:<br>-partial sitting and commented tour of the facilities with the founding chef (5 hrs.)<br>-partial sitting and commented tour of the facilities with the successor chef (3 hrs.) |

Table 2 - Data sources

We collected data on our focal case from three main sources to allow data and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978). First, we gathered secondary data in the form of press articles and CGR menus. We extracted all (159) articles on CGR for the period between 2000 and 2009 from the Factiva database. A total of 126 of these articles dealt with the 2005-2009 period on which we specifically focused. These articles described multiple aspects of CGR, its actors, cuisine, strategy and competitive challenges over the years. Second, we conducted formal interviews at CGR. Between 2005 and 2009, we formally interviewed the head chef twice (two hours, then one hour), and the two sous-chefs, twice; we interviewed the dining room chef, one station chef and the sommelier for a period of over an hour each. Prior to 2005, we also interviewed the two previous chefs (the founding chef and his successor); these data allowed us to contrast our information with that of the period under focus. All interviews were fully transcribed. We also had more informal conversations with cooks on several occasions.

Third, we conducted on-site real-time observations, both during and before our period of focus. Over 2005-2009, we observed work in the

kitchen during full sittings. Arriving at 6 pm while the restaurant team was preparing for the evening, we observed the preparation of ingredients in the kitchen, the briefing, the scanning of the clients list and of the specific cooking and service corollary requirements. Then, we spent the whole sitting in the kitchen (each of us standing at a distinct spot in the kitchen to enable observer triangulation (Denzin, 1978)) to observe the team while they worked under pressure. After the debriefing was completed, the kitchen was cleaned, the supplies were ordered and everybody was leaving; we left CGR at 1 am. For greater accuracy and despite the late hour, we fully transcribed the details of our observation immediately after it ended. On another occasion, we likewise observed kitchen and dining room work, but the chef additionally took us on a detailed guided tour of the buildings: our tour extended from the dining room to the kitchen, his personal small office adjacent to the kitchen and his files, the park and other facilities, including those that were under construction (future brasserie restaurant). As for interviews, we already had conducted two observations prior to 2005 when the kitchen was under the responsibility of the chef-founder and then of his successor; these observational data proved useful for contrasting with those collected in 2005-2009. The notes of these observations were also transcribed in full. Our data gathering ended when the focal chef himself left (for family reasons) in late 2009.

DATA ANALYSIS

Based on Chia and Holt's (2009) perspective on strategizing as wayfinding, we designed a five-stage data analysis, unveiling the relationship between the individual, organizational and the field levels and by using the concepts of purposive practical coping, immediate concerns, habitus and unintended consequences.

In the first analytical step, we retraced the overall evolution of CGR in haute cuisine, reviewing its Michelin ratings, evaluation by the press and competitive developments. Second, we adopted a more internal focus to our case and paid attention to what the different actors did, how they performed their activities and in which physical circumstances (Rasche & Chia, 2009; Tsoukas, 2010). Our observations proved especially rich in this regard since we were able to witness several purposive and practical coping actions in everyday kitchen and dining room work and to deeply sense how cooks and waiters embraced and internalized the social practice associated with haute cuisine. Third, we retraced the trajectory of the head chef to better understand his habitus. We were also attentive to the professional situations of the sous- and dining room chefs, as well as to that of other cooks. Fourth, we coded our data to identify small purposive actions and incremental changes made at CGR over 2005-2009 to fix problems or to deal with some immediate challenges. We specifically focused on those actions referred to in interviews and that each of us was also able to witness during our observations, which allowed triangulation. We therefore selected eight coping actions along four features: the organization (reducing the number of employees and dining seats down to 70 and 75, respectively; keeping a kitchen team of 30 but with two sous-chefs); the menu (combining classical dishes and innovative preparations in the menu; using Champagne as a drink to match dishes); material elements (introducing temperature regulators and lighting dimmers in the kitchen; changing dining room carpets and china); and the portfolio (developing a brasserie restaurant; organizing two running teams of cooks working alternatively in each kitchen). Although numerous other small purposive changes were undoubtedly made at the restaurant over the

2005–2009 period, we chose to stick to this list. Our purpose was not to be comprehensive but rather to specifically investigate clearly identifiable and traceable small improvements that took place at CGR. In a fifth step, based on our interpretation of the data, we modelled the relationships between practical coping actions, the immediate organizational concerns and the actors' habitus. We also traced the unintended consequences and identified how they dynamically intertwined with each other and with the institutional and competitive environment to contribute to the eventual forging of a coherent strategy at the restaurant.

## WAYFINDING AT CGR: TOWARDS CULINARY EXCELLENCE

In this section, we detail some of the changes that took place at CGR over a period of some four years and the immediate concerns that they echoed. Then, we analyse these changes within the perspective of wayfinding characterized by purposive coping actions informed by the actors' habitus, their trajectories and by the local context of CGR. Last, we show how strategy at CGR emerged from a complex combination of these purposive coping small changes and their unintended consequences.

