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SHAPING STRATEGIC ACTION THROUGH THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION AND EXPLOITATION OF AMBIGUITY[1]

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SHAPING STRATEGIC ACTION THROUGH THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION AND EXPLOITATION OF AMBIGUITY

Abstract. This paper extends existing understandings of how actors' constructions of ambiguity shape the emergent process of strategic action. We theoretically elaborate the role of rhetoric in exploiting strategic ambiguity, based on analysis of a longitudinal case study of an internationalization strategy within a business school. Our data shows that actors use rhetoric to construct three types of strategic ambiguity: protective ambiguity that appeals to common values in order to protect particular interests; invitational ambiguity that appeals to common values in order to invite participation in particular actions, and adaptive ambiguity that enables the temporary adoption of specific values in order to appeal to a particular audience at one point in time. These rhetorical constructions of ambiguity follow a processual pattern that shapes the emergent process of strategic action. Our findings show that 1) the strategic actions that emerge are shaped by the way actors construct and exploit ambiguity; 2) the ambiguity intrinsic to the action is analytically distinct from ambiguity that is constructed and exploited by actors; and 3) ambiguity construction shifts over time to accommodate the emerging pattern of actions.

Keywords. Strategic action, ambiguity, strategic ambiguity, rhetoric

Ambiguity exists in an organization when there is a "*state of having many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena*" (Feldman, 1989: 5). Although much literature on ambiguity indicates that it constrains collective strategic action (Cohen & March, 1974; Denis et al, 1996, 2001; Middleton-Stone & Brush, 1996; Sillince & Mueller, 2007) this paper argues that actors use rhetoric to construct ambiguity in ways that enable action. The view of ambiguity as a barrier to action is part of the common Western assumption that business is and should be discussed and communicated in a direct and clear way (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Such an assumption implies that choosing what products to offer and where and how to make and sell them are clear strategies. Contrary to this assumption our starting point is that these strategic actions are fundamentally rhetorical and ambiguous. Consistent with other scholars, we consider action strategic when it is perceived as consequential by those actors that hold responsibility for the prospective and overarching directions, survival and competitive position of the organization (e.g. Hendry, 2000; Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Melin and Whittington, 2003). For such actors, strategy involves persuasion of various audiences that particular actions have a significant and long term impact on the organization. We argue that strategic action involves the rhetorical construction of ambiguity in order to persuade relevant audiences that different potential courses of action are aligned to their interests and the interests of the organization.

Organizations with a professional, knowledge-based workforce, such as universities and hospitals, are characterized as having ambiguous strategic goals and directions (Cohen & March, 1974, 1976; Denis, Langley & Cazale, 1996; Middleton-Stone and Brush, 1996; Mintzberg, 1979). Generating organizational action around a specific strategic goal is difficult, as different interest groups pursue their own goals with little consideration for the strategies of the organization as a whole (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972; Cohen and March 1974; Denis, Lamothe, and Langley, 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Weick, 1976). However, the question of how actors experience and attempt to shape ambiguity when carrying out strategic action has not been widely explored in management and organization theory. This gap is problematic, as ambiguity contradicts rational actor models of management processes, and has been portrayed as resulting in inertia, inability to pursue coordinated action and political behavior (e.g. Denis, et al., 1996; 2001; Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992). This

paper uses a rhetoric theory lens to explain how different actors construct ambiguity in order to enable collective strategic action. The paper is based upon a three-year, longitudinal study of an internationalization goal in a university business school. We show that different rhetorical constructions of the ambiguities encountered in pursuing this goal shaped the emergence of particular strategic actions. Our study makes three contributions: first, that strategic action does not happen despite ambiguity but rather that the action that emerges is shaped by the way actors construct and exploit ambiguity; second that the ambiguity that is intrinsic to the action is analytically distinct from the way that ambiguity is constructed and exploited, and third, that ambiguity construction shifts over time to accommodate the emerging pattern of actions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Ambiguity in organizations. The literature is divided on the issue of whether ambiguity 'really' exists as intrinsic to particular contexts or whether ambiguity is rhetorically constructed. Some argue that there are ambiguous contexts and that they can be identified in terms of level of uncertainty, risk, unresolvable contradictions, and disagreement about boundaries, clear principles or solutions that pertain to the context (Alvesson, 1993: 2001; Wilkinson, 2006: 27). Such ambiguity may arise as an unintended result of perceptual biases (Wilkinson, 2006: 25) or of the strategy making process itself (Cohen and March, 1974). In particular, some contexts, such as universities and hospitals (Denis et al 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2005), are perceived to be innately ambiguous and some work types, such as the professions, are considered to be ambiguous (Alvesson, 1993). In such contexts, Cohen et al., (1972) have suggested that goal, authority and technology ambiguity arise unintentionally as a byproduct of the organizational strategy process. Goal ambiguity arises from the plurality of interests and meanings that multiple constituents attribute to any given goal. Authority ambiguity refers to the diffuse sources of power held by different constituents, which enables them to pursue at least partial solutions to their own interests without regard to hierarchical power. Technology ambiguity refers to the unclear relationship between goals and the means to achieve them (Cohen and March, 1974; Cohen et al, 1972), which is exacerbated by indirect control over resources (Middleton-Stone and Brush, 1996). Ambiguity is thus presented as the intrinsic condition of a specific organizational context, with which actors must cope.

This view of ambiguity as the condition of a particular context, presents it as problematic for collective strategic action. For example, authority ambiguity challenges leadership as it is difficult to align the competing political interests of different constituents (Denis et al, 1996; Fenton and Pettigrew, 2000), while goal ambiguity manifests itself in ongoing tensions over direction (Denis et al, 2001; Sillince and Mueller, 2007; Vaara et al, 2003). The garbage can model of decision-making provides insights into how strategic action occurs in such ambiguous contexts. Its premise is that problems, solutions and choice opportunities are independent streams of activity that converge according to the energy and attention that can be allocated by a range of potential participants and the amount of load upon the system at any given time (Cohen et al, 1972; Lutz, 1982; March and Olsen, 1976; March, 1981). Importantly, while actors can shape the ambiguity arising from these independent streams of activity, decisions are not made by resolving ambiguity (Cohen et al, 1972). Rather, decisions emerge from actors' ongoing responses to ambiguity as it occurs within the garbage can over time. Thus, the garbage can model provides some initial insights on the dual nature of ambiguity as both a property of the organization, but also as something that actors can shape through their responses to the streams of activity, albeit not necessarily with intended consequences (Denis et al, 1996; 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003).

We may further understand this dual nature of ambiguity if we turn to a stream of literature that suggests that ambiguity is intentionally constructed by actors. Actors are able to vary meanings, and thus to generate ambiguity, by making use of subtle differences between the symbolic social norms of different groups and contexts (Feldman and March, 1981). From this perspective, ambiguity is not simply located within a particular context but is something that actors discursively co-construct in interaction with each other (Sillince and Mueller, 2007; Vaara, Kleymann & Seristo, 2004). For example, when managers wish to avoid making decisions they tend to make their responsibility more ambiguous by involving many others in the decision process (Jackall, 1988). However, when they wish to retain control, delegation may also be used ambiguously as a disguised form of command and control (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984: 254; Davenport and Leitch, 2005). Sillince and Mueller (2007) found that senior managers made ambiguous statements that could be interpreted as supporting either empowerment or control and that this ambiguity had the effect of encouraging a project team

of middle managers to rhetorically expand their work remit. When the project failed, however, the team used rhetoric that presented a reduced remit, whereas senior managers clarified what they were saying to mean a preference for more control in order to blame the team. In this way senior managers delegated the risk of blame while retaining control (Sillince and Mueller, 2007; see also Davenport and Leitch, 2005). Ambiguity is thus not solely something that actors encounter in organizations, but rather can be actively exploited where actors encounter it as an organizational property (Vaara, 2002).

The literature on strategic ambiguity, defined as ambiguity in the communication of goals (Davenport and Leitch, 2005; Eisenberg, 1984; Ring and Perry, 1985) provides insights into how actors both construct ambiguous meanings and also exploit the ambiguity within organizations as a possible resource for strategic action. From this perspective, ambiguity enables different constituents to attribute different meanings to the same goal and powerful actors to persuasively construct different meanings for any given goal according to the interests of their audience (Eisenberg, 1984; Eisenberg and Goodall, 1997). For example, powerful actors may exploit the ambiguity of goals strategically in order to generate collective action by encouraging constituents to sign up to a higher-order or more abstracted meaning that does not counteract their particular interests (Eisenberg and Goodall, 1997; Ring and Perry, 1985). Managers may even exacerbate ambiguity through contradictory messages, such as the use of progressive and stability narratives during strategic change, in an attempt to co-opt participation from employees with different perspectives on the change (Sonenshein, 2010). Participants may have different interpretations of a situation but still agree on what action to take (Donnellon, Gray and Bougon, 1986), particularly where the initial goals are expressed with sufficient ambiguity that all actors can subscribe to them. Davenport and Leitch (2005: 1607) suggest that the particular circumstances in which constructing ambiguity may be an appropriate strategic response include: '*when goals are not clear, when stakeholders are not compliant, have power bases from which to resist the goal, or when achievement of the goal requires a creative engagement between the organization and its stakeholders'*. Thus, those contexts in which ambiguity is most likely to occur, are also those in which actors may actively construct and exploit ambiguity in order to influence particular courses of action (Eisenberg and Goodall, 1997). Strategic action in such contexts is both

shaped by the ambiguity of the organization and also by the way that actors respond to and construct that ambiguity.

