

From Long Range to Strategic Planners – A Review of Research on Corporate Strategists*

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Abstract: Corporate strategists first emerged after World War II in the role of the long range planner who later – after several popularity cycles – transformed into today’s strategic planners and Chief Strategy Officers. Due to corporate strategists’ prominent position in headquarters, several scholars analyzed their roles, backgrounds, organizational setups, and relationships ever since the 1960s. However, due to the changing responsibilities and name of strategists, these research articles seldom built on each other and repeatedly studied similar issues while neglecting others. In this review, we aim to trace the development of corporate strategists over the years to distinguish between the core characteristics that remained stable and the aspects of the role that evolved. Furthermore, we identify promising areas for future research to increase the understanding of this prominent group of strategy practitioners.

Keywords: corporate strategists, long range planners, strategic planners, chief strategy officers, strategy professionals

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Introduction

In the years following World War II, when environmental changes and complex organizational structures increased uncertainty for corporations, specialized long range planners were introduced at the headquarters to assist the key decision-makers in strategy formulation (Greenwood, 1964; Henry, 1977; Whittington, Caillaet, & Yakis-Douglas, 2011). Later, this executive role – which is unique, since it “molds the shape of all other plans because it encompasses basic decisions for these plans” (Murdick, 1964: 37) – evolved into today’s strategic planner who essentially stayed the same but, in addition to strategy formulation, also took over responsibilities concerning strategy execution. In recent years, this value-creating function at corporate headquarters (CHQ) became increasingly challenged. In 2015, for instance, Deutsche Bank announced a significant reduction of their corporate strategist staff (Manager Magazin, 2015), while Samsung decided to terminate the function entirely in 2017 (Reuters, 2017). Interestingly, this phenomenon is not new and, over the years, corporate strategists went through several popularity cycles (Whittington et al., 2011) during which some corporate planning units disappeared, only to reemerge after a few years.

Due to their prominent role in strategic planning, corporate strategists attracted many strategic management scholars over the decades (e.g., Bazzaz & Grinyer, 1981; Greenwood, 1964; Grinyer, Al-Bazzaz, & Yasai-Ardekani, 1986; Javidan, 1987; Menz & Scheef, 2014), which resulted in both practice- and research-oriented articles. However, due to the role’s volatile popularity, as well as the terminology changing from long range to strategic planners, these studies seldom built on each other. Consequently, scholars repeatedly probed similar aspects while neglecting others, thereby resulting in a disconnected body of research that produced only indicative findings. Due to this disconnect, we presently have no integrated understanding of how and why the role of corporate strategists evolved. We also lack answers to important questions, most notably about the specific added value of this managerial role. By addressing these shortcomings, we pursue two goals with this literature review. First, we would like to isolate the stable core characteristics of corporate strategists and trace the role’s aspects that evolved over the years. Second, we will identify worthwhile areas for future research that are promising to close the existing knowledge gaps.

By reviewing and integrating the merely loosely connected literature concerning this senior strategic role, we will inform concepts in several strategic management research streams, such as strategic leadership constellations, functional TMT members,

strategic planning practices, entrepreneurial corporate functions, and strategy professionals. For instance, in the strategy-as-practice perspective, the review contributes to previously identified research questions about strategy practitioners (Whittington, 2003), namely *where those individuals are located* and *how they are organized, what their backgrounds and skills are, and what methodologies they apply*. In the strategic leadership perspective, the article increases our understanding of the role and decision-making involvement of CEO advisers in the TMT periphery (Arendt, Priem, & Ndofor, 2005; Roberto, 2003). The review also gives a partial overview of corporate headquarters' "black-boxed" inner workings (Menz, Kunisch, & Collis, 2015: 669) by shedding light on a prominent value-creating corporate function.

Following this introduction, we conceptualize corporate strategists and explain our review approach in the next chapter. Afterwards, we trace how this executive role developed since its emergence based on our review of previous articles. In the third chapter, we synthesize our findings and identify promising directions for future research before concluding this article with a brief outlook on the future of corporate strategists.

Review Approach

Although the definition of strategy professionals includes strategic planning staffs on all organizational levels, as well as external consultants (Whittington et al., 2011), in this review we focus on strategy professionals on the corporate level for two reasons. In contrast to strategy consultants who often assist organizations only in specific strategy-related activities, corporate strategists are usually involved during the entire strategy cycle. Moreover, they typically do not have other operational responsibilities, which distinguishes them from decentralized strategy professionals on the divisional level (Ang & Chua, 1979). Notwithstanding, we draw on findings about other strategy professionals if they inform the relationships of corporate strategists with those actors (e.g., the division of work between corporate and divisional strategic planners). Following Mintzberg (1994a), we define *corporate strategists* as full-time¹ strategy specialists employed at the CHQ who are dedicated to develop and execute strategic or long range plans. This definition encompasses both the head and staff of corporate strategy/planning functions.

¹ It is noteworthy that the early corporate planners sometimes held additional, non-strategy-related responsibilities and therefore differ slightly from this definition. Nevertheless, we include them in the scope of our analysis.

Following the guidelines of Webster and Watson (2002), as well as those of Short (2009), we conducted a structured search to identify all relevant articles on *long range and strategic planners, planning departments, strategy functions, and Chief Strategy Officers (CSOs)* that jointly portray a comprehensive picture of corporate strategists. Initially, we used the EBSCO database to search all the articles that were published in the leading academic and practitioner management journals² for the keywords listed in Table 1. This search yielded 160 articles, which we screened manually to exclude the studies that were irrelevant to our review. In a next step, we searched the articles' lists of references to identify any further papers that needed to be included. This process resulted in 51 articles published between 1961 and 2017 (Appendix 1 summarizes the findings, methodologies, and research foci of each article). Due to their relatively old age – about two thirds were published before the year 2000 – most of the articles are either conceptual or based on descriptive observations.

Next, we studied all the identified articles in detail and synthesized their findings on corporate strategists in the following categories: *role & methods, personal background, and organizational setup & network*. During this initial review, we recognized four phases in the role's evolution, which suggested a chronological presentation of the findings to allow tracing the role's development over time. Afterwards, we consolidated the corporate strategists' characteristics in each phase and identified the external forces that explain the evolution of the role in each period.

² The searched journals include: *Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, Academy of Management Review, Management Science, Strategic Management Journal, The Academy of Management Annals, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies, Journal of Economics & Management Strategy, Organization Studies, Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, Strategic Organization, Long Range Planning, Global Strategy Journal, Business Strategy and the Environment, Harvard Business Review* and *MIT Sloan Management Review*.

Table 1: EBSCO search keywords

"Corporate Strategy Staff"	"Corporate Planning Department"	"Long Range Planning Function"
"Corporate Strategy Department"	"Corporate Planning Function"	"Long Range Planning Unit"
"Corporate Strategy Function"	"Corporate Planning Unit"	"Long Range Planning Group"
"Corporate Strategy Unit"	"Corporate Planning Group"	"Long Range Planning Director"
"Corporate Strategy Group"	"Corporate Planning Director"	"Chief Strategy Officer"
"Corporate Strategy Director"	"Long Range Planning Staff"	"Corporate Planner"
"Corporate Planning Staff"	"Long Range Planning Department"	"Corporate Strategist"

Review Findings

As summarized in Table 2, corporate strategists emerged after World War II and reached their first popularity peak during the early 1970s. In the subsequent years, environmental turbulence sent corporate strategists into a decline, which lasted until the mid-1990s. Since then, they have regained influence by expanding their role to address new challenges and avoid previous mistakes. In the following, we present the review's results in detail and suggest explanations why certain characteristics of corporate strategists changed along the four phases.