PURPOSIVE CHANGES AT CGR OVER THE 2005-2009 PERIOD

The new chef joined CGR in early 2005. Contrary to what often happens in haute cuisine, he was not appointed with his own team or even with his favourite sous-chef; he simply joined the remaining members of the existing kitchen team. He observed closely what was going on at the restaurant and then introduced some local changes he saw were necessary; the chronology of these changes is represented in Figure 1.
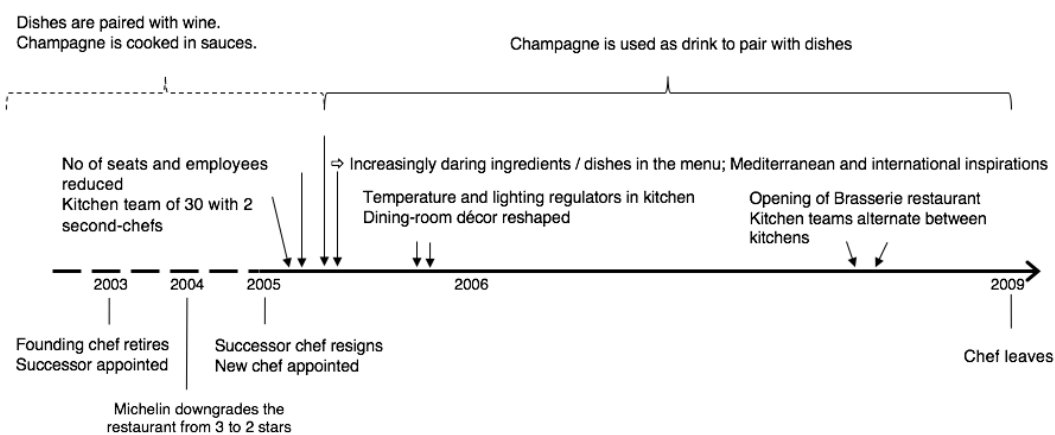


Figure 1 . Timeline of the purposive changes at CGR

Prior to 2005, CGR was organized to serve up to 100 guests at both lunch and dinner sittings: two kitchen teams (each of approximately 30 cooks) worked alternately to provide the service needed. For practical costs reasons, the new chef reduced the number of seats down to approximately 75 and that of employees to 70 (30 of whom worked in the kitchen). This step helped directly lower overall operating costs, as the restaurant was facing financial losses and was considering repositioning its pricing. "*Ever since we lost the third star, we have needed to decrease the*

*price of our meals… we are too expensive now. Thus, we need to cut costs*” (interview with the dining room manager). The chef also introduced a new hierarchy with two sous-chefs able to alternately take kitchen responsibility. The chef stated, “*Here, we're open seven days a week, so it's important that the kitchen team remains very fluid and that nobody gets trapped in a given station …. And I wanted to build something sound*” (interview). This was followed by the chef progressively introducing his own culinary innovations in the dishes and the menus. These innovations were of crucial importance at that time, since regular clients had deserted the restaurant. However, the new menus had to reconcile the tension between fulfilling the conservative expectations of the regular clients who had been nourished by the history of the place and offering something else that was new and exciting.

The figure of the founder chef still weighed heavily, and the new chef insisted that “*the problem was that clients were nostalgic and thought that all had already been said*” (interview). For example, he told us of an evening in 2005 when a couple, long-time restaurant clients, ordered the “degustation menu” and felt so unsettled by what they ate that the lady began to cry and commented, “*Monsieur [founder chef] would have never done that*”. Our data indicate that over the 2005-2009 period, new menus progressively incorporated innovative ingredients in classical dishes as well as more novel dishes, as illustrated in Table 3.

| Innovative ingredients in classical dishes | Innovative dishes on the menu | Drinks to pair with dishes |
|---|---|---|
| | **2005** | |
| Turbot with crayfish and Champagne sabayon sauce | | Meursault wine |
| | **2006** | |
| Royal spiny lobster hot and cold in roe nage | Foie gras Pithiviers, pigeon and olives in a Salmi sauce | Lanson Champagne 1989 |
| | **2007** | |
| Duck foie gras and black truffle, with white mushroom and orange wine seasoning | Poached and roasted Brittany lobster on finely chopped tomatoes, shellfish brunoise, and candied lemon, with lobster-stuffed macaroni | Martel Champagne 1998 |
| | **2008** | |
| Freshly caught Atlantic sea bass, vanilla-flavoured olive oil and Aquitaine caviar | Langoustines, raw with green mango, avocado and roasted coral; crispy tandoori; as ravioli, with champagne sabayon sauce | Pommery Champagne 1998 |
| | **2009** | |
| Roasted sea bream smoked with wild fennel, and bottarga bouillon | Poultry cooked with raz-el-hanout spice | Veuve Cliquot Champagne |

Table 3 - Evolutions in dishes: illustrative data

In 2005, the menu featured strictly traditional dishes, such as a “Bresse chicken roasted in salted crust, with truffles stuffed under the skin”. In 2006, more innovative, ones, such as a “*Roebuck loin rubbed in juniper, salsify, pumpkin, endive, and purple Mediterranean artichokes sauce*”, were integrated. *Over the following years, other original dishes appeared, while increasingly novel preparations were additionally introduced* in apparently still classical dishes: f*or example, the indispensable blue lobster was served with* mascarpone and herbs ravioli and seasoned with yuzu and bitter grapefruit. As illustrated in Table 3, the chef also kept the local Champagne as the unifying theme of the restaurant but within a new perspective: instead of cooking Champagne in sauces (as the founding

chef and his successor previously did), he used it as a drink to match his new dishes. The new chef stated, "*Champagne was definitely the starting point … But again, I needed to do something different ... I started to build menus by winery and to develop dishes in this perspective*" (interview). Appendix 1 illustrates one of these ephemeral menus: each one was created around a specific winery.

In the dining room, bright carpets, curtains, chairs and china soon replaced the former dark-coloured and floral décor; thus, the outlook of the place sustained the newly offered menus and the revised use of Champagne, and participated in creating a new and different dining experience. Small material changes were also made in the kitchen. Based on his experience in other kitchens worldwide, the head chef had felt that the temperature in the kitchen was too high and that the light was also too strong and disturbingly aggressive to allow his team, operating under the intense pressure of customer demands, to work well and peacefully concentrate on their preparations (interviews with the chef, sous-chef and informal discussions with cooks). He therefore introduced both temperature regulators and lighting dimmers to create more conducive working conditions. We actually observed the chef controlling the temperature and lighting at one sitting, muttering constantly to himself "*light at 10%*" or "*too hot …*".

