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The Exercise of Power in Strategy Meetings: A Comparison of Political Behavior in Online and Offline Meetings

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Abstract

Understanding how power is exercised in strategy meetings is a vital step toward increasing the effectiveness of strategic undertakings. The objective of this master thesis is to gain important insights into issues of power and politics by investigating strategists' micropolitical tactics in online and offline meetings. Existing research has examined the exercise of power in meetings, yet there is little understanding to date regarding the evolution of political behavior in online meetings. Hence, conducting a qualitative case study, this research aims to uncover and compare the applied political tactics in online and offline meetings. Specifically, several problem-centered interviews were conducted and analyzed by means of a grounded theory approach. Furthermore, by integrating different power theories, a theoretical framework was developed. The empirical study reveals that different contextual factors impact power dimensions in meetings. Furthermore, it indicates that employees draw on specific power resources depending on whether meetings are conducted online or offline. Finally, by highlighting a paradigm shift of the exercise of power with the trend from offline to online meetings, particular attention is paid to consequences for strategic work. With these findings, the thesis contributes to the existing strategy-as-practice literature. Moreover, the generated insights provide managers with knowledge regarding the psychology of the political function of online and offline meetings.

Keywords: Meeting; power; politics; political behaviour; strategy theory; strategic work.

1. Introduction

> Meetings are at the heart of an effective organization, and each meeting is an opportunity to clarify issues, set new directions, sharpen focus, create alignment, and move objectives forward. (Paul Axtell)

Undoubtedly, meetings are ubiquitous and a necessity for any organization. As reflected by the above quote from Paul Axtell, author of the award-winning book *Meetings Matter*, planned business gatherings represent an essential part of organizations and thus employees' working lives. As early as the 1970s, various researchers devoted their attention to the analysis of meetings by highlighting that millions of meetings occur every day, comprising 7-15% of companies' personnel budgets (Doyle & Straus, 1976) and consuming up to 70% of managers' daily working hours (Mintzberg, 1973). Over the past few years, however, the way of communicating business matters has changed significantly for several reasons. Globalization and advances in technology have allowed online meetings to creep from a futuristic mode of communication to an everyday experience by complementing and replacing physical interaction forms (Cichomska, Roe, & Leach, 2015). This trend away from offline (physical) to online (virtual) meetings will continue in the near future because the arguments for them are gaining strength with the recent coronavirus outbreak. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), per-day online meeting minutes increased from approximately 900 million to nearly 2.7 billion within a few weeks (Spataro, 2020). The shift from physical to virtual collaboration forms will impact the majority of businesses, which makes it more important than ever before to dive deeper into the concept of meetings.

Generally, the analysis of meetings has received considerable attention in various academic disciplines. The purpose of this thesis is to study the dynamics of strategy meetings since they are essential for shaping stability and

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change within an organization. To this end, authors of more recent studies on strategy research (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Whittington, 2006) have proposed to treat strategy as "something people do" (Whittington, 2006, 613) rather than something organizations have. Consequently, by focusing on the many micro-actions, social practices such as meetings become indispensable in the strategy formulation process. According to this strategy-as-practice (SAP) perspective, a meeting is defined as an "event that involves several participants colocated in the same (physical or virtual) space and whose purpose is ostensibly related to the functioning of the organization" (Seidl & Guérard, 2015, 5). However, strategy meetings not only have significant effects on the future of the organization by shaping its strategic orientation (Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989), but they also provide strategists an opportunity to combine various resources to influence strategic undertakings (Reckwitz, 2002). Consequently, the analysis of influence in organizational research is inevitably linked to notions of power and politics in social science. The recent turn in strategy research has already been considerably influenced by contemporary social science to analyze and explain issues of power in the context of strategizing (e.g., Knights & Morgan, 1991, Laine & Vaara, 2007, Mantere & Vaara, 2008, Samra-Fredericks, 2005). Nevertheless, various scientists highlight the importance of focusing more closely on political actions from a practice perspective (e.g., Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008, Clegg, Carter, & Kornberger, 2004, Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004).