Table 2: Review summary

Emergence		Peak		Crisis		Revitalization	
Period	Until circa 1965	Circa 1966 – circa 1975		Circa 1976 – circa 1995		Since circa 1996	
Avg. studies per year	0.15	1.44		0.95		0.81	
Theoretical perspectives	- Formal planning	- M-form organization		- Industrial organization		- Resource-based view	
	- Formulation and implementation			- Positioning school		- Learning school	
Environmental drivers	- Growing organizational complexity	- Decentralization		- Environmental volatility (e.g., oil crisis)		- Globalization	
	- Environmental uncertainty			- Rise of management consultants		- Technological disruptions	
	- Pressure to innovate						
Role & methods	- Technical and formalized	- Internal status increased		- Decline due to failure of quantitative tools and methods		- Detection of emergent strategies outside the planning cycle	
	- Crafting overall long range plans	- Range of tasks broadened		- Rise of qualitative methods and scenario planning		- Broader role of strategists	
	- Environmental forecasting	- Actual planning was cascaded down to divisional planning staffs		- Focus on specific, administrative tasks		- Involved in strategy implementation	
				- Actual planning completely handed over to divisions		- Communication on all organizational levels	
Personal background	- Relatively young	- Emergence of professionally educated planners		- Multifaceted backgrounds with both external and internal hires		- US CSOs typically hired internally	
	- Line management background	- Majority still recruited internally due to line experience		- First recruiting from strategy consultancies		- In Europe, 40% outsiders	
	- Higher educational degrees than the firm average	- Average tenure of US planners relatively short (3.5 years)				- Communication and social skills as important as analytical mindset	
Organizational setup & network	- Functions rather small	- Located close to the CEO		- Downsizing corporate strategy staffs, sometimes accompanied by "upskilling"		- Senior hierarchical location close to CEO crucial for effectiveness	
	- Started several hierarchical layers below CEO to move up over the years	- Relative small on average		- Involving of external consultants for analytical tasks		- Strategist staff size varies substantially between firms	
	- Working relationships mostly with other staff functions	- Corporate strategists with formal authority over divisional planners		- In the UK, some functions were moved away from the CEO		- Reliance on consulting support in strategy formulation	

Phase 1 (until *circa* 1965): Emergence

In the years following World War II, many US organizations introduced long range planning systems, which were initially oversaw by line managers on a part-time basis. In the mid-1950s, firms began to install dedicated long range planning units at their CHQs (Summer, 1961), which adopted the responsibility for the planning systems. With this expansion of planning and forecasting capacities, firms reacted to the increased complexity of their organizational structures, risen environmental uncertainty, and competitive pressures to innovate (Greenwood, 1964; Henry, 1977; Summer, 1961). Towards the end of this period, Chandler (1962), Ansoff (1965), and Learned, Christensen, Andrews, and Guth (1965/1969) published studies, which established the foundation for the theoretical field of strategic management that would shape the academic discourse in the following years. Especially Ansoff's portrayal of very technical, top-down planning, which he developed based on his observations during his tenure at Lockheed, are clearly recognizable in the descriptions of the first generation corporate strategists.

Role and methods. During this first phase, the corporate strategist's role – at that time they were described as long range planners – was characterized by its technical nature and formalized routines, which were predominantly focused on developing formal plans at the top of the organization (Branch, 1964; Greenwood, 1964). However, these early strategists did not only craft the overall long-term plans for their organizations, but also worked out plans in various functional areas (Branch, 1964). Similarly, Greenwood (1964) notes that the long range planners sometimes assisted line managers translate the long-term strategy into operating plans. Therefore, planning units were, at that time, predominantly focused on formulating plans and left their implementation to line managers – a distinction that was also reflected in the early seminal works on strategic management (e.g., Learned et al., 1965/1969).

Besides this focus on strategy formulation, the early strategists scanned and forecasted the environment to detect external changes that would impact on the long range plans (Greenwood, 1964). In order to increase the accuracy of their environmental forecasts, the planners introduced quantitative, operations research techniques, such as “simulation studies”, “linear programming”, and “network analysis” (Weston, 1973: 510), which was a trend that also contributed to Ansoff's (1964) “quasi-analytical” approach to strategy formulation. In sum, this first generation of strategists was

characterized by a relatively isolated position at the top of their organizations with a limited, technical role focused on formal planning and environmental forecasts.

Personal background. The corporate strategists of the first generation were relatively young – their average age was 43 years – compared to other, similarly compensated executives (Branch, 1964). During this phase, it was said that a deep understanding of the company's operations was essential for strategists (Summer, 1961). Similarly, Branch (1964: 92) explains that “line experience seems desirable to develop understanding of the more directly productive phase of the enterprise and to provide greater acceptance when function exclusively as staff”. In terms of education, the early strategists' level of education typically exceeded the company average (Litschert, 1967) and undergraduate education often related to the company's industry (Branch, 1964; Litschert, 1967). On graduate level, however, the educational fields varied, which indicates that the education of those executives “involved broadening rather than further specialization”. This could be explained by the “multifaceted management endeavor” that strategic planning represents (Branch, 1964: 93).

Organizational setup and network. During the early years, many corporate strategists initially did not report to the CEO directly (Branch, 1964), but were located several layers down in the organization (Steiner, 1970: 134). However, close to the end of the first phase, their internal importance had increased and they had moved up the hierarchy to directly report to the CEO (Litschert, 1967). At that stage, planning teams were reportedly quite small: Fifty percent of the studied organizations had a function smaller than five employees, which indicates that they were more focused on producing qualitative than voluminous outputs (Branch, 1964).

Within the CHQ, early strategists spent a considerable amount of time working together with various other staff functions (Branch, 1964). Apart from that, we know relatively little about the relationships of these executives within their organizations, thereby indicating that the early planners were isolated from their firms' operations. However, Greenwood (1964: 228) describes how effective planners began to descend “from the ivory tower” to assist operating executives implement approved plans and facilitate cross-divisional communication. This development was arguably triggered by the increasing popularity of multidivisional organizational structures (M-form organizations), which increased the planning complexity for corporate strategists and ultimately led to the decentralization of planning tasks in the subsequent phase.

Phase 2 (*circa* 1966-1975): Peak

From 1966 until the mid-1970s – the second phase – the popularity of corporate strategists increased. In 1970, the first study on the presence of long range planning functions reported that 67 percent of 137 US firms had installed planning units – most of them located on the corporate level (Weston, 1973). In Europe, Keppler, Bamberger, and Gabele (1979) even found that 79 percent of West German firms had installed a central planning function in 1973/74, thereby indicating that the trend had expanded overseas. What distinguished the second from the first phase, was the widespread adoption of M-form organizational structures, which changed the role of corporate strategists fundamentally. Although the M-form organization was already theoretically introduced in 1962 (Chandler, 1962), it took firms until the second half of the 1960s to implement it widely (Hoskisson, 1987). General Electric, for example, introduced strategic business units in the early 1970s, which transferred certain planning responsibilities to the divisional level (Ocasio & Joseph, 2008).