A final change is related to the diversification of the offerings within the business portfolio: the opening of a brasserie restaurant intended to provide lunch to hotel guests who had very limited medium-to-high-range choices available in town. The new chef added, "*Our problem is that the gastronomic restaurant serves hotel guests for only one meal at night. With the brasserie Restaurant, we will generate additional cash by serving our guests lunch as well, in a more relaxed and informal dining room; simpler, less expensive […] We also wanted to stop offering standard lunch [based on some dishes from the evening menus, though at lower prices] at the gastronomic restaurant for hotel guests since that depreciated the value of dinners*" (interview).

The brasserie restaurant opened in late 2008. It was positioned as less expensive than the gastronomic restaurant and was located in an outbuilding that was renovated for the purpose. The chef collaborated with his existing kitchen team (sous-chefs and station chefs) on designing a new menu based on simpler seasonal products at lower prices (€50 for lunch compared to approximately €200 at the gastronomic restaurant). The chef organized his team to alternate between the two restaurants: two groups of cooks, operating alternately in each kitchen. The chef stated, "*We have the same employees but we have two turnovers. The [brasserie] menu is comforting, with steak, liver… We also took the opportunity to introduce American-inspired dishes, and pot-au-feu!*" (interview). Altogether, and as summarized in the first and second columns of Table 4, several small incremental changes took place over the 2005-2009 period to purposively cope with immediate concerns at CGR.

| Immediate organizational concern | Purposive practical coping | Shaped by habitus |
|---|---|---|
| Changes to organization | | |
| Lower operating costs | Overall number of employees and dining seats reduced to 70 and 75, respectively | Integrated haute cuisine norm of average ratio of 1 employee/client/sitting |
| Preserve operational fluidity | Kitchen team of 30, although with 2 sous-chefs | Integrated haute cuisine norm of strongly formalized kitchen organization |
| Changes to menu | | |
| Seduce clients | Increasingly daring ingredients and innovative dishes introduced in the menu | Careful creativity by the chef; personal touch, taste and inspiration |
| Anchor the restaurant in the Champagne region | Champagne used as drink to pair with dishes | |
| Changes to material elements | | |
| Sustain concentration in the kitchen | Temperature regulators and lighting dimmers installed in the kitchen | Consistently produce high quality while dishes are cooked to order; chef's own experiences worldwide |
| Modernize the outdated dining room | New décor and china in the dining room | Belief that eating environment contributes to the eating experience |
| Changes to portfolio | | |
| Offer choice of lunch for hotel clients | Opening of the brasserie restaurant | Integrated knowledge that related diversification towards offering less prestigious eateries is common and successful in haute cuisine |
| Devise menus | Kitchen teams alternate between gourmet and brasserie restaurants | Furthering of the cook's experiences |

Table 4 - From immediate concerns to purposive changes
as practical coping shaped by habitus

The cumulative effect of such small and multifarious changes was that by the latter half of 2009, clients who had been lost after the founding chef retired gradually returned. The newly established brasserie also started to attract clients. Food critics increasingly suggested that CGR should logically be awarded three Michelin stars (press articles LF2007-0120; LF2008-0222; LM2008-1002: S2009-0313). We now turn to analysing how habitus shaped these practical coping activities by infusing them with haute cuisine social practice.

PURPOSIVE CHANGES AS PRACTICAL COPING SHAPED BY
HABITUS

When he joined CGR, the chef was in his mid-thirties. Of southern French extraction, he attended culinary school in France, started as a *commis* (trainee) and rapidly rose to station chef and then to sous-chef. Next, he became an executive chef in reputed French restaurants in Japan and in the US; under his supervision, a New York restaurant earned the distinction as the best US restaurant and achieved three Michelin stars in the early 2000s. In total, before arriving at CGR, the chef had 15 years of experience in high-end gourmet restaurants in different contexts and cultures. In early 2005, he was acutely aware of the weight of the history at CGR, of the clients' and employees' elevated expectations, and of the current difficulties the restaurant faced; having a clear understanding of the challenge, he stated, "*We do know at which level we have to play to make it*" (interview). He also saw it as an opportunity to develop his own reputation and shape his personal trajectory in the international haute

cuisine arena, as he indicated, "*I have nothing yet, I have no image; we have to build it. […] If you want to stand out, message comes first and cuisine second. You have to have people come into your story and dream*" (interview).

In 2005, CGR, having lost its long-cherished Michelin three-star rating, appeared to be on a downward spiral and heading towards culinary oblivion. This fall was existentially problematic for the chef and employees who considered themselves to be inextricably wedded to the higher echelons of haute cuisine as a lifelong vocation and who were reluctant to contemplate working in another type of restaurant. A sous-chef said, "*Working in a two-star restaurant on the verge of becoming one-star didn't make sense; it's not my job, it's different. And it's not what I want. I am an haute cuisine cook; that's what I do …*". The provision of a memorable gastronomic experience is an intricate social practice that carries with it specific priorities, social stakes, career trajectories and embedded ways of knowing and working: these shape every practical coping action.

A short example will help illustrate this. During one of our observations, poultry roasted in a salted crust had been ordered by some guests at a table. When the dish was carried at the pass from the oven, the chef and a sous-chef assessed its cooking, agreed that the piece needed another 10 minutes, and sent it back. This delay provoked a chain reaction because other guests at the table had ordered different courses, which now had to be held back so that guests could be served at once. However, because keeping clients waiting is not tolerated in haute cuisine, the chef and sous-chef also quickly improvised by introducing an additional starter course so that the guests would not notice the delay; this practical coping action taken *in situ* and *sponte sua* saved the day on this occasion. Ten minutes later, when the chicken was back from the oven, they checked the cooking and agreed, "*It's fine; we were right, it's perfect*" (observation). Such a spontaneous coping response was irretrievably shaped by the actors' haute cuisine habitus that refused to simultaneously compromise the quality of food served and to countenance the notion of keeping guests waiting. This is a strong professional imperative, which distinguishes haute cuisine from other cooking fields.