Motivated by this critique, this paper employs different power concepts from social science to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the exercise of power in meetings. Therefore, power is conceptualized as an ability or capacity (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006) to reach personal or organizational goals, whereas politics is "power in action" (Hardy, 1996, S3). From this perspective, a social actor's political behavior becomes a key activity in meetings, in that it describes the mobilization of certain power dimensions to influence strategic work. An extensive literature review (Dittrich, Guérard, & Seidl, 2011) has identified that strategists can politically utilize meetings by *setting and advancing the agenda* (Adams, 2004; Tepper, 2004), *exerting influence* (Clifton, 2009; van Praet, 2009; Wodak, Kwon, & Clarke, 2011), *bargaining* (Boden, 1995; Mintzberg, 1973), *keeping topics on the agenda* (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Tepper, 2004), *suppressing new ideas* (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Schwarz, 2009) and *forming alliances and building support* (Adams, 2004; Kangasharju, 1996, 2002). Despite these six dimensions of the political function of meetings, however, little is known about the many everyday micropolitical practices that strategists employ in meetings. Moreover, previous studies primarily focus on physical meetings while neglecting the importance of digital meetings. Thus, this thesis analyzes the exercise of power in strategy meetings by comparing the political behavior in online and offline meetings. More precisely, this work aims to integrate a power-related perspective into the analysis of meetings to answer the following research question: *How do strategists politically utilize online and offline meetings to influence strategic work?*

To answer the research question, a holistic multiple case study (Yin, 2003) was conducted. Additionally, a qualitative approach enabled an analysis of the complexity of this social phenomenon from the researcher's perspective (Williams, 2007) and provided deep insight into the individual case (Flick, von Kardorff, & Steinke, 2000). Data was primarily gathered from problem-centered interviews (PCIs; Witzel, 2000) with 10 individuals from two hierarchical levels and five heterogeneous companies. These interviews were further coded and analyzed according to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). More precisely, this approach sought to develop a theoretical framework by continuously comparing data, codes, categories and concepts. The findings of the empirical data are presented utilizing first- and second-order concepts (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). More precisely, respondents' answers have been, first, truthfully replicated and second, interpreted at an abstract level by examining them in relation to the theoretical background (van Maanen, 1979).

The study provides revealing insights into the redistribution of power caused by the online meeting trend. With its findings, this thesis contributes to the existing literature not only by integrating a micropolitical approach into the analysis of meetings, but also by highlighting the importance of web conferencing in SAP research. Moreover, the study offers important practical implications by drawing managers' attention to the hidden political tactics applied in business gatherings. Understanding the exercise of power in physical and virtual meetings generates useful insights for managing power relationships in times of digital transformation and home office regulations.

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 introduces the background on meetings, power and politics in the context of strategizing. Accordingly, evidence from existing studies is presented in detail and critically reflected on by the author of this thesis. Furthermore, based on the previous literature, differences in political behavior between online and offline meetings are deduced and the research question is derived. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the empirical study, which is designed to answer the research question. Chapter 4 presents the research findings as well as the developed framework. Chapter 5 discusses the design and insights of the study, and Chapter 6 concludes the thesis.

2. Literature Review

This chapter discusses essential terms fundamental to the thesis by providing information on meetings, power and politics in the context of strategizing. Therefore, the literature review consists of three parts. First, (1) general characteristics of strategy meetings are presented. Further, (2) the concepts of power and politics are introduced, and a micropolitical approach in strategizing is outlined. Finally, (3) a summary of essential findings on power and politics in meetings is presented to derive the research question for the empirical part of this thesis.

2.1. Meetings

The next section reviews the literature on meetings. Meetings in strategy research are defined, characteristics of physical as well as online meetings are displayed and compared, and the general functions of meetings are presented. The final section of this chapter presents the extended framework for studying meetings that is utilized for the remainder of this thesis. To provide an overview of the meeting literature, Figure 1, which is displayed in the next subchapter, highlights the relevant topics and sources. The shaded areas are of particular importance for this thesis and are presented in more detail.