Role and methods. During this second phase, the status of formal planning within firms increased and this was accompanied by long range planners' tasks becoming broader to include more operational duties (Steiner, 1970). For example, corporate strategists were actively involved in various steps of the M&A process, such as target selection and synergy evaluation (Mason, 1968). However, in the course of introducing multidivisional structures, decentralized planning staffs were installed on lower levels of the organization (e.g., Friedrich & van't Land, 1974) and the actual formulation of plans was cascaded down the hierarchy (Kudla, 1976; Shagory, 1975). The corporate strategist therefore evolved from the one who carried out the planning to “the coordinator of planning done by line and staff throughout the company” (Steiner, 1970: 135). In this role, corporate strategists provided market assumptions and formulated goals for the divisions, but instead of developing the plans themselves, they supervised and integrated divisional planning activities (e.g., Litschert, 1971; Steiner, 1970; von Allmen, 1969). At that time, Pennington (1972) emphasized more drastically that planners ought to become assistants of the executives on lower levels of the planning organization to stay relevant in this changed setting.

At the same time, the planning systems administered by corporate strategists became too inflexible and ineffective (Henry, 1977), which resulted in the trend of “loosening [the systems] up [to] stimulate more innovation and creativity” (Steiner, 1970: 136). Interestingly, it appears that the trend towards less formalization, which

started at the end of the 1960s, resulted in new problems. In a 1974 survey, strategists identified the lack of formalization as the most pressing issue of their planning systems (Al-Bazzaz & Grinyer, 1980). In conclusion, the second phase ended in an “identity crisis” for corporate strategists that would transition into the next phase.

Personal background. The years between 1965 and 1975 were characterized by a steep increase in the demand for strategists (Whittington et al., 2011) and, as a result, professionally educated planners emerged (Shagory, 1975; Steiner, 1970). The majority of corporate strategists was, however, still recruited internally (Eppink, Keuning, & de Jong, 1976; Litschert & Nicholson, 1972). This can be explained by the increased importance of line experience that was required to understand the decentralized developed plans that needed to be coordinated and integrated (Pennington, 1972). Interestingly, certain companies introduced rotation programs that aimed at regularly familiarizing the strategists with the challenges of line managers (and *vice versa*) (Litschert & Nicholson, 1972) – a concept that would reemerge at IBM three decades later (Harreld, O'Reilly III, & Tushman, 2007). The continued technical nature of strategy formulation, as outlined by Ansoff (1965), required corporate strategists to have a strong analytical mindset and technical expertise to perform various quantitative analyses and environmental forecasts (e.g., Denning, 1969; Litschert & Nicholson, 1972; Mason, 1968).

Organizational setup and network. As corporate strategists had moved close to the CEO (e.g., Bazzaz & Grinyer, 1981; Higgins & Finn, 1977; Litschert, 1971), they became “an extension of the chief executive responsible for providing an objective analytical ability free from functional or executive responsibilities” (Denning, 1969: 67). During this phase, the average staff size of corporate strategists remained small, however, scholars observed significant outliers, which indicates that certain companies decided to employ a very large number of strategists on the corporate level. For instance, Higgins and Finn (1977) identified one company that employed thirty planners on a full-time basis, while the average function in the UK consisted of only 3.8 planners. Bazzaz and Grinyer (1981) similarly found that the average corporate planning team was relatively small, but noted that a number of sample firms employed very large planning staffs consisting of more than fifty planners.

This huge variance in corporate strategist staff size can be explained by considering the newly introduced divisional planning teams, which tended to be larger than their corporate counterparts (Bazzaz & Grinyer, 1981). In this regard, Friedrich and

van't Land (1974) described two possible configurations for planning teams in M-form organizations. In the first option, a relatively large central planning staff fulfills both overall strategic and operational planning. In the second option, only a small team of experts at the top develops the overall strategy, while multiple planning departments on the divisional level formulate operational plans.

During the years of the second phase, corporate strategists would remain in the lead over the divisional planning units and hold formal authority over their counterparts. For instance, they supervised divisional planning activities, coordinated them across business units, and had the right to request analyses (Friedrich & van't Land, 1974). In this coordinating role, corporate strategists were crucial for connecting and moderating between the CHQ and the operating entities. They were specifically “communicating corporate goals and priorities to divisional managers, assessing business-level plans presented to the top management, and aggregating business-level plans into corporate plans” (Grant, 2003: 506).

Phase 3 (*circa* 1976-1995): Crisis

In the following phase, which lasted until the mid-1990s, several factors contributed to the decline of corporate strategists. During the 1970s and 1980s, environmental volatility (e.g., the oil crisis) took planners by surprise and demonstrated the inability of their forecasting techniques to predict rapid environmental changes, thereby challenging a substantial part of their role (e.g., Edwards & Harris, 1977; Grant, 2003; Pinnell, 1986). In addition, with the M-form organization maturing and management consultancies becoming more popular, the activities of corporate strategists were increasingly taken over by the divisional level or external consultants (Rumelt, Schendel, & Teece, 1991). As a result, some large, multidivisional companies closed down their corporate strategy functions during this period (Ang & Chua, 1979; Bonn & Christodoulou, 1996; Houlden, 1995).

In order to understand the decline of corporate strategists, an alternative explanation can be found in academia, which challenged the value-added of formal strategic planning. Based on Michael Porter's contributions to the Industrial Organization (1980, 1985), superior performance was theoretically rooted in a firm being positioned in an attractive industry (based on a generic strategy) and not in top-down strategies or internal management capabilities (Hoskisson, Wan, Yiu, & Hitt, 1999). Furthermore, towards the end of this phase, Henry Mintzberg described how

strategies can result from an emergent process (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) and pessimistically attested the ineffectiveness of the formalized strategic planning that was conceptualized during the 1960s (Mintzberg, 1994a).

Role and methods. In this setting, the “mature” corporate planning departments completely handed all the actual planning over to the divisional levels and focused their work on single “strategic issues”, as well as “sensing the environment”, instead of trying to forecast it precisely (Houlden, 1985: 52). Within the formal planning system, observers described the role of corporate strategists as somewhat administrative, with its design, organization, and continuous improvement being their main activities (e.g., Al-Bazzaz & Grinyer, 1980; Bonn & Christodoulou, 1996; Javidan, 1987). Consequently, expensive strategic planners were increasingly pressured to justify their added value, which was conveyed by the fact that certain corporate planners “were required to prepare detailed reports of [their] performance” (Bonn & Christodoulou, 1996: 546). Since economic volatility had proven the quantitative operations research techniques applied by corporate strategists useless, qualitative tools became more important (Houlden, 1985). Examples of more qualitative methods are the “SWOT or TOWS analysis”, “competitor benchmarking”, or the “industry structure analysis” (Houlden, 1995: 106). Moreover, corporate strategists added the scenario analysis to their toolbox to deal with the increased environmental uncertainty (Grant, 2003; Huss & Honton, 1987).

Personal background. During the third phase, the backgrounds of strategists became more multifaceted and a combination of external and internal hires with a diverse mix of functional experiences was sought (Houlden, 1985; Houlden, 1995). This shift – away from exclusive internal recruiting – indicates that firms responded to the inability of previous strategists to predict fundamental environmental changes by bringing in fresh insights. Furthermore, after the advent of strategy consultancies, companies began to recruit corporate strategists from these firms, because they potentially provided industry knowledge, as well as an outside perspective (Prete & Boschetti, 1990).