The loss of the three-star Michelin rating had created a crisis of identity for the cooks and their self-understanding. However, despite all these uncertainties, the actors in the restaurant held the customer's delight as their primary and core objective; this was their *raison d'être*. The head chef stated, "*When you are a kid and you want to become a cook, you dream of […] the three Michelin stars. We have the tools to achieve this. On a daily basis, we expect the Michelin stars back … but we are not obsessed because we do not control the stars … Cooking is a giving job. What we want first is to delight people and for this, we need to be delighted ourselves; we need to enjoy what we do*" (interview). As accomplished practitioners, the chef and his team are in the business of haute cuisine culinary advancement to delight customers. Their haute cuisine habitus profoundly shaped the multiple purposive incremental changes made over the 2005-2009 period, as synthesized in last column of Table 4.

While reducing the overall number of employees at CGR was motivated by economic considerations, as we pointed out earlier, the reduction also bore the hallmarks of haute cuisine where the average ratio of employees to guest per sitting is often one to one. This was something the head chef had experienced in other Michelin-starred restaurants and that he preserved at CGR. Further, the changes made to the menus deeply echoed haute cuisine practice, in which novelty is expected from chefs though not desired simply for its own sake. At CGR, the chef carefully and

progressively combined his own touch, taste, Mediterranean origins and international exposure with the local products, clients and tradition. Likewise, in giving pride of place to the locally produced Champagne in the eating experience, he preserved highly classical references but broke with the past and created his own personal culinary imprint by serving Champagne as a drink to match dishes; this was a small change with big implications, as it subtly signalled a clear break from his illustrious predecessor. "*I had two possible choices*", said the chef, "*perpetuating the existing (and we would have continued our descent [shakes his head no as he talks]) or not […]. I have to write my own story, my trajectory, my own cooking* …" The chef considers himself as an artisan, and his culinary inventions are consubstantial with his own acquired habitus, his sense of self and the trajectory of his personal odyssey as a chef. All these elements are strong constituents of his habitus.

These innovative changes in the dishes and menu were matched by subtle changes in the dining room décor, which provided a new gastronomic ambience for clients whose dining experiences and tastes were gradually fused with the chef's own culinary preferences. As the chef put it, "*It's a whole story*" (interview). Material changes in the kitchen (temperature controls and light dimmers), although seemingly incidental, were nevertheless perceived as key changes by cooks who noted their subtle but significant effect on everyday practices. It created a quieter and more relaxed atmosphere that helped them to feel more engaged with the challenge of achieving high-end gourmet cooking, as well as enabling a better kitchen/dining room interface to maintain service quality at the highest level expected of the best restaurants and sustaining the customers' eating experience. Last, the opening and positioning of the brasserie restaurant echoes business developments that are well accepted in haute cuisine, where the gastronomic achievements of gourmet restaurants often irrigate other offerings at less prestigious (though high quality) spin-off bistros that, in turn, generate cash to sustain operations at the flagship Michelin-starred restaurant. Altogether, the many changes, from the minor material to the more structural, together with the culinary innovations that took place at CGR over the four years were essentially *in situ* practical coping actions, as they were taken to deal with and overcome immediate concerns but were also profoundly shaped by the haute cuisine habitus of actors.

… TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES AND EMERGENT STRATEGY

In the very process of wayfinding their way towards culinary excellence, the changes initiated by the head chef generated several positive unintended consequences. The practical coping actions taken to deal with immediate obstacles and predicaments unexpectedly helped contribute to a clearer sense of strategic direction. Five unintended consequences emerged from the combination of the purposive practical coping actions we identified. These unintended consequences synergistically interacted with one another. From the combination of their outcomes, we ultimately identified three unintended consequences that were related to each other with respect to creativity, as depicted in Figure 2.
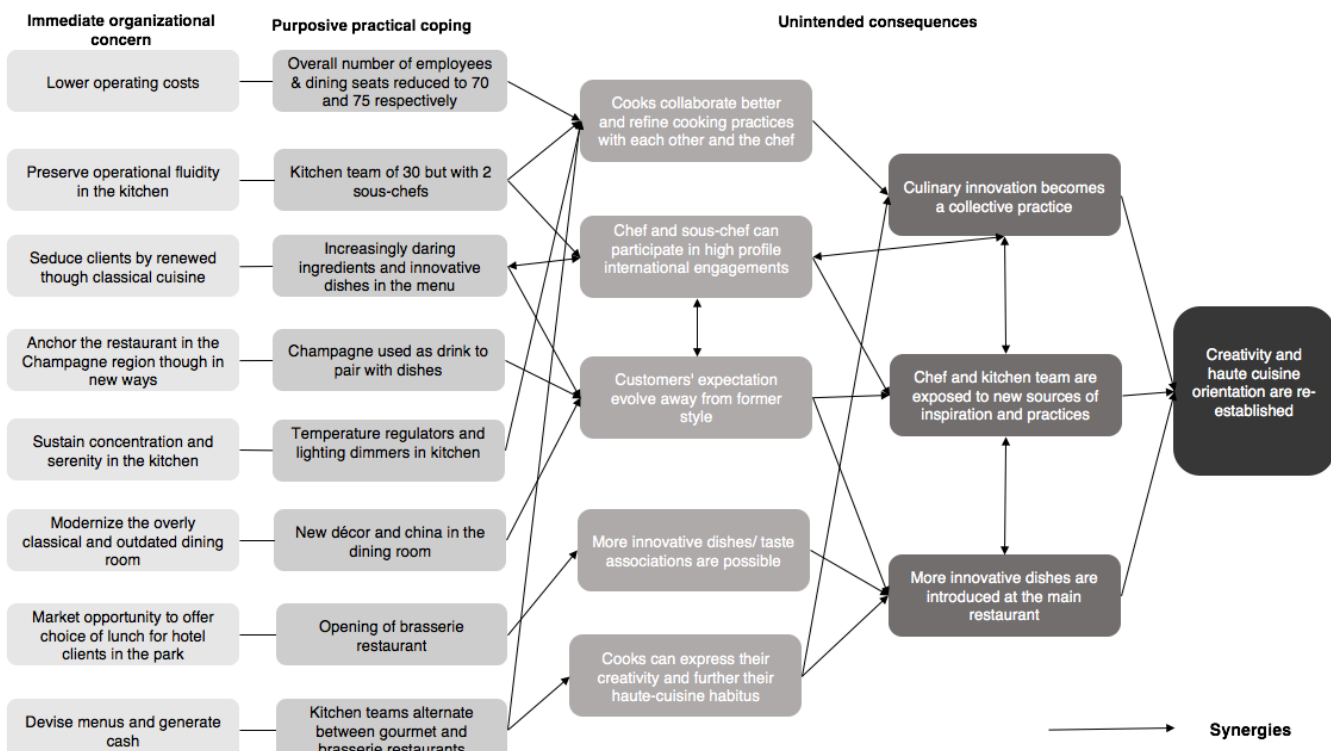
Figure 2 . From immediate concern to practical coping to unintended consequences and synergies