Most studies are conducted from the perspective of one group of key actors who are trying to construct ambiguity according to their interests (e.g. Denis et al, 1996; Jarzabkowski and Sillince, 2007; Sillince and Brown, 2009). However, there is less research into how other constituents perceive attempts to exploit ambiguity or how they might react by constructing ambiguity in turn, in order to shape the possible courses of strategic action towards their interests. While the literature indicates how powerful actors can exploit ambiguity, it is important to recognize that ambiguity is also constructed through their interactions with others. Ambiguity may be used by the sender of a message in order to enrol the recipient into the co-creation of its meaning. However, the speaker's message must also be constructed ambiguously as a necessary condition for the construction of shared meanings (Nerlich and Clarke, 2001: 10) because it provides the recipient of a message with choices in ascribing meaning to the message independently of the speaker's intended meaning (Fredsted, 1998: 529; Ramsland, 1987: 334). For example, senders can allow several recipients with differing opinions to interpret a message as being close to their own (Glazer, 1990; Aragones and Neeman, 2000; Tomz and Van Houweling, 2009). As Sonenshein (2010) shows, ambiguous managerial messages intended to co-opt employees into strategic change were variously received by recipients who constructed their own versions of ambiguous messages in order to resist or champion the change. The construction of ambiguity thus occurs within both the speaker and the recipient. While Eisenberg (1984) has suggested that the sender can narrow down the meaning of a message, ambiguity is not only the property of the sender of the message but can also be created or modified by the interpretations of the recipients, who ascribe meanings that fit with their personal or organizational preferences (Middleton-Stone and Brush, 1996: 647; Price, Gioia and Corley, 2008: 180; Sillince & Mueller, 2007; Sillince and Brown, 2009; Vaara, Kleymann & Seristo, 2004).

Strategic ambiguity is thus in need of further theoretical elaboration in order to account for the ways that multiple actors shape ambiguity and the implications of these different constructions for the way that strategic action emerges within organizations. We propose that rhetoric, which is a branch of discourse and language theory associated with persuasion, is an appropriate theoretical and

methodological lens for understanding how multiple actors construct strategic ambiguity and how those constructions shape strategic action (Middleton-Stone and Brush, 1996). Strategic ambiguity is the ambiguous construction and exploitation of strategic goals through the use of rhetoric (Davenport and Leitch, 2005; Eisenberg, 1984; Ring and Perry, 1985), while strategic action is the emergent pattern of action that an organization follows over time (Mintzberg, 1978).

Rhetoric in organizations. While various authors have proposed that language is a means of constructing ambiguity (e.g. Davenport and Leitch, 2005; Middleton-Stone and Brush, 1996; Vaara, Kleymann and Seristo, 2004), less attention has been paid to how that ambiguity enables or disables strategic action. This paper addresses this gap by integrating ambiguity with rhetoric theory. Drawing upon Eisenberg's (1984) definition of strategic ambiguity as a resource to facilitate action, we argue that ambiguity can be rhetorically constructed by actors, in order to align particular actions with the interests of different audiences and persuade them to take part in those actions. Rhetoric, as a theory specifically concerned with argumentation, justification and persuasion (Artistotle, 1984) is particularly well suited to the examination of strategic action because it is a strategic form of speech act, in which actors use speech to have effects upon an actual or implied audience (Heracleous, 2006). We first explain the growing attention to rhetoric as a way of understanding how modern organizations construct ambiguity. We then locate various organization studies approaches within rhetorical theory and define our stance on rhetoric in this paper.

The organization studies literature increasingly demonstrates the importance of rhetoric in both the micro and the macro processes of management (e.g., Cheney, et al, 2004; Fine, 1996; Golant & Sillince, 2007; Green 2004; Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007; Sillince, 2002, 2005; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Zbaracki, 1998). However, while some parts of the classical rhetorical tradition (e.g., Aristotle, 1984: 2295), Western business codes (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), and common sense notions of honesty recommend that rhetoric should be clear, modern organizations are often characterised by ambiguity in terms of speaker, audience and message (Cohen and March, 1974; Eisenberg and Goodall, 1997). Indeed, classical rhetorical tradition did qualify its prescription of clarity by introduction of the concept of the enthymeme (Aristotle, 1984: 2157). Rhetorical theory shows how actors draw flexibly on archetypal rhetorical strategies that are based on different

underlying assumptions and values (Eastman and Bailey, 1998; Heracleous and Barrett, 2001; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). For example, proponents and opponents of the multidisciplinary organizational form drew on competing assumptions about expertise and trusteeship respectively (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Rhetoric plays on the ambiguity of particular assumptions (Boiral, 2003). For example, Zbaracki (1998) noted a difference between the 'technical' practice of total quality management (TQM) that was adopted in his research sites and the appropriation of *'rhetorical TQM…a broadly used, ambiguous term with unclear organizational implications'* (p.603). Ambiguity surrounding the rhetorical appropriation of TQM enabled actors to proclaim success in one successful project by overlooking five failed projects. This ambiguity was amplified by attributing meanings to technical TQM that excluded its challenging statistical content. Such uses of rhetoric exploit the ambiguity of modern organizations, in order to justify particular meanings (Fine, 1996; Heracleous and Barrett, 2001). Ambiguous constructions present particular courses of action as desirable (Jarzabkowski and Sillince, 2007; Zbaracki, 1998), without necessarily excluding other meanings and actions that may be drawn upon for other purposes (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Classical rhetorical theory is thus challenged by the ambiguity of modern organizations, which have neither a single clear message, a single, identifiable speaker nor, often, any co-present audience (Cheney, 1992).

New Rhetoric theory has developed in order to better explain how rhetoric establishes connections with different audiences that may not be physically present during the speech act (Burke, 1989a; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969), in particular by uncovering an '*implied audience'* (Bitzer, 1999). Given the complexity of modern organizations, speakers invite various audiences to attribute particular meanings to the organization and its goals, values and actions (Burke, 1989a). They do so by constructing the organization in ways that are congruent with the values of an implied audience. New Rhetoric establishes '*a sense of communion centred around particular values*' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 50-1). Such rhetoric assumes a common audience and evokes the values of that audience (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995) as socially accepted values (Burke, 1989b). The common knowledge, values and assumptions of the audience are also used in the concept of the enthymeme: '*The enthymeme must consist of a few propositions, fewer often than those which*

make up a primary deduction. For if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need to mention it; the hearer adds it himself' (Aristotle, 1984: 2157: 16-19). For example, Jarzabkowski and Sillince (2007) show how university managers rhetorically construct academic values in discussing multiple goals associated with teaching, commercial activities and research. By assuming the common values of an academic community in their rhetoric, they construct multiple goals as congruent with academic pursuits. Such rhetoric is not addressed to any specific audience but constructs a general invitation to an implied academic audience to attribute academic values and meanings to these goals. New Rhetoric theory (e.g. Burke, 1989a; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) advocated designing messages for a universal or less specific audience and in so doing broke away from classical rhetoric theory (e.g. Aristotle, 1984) that had prescribed the targeting of messages at specific audiences. Ambiguity is an important part of such rhetoric, as excessive clarity may exclude recipients (Eisenberg, 1984; Mey, 2003). For example, an actor may avoid explicit statements or extreme opinions in order to appeal more to the communal values of the audience, and to enable the audience to attribute meanings to the statements that are consistent with their own specific values (Aragones and Neeman, 2000; Glazer, 1990; Shepsle, 1972). This emphasis on how links are constructed to the values of an implied audience has widened the relevance of rhetoric as an explanatory approach, for example in understanding how the audience is drawn into the world of a speaker (Burke, 1989a). For organization studies scholars, New Rhetoric is useful in understanding how speakers construct messages that establish a connection with an implied audience even where that audience is not co-present in the speech act.

This paper draws the above strands of literature together, exploring how rhetoric as a strategic form of speech act enables different groups of actors to construct and exploit ambiguity according to their own interests in any particular strategic action, and how these differences shape the emergent process of strategic action. With this aim, we address the following research questions

1. *What rhetoric do actors use to construct and exploit ambiguity*?; and
2. *How do these constructions facilitate strategic action?*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

We used theoretical sampling to select a case that reflected the phenomena under investigation (Yin, 1994). Business schools have a professional workforce with multiple goals, diffuse power relations amongst different actors and tensions between managerial and professional values, all factors that have been associated with members' use of ambiguous language (Cohen and March, 1974; Mintzberg and Rose, 2003). Our study is conducted in a UK business school, 'BizEd', where we were able to follow the construction of a strategically ambiguous goal over time from the perspective of different constituents. Our study examines how a specific strategic goal, internationalization, was rhetorically constructed and exploited by different groups within BizEd over a three year period[3]. As the following brief case history illustrates, the internationalization goal was a case of ambiguity because it had unclear meanings that enabled it to be interpreted differently by different groups according to their own interests.

For some time, in School meetings and awaydays, an internationalization strategy had been raised as part of BizEd's ambitions to be a leading business school. In late 2001 BizEd developed a Strategic Internationalization Group (SIG) that was charged with developing an internationalization strategy for the School and determining ways to implement it. However, in early 2002 BizEd also underwent accreditation by an international Business School Accrediting agency (BSA). BSA accreditation focused largely on the teaching programs of its member schools. BSA withheld full accreditation of BizEd because of a lack of evidence of internationalization in its teaching programs. BSA would revisit in 2005 and award or withdraw full accreditation of BizEd, based on a range of internationalization indicators.