Organizational setup and network. Due to their declined influence, a significant share of corporate strategists in the UK were moved from the CEO to the finance function between 1985 and 1992 (Houlden, 1995). Not surprisingly, firms downsized their corporate strategy staffs during the ongoing decentralization of strategic planning (Grant, 2003; Jennings, 2000), which is also confirmed by an analysis of job

advertisements between 1960 and 2003 (Whittington, Yakis-Douglas, Ahn, & Cailluet, 2017). Moreover, with the responsibility for recurring planning activities being handed over to the divisions, analytical expertise was increasingly “insourced” from strategy consultancies, thereby further challenging the *raison d’être* of corporate strategists. Whereas strategy units collaborated only sporadically with outside consultants at the beginning of the third phase (Keppler et al., 1979), external strategy professionals began to take over “intelligence activities” from corporate strategists from the mid-1980s onwards (Grant, 2003: 508). As a result, certain firms replaced their formerly large corporate planning staffs with a small number of highly qualified strategists, which indicates that those functions were focusing on single strategic issues, while repetitive planning and analytical tasks were reassigned to the operating divisions and strategy consultants, respectively.

Phase 4 (since *circa* 1996): Revitalization

Ever since the mid-1990s, globalization and technological disruptions accelerated the competitive environment and imposed new challenges on CEOs, thereby giving the managerial role of corporate planners – who were thenceforth labeled as strategic planners or Chief Strategy Officers – a second spring (Delmar, 2003). This reemergence is also documented by a sharp increase in strategic planning job advertisements in the *New York Times* during these years (Whittington et al., 2011). Meanwhile, the resource-based view became popular among strategic management scholars (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984, 1995), shifting the focus back “inside the black box of the firm” (Hoskisson et al., 1999: 437). By rooting a firm’s competitive advantage in its resource endowment, managerial skills became more important than in the Industrial Organization concept, thereby potentially contributing to the new rise of corporate strategists.

Role and methods. Following Mintzberg’s (1994b) recommendations for detecting and fostering strategies that emerge outside the formal planning system, corporate strategists started working on all layers of their organizations. As a result, their role broadened and became more multifaceted depending on the various challenges faced by the company (Angwin, Paroutis, & Mitson, 2009; Breene, Nunes, & Shill, 2007; Menz, Müller-Stewens, Zimmermann, & Lattwein, 2013). Compared to previous periods, especially two aspects are notable. First, compared to their predecessors, modern-day strategists are much more involved in the implementation of strategic plans

(Breene et al., 2007; Menz et al., 2013). This increased focus on strategy execution might have resulted from the pressure on corporate strategists to make their value-added more visible during the previous period. Second, arguably a side effect of the increased implementation focus, the strategist's role involves frequent communication with employees on all hierarchical levels and also with external stakeholders (Angwin et al., 2009; Breene et al., 2007; Dye, 2008). Gone are the days of the isolated planner at the top during the 1960s or his later successors whose interactions were mostly limited to members of the formal planning system. In today's world, corporate strategists need to be comfortable with communicating on all levels of the organization to detect emerging strategies, convey the CEO's vision, and ensure strategy implementation. Furthermore, as competitive environments accelerated, their work became "more *ad hoc*" (Prete & Boschetti, 1990: 24), which led to a new round of decreasing formalization (Bonn & Christodoulou, 1996). At present, apart from the annual formal strategy cycle, the role of corporate strategists is characterized by the absence of repetitive routines, because strategic issues arise on a non-regular basis in a wide variety of areas (Angwin et al., 2009).

Personal background. Today, CSOs in the US are typically recruited internally and have been with the firm for a substantial number of years. Breene et al. (2007) report that 84 percent of the executives in their sample were hired internally and had worked for their companies for an average period of eight years prior to assuming the CSO position. In Europe, the picture differs, as more than 40 percent are recruited externally (i.e., they have less than two years of firm experience) (Menz et al., 2013). This difference can be explained by the different profiles of the CSO roles in the US and Europe, since scholars suggest that the optimal CSO candidate depends on the role that he or she is intended to fulfill (Angwin et al., 2009; Powell & Angwin, 2012). In terms of education, two thirds of European CSOs hold a graduate degree in business administration or economics, which is a substantive increase compared to the previous decades and might be explained by the increased number of universities that offer specialized programs (Menz et al., 2013). Since modern corporate strategists need to detect strategies that emerge outside the planning system and ensure strategy execution, successful strategists are not distinguished according to their analytical abilities – which are still the role's basic requirement – but by their communication skills and social sensitivity (Angwin et al., 2009).

Organizational setup and network. Research on CSOs emphasizes the importance of a close proximity to the CEO, since it bestows on strategists the indirect authority needed to successfully carry out their role (Breene et al., 2007; Kaplan & Norton, 2005). Consequently, it appears that a large number of CSOs, both in the US and in Europe, report directly to the CEO (Breene et al., 2007; Menz et al., 2013). In their analysis of the hierarchical location of CSOs, Menz and Scheef (2014) report that the share of S&P 500 firms with CSOs in the TMT increased from 34 percent in 2004 to 49 percent in 2008. Moreover, they find that product diversification, acquisition activity, and TMT role interdependence are positively associated with CSO presence in the TMT. In terms of staff size, Menz and Barnbeck (2017) find substantial differences between European corporate development and strategy functions. They identify that firms' industry fragmentation, related diversification, acquisition and alliance activity, as well as firm size, are positively related to function size. In contrast, unrelated diversification, the number of operating divisions, and divisional influence in the TMT are negatively associated with the number of corporate strategists. Interestingly, their findings indicate that serial acquirers and diversified firms benefit from larger corporate development and strategy functions in terms of return on assets.

The unique relationship with divisional strategy teams who, in the previous phase, were increasingly taking over responsibilities from corporate strategists, is described to evolve as a newly introduced strategy process matures (Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007). In the course of this, corporate strategists change from adaptive (e.g., collaboration or initiation) to recursive (e.g., coordination or execution) activities, while the reverse can be observed for divisional teams. Furthermore, this shifting activity distribution is suggested to be crucial for the improvement of the strategy process's outcome (Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007). Since modern corporate strategists have expanded their focus to strategy implementation, they rely extensively on the support of external consultants in strategy formulation (Breene et al., 2007).

Overall Synthesis & Opportunities for Future Research

By bridging the disconnect of previous articles on corporate strategists, the portrayed arc reveals common themes across the four phases, aspects of the managerial role that evolved over time, as well as existing knowledge gaps.

First, the environmental and organizational context of corporate strategists represent a common theme across all four generations. Changes in contextual factors –

such as environmental shocks or the emergence of other strategy professionals (Grant, 2003) – called the relevance of corporate strategists into question and thereby advanced the development of the role. Second, the vast majority of strategists consistently reported directly to the CEO with whom they maintained a trusted relationship (e.g., Breene et al., 2007). This emphasizes the prominent role that corporate strategists play as the “extended work bench” of the CEO and marks them as an influential group of strategy practitioners outside the TMT. Third, despite fluctuations associated with the observed popularity cycles, the average number of corporate strategists remained small over the years. However, although corporate strategy functions tend to be smaller than their divisional counterparts, their overall costs are reportedly equal (Bazzaz & Grinyer, 1981), thereby indicating that the corporate role requires a broader skillset.