First, culinary innovation became a collectively shared practice. Within the kitchen team's relationships, the more relaxed and focused working atmosphere created in the kitchen produced subtle changes that, in turn, encouraged fresh experimentation, collaboration and hence new culinary achievements. Cooks could focus more on producing higher quality dishes, became more willing to accept feedback from clients and became more prepared to exchange, explore and refine their cooking practices with each other. They grew more confident in their own capabilities and learned to collaborate with the chef who entrusted them with creating new dishes around general themes he proposed (interview) at both the gourmet and brasserie restaurant. This confidence was especially important to sous-chefs because it represented a genuine developmental opportunity to further their own habitus and culinary expertise as future haute cuisine chefs. One of them explained, "*In 2005, I had already given notice when he [current chef] joined. Eventually I decided to stay and give it a try … to further my experience with a third chef… and in the end, I am still here! […] We work in a three-Michelin-star spirit. […] and we are involved in creativity. In between sittings, we work in the kitchen. He [chef] brings up ideas, like 'it's early winter, eating richer dishes is comforting … creams and sabayons…' and we work together, we exchange ideas, we experiment, we taste, we discuss openly*".

Second, the chef and his team were increasingly exposed to new sources of inspiration. The delegation of responsibilities and the smoothness of the restaurant operations released the head chef from his supervisory oversight, thereby enabling him to spend more time outside the restaurant to participate in high profile public engagements. For example, when we met him the second time, the chef was back from Helsinki and about to leave with two of his subordinates for Singapore to

perform cooking demonstrations alongside other internationally acknowledged chefs. He would display his culinary innovations, such as the way Champagne is used at CGR, the philosophy of cuisine that prevails, and how local products and international developments are brought together in a unique way. Such wider field-level activity contributed to attracting international clients to CGR. It also enriched the chef's own sources of inspiration and indirectly impacted the dishes served at the restaurant, as reflected in the introduction of non-local ingredients (such as green mango) and in the new associations or preparations (such as Japanese inspired jellies) that the sous-chefs were able to better appreciate as well. In the restaurant's kitchen, these novelties progressively modified the cooks' daily practices as well as the clients' expectations, allowing tastes to evolve away from the former classical style of the restaurant. The spin-offs from the small purposive operational changes that were made led to an unexpected possibility of opening up to fresh inspirations for the chef and his team.

The third unintended consequence that we identified regards the impact of the opening of the brasserie restaurant. Originally, this project was seen as a much-needed way of generating fresh revenue and bore no other direct relationship to restoring the main restaurant's gastronomic status. However, it unexpectedly came to serve as an experimental laboratory for the cooks; it provided fresh opportunities for them to develop their professional skills, their culinary expertise and their haute cuisine self-understandings. For one thing, cooking in the smaller brasserie's kitchen gave them greater decision-making autonomy: as the kitchen required fewer cooks with enlarged responsibilities, working at the brasserie became an opportunity for the cooks to develop themselves. However, the most unexpected thing was that for the main restaurant, the brasserie turned out to be an experimental bridgehead, with far wider-ranging impact than initially intended. Cooks took the challenge of mixing ingredients from a variety of traditions (e.g. local, Mediterranean, Japanese and American), and quickly saw the opportunity for experimenting with new and more innovative dishes as well as introducing new taste associations that were unfamiliar and not yet acceptable at the main gastronomic restaurant. The brasserie therefore served as a springboard for the cooks to express and display their own culinary skills. Freed from nostalgia and classical expectations, clients were also more open to taste new preparations there. Successful new associations, ingredients or preparations initially created at the brasserie were subsequently incorporated into new dishes at the gastronomic restaurant. Thus, Mediterranean and international inspirations grew more salient over time with the introduction of elements such as candied lemon, Middle Eastern soft spices, chickpeas or dates. This emergent synergy, in turn, opened spaces for further culinary developments, as the clients' tastes and expectations progressively evolved. The team discovered new ways of expressing themselves and developing their habitus as they worked in the two entities that were initially intended to be gastronomically independent. As the head chef summarized it, "*Some wait passively in expectation, while others are actively involved in their jobs. I want to do things, to motivate; one never knows what might happen*" (interview).