The 'internationalization' goal quickly became central to the campaign for BSA accreditation; '*When BSA came […] they didn't think we were international enough. It made us sit back and think*'. The BSA panel wanted the business school '*to have stronger international links with other universities overseas'.* Managers began to influence the SIG to incorporate BSA accreditation in the internationalization strategy. For example, in June 2003 the Dean attended an awayday to determine the SIG's mandate; '*It was given that it was a very important thing for his strategic objectives that the*

[3] Actual names of the School, accrediting agency and specific dates are changed, to preserve the anonymity of the case. However, the intervals between the events and the events themselves are accurately represented.

school had BSA, and so in a sense had that as an influencing factor that was getting in the way of anything which marked the long term strategy'.

While managers endorsed the Dean's perspective, there was considerable ambiguity about BSA as the internationalization goal. For example, some academics at the awayday contradicted this view, querying '*Why are we going for BSA? Is BSA important? It is a distraction*.' Despite this ambiguity, BSA was incorporated into the internationalization goal. However, this decision did not resolve ambiguity and make BSA the appropriate solution to the internationalization problem. Rather, ambiguity persisted, as some protested; '*It may be better that we would actually develop a clear internationalization strategy for its own purposes, and that we develop a vision of what an international business school needs and not just try to suit the understanding of BSA*'. Still others felt that the BSA definition was potentially dangerous because it would switch attention to BSA definitions of international quality, such as international teaching exchanges, rather than international research; '*If you talk about research at an international level it tends to mean a high quality of research*'. Even this definition was ambiguous; '*When we talk about international research it felt very often that it just means international quality, but what I am talking about is collaborating with somebody in another country*'.

Data collection. The process of developing the internationalization goal at BizEd thus had the characteristics of ambiguity appropriate for examining our research questions. We began to collect data at the formation of the SIG in 2002, completing our data collection after the 2005 BSA visit, collecting interviews, emails, documents, and 10 meeting observations. In total 34 open-ended interviews were collected over three rounds, with all managers and academics in the SIG; one round at the start of the process in 2003 (11 interviews), one round during 2004 (11 interviews) and an exit interview round in 2005 before the BSA visit (4 interviews) and after the BSA visit (8 interviews). All interviews were transcribed verbatim, forming the primary data source, supported by being on-site on the days when we had interviews or when we attended meetings. We attended an audio-taped and fully transcribed eight-hour awayday, 6 SIG meetings and three BSA preparation meetings, as well as being on-site at the three days of the BSA panel visit, at all of which detailed notes were taken about the way the internationalization goal was discussed by different constituents. All field notes were

written up within 24 hours of an event to which they related. Additionally, relevant documents, such as letters between BSA and BizEd, documents for BSA, and some emails pertaining specifically to internationalization and the BSA were collected, resulting in a data set in excess of 1,000 type-written A4 pages.

Data analysis. Data were collected primarily by two of the authors, who cross-checked their impressions and tentative findings after the initial interviews and meeting observations, in order to inform the second round of interviews. A coding meeting was then held between the three authors, to discuss emergent findings from the existing data set of interviews and meetings, with one author acting as an 'outsider' in questioning the findings and themes of those who had collected the data (Evered and Louis, 1981). Following this, a coding schema was proposed, based around different constituents and their rhetorical practices, which we describe below. The third round of interviews was then conducted and all interviews, meeting notes and documents were coded. We describe the stages of analysis below. In each of these stages, each author individually coded the interview and field note data when we were looking for types of rhetoric, phases of strategic ambiguity, and how rhetoric constructed ambiguity. Prior to each stage, we discussed how we would approach the data, in order to provide consistency and then met to talk through our codes, themes and ideas, discuss discrepancies and further refine our analytic categories (Miles and Hubermann, 1994). In summary, at each stage all three authors had a coding meeting, after which they did separate coding and then met again to discuss their coding, examining any data where they did not agree, in order to arrive at a commonly agreed coding. This was an interpretative process of discussing and refining what we meant by the particular codes described below, and why we felt a particular datum fell into one or another coding category, as appropriate to the generative methods of working with qualitative data (Locke, Golden-Biddle and Feldman, 2008). By triangulating data through multiple participants and different sources, using multiple investigators and querying and refining the coding throughout the analysis, we minimized the bias attendant upon a single data source or a single researcher's interpretations (Yin, 1994).

All three authors read through the interview transcripts, field notes and documentary data searching for text extracts that could be classified as rhetoric. Consistent with the method used by

other scholars of rhetoric in organizations (e.g. Fine, 1996; Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), we identified spoken and written text extracts as rhetoric because they illustrated persuasive argumentation about the internationalization goal or its associated actions (see Cheney, 1991; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Initially we classified these text extracts in terms of nine rhetorics. We created nine separate files and copied text extracts into one of these files. For each rhetoric we created a table containing a definition, the relevant text extracts, the claim being made, who (academic or manager) used the rhetoric, the assumptions the rhetoric was based on, how the rhetoric positioned the individual actor or BizEd as an organization with regard to the actions and goal of internationalization and how the speaker used the rhetoric to construct ambiguity about the specific issue to which the textual item referred. Then, consistent with the principles of abductive research (Locke et al, 2008), we discussed these nine rhetorics extensively, comparing and contrasting them in terms of their effects on speakers, audience and actions, which led us to perceive some as subcategories, which we merged into six final categories of rhetorical responses to ambiguity that we agreed were clearly distinct and that were used somewhat differently by the two classes of speaker that we identified: managers and academics.

We then ordered the story of strategic action chronologically, constructing a narrative of how the BSA process unfolded over time (Langley, 1999). From this we identified five overlapping phases of ambiguity in which different aspects of strategic action emerged. Next we analyzed the way that rhetorical responses evolved over time in relation to these emerging actions within the strategy process, exploring the consistency of our rhetorical responses with the theory of rhetoric. We found that three responses enabled the speaker to construct or exploit the ambiguity surrounding particular actions in ways that blocked or withdrew support from those actions: these we labelled doubting, distancing and fogging rhetoric. The other three rhetorical responses of conformity, responsibility and impression-management rhetoric constructed or exploited ambiguity in ways that enabled the speaker to support specific actions. We found that these rhetorical responses altered over time as academic and managerial actors constructed ambiguity anew as additional actions emerged from the process. Furthermore, we found that the ambiguity constructed around any particular action encouraged the search for new actions, so shaping the pattern of strategic action that led to the attainment of BSA.

This finding motivated us to further analyze how rhetoric constructed or exploited ambiguity over time, leading to our next phase of analysis.

We next explored the concept of strategic ambiguity, examining how the six rhetorical responses were used to construct the speaker's interests over the internationalization goal generally and BSA specifically. We queried the data intensively, asking questions such as; how does this rhetoric construct or exploit ambiguity? Who is the implied audience for this rhetorical act? How does it assert the speaker's interests in the action being proposed? From this we concluded that our two classes of speaker, managers and academics, were distinct in the way that they appealed to an implied audience. Academics took the implied audience to be a cohort of academics with similar professional values to themselves about privileging research in any internationalization goal. They thus used rhetoric to assert academic interests, constructing and exploiting ambiguity in a way that was protective of those interests. We labeled this *protective ambiguity*. Managers moved between an implied audience with managerial values to strengthen BizEd as a reputable institution, and an academic audience, trying to construct rhetorical links to each of these audiences. They thus constructed ambiguity around different interests, sometimes using rhetoric to construct *protective ambiguity* over BizEd's reputation by appealing to managerial values. At other times they rhetorically invited academics to participate in supporting that reputation by constructing links to academic values. We labeled this construction *invitational ambiguity*. We also found that, as actions began to coalesce around the BSA visit in the final phase, both managerial and academic speakers began rhetorically to construct ambiguity with consideration of the BSA audience and to position their interests as aligned for the purposes of persuading that audience. As they still displayed rhetoric that supported their other interests, we labeled this *adaptive ambiguity*, because it enabled the speaker to temporarily adapt to assume the interests of a particular audience whilst still retaining their own interests. Table 1 summarizes our definition of these three types of ambiguity and provides a representative example of each.

INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

Finally, we examined the six specific rhetorical forms for association with the three ways of constructing ambiguity. While there were general trends, we only found exclusive one-to-one

correspondence between impression management rhetoric and adaptive ambiguity. The other rhetorical forms clustered more to one way of constructing ambiguity than another but the associations were not exclusive. However, we did find a processual evolution in the way that rhetorical forms and construction of ambiguity moved over time in response to the emerging strategic actions, which we present in the findings and explain in the discussion.

We thus addressed our two research questions, in terms of both the rhetorical responses that actors use to construct ambiguity and how these constructions facilitate strategic action. We now present these findings in two parts. Section 1 explains the six rhetorical forms, while Section 2 shows how these rhetorical forms shaped emerging strategic actions and constructed protective, invitational and adaptive ambiguity around those actions.

FINDINGS

Section One: Six Rhetorical Forms

In this section we explain the six rhetorical forms and the way that actors used them to respond to the ambiguity that they encountered around BSA as one means of achieving the internationalization goal. As section two presents further evidence of the rhetorical forms and how they constructed ambiguity, this section is intended briefly to introduce each category of rhetoric.

Doubting rhetoric responded to the ambiguity encountered about any particular action, such as whether to pursue BSA, by casting doubt on its necessity: '*"Do we need it?" and I have no idea. I don't know' (*academic, June 2004); *'I do not see the necessity to move from here to there'* (academic, June 2004); as well as doubting whether particular actions would actually enable the goal; '*I don't know whether that counts for BSA'* (academic, May 2002). This avoided commitment to action, as actors constructed the ambiguity around BSA in ways that cast doubt on its validity.

Distancing rhetoric distanced the speaker from any particular action, such as teaching exchanges, asserting that if that was part of the BSA goal, it was not the goal for that speaker but rather a goal that '*They' [managers] are after continuing international teaching activities and big partners, you know'* (academic, May 2004) whereas academics should really be doing something else, such as research; '*… why should I do this, what's the added value for me?'* (academic, March 2004).