Besides these stable core characteristics of corporate strategists, several aspects of their role changed over the years. Most notably, their set of tasks evolved from initially focusing only on technical planning and forecasting, to administrating the planning systems and, later, to managing individual strategic issues and strategy implementation. Since the actual planning was cascaded down the hierarchy in the course of this development, the role became less technical and involved more personal interactions. Consequently, the relationships and communication skills of corporate strategists became more important. Whereas early strategists were predominantly isolated in the CHQ, interacting only with the CEO and other corporate functions, their successors coordinated the decentralized planning activities, thereby connecting the CHQ with the divisions. Later, the importance of interpersonal skills increased even further, since modern corporate strategists need to be comfortable with communicating on all hierarchical levels to ensure strategy implementation. Remarkably, at present the corporate strategist role, which started off as being extremely formalized in the 1960s, is characterized by a complete absence of formalized routines (Angwin et al., 2009).

In addition to the presented findings on corporate strategists, the review also highlighted previous articles’ predominantly conceptual and indicative nature, which resulted in very few empirically supported findings. For instance, we still know very little about the relationships of this managerial function, its critical contingencies, and most notably, its effects on firm outcomes. Regarding the latter, recent research has identified no performance consequences of CSO membership in the TMT (Menz & Scheef, 2014), but suggested that serial acquirers and diversified firms may possibly benefit from larger corporate strategist teams (Menz & Barnbeck, 2017). Since financial

performance measures may perhaps be too distant from the activities of strategy practitioners to detect direct effects, future research should study intermediate outcomes that are closer to the actual work of corporate strategists (Whittington & Cailluet, 2008). Based on the literature review, we have identified several areas for future research that are promising to uncover specific value-adds of corporate strategists. In the following, we outline these research opportunities and derive possible research questions in each area (Table 3).

Table 3: Opportunities for future research on corporate strategists

Research opportunity	Potential research questions
Opportunity 1: Learning processes in strategizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do corporate strategists deliberately apply learning processes, such as knowledge articulation, codification, sharing, or internalization, to advance their role and keep abreast of changing environmental conditions? - Are the learning processes applied by corporate strategists positively related to the effectiveness of the planning system (or the quality of strategic initiatives)? - What role does the previous strategizing experience of the organization (e.g., the age of the strategic planning system or the number of conducted strategic initiatives) play in the effectiveness of deliberate learning processes?
Opportunity 2: Implications of new technologies for corporate strategists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which new technologies will support corporate strategists in their role? Which of their activities can be automated? Which ones will become more important (e.g., sensemaking)? - Which new skills do corporate strategists need to master to excel at their role? - What is the optimal setup between corporate strategists and technical executives, such as CTOs, CDOs, or CIOs? - To whom should the upcoming insights and analytics functions optimally report? What is their interaction with corporate strategists?
Opportunity 3: Relationships of corporate strategists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Under which conditions do firms benefit from employing a CSO who complements the CEO in terms of functional, industry, and firm experience? - How frequently do corporate strategists communicate with the CEO, divisional strategists, or venture teams? How does this pattern change over time? - Under which circumstances do firms benefit from granting corporate strategists formal authority over their divisional counterparts? - Do conflicts between corporate and divisional strategists benefit their effectiveness?

Opportunity 1: Learning processes in strategizing

The review illustrates that strategists who are unable to adapt to changing contexts and continue with their past routines, will lose their influence within the firm (Pennington, 1972; Pinnell, 1986) and ultimately cease to exist. During the 1970s and 1980s many planning functions followed this route, because they failed to adapt their role in response to the emergence of divisional units (e.g., Pennington, 1972; Steiner,

1970), challenges by uncertain environments (e.g., Grant, 2003; Henry, 1977; Whittington et al., 2017), new requirements of the firm (Pinnell, 1986), or simply the maturity of the planning system (e.g., Houlden, 1985; Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007). In order to avoid this fate and stay relevant, it is possible that today's corporate strategists not only fulfill their respective responsibilities, but also continuously interpret their situation, detect new requirements concerning their role, and initiate learning processes.

We therefore encourage researchers to study whether and how corporate strategists advance their role and the strategy process by applying organizational learning routines. Interestingly, previous literature in the field already suggested the need for analyses concerning the dynamic character of strategic planning configurations (Wolf & Floyd, 2017) and observational studies described how corporate strategists evolved over time (Harreld et al., 2007; Jennings, 2000; Ocasio & Joseph, 2008). However, we do not know whether corporate strategists deliberately drive the adjustment of their role and configuration in response to contextual changes. In contrast to other CHQ functions, which are obligatory or can transparently track their value-added, such proactive behavior is especially important for strategists, because their added value is purely subjective and difficult to quantify.

If corporate strategists apply learning processes to adapt to new situations, it can be regarded as a dynamic capability in the sense of Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997), since they would help the firm secure its competitive advantage during the course of a changing environment. We therefore hope that future studies will shed light on this topic and explore not only how corporate strategists detect environmental shifts, but also how they systematically develop their role through organizational learning in response to those shifts. Thereby, similar studies on strategy-related functions, such as strategic alliances (Kale & Singh, 2007) or M&A (Trichterborn, zu Knyphausen-Aufseß, & Schweizer, 2016), can serve as a starting point for studying similar mechanisms applied by corporate strategists in, for example, the context of the recurring strategy cycle or strategic initiatives.

Opportunity 2: Implications of new technologies for corporate strategists

A contextual shift that has impacted the role and applied methodologies of corporate strategists in recent years, was the emergence of new, disruptive technologies. As outlined in several practitioner-oriented articles, strategists are increasingly using tools – that are enabled by these new technologies – in their day-to-day work, which

indicates that they are reversing the trend away from technical methods. We expect that this return to their technical roots will impose severe challenges to corporate strategists and we believe that this deserves closer examination.

In the near future, companies will integrate predictive machine learning algorithms that leverage their extensive, but unstructured, datasets into their decision-making processes (Shields, 2018), thereby increasing the amount and quality of information available to strategists. Innovative firms already apply such technologies, for instance, in their product development, in the identification of attractive acquisition targets, or in their footprint optimization (Davenport, 2016). In the long term, this trend will potentially result in the advent of “strategizing machines” that automate a large amount of today’s strategists’ tasks (Davenport, 2016). Although such technology will still rely on human inputs and sensemaking, its emergence will have substantial implications for corporate strategists.

In terms of personal background, corporate strategists will likely be required to add computer science to their skillset, as a recent executive survey showed that managers regard technological proficiency and data analysis to be more important skills in the future than strategy development (Harvard Business Review, 2017). The survey also disclosed the increasing importance of “people skills” to counter the ramifications of workplace automation. Therefore, if applied to corporate strategists, it is likely that they will become teachers of how to use the predictive tools applied in strategic planning on all levels of the organization (Shields, 2018).

Regarding working relationships, we expect that the increasing influence of technical executives in the C-suite (i.e., Chief Technology/Information/Digital Officers) will challenge the legitimacy of corporate strategists, and that this will potentially result in a popularity decline similar to the one that followed on the emergence of divisional planners in the third phase. Highlighting the convergence of technical and strategic roles in 1992 already, Stephens, Ledbetter, Mitra, and Ford (1992: 449) noted that the Chief Information Officer is an “active participant in strategy planning”. Moreover, the adoption of independent “insights and analytics functions”, which will be significantly involved in strategic decision-making, will encroach further on the core activities of corporate strategists and potentially spark conflicts (van den Driest, Sthanunathan, & Weed, 2016).