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This research developed out of an observation that although emergent strategy has been well acknowledged as a concept in strategic management literature for several decades, its specific dynamics and

intricacies were yet to be examined in further detail (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Vaara & Whittington, 2012); in particular, no examination had been undertaken to understand specifically how strategy can emerge as a coherent and consistent pattern despite or in the absence of deliberate intentions. We investigated this question from a practice-based perspective (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Kouamé & Langley, 2018; Mirabeau et al. 2018), accounting for the social embeddedness of actors and how it affects their responses. We specifically adopted a conceptual approach for strategizing as wayfinding (Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Tsoukas, 2010), that is, a relational stance, which acknowledges the purposiveness of action, the importance of habitus in predisposing organizational actors, the significance of small incremental changes in bringing about major transformations, and the inevitability of unintended consequences arising from such actions taken. Our longitudinal empirical study of a gourmet restaurant, a small company in a highly structured field, showed how strategy emerged within the organization through a multitude of small local actions that were taken with a restricted view to fixing immediate problems and concerns *in situ* but that also drew from the actors' habitus and the haute cuisine social practice in which they were engaged. With this approach, our study contributes to a better understanding of the phenomenon of emergent strategy and to the development of the concept of strategizing in a wayfinding framework.

MODEL OF STRATEGY EMERGENCE

First, we add to existing knowledge by proposing a model of strategy emergence. We empirically show that in emergent strategy, as a "pattern realized despite, or in the absence of intentions" (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985: 257), consistency is made possible by the immanence of social practices through habitus which infuses every coping action taken, as illustrated in Figure 3.
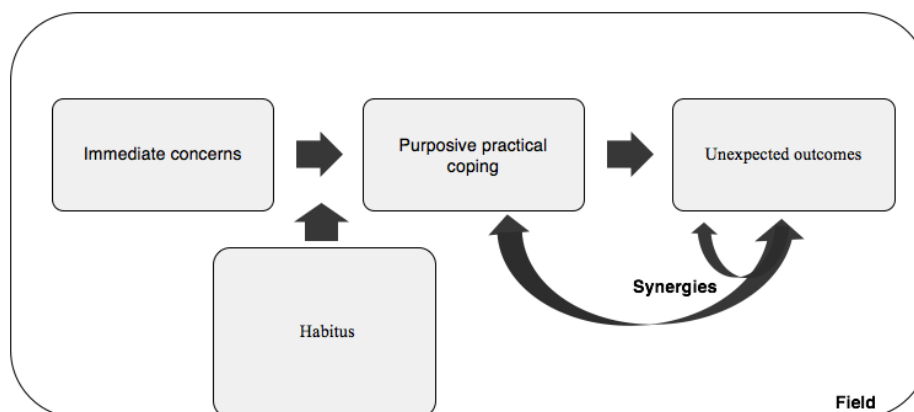


Figure 3 . Strategy emergence as wayfinding

The seemingly inconsequential small changes made to purposively overcome immediate concerns at CGR are practical coping actions that were profoundly shaped by the restaurant's staff's and the chef's ingrained habitus, structured by the field of haute cuisine. Haute cuisine and the particular local restaurant are immanent in everyday purposive practical coping actions and contribute to providing coherence to the emerging stream of actions. Our study, hence, contributes to strategy research by

empirically pointing to the value of introducing the field–habitus relationship in the analysis of strategy emergence. In the particular case of CGR, this feature is especially salient, since the restaurant was on a downward spiral and heading towards culinary oblivion. Things had to be turned around; however, the "how" was an open question. Given the staff's and chef's understanding of haute cuisine, working towards regaining the lost gastronomic status seemed natural, even though they did not know how exactly this could be achieved. This is not to say that fighting to win the third Michelin star back was unimportant to CGR and its members. Indeed, it was absolutely crucial, but it influenced actions and behaviours in a different, less direct and more profound way (Chia, 2013), namely, one that was mediated by the social norms and practices surrounding the provision of haute cuisine. The cooks and the chefs most certainly valued regaining the Michelin three-star rating but also recognized that it could only be achieved by internalizing and perfecting their own culinary expertise so that they could delight their guests through culinary innovations and excellent service. The chef had also integrated this challenge organizationally and exemplified it personally by defending or upgrading the restaurant's evaluation and internationally building his own reputation in the field. This, in our understanding, is how the Michelin quest tempered by the habitus of haute cuisine and moderated by the contexts and expectations of various stakeholders shaped the eventual consistency and coherence of the multitude of small initiatives undertaken at various levels in the organization. Thus, the restaurant's glorious history, acknowledged classicism, longstanding relationships with Champagne producers and the international experiences of the head chef as well as the traditions of haute cuisine all participated to make possible the emergence of a coherent pattern in the stream of actions and decisions retrospectively recognized as strategy.