This rhetoric constructed ambiguity over academic involvement in BSA related actions, and made it easier for speakers to resist enrolment on BSA related tasks.

Fogging rhetoric queried what BSA meant: '*It is not very clear this strategy'* (academic, June 2003), stating that the internationalization strategy was unclear and so could not be acted upon; '*I think the issue is what do we mean by Internationalization'* (manager, June 2002). Fogging rhetoric avoided action by constructing ambiguity over the internationalisation strategy generally and BSA's place in it specifically.

Conformity rhetoric suggested that BSA was an inevitable goal in a global market: *'So we live in a globalized world and education to a large extent follows what is happening in the world'* (academic, June 2003). Conformity rhetoric assumed that any reasonable audience would understand the necessity of achieving BSA and so supported action: '*Following this trend you are benchmarking the school against internationally recognized schools'* (academic, May 2002).

Responsibility rhetoric made an implicit assumption that BSA was the goal: '*we have got to think what it is in each area which would make a difference to BSA'* (manager, June 2003) and allocated individuals to take responsibility for action; '*It needs a central person, a manager, to take this forward'* (academic, May 2002). This redirected attention from the validity of the goal to how BizEd and its members could responsibly carry out that goal, so supporting action.

Impression management rhetoric had BSA as the implied audience: *'other things are more to do with the presentation; to present the information more cleverly*' (manager, June 2003). It constructed ambiguity over the internationalisation goal generally and BSA more specifically, to suggest that actions already being undertaken by BizEd, such as its research, were international and so already fulfilled that goal. This suggested it was not necessary to take new actions to achieve the goal but rather to spend effort impressing upon others how good BizEd was; '*we didn't present ourselves properly. It was all a matter of presentation or a lot of it was presentation'* (manager, May 2002). This meant that individuals did not have to be convinced to undertake new actions but rather had simply to help demonstrate how good their existing actions were; '*in international terms we are actually pretty good but we are not always perceived that way*' (manager, May 2002). Thus, impression management rhetoric created commitment to actions of presenting a united and positive

image to outsiders. The next section explains how these rhetorical responses constructed ambiguity and how these constructions shaped emerging actions.

Section Two: Rhetorical constructions of ambiguity shape emergent strategic action

In this section we present five overlapping phases of ambiguity construction that progressively shaped the emergence of strategic actions. There is always some tension in qualitative research between presenting sufficient representative examples of the data to show richness, while also ensuring a tight story line (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993). We present the data as a chronological story, explaining the prevalent forms of rhetoric for academics and managers in each phase, how they constructed ambiguity, and how those constructions shaped emerging strategic action.

Phase 1. Ambiguity over whether BSA is a worthy goal for BizEd (March 2002 – August 2003)

At the outset, there was ambiguity about whether or not BSA was a worthy goal for BizEd, with academics and managers constructing the goal according to their different interests. Table 2 shows that academics responded to the failure to achieve BSA on grounds of insufficient internationalisation by drawing on doubting, distancing and fogging rhetoric to construct protective ambiguity that enabled them to maintain academic autonomy and detachment from managerial concerns about BSA. By contrast, managers responded with conformity rhetoric that constructed protective ambiguity about this knock to BizEd's reputation. Managers also used responsibility rhetoric towards academics constructing invitational ambiguity in an attempt to gain their commitment to BSA as a goal.

INSERT TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE PLEASE

Managers, mindful of the importance of accreditations for business school rankings, demonstrated willingness to comply with BSA in the BizEd letter to BSA in February 2003; '*the simple goal has been to try and make sure that we achieve the requirements for the BSA Internationalization…'*.. They thus constructed the ambiguity of the BSA goal protectively, as a way of preserving BizEd's reputation: *'the main goal is to improve our profile so that the world, and especially BSA, knows that means we are a very good international school'.* Managers also used rhetoric to construct invitational ambiguity in an effort to enroll academics' participation in BSA: *'In*

my view simply because it is the [academic] subject groups that actually do it. In the end, the teaching and the research are done by the subject groups, so that if they don't buy in to the internationalization then whatever the people who set up the strategy might wish to happen, it won't actually happen'. Managers appealed to the self-interest of an academic audience by implying that the School's research reputation was affected by the BSA-accreditation: *'The over-riding indicator of that* [research reputation] *will be full BSA accreditation, because it is the only accreditation that we go for that has a major specific international dimension'.*

In contrast, academics' doubting and fogging rhetoric obscured the BSA goal, questioning its value to BizEd, Their rhetoric emphasized academic values, in order to argue that BSA was less important than research and hence unnecessary for internationalisation: *'I don't know whether that [good research] counts for BSA but I think it is something that definitely improves internationalization'.* Academics thought that BizEd should proactively develop its own internationalisation strategy: *'It may be better that we would actually develop a clear internationalization strategy for its own purposes, and that we develop a vision of what an international business school needs and not just try to suit the understanding of BSA. I would prefer that we are pro-active and take the lead and say that this is what we want'.* They thus positioned themselves and their academic goals as superior to BSA: *'I sort of felt that I have actually got more important things to do'* while suggesting that the internationalisation strategy was confused: *'You are again trying to change the criteria, which we haven't fully understood, or which are by definition not fully understandable since they are contradictory or ambiguous or whatever.'* Academic rhetoric thus exploited the ambiguity of the BSA goal: '*we cannot have a strategy if we don't have clear criteria of what we want to do. So it is not very clear, I think, to group members where it is going.*' *'What exactly are the BSA criteria and how exactly do they translate into what we are doing?'* This rhetorical construction of ambiguity enabled them to avoid actions associated with BSA: '*I am not sure how valuable [accreditation] is'*. Through doubting, distancing and fogging rhetoric academics constructed protective ambiguity that preserved academics' interest in research goals and autonomy from managerial attempts to co-opt them into strategic actions.

Constructing ambiguity shapes strategic action: Managers' rhetoric responded to the ambiguity of BSA by constructing it as a strategic goal, and suggesting teaching exchanges as a possible strategic action; '*Well, there are actions in place. One is that [the SIG chair] is really working hard and getting involved and improving collaboration. At the group level we are to send out lecturers to teach in France and Germany'*. Their rhetoric impressed upon academics their responsibility for carrying out the teaching, couching it ambiguously in invitational terms that also noted the potential research benefits of such exchanges; '*we also have to rely on faculty participation. So since the faculty are members of the subject group, they are not members of the programme, then it is up to the subject group to engage with our partners and participate in exchanges for research'*. Yet academic commitment to this action was uncertain; '*I don't think internationalization is really embedded within the school - I think we are playing at it still. I think you have to make everyone live and breathe it'*. Thus, possible courses of action emerged that initiated further ambiguity in Phase 2.

Phase 2. Ambiguity over teaching exchanges (February 2003 – February 2004).

The different views of managers and academics toward teaching exchanges were a source of ambiguity in Phase 2. Table 3 shows that academics used doubting and distancing rhetoric to construct protective ambiguity over the teaching exchanges, in order to preserve their academic interest in research. Managers responded by increasing responsibility rhetoric and accompanying it with financial incentives, so constructing invitational ambiguity in an attempt to enroll academics in teaching exchanges.

INSERT TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE PLEASE

Academics still constructed themselves as doubtful about the validity of BSA as a goal; *''It needs a discussion about. 'Is it worth the effort to do that?''* and thus as distant from the associated teaching exchanges: '*you don't get anything for it [teaching abroad], so would you volunteer? There's nothing you can gain'*. The incentives that were introduced in an attempt to co-opt academic commitment, actually elicited angry distancing rhetoric that strongly reiterated academic values: '*BizEd tends to take the view that if we pay people some extra money to do something that would be more motivating…You know, throwing money at them when we are supposed to be doing research'*. Academics thus constructed ambiguity over teaching exchanges in ways that were protective of their

academic interests, emphasizing these exchanges as an inappropriate strategic action, regardless of any financial incentives; '*Well, you know you can't do everything with incentives'.*

In response, managers constructed invitational ambiguity in order to enroll academics in both BSA as a goal and teaching exchanges as a way to attain that goal. At an awayday in June 2003 to discuss internationalization the Dean's rhetoric argued that academics had responsibility for BSA: '*you have to realise we decided to go to BSA as part of the strategy […] so it was a choice'*. Managers emphasized teaching exchanges as an essential strategic action for conforming with BSA requirements: '*Programmes. Students … and opportunities for study abroad. That's programmes. They are what they [BSA] say are below standard'*. They tried to construct ambiguity over teaching exchanges in invitational terms in order to surmount academic reservations: '*they wouldn't be academics if they were totally obsessed with money, because they could earn a lot more money elsewhere. … However, we are all human and even the most hard-nosed academic, who loves his subject, wouldn't mind a bit more money so I think it is absolutely quite a good motivator'.* At the same time, managers were conscious of the ambiguity of teaching exchanges as a strategic action, in terms of the values of an academic audience: *'there is still the pressure to publish. I mean many of them were saying "I am not interested if it would get in the way of the real pressure to publish"*'. Increasingly, therefore, managers became persuaded by academic constructions of the teaching exchange action; *'They [academics] are told when they come here 'You will get your promotion if you get four international journal articles out, and if your teaching quality is brilliant'. They don't say anything about going a week to teach somewhere else and marking a hundred MBA scripts for French students or something'.*