In sum, the recent practitioner-oriented articles indicate that the introduction of new, technology-enabled strategy practices will significantly impact on corporate

strategists in future. We therefore hope that future research will identify best practices for the role and organizational setup of corporate strategists in the digital age.

Opportunity 3: Relationships of corporate strategists

Based on the literature review, a notable aspect in the evolution of corporate strategists was the increasing importance of their interactions and working relationships with other actors in the organization. Although previous articles identified their most important relationships, we still know very little about them – particularly in terms of their antecedents, contingencies, and outcomes. Hence, we encourage researchers to substantiate this area and to study the corporate strategists' relationships with the CEO, divisional strategists, and venture teams more closely.

Over time, research consistently acknowledged a close and trusted relationship with the CEO as a success factor of corporate strategists (e.g., Breene et al., 2007; Denning, 1969; Dye, 2008). For instance, Breene et al. (2007) reported that the CSOs in their sample knew their superiors for five years on average, before assuming the strategy post. They explained that this personal connection and proximity is crucial, since it bestows on the strategist – whose role is usually not associated with commanding authorities – the CEO's executive powers. In terms of personal backgrounds, previous research suggested that firms benefit from employing a CSO whose background complements the CEO's (Vancil, 1967). Both findings raise the question of contingencies in the CEO-CSO relationship, which we believe is a promising research area for future studies. For instance, outsider CEOs will conceivably benefit more from selecting a company veteran as CSO who has built an extensive network in the organization, instead of selecting a confidant from the outside. Furthermore, the benefits of complementary CEO-CSO backgrounds can also depend on a firm's competitive environment or industry life cycle stage.

Besides the CEO, the divisional strategy units became important counterparts of the corporate strategists and reshaped their role after first emerging during the second phase. Some would argue that the two groups are two sides of the same coin and together they represent the total number of strategizing resources in the firm. We therefore believe that the interaction between corporate and divisional strategists is crucial for the success of strategic planning and that it is a worthwhile direction for future research. The initial study in this area by Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007) shows that this relationship evolves as the planning process matures and indicates that this change

determines the outcome of the process. However, previous studies indicated that the relationship between corporate and divisional strategists varies from firm to firm. While certain researchers portray corporate strategists as more powerful than divisional units (Friedrich & van't Land, 1974), others describe how divisional units have taken over the lead, which sometimes resulted in the downsizing or even termination of the corporate function (Grant, 2003; Houlden, 1995). These observations impose the question under which circumstances top-down modes are preferable over bottom-up ones and *vice versa*. Researchers should therefore not assume that the relationship remains stable over time but should examine how it dynamically evolves as a firm's strategic challenges change (Jennings, 2000; Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007).

The relationship between corporate strategists and venture teams that are spread across the organization is another worthwhile area for future research. In order to foster fundamental innovation, firms employ corporate venture teams that search for new business and investment opportunities outside the organization's core (e.g., Chen & Nadkarni, 2017). Thus, the purpose of these venturing units lies "at the intersection of entrepreneurship and strategic management" and overlaps with that of the corporate strategists to strategically renew the firm (Chen & Nadkarni, 2017: 37). In recent years, corporate venturing increased in popularity, as corporate investors tripled globally between 2011 and 2016 (Himler, 2017). Although this development suggests that venture teams are a relatively recent phenomenon, early research on the first generation of corporate strategists already characterized the special relationship between the two groups as far back as the 1970s: At that time, temporary venturing units were "responsible for finding, investigating, and developing new business opportunities either through acquisition of internal development" and were typically initiated by, but acting independently from, the central strategy department (Litschert, 1971: 39). Due to their increasing popularity in recent years, we encourage researchers to follow this trail and to study the relationship between "traditional" strategy departments and "agile" venture teams more closely.

Conclusion

In this article, we integrated the previously disconnected research streams on early long range planners and their CSO successors. We identified the dynamic aspects of this executive role that evolved during the years and we traced the stable characteristics that remained constant. We also synthesized previous articles' mostly

indicative findings on corporate strategists to identify starting points for future empirical studies to gain statistically substantiated insights.

Overall, we are optimistic about the future of corporate strategists, because the challenges imposed by disrupting technologies and accelerating competitive environments are likely to increase the need for strategizing resources in CHQs. Ironically, the initial study on corporate strategists described a very similar environment that led to the emergence of corporate planners in the first place (Summer, 1961), thereby emphasizing the stable core of this managerial function. However, the fact that today an increasing number of firms employ highly paid CSOs in their TMTs (Menz & Scheef, 2014), while others have begun to downsize their strategy functions (e.g., Deutsche Bank & Samsung), emphasizes the need to better understand this executive role. We therefore hope that this article sparks the interest of management scholars to investigate the outlined research questions, thereby closing the existing gaps in our knowledge about corporate strategists.

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Appendix 1: Literature overview

Study	Focus	Methodology	Key findings
Summer (1961)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Conceptual, illustrative examples	Full-time corporate planners emerged since the mid 1950s - previously line managers had part-time responsibility to coordinate functional plans. The increased importance of the planning function was triggered by increased planning complexity, divisionalization, required innovation speed, and required technical knowledge. Specific firm-specific expertise, financial accounting knowledge, and communication skills were necessary for effective planners.
Branch (1964)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Survey of 35 North-American corporate planning groups	One third of the corporate planners have an additional function. The planning units are relatively small, indicating a focus on the quality rather than quantity of work. Not all report to the CEO. Units work on overall as well as functional plans. Considerable amount of time spent on interactions with other staff units. Relatively young executives with little prior planning experience (some line experience helpful). High educational level from various fields.
Greenwood (1964)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Conceptual, findings from studying 45 North-American corporate planning staffs	Corporate planners add value by (1) studying the environment for changes, (2) check the consistency of a firm's operations with the strategy, and (3) supporting operational managers in translating long-into short-term plans.
Litschert (1967)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Interviews with executives in 40 companies	Long range planning groups are usually small, located near the top management. Employees obtained slightly higher educational degrees than in other departments. Departments are involved in the development of long range plans, periodic market analyses, development of assumptions, financial analyses, and feasibility studies.
Vancil (1967)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Conceptual	Chief planner's personality should be compatible with the president. FTE growth in the department is a sign of success. Often, planning departments have a close relationship with the controlling department.
Mason (1968)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Conceptual, findings from studying 6 corporate planning groups	Corporate planning groups are involved in various steps of the M&A process, such as target selection and synergy evaluation, working closely with top management. Usually, they aggregate various inputs from internal and external parties.
Denning (1969)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Case studies of 3 corporate planning functions in UK firms	Corporate planning departments should have direct access to the CEO. The firm's environment and structure (e.g., internationalization, divisionalization) define the optimal role of the planning department in the areas of strategic management and coordination. The authors propose a framework that allows to cluster planning activities into those that are optimally initiated, coordinated, or carried out by the planning unit.