Our study therefore also suggests that the pervasive influence of social practices is what accounts for the interactions between the micro and macro levels and is fundamental to understanding how strategy emergence from local purposive coping actions is possible. In so doing, it contributes to answering the call to better account for the social and collective embeddedness of the strategy practitioner's agency (Elbasha & Wright, 2017; Rasche & Chia, 2009; Rouleau, 2013: 561; Whittington, 2007) and to highlight how "lower level processes and practices engaged by individuals and groups connect to broader organizational-level processes and outcomes" (Kouamé & Langley, 2018: 560). As such, our study also exemplifies the power of an approach that humanizes "people as relational knowing beings reflexively situated" and that focuses on their "lived experience" (Cunliffe, 2018: 1432). Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the specific case we investigated may cause some limitations to our conclusions. In particular, we selected CGR as an instrumental case because it is a small company engaged within a highly structured field, and in which strategy largely revolves within a clear activity and physical perimeter (the kitchen). The immanence of field-level practices and social elements may well be less obvious or more diffuse in larger organizations and/or in those evolving within less structured fields; this does not mean that it would be less significant but rather that empirically detecting it could be more challenging. To strengthen the generalizability of our findings, additional research will be useful to further investigate more dispersed settings. Further studies will also potentially unveil how perhaps more heterogeneous habitus interact to provide coherence to the macro pattern emerging out of micro decisions and actions. In the case we studied, the actors' habitus are profoundly shaped by haute cuisine and although these

habitus retain highly personal dimensions, they nonetheless have much in common. This will certainly be less the case in larger organizations, although we suspect that shared organizational elements will nonetheless still be significant. Further explorations in this direction, as fascinating as they may be, will, however, be empirically challenging since they will require both an in-depth engagement with actors in the field (to finely capture their habitus) and a distanced appreciation of the emerging flow of actions and decisions taken.

## SYNERGISTIC INTERTWINEMENT IN STRATEGY EMERGENCE

Second, we contribute to emergent strategy research by unveiling its dynamics. In particular, we put forward the almost systemic nature of emergent strategizing. We concur with some past studies (e.g. Pascale, 1984; Tsoukas, 2010), showing that emergent strategizing lies in locally embedded daily interactions with the external environments that crucially rely on perceptual sensitivity to situations. However, in addition, we show that emergent strategizing also develops through the synergistic intertwinement of coping actions and of some of their unintended consequences. Given the contrast between the intended financial and eventual creative contribution of the project to the overall emergent strategy at CGR, the brasserie restaurant project is especially illustrative in this regard. As a coping action, it intertwined with other coping actions taken (for example the introduction of lighting dimmers and temperature regulators in the main kitchen) to produce unintended consequences. However, and in addition, unexpected consequences mix together, and with coping actions, to further produce other unintended consequences.

Prior literature had provided only indirect indications of parallel dynamics, especially through the contribution of projects misaligned with or peripheral to the existing intended strategy (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Regnér, 2003), and through the dissonances created by unintentional elements in strategic change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005); in addition, this aspect was not considered in the original wayfinding framework (Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009). In contrast, we show that strategy partly emerges from the synergistic interweaving of coping actions and their unintended consequences. This also suggests that these elements are normal constituents of organizational life and that they can be positive. Through this, we add to existing literature with synergies as a new dimension in the emergent strategy as a wayfinding phenomenon.

Further research will nonetheless be useful to deepen the understanding of how various, seemingly unconnected projects and their unintended consequences unexpectedly combine with each other and contribute to sustain emergent strategy. It will also be necessary to better understand whether and how the actors' habitus shapes such synergies among coping actions and their unintended consequences: how it influences the interaction of elements to produce a further combined effect. We showed that the actors' practical coping actions are shaped by habitus. On this basis, one can reasonably imagine synergies to be identically influenced since actors remain in the game at this stage: they can spot possible synergies, actively interlace elements or keep them apart.

Additionally, our study shows that emergent strategy is a dynamic phenomenon within which coping actions and their consequences continuously relate to each other over time. This aspect has not been under direct scrutiny in prior literature, which to date has suggested a rather analytical and static linking of internal elements within emergent strategy (e.g. Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009). In this study, we show how small