Constructing ambiguity shapes strategic action: While teaching exchanges and associated financial incentives emerged as a possible strategic action to support the BSA goal, they met with little success. Rather, managers became convinced that teaching exchanges would not work. Responding to academic constructions of protective ambiguity, they reached a resigned acceptance of academic autonomy: '*in the end it is the subject groups that actually do the doing. If they don't buy into it academics can't really be ordered to do things'*. In response to the lack of progress on BSA, at the SIG awayday in June 2003 a further possibility emerged that would not be so dependent upon

academic commitment: Delegate A: '*We're not co-ordinating, for example, the teaching inputs, the exchange teaching*'. Delegate B: '*There's a missing link organisationally'.* The 'missing link', developed into a new possible course of action, as it was explored; Delegate A: '*Joint programmes, it's one that has been added recently and we haven't talked about it much. Is it important?'* Delegate B: '*I think as an international school we look conspicuous in not having any, in the same way of not having any international students several years ago, ... most schools you go to have got something they're doing, and some of them have had them for a long time. I think we're just late into the business'.* Delegate C: '*Is it something we need to put attention on before BSA?'* Delegate B: '*We've got to have something in the programme before BSA come back*' Delegate A: '*So that's where the partnership comes in ... That's the link, that's the one that works*' Delegate C: '*Is that possible? To have something in the prospectus before BSA comes?'* Delegate B: '*Yes. Just'*. By the end of the awayday, student exchange (as opposed to teaching exchange) programs had become the top priority: '*Are we happy about this issue about actually getting the students out to our partners? It was only given two green dots…but it's our priority now'*. Exchanging students enabled managers to pursue BSA as a goal, particularly responding to a BSA letter in May 2003 about international partners: '*BizEd should be encouraged to look out for highly qualified partnering institutions'*.

Phase 3. Ambiguity over who is responsible for BSA (June 2003 to July 2004).

As shown in Table 4, Phase 3 was characterized by ambiguity over who should be responsible for BSA. Managers constructed protective ambiguity about BizEd's reputation. Rhetorically, they constructed themselves as responsible for BSA and not reliant on academics. They sidelined academics and began to push through student exchange programs and educational partnerships that could be pursued without academic commitment. Academics persisted in constructing protective ambiguity to assert their right to remain disengaged from BSA activities. While these divergent perspectives enabled managers to undertake BSA actions without academics, ambiguity remained over whether managerial responsibility would be sufficient to attain the goal.

INSERT TABLE FOUR ABOUT THERE PLEASE

Managers exploited ambiguity to construct accreditation as necessary to protect BizEd's reputation. This led them to dissociate themselves from academics. They expressed frustration at the

lack of academic commitment, and stopped trying to persuade academics to take part; '*It is an incredibly thankless task; banging my head against a brick wall'*. Instead, managers claimed responsibility with their rhetoric: *'the [international teaching] project, I think it is such a potentially big winner … I think we should take more care of it'*. In doing so, their rhetoric drew upon managerial values that were appropriate to achieving BSA: '*I am a complete pragmatist and a doer. I shall be one of the people who will be making any international strategy work…typically academics have chosen to be academics because they like thinking and talking…whereas I am paid to make it work'*. At the same time, they portrayed academics as unreliable: '*they [academics] regard doing something for the good of the business school, involving another institution, as being extra duties'*. Any reliable support for BSA required managers and administrators: '*the average academic is research driven. If we hadn't had those full time administrators nothing would have happened*'. Responsibility rhetoric was used to strongly affirm managers' role in BSA: *'I am really keen to do a lot more internationally…we are missing a trick if we don't capitalize on every opportunity we have in order to expand their [students'] horizons and give them exposure to as many international contexts as possible, because a lot of them will be working internationally*'.

On the other hand, academics continued to cast doubt: '*I asked how important is it? And [the Dean] found it really difficult to answer, because he knows that actually they [BSA] are playing some games and it goes against some of the strategic direction we would like, that we are comfortable with, and that it is not very strategic*'. Doubting rhetoric exploited the ambiguity of the BSA goal in order to protect academic research interests: '*So it really seems bad that it is international research and it doesn't really fully count [to BSA]'*. BSA was portrayed as inappropriate to BizEd: '*Should we do things which are not natural just to seem international?* They cast doubt on the partnerships: '*So there was some clarification that the partners are selected. One of these criteria is accreditation - they have to be BSA accredited. And then I was querying this*' and distanced themselves from student exchanges, as inferior to academic research relationships: '*we do a lot of international links on an individual basis, research based mainly'* ; '*I would much prefer personally to have seen a much smaller number of relationships with a lot of … research collaboration… and we haven't got that'*.

Constructing ambiguity shapes strategic action: Rhetorical constructions of ambiguity increasingly shaped strategic action in this phase. Academics were no longer targeted for specific actions and the international student exchanges that emerged as a possibility in the previous phase were accelerated. New managers were appointed to coordinate specific BizEd responses to BSA. Thus management responsibility for BSA was consolidated with specific actions and a stronger cohort of managerial engagement. At the same time, specific French and German partners that were BSA accredited were identified. Academics continued to cast doubt on the value of these emerging actions. However, such doubts were episodic compared with the continuous and systematic activity by managers to develop actions that supported BSA, such as student exchanges, BSA-accredited partnerships, and development of a clear strategy with which to persuade BSA that BizEd had a consistent and committed approach to internationalization.

However, despite assuming responsibility for BSA and its actions, as Phase 3 drew to a close, managers became aware that some of the strategies for achieving BSA would need academic cooperation. In particular, they needed to respond to a BSA letter in 2004, asking '*whether, in the context of internationalization, the intercultural training component could be offered to all students whether or not they undertake an international placement'*. Such training would need to be an integral component of internal student courses and so would need to involve academics. This became a critical turning point in the process.

Phase 4. Ambiguity about academic commitment to BSA (April 2004 to November 2004)

As Table 5 shows, in Phase 4, there was ambiguity over the extent of academic commitment to BSA. Responsibility rhetoric enabled managers to construct ambiguity over BSA in ways that would invite greater academic commitment. Academics found themselves increasingly persuaded by managerial rhetoric, particularly the appeals to academic interests. They began to rhetorically construct conformity to BSA as one way to protect their academic interests.

INSERT TABLE FIVE ABOUT HERE PLEASE

Managers suggested that the problem of intercultural training was consistent with academic values and one for which academics could take responsibility using their existing research resources. They asked one academic group doing research in that area to create a course on intercultural training

for students studying at BizEd; '*We have also introduced intercultural training for all first year students, so as part of foundations of management they have had a week or two weeks of tutorials from specialists on intercultural issues'*. At the same time their conformity rhetoric heightened academic awareness that academic interests were also tied to protecting BizEd's reputation. Managers raised the spectre of what would happen to funding and international reputation if BizEd failed to conform to international rankings standards, such as BSA: '*Well we have been very public about this … and our Head of School because he is tasked with making sure we are credible and high up the ranking of international schools as possible. I think it [failing to get BSA] could shake, for a while…some of the foundations of what we have been thinking'*. These managerial constructions of ambiguity emphasized academic commitment to attaining BSA, as a means of protecting their academic standing.

Academics were increasingly persuaded by this protective ambiguity construction. Their rhetoric also began to display conformity to BSA as part of moving up the business school rankings and so protecting their academic status: '*It's important to appear on the rankings*'. Academics were thus responsive to managerial constructions that invited them to take part in BSA; '*We [academic group] are now in the process of discussing with [manager] to offer this more widely and the credits for teaching as a cultural sensitivity training'*. They reflected the managerial responsibility rhetoric in their own rhetorical acts, adopting inter-cultural training as an action that was within their academic remit: '*So from my role as group convenor and now another big activity in the group [inter-cultural training], I am ready to contribute, from within the group, to whatever target is given or whatever initiative is given to say, 'Well, yes, we could deal with this*'' (academic June 2004). They presented inter-cultural training as consistent with their academic values of quality in research; '*the meeting that I just pulled out of is about something that a PhD student of mine developed as part of her PhD work, which is a cross cultural training for students, which is evaluated and everything''*.

Constructing ambiguity shapes strategic action: During this phase, intercultural training emerged as an action that both satisfied a BSA requirement and was something that academics felt they could do. The successful implementation of this action, and academic acceptance of it as something that could be incorporated more widely into their teaching programs, marked an important

turning point, as it brought academics into the process of achieving BSA. The international student exchanges that arose in Phase 3 were now also gaining considerable momentum. Nonetheless, ambiguity over academic commitment remained. Managers worried that the various student exchanges might not be enough to convince BSA of academic commitment to increased internationalization; '*What will be interesting to see is if BSA thinks that is enough development'*.

Phase 5. Ambiguity about academic commitment to BizEd performance for BSA (Nov 2004 – May 2005)

As Table 6 shows, during Phase 5, ambiguity persisted over academic commitment to supporting BizEd's performance for BSA. Managers argued that BSA was still in the balance and dependent crucially on academic support; '*we still feel that we aren't necessarily going to get it'*. Their rhetoric constructed adaptive ambiguity, which enables a speaker and audience to temporarily assume shared interests, in order to enable academics to put aside their former reservations about the BSA goal, at least temporarily. Academics responded by adopting the managerial responsibility and impression management rhetoric and colluding in adaptive ambiguity in order to perform for the BSA visit in February 2005.

INSERT TABLE SIX ABOUT HERE PLEASE

BizEd managers had amassed considerable evidence of commitment to internationalisation, including academic participation, which they intended to submit to the BSA visiting panel. Internationalisation was always an agenda item at all subject group meetings and this was reproduced in documentation that was submitted to BSA. For example, the minutes of the February 2004 SIG meeting were included in the 2005 BSA documentation; *'Noted: Subject groups should have 'Internationalisation' as an agenda item at each meeting. SIG would provide guidance by looking to other business schools who had excelled in this area'*. However, managers realised that despite increasing consciousness of school rankings, academics were not very interested in BSA: '*it's not the most important thing on people's agendas'*. Therefore most of what managers said about inter-cultural training and about the paper trail that demonstrated consistent BSA-compliant actions over the previous three years had to be carefully constructed in order to enrol academics.