(continued)

Appendix 1 (continued)

Study	Focus	Methodology	Key findings
von Allmen (1969)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Conceptual	Corporate planners break down corporate objectives for the divisions and corporate functions, monitor the environment of the firm, design and administer the planning system, and manage acquisitions. It is essential for new planners to produce tangible results quickly and build a network with the key decision-makers. Thus, it is advisable that the planner is member of the TMT. Potential conflicts arise between the planning and finance function.
Steiner (1970)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Conceptual, illustrative examples	Corporate planners are accepted in the US and moved up in the firms' hierarchies. Due to their proximity to the TMT, their breadth of activities increased to also more operational tasks. Often, corporate planners (and planning staff) were promoted from lower-level line management positions. The role of planners changed from the 'pure' planner to the coordinator of planning and teacher of planning methodologies (most relevant in decentralized firms).
Litschert (1971)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Survey of 28 long range planning groups and interviews with planning executives from 7 companies	Planning groups are located at the top of the organization and usually report to the CEO. They are relatively small and exist both in the CHQ as well as the business units. Planning groups in technologically stable environments were structured in subunits, each dedicated to a specific function. Sometimes, planning groups are complemented by teams to explore new business opportunities.
Litschert & Nicholson (1972)	Role & methods; Personal background	Interviews with corporate planning executives from 7 companies	Long range planning groups are usually not staffed with professional planners but with managers who obtained an undergraduate education in the company's industry (plus an MBA). Often, rotation programs between the long range planning group and line managers are in place. However, a small permanent team (and the head of the unit) are excluded from the program to ensure planning continuity.
Pennington (1972)	Role & methods; Personal background	Conceptual, illustrative examples	Corporate planners should provide planning expertise (carry out some analyses, make valid assumptions) to line managers who carry out the actual planning. Ideally, planners are recruited from line management positions, as they have knowledge of the firm's operations and respect within the firm.
Weston (1973)	Organizational setup & network	Survey of 162 North- American firms	67% of the firms have introduced a formal long range planning function. Those functions are predominantly found at the corporate level only (24%) or both the corporate and the divisional level (57%). Planning functions only at the divisional level were very rare (only 4%).
Knoepfel (1973)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Conceptual	To cope with organizational politics and resistance towards change, corporate planners should have significant experience in the corporation. Political and communication skills become as important as technical expertise.
Friedrich & van't Land (1974)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Case study of a European steel company	A planning unit can either be installed as a central department or as decentralized units in the divisions that are supervised by a small team at the top. In the latter case, the corporate team holds formal authority and has the right to request analyses.

(continued)

Appendix 1 (continued)

Study	Focus	Methodology	Key findings
Shagory (1975)	Role & methods; Personal background	Conceptual, illustrative examples	Corporate planners are responsible for the coordination of divisional strategies, identification of growth prospects, market research, formulation of corporate plans, and M&A negotiations. Usually, planners transfer from internal positions and are trained on the job; however, the first companies start to recruit planners externally.
Eppink, Keuning & de Jong (1976)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Survey of corporate planners in 20 Dutch companies	The vast majority of Dutch planning units was introduced in the early 1970s, which thus slightly lags behind Anglo-Saxon firms. However, first planning departments are being closed down in highly diversified firms that decentralize planning responsibilities. The planning staffs are relatively small (avg. 3 FTE). Most of the planners have an accounting and finance background, and the majority are internal appointees (85%). The most important part of the role is coordination - formal tools and techniques are reported to be not very important.
Kudla (1976)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Interviews with planning executives in 14 North-American firms	Corporate planning departments coordinate and review divisional plans, assist in the development of overall goals, and provide environmental assumptions. They interact with divisional staff groups as well as intermediary planning groups, which facilitate the communication across multiple business units. Multidivisional firms increasingly tend to only have decentralized planning departments in the business units.
Henry (1977)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Three field studies of corporate planning systems in 29 North- American firms	Planning units of the 1960s were significantly renewed in the early 70s. The author identifies three problem clusters that caused the change: Issues associated with management attitudes, the design of the planning system, and the method to manage the system. In most of the cases, the early planning systems were too formalized and thus became ineffective.
Higgins & Finn (1977)	Organizational setup & network	Two surveys of CEOs and corporate planning executives in 71 UK firms	A close relationship with the CEO is important for the planning executive. On average, planning departments consist of 5.6 employees - they tend to increase with firm size. Overall, CEOs think that the advantages of corporate planning outweigh its disadvantages.
Ang & Chua (1979)	Organizational setup & network	Survey of corporate planning executives in 113 North-American firms	More than half of the firms had installed dedicated central planning departments. The size of these units varied significantly (1 - 100 employees). Most notable difficulties in the planning efforts was availability of reliable forecasting data and communication of TMT with lower hierarchical levels.
Keppeler, Bamberger & Gabele (1979)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Survey of 181 Western German firms	79% of the German firms had established central planning positions. Usually, they coordinate long range planning across hierarchical levels. 80% of the planning units carried out additional tasks (e.g., business planning or execution supervision). In contrast to the US, German units usually do not report directly to the CEO but one level below - however, none reported to a non-TMT member. Divisionalized firms and companies under innovation pressure tend to install central planning units.

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Appendix 1 (continued)

Study	Focus	Methodology	Key findings
Al-Bazzaz & Grinyer (1980)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Survey of corporate planners in 48 UK firms	Corporate planners have a limited set of responsibilities with a focus on the design and administration of the planning process. Corporate planners perceive their greatest contribution to be in the identification of problems, strengths, and weaknesses. However, they note that their contributions are hard to quantify.
Bazzaz & Grinyer (1981)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Survey of corporate planners in 48 UK firms	The existence of specialized corporate planners is significantly associated with firm size. Specialist planners usually have a high hierarchical status. Planning departments at the corporate level are usually small compared to units on lower hierarchical levels (however, the total costs are similar). The activities of corporate level planners are more extensive than those of business level planners.
Leontiades & Tetzel (1981)	Role & methods	Cross-sectional study of 88 North-American firms (survey data)	At the corporate level, the time Chief Planning Officers spend on business-level planning is inversely related to the time spent on corporate-level planning. In addition, they spend more time on corporate-level planning if their firm is very diversified.
LaForge & Wood (1982)	Role & methods	Survey of corporate planners in 59 North- American banks	In 1977, two thirds of the respondents reported to use operations research techniques, such as simulations, regression techniques, linear programming, or network analysis. The results indicate that larger banks are more likely to use operations research than smaller ones.
Houlden (1985)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Survey of corporate planning units in 105 UK firms	Both existence and size of corporate planning units are related to firm size. Other suggested antecedents of the setup of corporate planners are related diversification, organizational centralization, CEO leadership style, and internal and external turbulence. As corporate planning matures, planning is transferred to line managers and focus shifts to single strategic issues and implementation. 67% of the planners report to the CEO. 96% hold university degrees. Balanced recruiting in terms of functional, firm, and methodological expertise.
Grinyer, Al-Bazzaz & Yasai-Ardekani (1986)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Survey of corporate planners in 48 UK firms	Empirical analysis of contextual factors on the use of qualified specialists, their status, their tasks in the planning process, and the formality of planning. Firm size is positively associated with the number of specialized planners. Planners employ more sophisticated forecasting and evaluation techniques when the firm's core technology is vulnerable. Planners are located on lower hierarchical levels in firms with high market shares.
Pinnell (1986)	Role & methods	Conceptual	Description of the evolving role of corporate planning departments. Planners need to adapt their role to the requirements of the firm's situation (i.e., boom, recession, recovery). Significant event was the oil crisis in the early 70s on the role of corporate planning departments.
Javidan (1987)	Role & methods	Survey of planning executives in 101 North-American firms	Effective planning staffs generate inputs on the corporate and divisional level, and administer the planning system. The communication of corporate goals, identification of divisional strategies, and evaluation of corporate strategies and goals have the highest impact on the staff's effectiveness.