changes cumulatively and dynamically lead to unexpected consequences and unanticipated synergies and contribute in an iterative way to shaping the eventual strategic trajectory of the organization. Considered at a given moment, each purposive coping action alone might appear to have potentially limited consequences; however, some coping actions and unexpected consequences resonate with each other over time and interlace to produce other unanticipated effects that also contribute to strategy emergence. In other words, we show that the intertwining of elements in the dynamics of emergent strategy develops through time in possibly unexpected ways. Altogether, we suggest that strategy emerges as a dynamic, synergistic and cumulative combination of coping actions and their (unexpected) consequences. We suspect, however, that distinct temporalities are at play, as can be illustrated by the contrast between the short-term direct effect of temperature regulators and lighting dimmers in the kitchen compared to the more gradual effects of opening the brasserie restaurant. However, we were not able to precisely account for these nuances and further empirical research is therefore needed to cultivate this avenue.
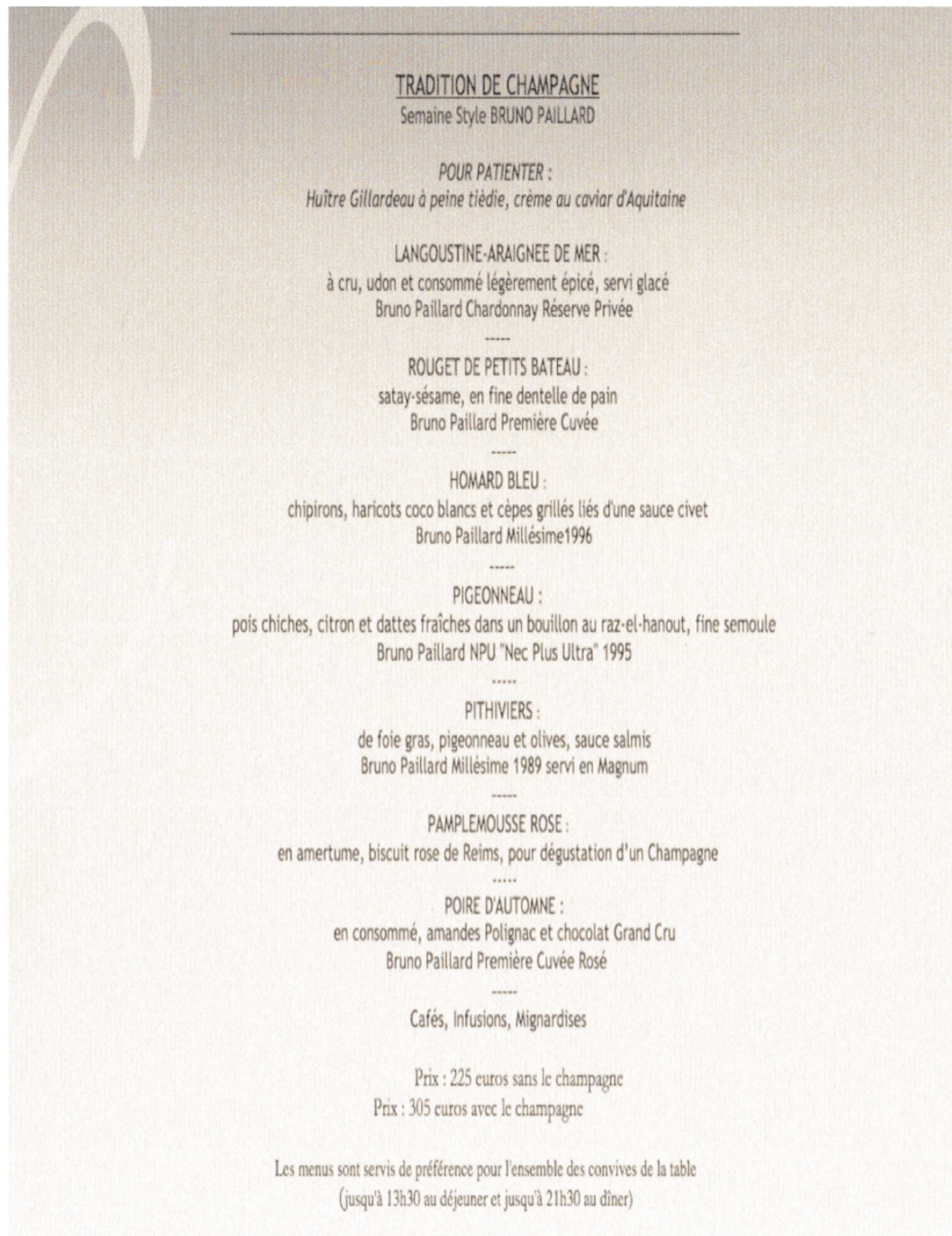
CONTRIBUTION TO THE WAYFINDING FRAMEWORK

Third, our study also contributes to the strategy as wayfinding framework, which has received limited attention to date. On the theoretical side, we contribute to furthering the development of this framework by putting forward central concepts, by interrelating them into a model and by suggesting new interactions between them. In particular, theoretical elaborations by Chia and Holt (2006, 2009) are more significantly focused on elements than on the relationships between them. With our model of emergent strategy as wayfinding, we add to the wayfinding framework by interrelating its main components: we show that (and how) purposive actions relate to immediate concerns (to which they respond), to habitus (which shapes them), and to their consequences (intended and unintended). We also put forward a synergistic relationship between purposive actions and unintended consequences over time, which was not initially included in the framework. Our study also contributes to the methodological development of the wayfinding framework, which, to our knowledge, has not been empirically implemented in strategy literature to date. The different stages that we describe in our research process can be used as guidelines by other researchers wishing to account for wayfinding and to relate the micro-level purposive actions to macro-level phenomena.

In sum, our study contributes to developing a research approach to understanding strategy emergence that is empirically rich and that attempts to capture the messy and richly textured character of strategy emergence from within the everyday experiences of the organizational actors themselves. It shows how the emergence of a coherent and plausible strategy is often a consequence of purposive tinkering, idiosyncratic though socially structured adaptive changes made within specific organizational circumstances, and unintended consequences. All these elements account for the iterative nature of what we call wayfinding, where despite the lack of a deliberate strategy, coherence and consistency of action is achieved in the emergent pattern of action.

## APPENDIX

Ephemeral menu created around a specific Champagne winery

TRADITION DE CHAMPAGNE
Semaine Style BRUNO PAILLARD

*POUR PATIENTER :*
*Huître Gillardeau à peine tiédie, crème au caviar d'Aquitaine*

LANGOUSTINE-ARAIGNEE DE MER :
à cru, udon et consommé légèrement épicé, servi glacé
Bruno Paillard Chardonnay Réserve Privée
-----
ROUGET DE PETITS BATEAU :
satay-sésame, en fine dentelle de pain
Bruno Paillard Première Cuvée
-----
HOMARD BLEU :
chipirons, haricots coco blancs et cèpes grillés liés d'une sauce civet
Bruno Paillard Millésime1996
-----
PIGEONNEAU :
pois chiches, citron et dattes fraîches dans un bouillon au raz-el-hanout, fine semoule
Bruno Paillard NPU "Nec Plus Ultra" 1995
-----
PITHIVIERS :
de foie gras, pigeonneau et olives, sauce salmis
Bruno Paillard Millésime 1989 servi en Magnum
-----
PAMPLEMOUSSE ROSE :
en amertume, biscuit rose de Reims, pour dégustation d'un Champagne
-----
POIRE D'AUTOMNE :
en consommé, amandes Polignac et chocolat Grand Cru
Bruno Paillard Première Cuvée Rosé
-----
Cafés, Infusions, Mignardises

Prix : 225 euros sans le champagne
Prix : 305 euros avec le champagne

Les menus sont servis de préférence pour l'ensemble des convives de la table
(jusqu'à 13h30 au déjeuner et jusqu'à 21h30 au dîner)

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