Impression management rhetoric was important in constructing adaptive ambiguity. It enabled managers and academics to participate in a shared three day performance in front of the BSA visiting panel in February 2005. Managers developed a script, referred to as a *'hymn sheet'*, which the Dean emailed to all academics. The hymn sheet enabled academics to take part in adaptive ambiguity by constructing BSA as a performance; '*They produced a hymn sheet and also … arranged to have an extra meeting where they want to prepare all members for BSA'*. Managers were strategic in their impression management rhetoric, developing a one day rehearsal three months before the BSA; *'It was all very well organized. We were preparing the team [that would meet the assessors] and thinking carefully about who would represent what at various meetings'.* At the BSA visit in February 2005 any staff due to appear before the BSA assessors were assembled 45 minutes before their performance for a rehearsal and preparation briefing. Managers further emphasised a front stage performance to the BSA assessors by asserting collective responsibility for the performance: *'[Internationalization] is a very important aspect that is likely to be explored by the assessors in all the other panels and we must avoid any contradiction or confusion. Everyone must therefore be 'singing from the same hymn sheet''.* The Dean's email was an attempt to overcome academic resistance by means of adaptive ambiguity that acknowledged that academics might have different fundamental meanings but could temporarily assume responsibility for attaining BSA: '*The 'hymn sheet' is attached.… Please read and digest this. It doesn't matter if you cannot sing in tune but you need to get the words right!*'

Sensitive to the value of achieving BSA for their own status of being in a well-ranked school, academics colluded in the adaptive ambiguity. Their rhetoric assumed responsibility for internationalization; for example, referring to more international content in teaching: '*We all or many of us have more international examples and think about that when we teach. I would say that in most aspects of our operations internationalization is something that is included'*. They also participated in impression management rhetoric to persuade the BSA audience of internationalization: '*Here is the real evidence of our achievement: I think that the internationalization of staff is an accomplishment'*. They presented a positive image of BizEd's increased internationalisation: '*There is an awareness that developed a lot stronger since the last BSA. I remember from the last BSA, as I was on the panel*

and I mentioned activities and PhD work launched and now three years later it's there and they could see it. Everyone was also very positive'. It was important to emphasise the unanimity of views across BizEd during the BSA visit. By creating high visibility of academics in meetings with BSA, particularly those of internationally diverse backgrounds, as well as marshalling a documentary trail of evidence about increased internationalization in academic courses, all BizEd members were constructed as committed participants in BSA. This impression management rhetoric persuaded the visiting BSA assessors, whose written feedback in March 2005 noted that: '*There was a balance of academic versus managerial dimensions'.*

In May 2005, BSA granted full accreditation to BizEd and the Dean held a champagne reception for managers and academics to celebrate. An email from the Dean in 2005 clarified that the next internationalization goal was the coming Research Assessment Exercise (RAE): '*BSA was the first of the three great challenges the School faced in the coming months. The other two are […] and RAE 2007*'. An academic reflected on the ambiguity of this goal; '*Can you do world class RAE research that is centered in the UK?...Look beyond 2007 and 2008, we would like four research publications rather than ten, but four really good international publications*'. Ambiguity over what internationalization meant and how to pursue it thus remained but shifted to the next goal.

DISCUSSION

This paper set out to address two research questions about ambiguity: *What rhetoric do actors use to construct ambiguity* and *How do these constructions facilitate strategic action?* Our findings from Sections One and Two, respectively, answer these two questions. The findings show how ambiguity is both shaped by the strategic actions proposed, but also how actors construct that ambiguity rhetorically in order to shape ongoing actions. We show that strategic action does not happen despite ambiguity but rather that the pattern of action that emerges is shaped by the way actors construct and exploit ambiguity over time. We now discuss the findings on rhetoric and their links to construction of different types of ambiguity, before developing a process framework that explains the evolving relationship between strategic ambiguity and strategic action.

Much of the literature on ambiguity indicates that it constrains collective strategic action because of ongoing tensions over direction (Denis et al, 2001; Sillince & Mueller, 2007), competing

political interests of different constituents (Denis et al, 1996; Fenton & Pettigrew, 2000) and means-ends ambiguities over how to pursue goals (Cohen & March, 1974; Middleton-Stone & Brush, 1996). Our finding of six rhetorics through which actors construct ambiguity indicates that ambiguity need not always constrain action. Rather, we found three rhetorics, doubting, distancing and fogging rhetoric, that construct ambiguity in ways that constrain specific actions whereas other rhetorics of responsibility, conformity and impression management constructed ambiguity in ways that enabled action. Furthermore, these rhetorical ways of constructing ambiguity shaped the pattern of action over time; for example, new actions, such as student exchanges, emerged in response to rhetoric that obstructed teaching exchanges.

The Processual Dance of Ambiguity and Action

Our findings extend the theory of strategic ambiguity, which indicates that ambiguity can be a resource for action (Davenport and Leitch, 2005; Eisenberg, 1984; 2007; Eisenberg and Goodall, 1997; Sillince and Brown, 2009; Sillince and Mueller, 2007). We show that particular types of rhetoric construct ambiguity in protective, invitational and adaptive ways in order to support the interests and values of their managerial and academic speakers (see Table 1). While we did not find a strict one-to-one correspondence between specific rhetorical forms and the three types of ambiguity, rhetorical forms did cluster to types of ambiguity construction. As shown in Tables 2 to 6, doubting, distancing and fogging rhetoric were most associated with constructing ambiguity that protected academic interests. They protect the values of the speaker by persuading the audience that particular actions are not appropriate for or pertinent to the speaker. Conformity rhetoric was also associated with protective ambiguity. However, it was primarily used by managers to construct BSA as a necessary goal in order to protect BizEd. Even when academics adopted conformity rhetoric in Phase 4, they did so in order to protect their own academic interests, by taking part in the protection of BizEd's reputation. We may understand these different rhetorical ways of constructing protective ambiguity with reference to the way that managerial and professional roles are associated with diffuse power and authority in professional organizations (Mintzberg, 1979; Podsakoff, Williams & Todor, 1986), such as universities and hospitals (e.g. Cohen & March, 1974; Denis et al, 1996) As professionals, academic power is grounded in their professional role as knowledge-workers whose

specific knowledge furthers the goals of the organization (Coff, 1999, 2003; Levina & Orlikowski, 2009). Their power to resist managerial goals is based on constructing those goals in accordance with their own professional interests. Hence, they used rhetoric that denigrated the BSA goal as a means of protecting their professional interests; here, rhetoric was a source of professional autonomy and resistance to managerial goals (Anderson, 2008; Thomas & Davies, 2005).

By contrast, the managerial role is one of enabling organizational action, particularly by persuading professionals to take part in that action. Managerial rhetoric was grounded in protecting BizEd, whilst not alienating the academic audience; conformity rhetoric persuades an audience that particular actions are inevitable, even if they are not palatable to the speaker or the audience. Hence, we may see this rhetoric as a way of asserting managerial power in the context of ambiguity and diffuse power, through persuasion about the necessity of specific goals (Davenport & Leitch, 2005; Denis et al, 1996). Responsibility rhetoric was largely managerial. Sillince and Mueller (2007: 167) showed that managers construct ambiguity by interpreting the concept of responsibility differently over time. However, they did not speculate about the nature of that ambiguity or how it worked as a rhetorical device, issues that have been dealt with here. Our data also showed that responsibility rhetoric shifted its focus from teaching to student exchanges and that it was coupled to invitational ambiguity, in which the speaker invites the audience to take part in the values being espoused. Responsibility rhetoric goes a step further than conformity rhetoric in the persuasive construction of ambiguity, by suggesting that, as the audience accepts that a particular action is necessary or in their interests, they will want to take responsibility for achieving that action. Both conformity and responsibility rhetoric are thus aimed at subtly serving the managerial speaker's interests by connecting with the values of the audience (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969), in order to persuade them to act in particular ways. Their effects may be seen in the way that academics eventually accepted and adopted both of these managerial rhetorical forms in Phase 4, in order to persuade themselves that the actions of protecting BizEd and taking responsibility for specific BSA actions were appropriate to academic values.

Impression management rhetoric was only associated with adaptive ambiguity; the encoding of a message in ways that allowed the speakers and the audience to construct temporary alignment

between their interests. Impression management rhetoric was largely a strategy of enabling actors to dissemble in their exploitation of adaptive ambiguity, in order to attain a temporarily important goal without sacrificing their other interests. For example, academics constructed themselves as participants in BSA for the purposes of the performance in front of the panel, without having engaged in many tangible actions, other than cross-cultural training, in the preceding three years.

These findings on rhetoric elaborate existing understandings of the association between ambiguity and action. When examined from the perspective of multiple actors, rhetorics that exploit ambiguity to avoid a particular action may be strategic for those actors in supporting the status quo, but may also stimulate the search for alternative courses of action. That search may generate alternative constructions of ambiguity that shape the emergent process of strategic action. This shaping process involving the way that existing ambiguity is exploited rhetorically, and the generative actions that lead to new constructions of ambiguity comprises a processual 'dance[4]' of ambiguity, in which successive constructions of ambiguity shape both emergent actions and the way that actors respond to and interpret those actions.