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Study	Focus	Methodology	Key findings
Prete & Boschetti (1990)	Role & methods; Personal background	Conceptual, illustrative examples	Planning needs to be more flexible and less formalized (ad hoc instead of annual). Strategists are not the architects of strategy anymore but coordinate the process, supply analyses, monitor environmental changes, and sometimes ensure implementation. External consulting experience and experience in other industries are suggested to be beneficial.
Kukalis (1991)	Role & methods	Cross-sectional study of 115 North American manufacturing firms (survey data)	In general, planners are more effective when their setup accounts for the firm's context. Specifically, they are more involved in the planning process if the environment is stable (low complexity), firm size is large, and the products of the business units are related.
Mintzberg (1994a)	Role & methods	Conceptual, illustrative examples	Planners should add value by detecting emerging strategies throughout the organization, carrying out analyses on an ad-hoc basis, and ensuring that line managers engage in strategic planning by asking challenging questions.
Houlden (1995)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Survey of strategic planners in 86 UK firms	The findings of their 1985 study were confirmed. Overall, the number of firms with corporate planning units increased since 1985 due to medium-sized companies. In the course of decentralization, some large organizations discontinued their central planning departments. Results indicate that some planning units were moved from the CEO to the CFO.
Bonn & Christodoulou (1996)	Role & methods	Interviews with strategic planning executives in 80 Australian firms	The number of companies with planning departments decreased between 1982 and 93 from 94% to 65%. In addition, the role of planning departments changed from a methodology driven unit carrying out the planning to a unit coordinating the planning of line managers and administrating the process. Moreover, many planning departments were required to report their quantified value-add in 1993.
Jennings (2000)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	In-depth case study of a UK utilities company	Examination how the planning process and planning organization evolved after the privatization of a company. In course of divisionalization, planning staff was relocated from the CHQ to the business units. The small remaining central planning unit was mainly responsible for coordination.
Grant (2003)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	In-depth case studies of 8 oil majors based on interviews with 28 strategists and archival data	Corporate planning departments in oil majors support the TMT in strategic decision-making by conducting analyses, administering the planning process, connecting corporate and divisional managers, and internal consulting. Usually, the planners are recruited from line management or other CHQ functions (avg. tenure 3-5 years). As environments became more turbulent, responsibility for strategic decision making was decentralized. Consequently, corporate units decreased in size while divisional units grew.

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Study	Focus	Methodology	Key findings
Delmar (2003)	Role & methods; Personal background	Conceptual, illustrative examples	Before assuming the CSO position, executives were typically a company's original founder, who stepped aside for a professional manager, the former CEO of an acquired firm, or an external management consultant.
Kaplan & Norton (2005)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Conceptual, illustrative examples	The authors propose to integrate strategic planning departments with an Office of Strategic Management that oversees strategy execution. They propose nine processes, which the combined unit should carry out and recommend that the unit has direct access to the CEO. In terms of size, they state that the combination does not necessarily imply an FTE increase.
Paroutis & Pettigrew (2007)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	In-depth case study of a UK utilities company	Both the activities and interactions between corporate and divisional strategy teams change with the age of the strategic planning process. The authors indicate that interactions between strategy teams on different hierarchical levels can affect the effectiveness of the strategic planning process.
Breene, Nunes & Shill (2007)	Role & methods; Personal background	Survey of 200 North-American CSOs and press review of 100 CSO appointments	US CSOs split their time almost evenly between strategy formulation and execution, the latter being slightly more important. The authors stress the importance of communication on various hierarchical levels. Typically, strategists have extensive prior firm and industry experience before becoming CSO.
Dye (2008)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Roundtable discussion with 6 North-American CSOs	A close relationship with the CEO and communication on both the corporate and business level is vital for success. In the development of the long-term strategy, CSOs balance short and long-term goals. It is advantageous to have a good relationship with the finance function.
Ocasio & Joseph (2008)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	In-depth case study of General Electric	At GE, the first long range planning units emerged from consultation services and marketing services. Shortly afterwards, long range planning was renamed into strategic planning. Later, planning activities were decentralized and coordinated by the corporate planning unit - the specific configuration varied according to the preferences of the respective CEO in power.
Angwin, Paroutis & Mitson (2009)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	Interviews with 97 strategy practitioners in the UK	CSOs and their small teams are typically reporting directly to the CEO. Their tasks span from strategy initiation, reflection, to execution. To coordinate and connect various internal and external stakeholders, they need strong communication skills in addition to their technical skillset.

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Study	Focus	Methodology	Key findings
Whittington, Caillaud & Yakis-Douglas (2011)	Organizational setup & network	Descriptive study of New York Times job advertisements (1960-2000)	Overall, the job market for strategic planning professionals is very cyclical: A steep demand increase during the 1960s was followed by drops in times of economic downturns - in particular during the 1990s.
Powell & Angwin (2012)	Role & methods; Personal background	Conceptual, findings from 24 interviews with UK CSOs	Depending on the organizational context and stage of the strategy process, firms should design the CSO role according to one of four categories: internal consultant, specialist, coach, and change agent.
Paroutis & Heracleous (2013)	Role & methods	Exploratory interviews with strategy directors in 11 UK firms and a longitudinal case study of a UK utilities company	Senior strategists utilize different dimensions of first-order strategy discourse (i.e., identity, functional, contextual, metaphorical) during the phases of institutional adoption to accomplish specific outcomes.
Menz, Müller-Stewens, Zimmermann & Lattwein (2013)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network; Personal background	2 surveys of CSOs in German-speaking Europe (n = 90 & 54)	European CSOs typically report to the CEO but are not a member of the TMT and are mainly involved in corporate development, process management, and portfolio management. Two thirds have a business or economics degree and 40% have less than 2 years firm-experience before assuming the CSO position. The median department size is 6 FTE. One success factor is the collaboration with a variety of other corporate functions.
Menz & Scheef (2014)	Organizational setup & network	Longitudinal study of 150 North-American firms (2004-2008, archival data)	In the US, a firm's diversification degree, acquisition activity, and TMT role interdependence are antecedents of CSO presence in the TMT. However, no direct or indirect performance effects of CSO presence in the TMT were identified.
Whittington, Yakis-Douglas, Ahn & Caillaud (2017)	Role & methods; Organizational setup & network	Longitudinal study of 2,882 strategic planner job advertisements (1960-2003, archival data)	Together with increased environmental turbulence, strategic planners became more decentralized and conducted less economic analyses. Relatively stable was the importance of analysis and forecasting as part of strategic planner jobs - however, compared to marketing executives, the importance of analysis and forecasting decreased as environments became more turbulent.
Menz & Barnbeck (2017)	Organizational setup & network	Cross-sectional study of 105 European firms (survey and archival data)	Industry fragmentation, product diversification, acquisitions, alliances, firm size, and the number and influence of business units are associated with corporate development and strategy function size. Serial acquirers and diversified firms benefit from larger corporate development and strategy functions in terms of ROA.