Protective ambiguity occurred most in Phases 1, 2 and 3. Its effect on action is to emphasize that the implied audience has common values in order to protect the interests of the speaker. The actions were intrinsically ambiguous; for example, about whether BSA was a worthy goal for BizEd, about whether or not there should be incentivised teaching exchanges, and whether or not managers could achieve BSA accreditation single-handedly, without academics' help. Rhetorical construction and exploitation of protective ambiguity about these actions ignored inconsistency and non-prioritisation by emphasising and protecting the speaker's values in the action. Managers and academics were each able to separately construct protective ambiguity about strategic actions by emphasising their own values, despite having different interpretations that either constrained or enabled the specific action. For example, it was exploited as a form of resistance to action, such as when academics resisted teaching exchanges in order to protect research autonomy. Such exploitation then led to alternative strategic actions, which were the subject of further ambiguity construction and exploitation. For example, managers constructed protective ambiguity to enable the strategic action of

[4] We thank Reviewer 1 for suggesting the metaphor of dance to capture our process

student exchange programmes as a substitute for the failed teaching exchanges. We suggest that, in these early phases, protective ambiguity enabled managerial and academic speakers to reveal their interests to each other, so clarifying which actions might be desirable or acceptable to them.

Invitational ambiguity has the effect of emphasizing common values between the speaker and audience in order to encourage the audience to interpret specific actions as in their common interests. It thus opens up a space for the audience to act, albeit that the audience may respond with alternative constructions that exploit ambiguity differently. Invitational ambiguity was most important to action in Phase 4. The BSA goal was still intrinsically ambiguous; academic commitment was ambivalent, and academics did not want to put in effort despite their ambition to belong to a well respected school. Managers constructed invitational ambiguity by emphasizing that academics were partners in achieving some actions for BSA, such as cross-cultural training. Managers were able to exploit the invitational ambiguity surrounding that action to connect with academic interests and values, persuading them that BSA was a common goal for which some forms of academic action were appropriate. This turning point shows how the construction and exploitation of ambiguity shapes both action and the interpretations that speakers attribute to actions. Managers and academics had each been sufficiently persuaded by the other's protective ambiguity, that they were able to find a common action that was acceptable to both.

Adaptive ambiguity enables the speaker to temporarily adopt common values with the audience for the purposes of undertaking a specific action, whilst reverting to their own interests and values upon completion. Adaptive ambiguity was used most in Phase 5. There was intrinsic ambiguity in the context because of ambiguity about how much academic commitment would be 'enough' to convince the visiting panel. Academics constructed adaptive ambiguity in order to shift their behavior between settings. They exploited the ambiguity of the goal through temporary performance for BSA whilst retaining their ongoing commitment to their own research interests. We suggest that adaptive ambiguity is critical to strategic action because it enables actors to allow a particular action to take place about which they may have ambiguous feelings, without committing them to that action. They are thus able to preserve their own values, whilst acknowledging that other actions and values also have a place within the organization.

Processual Framework of Ambiguity and Action

In examining how managerial and academic actors rhetorically constructed three types of ambiguity to support their own interests in particular actions, we develop an empirically-grounded elaboration of the theory of strategic ambiguity. While most studies examine strategic ambiguity as a resource for a single group of powerful actors (e.g. Davenport & Leitch, 2005; Denis et al, 1996; Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997), our data suggest that ambiguity can be used in more pluralistic ways that serve the interests of multiple actors with different power bases. Strategic ambiguity is thus not only the property of one group of actors. Rather it is exploited by different actors, according to their specific interests. Rhetoric is an important lens because it shows us the interactive nature of constructing ambiguity. Furthermore, we find a processual association between the three constructions of ambiguity. In settings of pluralistic power such as where there are managers and professionals, each side must initially preserve its separate position and identity by means of protective ambiguity before any breakthrough to collective action can emerge. However, it is likely that there will also be a process of convergence involving the construction by one or both sides of invitational ambiguity. Where convergence is impossible, incomplete or insincere, there is the possibility of constructing adaptive ambiguity to put on a plausible performance to cope with any unavoidable event.

Based on these findings, we develop a general processual framework for understanding the association between strategic ambiguity and emerging strategic action. Any particular action has a degree of existing ambiguity – it will not be clear, unequivocal and unanimous to all actors. This ambiguity means that the action is open to rhetorical construction and exploitation by actors, either to protect their own interests (protective ambiguity), invite others to join them in those interests (invitational ambiguity), or enable others to dissemble so that some actions can occur without either resistance or commitment (adaptive ambiguity). In turn, each of these ambiguity constructions stimulates the search for further actions, which then lead to a new cycle of existing ambiguity. Ambiguity as a rhetorical resource thus involves an ongoing dance between on the one hand existing, intrinsic ambiguity that resides in any particular action, and on the other hand the construction and exploitation of that ambiguity in the heat of the moment as events move forward.

The Duality of Ambiguity

Our findings contribute to the literature by showing the duality of ambiguity, in which it is both a property of action that actors encounter but also one that actors actively shape. These two elements are analytically distinct as shown in our framework, albeit that they may appear entangled and messy in the practice of constructing and exploiting ambiguity. Nonetheless we suggest that this analytic distinction is important for strategic action, as it enables actors to continuously interpret ambiguity in ways that enable them to perform certain actions, even as they acknowledge their ongoing ambiguity. It is thus important to recognize that ambiguity is not only an intrinsic, singular or fixed property pertaining to a context, action, state or condition of certain types of organization. It is also rhetorically constructed (Davenport and Leitch, 2005; Feldman and March, 1981; Feldman, 1989; Sillince and Mueller, 2007; Vaara, Kleymann & Seristo, 2004; Vatz, 1999). Our general processual framework generalises from our data, and suggests that these two types of ambiguity can be distinguished analytically and that they shape each other dynamically.

Garbage can models of decision-making (Cohen et al, 1972), suggest that action occurs despite ambiguity, rather than through ambiguity resolution. Our study has gone further by showing that action not only occurs together with ambiguity but is actually shaped by the various constructions of ambiguity. We have shown the dual nature of ambiguity, as both shaped by and shaping of action through the ways that it is rhetorically constructed and exploited by actors. Specifically, construction of ambiguity in each phase led to actors exploiting that ambiguity, and led to the emergence of a new potential action, which then led to the next phase of ambiguity construction, so enabling the process of emergent action over time. We thus extend existing understandings of strategic action in organizations by showing that strategic action does not just occur despite ambiguity but rather that the construction and exploitation of ambiguity by different actors shapes the emergent pattern of strategic action.

Research Agenda

Finally, our study of patterns of rhetoric and ambiguity construction provides grounds for future research in other contexts. Our case is a business school, which is an ambiguity-prone context (Cohen et al, 1972; 1974) and the internationalisation strategy is an ambiguously expressed goal. Hence, our case lends itself to exploitation of existing ambiguity and construction of further

ambiguity in relation to specific action. Further research is needed to explore whether or not ambiguity follows a similar process in more structured organizational contexts, and the extent to which strategic ambiguity facilitates action in such contexts. For example, it may moderate the alienating effects of coercive control or it may be used in managing the conflicting demand for greater empowerment by subordinates and for more control by their supervisors. Furthermore, while our study showed how rhetorical construction of ambiguity eventually led to the emergence of strategic action that gained sufficient common interest to be pursued, other studies may show how ambiguity construction continuously shifts the goals, so that no common action is enabled. As ambiguity is considered both a problem for organizational action and also a feature of many organizations, we suggest that these are important topics for future research.

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TABLE ONE. Three types of ambiguity

Definition	How rhetoric exploits ambiguity	Example of actors constructing ambiguity
Protective ambiguity: Appeal to common values in order to protect particular interests	X rhetorically appeals to Y. X uses value that both X and Y believe in to protect X's interest, even where this may not align with Y's interest	Academics appealing to managers • *'I think staff has also been an issue because of the RAE [Research Assessment Exercise] pressures to excel in international research and I think there are some obvious conflicts there [with BSA]'* (academic, June 2004). • Through this rhetoric, academics exploit the ambiguity of the BSA goal, by asserting the value of research excellence as the source of BizEd's international reputation. Managers can agree that research excellence is ONE of the sources of BizEd's international reputation. The academic interest is in protecting their time to do research, rather than put effort into BSA.
Invitational ambiguity: Link values of X and Y in order to invite Y to interpret the situation in the same way as X	X rhetorically supplies Y with a link between X's own values and Y's values, inviting Y to interpret the situation as one of common interest. In doing so, X invited Y's participation in the goal	Managers inviting academic participation • *'The goal is to be a truly international school. I think getting the BSA accreditation is an objective in achieving that goal…I think one of the goals will relate to the research opportunities that [BSA] provides and trying to refocus on some of the research activities and some of the other corporate activities, rather than specifically focusing on student exchanges and faculty exchanges'* (manager June 2003). • Through this rhetoric, managers exploit the ambiguity of the BSA goal in order to link BizEd's international reputation (managerialist value) to research activity (academic value). Academics can agree that an international reputation that supports research activities is in their interests. Hence, managers are inviting academics to interpret BizEd's reputation as a common interest goal that can be supported by engaging in BSA.
Adaptive ambiguity: Adopt temporary stances of common values with specific and distinct audiences	X rhetorically constructs common values with Y for a discrete time period, even where these values may not be a priority or longer-term interest for X	Managers and academics adopt common values for the duration of the BSA visit • '*Next week we face BSA 2005, a challenge we must win… please support your colleagues as they ready to battle for us'* (dean's email to all staff February 2005). Academics present an interest in internationalization through BSA during the visit: "*I was on one of the panels. It's all part of it that I am from overseas. We met beforehand and we came out very well in terms of all the Internationalization dimensions that we could emphasize to them [the BSA assessors]" (*academic March 2005*).* • Through this rhetoric, managers and academics exploit the ambiguity of the BSA goal to construct common values about it as a valid internationalization goal, so enabling them to present a united front for the duration of the BSA visit.

TABLE TWO.
Phase 1. Ambiguity over whether BSA is a worthy goal for BizEd (March 2002 – August 2003)

Phase, type of rhetoric, and construction of ambiguity	**Effect on action in next phase**
Doubting rhetoric We academics question the validity of BSA as the internationalization strategy. BizEd academics already do international research and should not be pushed around by BSA. This constructs protective ambiguity that supports academic autonomy over research (e.g. '*Because of the reasons that I said earlier about the dubious nature of the accreditation, in the sense that it is a club and run by people who are untrained and bring baggage, I wouldn't put it any higher up'*) Distancing rhetoric We academics need research time and so need to distance ourselves from BSA. This constructs protective ambiguity that supports academic autonomy over research and detachment from managerial concerns (e.g. *'We do research, not to get a good score on the RAE, but we do research because that is part of what we do'*) Fogging rhetoric We academics remain sceptical and confused about the strategic value of BSA. This constructs protective ambiguity that supports academic detachment from managerial concerns (e.g. '*I think the problems are more 'What is the strategy of internationalization?' at the moment it is going everywhere and it's a logical argument. It's very well, but if we don't know the criteria that BSA is using then we cannot have a strategy if we don't have clear criteria of what we want to do. So it is not very clear, I think, to group members where it is going'*)	Action in next phase: While academics asserted their autonomy from managerial concerns over BSA, managers made the first steps in complying with it as a goal. Academic participation in international teaching exchanges thus emerged as a possible strategic action for pursuing BSA
Conformity rhetoric We managers, regardless of our views about the quality of the BSA judgement, should conform to BSA in order to protect BizEd's reputation. This constructs protective ambiguity that enables managers to align with BSA as a necessary goal for BizEd. (e.g. '*Well, I guess that by receiving BSA from the accreditation it is validation really that we are doing the right things. If you like BSA accreditation would be a signal to us that we have achieved the right goal in terms of Internationalization, and even if BSA accreditation was not an issue we should be looking at these goals anyway because it will enhance our reputation at home and abroad'*) Responsibility rhetoric: We managers need help from academics to deliver the BSA goal; therefore we need to appeal to their academic interests in taking on specific actions that will support BSA. This constructs invitational ambiguity by positioning BSA as of value to academics (e.g. '*So the role of the group is to make it attractive to group members to participate in programmes*)	

TABLE THREE.
Phase 2. Ambiguity over teaching exchanges (February 2003 – February 2004).

Phase, type of rhetoric, and construction of ambiguity	**Effect on action in next phase**
Doubting rhetoric: We academics question whether BSA is worth the amount of effort going into it. This constructs protective ambiguity that supports academic detachment from managerial concerns (e.g. '*we had away days about this where we said 'Where shall we go?" Maybe that's not very good, Where should BizEd be in ten years or so?'... I don't know. I am not fully in the picture'*) Distancing rhetoric: We academics should not be doing teaching exchanges because they distract us from our research, which is more important. This constructs protective ambiguity that supports academic autonomy over research and detachment from managerial concerns (e.g. *'I do not feel, as I say, enough in the game to try and establish what I think they are really after'*)	Effect on action: Managers were persuaded by academic constructions of the teaching exchange action and questioned the previous assumption of shared responsibility for BSA. Managers developed a resigned acceptance of academic autonomy and proposed student exchanges as an alternative strategic action for pursuing BSA
Responsibility rhetoric: All of us, managers and academics, have responsibility because we have all chosen to pursue BSA as a goal. This constructs invitational ambiguity by positioning BSA as a goal to which everyone has subscribed and hence would want to support (e.g. *'we are really struggling to expand on teaching exchanges. ... Offering anyone, you could almost throw money at people at the moment and it doesn't mean anything'*). Conformity rhetoric: We managers need you academics to undertake teaching exchanges in order to comply with the commitment BizEd has made to BSA. This constructs invitational ambiguity by positioning BSA as a goal to which everyone has subscribed and hence would want to carry out specific actions in its support (e.g. '*it is up to the subject group [of academics] to engage with our partners and participate in exchanges*')	

TABLE FOUR.
Phase 3. Ambiguity over who is responsible for BSA (June 2003 to July 2004).

Phase, type of rhetoric, and construction of ambiguity	**Effect on action in next phase**
Doubting rhetoric: We academics doubt the value of BSA if it excludes research. This constructs protective ambiguity that supports academic autonomy over research (e.g. '*Some of them achieve world standard and could actually be recognized internationally for the work that they do, and that is way beyond BSA. It is miles beyond BSA! It is another galaxy, beyond… And that is why BSA is not so research obsessed, as compared with some of the other schools we are'*) Distancing rhetoric: We academics already have a lot of international links through our research that are superior to BSA-driven links. This constructs protective ambiguity that supports academic autonomy over research and detachment from managerial concerns (e.g. '*To be candid, I would say that the Research Committee of the three committees (Undergraduate teaching, Postgraduate teaching and research) Research is the one that has probably engaged least with the official internationalization process.*')	Effect on action: Student exchange programmes were developed, with specific managers appointed to take responsibility for those particular actions. As the phase progressed, managers became aware that they needed academics to take responsibility for some BSA actions
Responsibility rhetoric: We managers need to take over full control of BSA process in order to protect BizEd's reputation through accreditation. This constructs protective ambiguity that excludes academics and legitimates managerial control (e.g. 'There are one or two Course Directors and Supervisors that aren't keen for their students to be abroad')	

TABLE FIVE.
Phase 4. Ambiguity about academic commitment to BSA (April 2004 to November 2004).

Phase, type of rhetoric, and construction of ambiguity	**Effect on action in next phase**
Responsibility rhetoric: We managers see intercultural training as a BSA requirement that is also consistent with academic values and research interests. This constructs invitational ambiguity that seeks to enrol academics in specific BSA actions (e.g. '*So for example the meeting that I just pulled out of is about of something that a PhD student of mine developed as part of her PhD work, which is a cross cultural training for students, which is evaluated and everything. So this has developed over the last two years as a core part of teaching in undergraduates'*) We academics can respond to meaningful requests for supporting BSA that are within our academic remit. This constructs protective ambiguity over academic autonomy whilst enabling academics to take part in specific actions that are consistent with academic values (e.g. '*We have also introduced intercultural training for all first year students, so as part of foundations of management they have had a week or two weeks of tutorials from specialists on intercultural issues, they got them for example into groups and made them play simple card game and then moved them into different groups and weren't allowed to discuss rules and they couldn't understand why they were all playing by different rules. So that's been good as well*') Conformity rhetoric: All of us, not just the managers, need to support BSA, because it is essential to BizEd's rankings, and hence its status, reputation and funding. This constructs both protective ambiguity about BizEd and also invites academics to take part in that protection to support their own interests (e.g. '*catch 22 one of the things is we do want to be an international accredited school. The problem is one of the ways in which you show the public you are is BSA. It could, I think, undermine our potential as a top international school. It is a real conundrum*'). To us academics, BizEd's international reputation is important and we can undertake reasonable academic actions (student exchanges but not academic exchanges) to support the attainment of BSA. This constructs protective ambiguity over academic autonomy whilst enabling academics to take part in specific actions that are consistent with academic values (e.g. '*what the SIG is heading for, they offered kind of opportunities to go abroad, to study abroad, to learn about institutions, you know, the kind of programmes where the students go from one major player to another'*)	Effect on action: Managerial and academic rhetoric align, both constructing BSA as necessary. Academics set up an intercultural training course that is BSA-compliant

TABLE SIX.

Phase 5. Ambiguity about whether BizEd will be able to perform for BSA (Nov 2004 – May 2005).

Phase, type of rhetoric, and construction of ambiguity	**Effect on action in next phase**
Responsibility rhetoric: Not only we managers but also you academics are responsible for preparing persuasive scripts for the BSA performance on the day, regardless of any personal interests or actions over the previous three years. This constructs adaptive ambiguity by training academics to temporarily align with managers in taking responsibility for the BSA goal, through their performance in front of the BSA panel. (e.g. '*You do see it in other [academic] groups as well. It is regularly announced in guest lecturers, seminars by international researchers from various groups. If you look at the faculty that's been hired in the past three years it is a fairly international crowd'*) We academics know that BSA is important for our school rankings. We have a responsibility to perform appropriately to help convince the BSA panel of BizEd internationalization. This constructs adaptive ambiguity by motivating academics to temporarily align with managers in taking responsibility for the BSA goal, through their performance in front of the BSA panel. (e.g. '*X has strong Business School and University. I think its done better in terms of positioning itself, it might just be about PR and publicity issues. It'd done better at positioning itself on the leading edge, more people that government work with, X manufacturing group is an example of that. I think over time you build a general reputation and Industry says well if we send top managers to Business School we send them to X.'*) Impression Management rhetoric: We managers know that achieving BSA requires academics to partake in a performance in front of the BSA. They can do this by using adaptive ambiguity for creating an impression without undertaking actions that substantially change their academic values (e.g. '*the major accomplishment would be the strong awareness that internationalization is important'*). We academics are willing to collude with managers in presenting our actions over the past three years as pro-BSA for the purposes of the panel. This constructs adaptive ambiguity by enabling managers and academics to temporarily perform harmoniously together for the BSA panel (e.g. *.'There isn't an international panel on BSA, so the people are going to be distributed across the panels. So they have decided they would like to meet, so that when [a named academic] appears on the random faculty panel he will be able to talk about the things that are coming through from SIG. I thought that was a good idea'*).	Effect on action: Co-ordinated, well rehearsed and convincing performance before BSA visiting panel