2.1.1. Definition and conceptualization of meetings

Generally, a meeting can be defined as a "communicative event involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group" (Schwartzman, 1989, 7). The traditional literature views meetings as rather useless and irrelevant for the success of an organization. Meetings are considered to be a neutral frame for organizational processes without having profound consequences (Schwartzman, 1989). In contrast to this traditional view, however, papers written after the 1970s highlight the importance of business gatherings. Mintzberg (1973), for instance, suggests in his seminal study of managerial work that upper managers attend approximately eight meetings per day. As previously mentioned, he finds that CEOs spend up to 70% of their daily working hours in scheduled (60%) as well as unscheduled (10%) meetings discussing fundamental organizational problems. These results are supported by subsequent studies, although differences across organizational functions and levels have been found (e.g., Ives & Olson, 1981, Mosvick & Nelson, 1987, Tobia & Becker, 1990). Furthermore, other studies emphasize the millions of dollars that globally operating companies spend each year on meetings (e.g., Doyle & Straus, 1976, Monge, McSween, & Wyer, 1989). According to Doyle and Straus (1976), such meeting expenses can comprise 7-15% of companies' personnel budget. As one can see, meetings are no longer considered to be useless and irrelevant but rather an important part of business life and a factor capable of shaping organizational processes (Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989).

In SAP research, scholars including Johnson et al. (2003) pave the way for micro-strategy by emphasizing the many micro-actions that strategists utilize to shape strategic work. In contrast to the traditional strategy discipline, practice-based theorizing focuses on *human activity* that is consequential for an organization's future. According to this view, strategy is treated as "something people do" (Whittington, 2006, 613) rather than something organizations have, as previously stated. Meetings are, therefore, fundamental to strategy formulation processes and are conceptualized as practices, that is, routinized types of behavior, consisting of different interconnected elements. By combining various resources such as specific forms of language and nonverbal behavior, actors can reach collective action (in meetings), which is consequential for strategic work (Reckwitz, 2002). At this point, it is important to emphasize that practices, in addition to their nature of routinization, are alterable due to different combinations depending on the occasion, time and actors (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

In SAP research, meetings are often called *strategy meetings* (Clarke, Kwon, & Wodak, 2012; Kwon, Clarke, & Wodak, 2014). However, meetings that are not explicitly called *strategy meetings* are also relevant for many SAP researchers (Hendry & Seidl, 2003; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Wodak et al., 2011) because meetings often concern strategic issues and are therefore important for the future of the firm (Seidl & Guérard, 2015). Hence, Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008, 392) define *meetings* as "social practices that have implications for stabilizing or destabilizing the flow of strategy activity within organizations." The meeting analysis in this paper is well in line with this definition insofar that it explores meetings that are explicitly called *strategy meetings* as well as meetings that are only implicitly called *strategy meetings* but have strategic relevance.

As Figure 1 highlights, this paper follows the rather broad definition of Seidl and Guérard (2015), who define meetings as:

> a planned and episodic communicative event that involves several participants collocated in the same (*physical* or *virtual*) space and whose purpose is ostensibly related to the functioning of the organization. (Seidl & Guérard, 2015, 5)

The general definition mentioned above captures various characteristics of meetings that are the same for physical (offline) and virtual (online) meetings. More precisely, business gatherings are not only planned and episodic, but they are also characterized by talk and other forms of interaction among the participants. Furthermore, there exist different types of meetings such as regular or irregular and open or closed meetings (Seidl & Guérard, 2015). The next two sections focus on the space aspect of meetings and the differences between offline and online meetings. First, specific characteristics of offline meetings are outlined. Second, these characteristics are compared to the idiosyncratic features of online meetings. Last, the accelerated trend toward virtual meetings and therefore the need to include online meetings in the analysis is highlighted.

2.1.2. Characteristics of offline meetings

In physical meetings, strategists are co-located in a physical space where they can interact face-to-face. Thereby, materiality, in the sense of the furniture in the meeting room and the tools utilized during the meeting, can play an important role. On the one hand, the furniture, such as the arrangement of tables and chairs, can have a strong influence on the interaction of the participants (Seidl & Guérard,

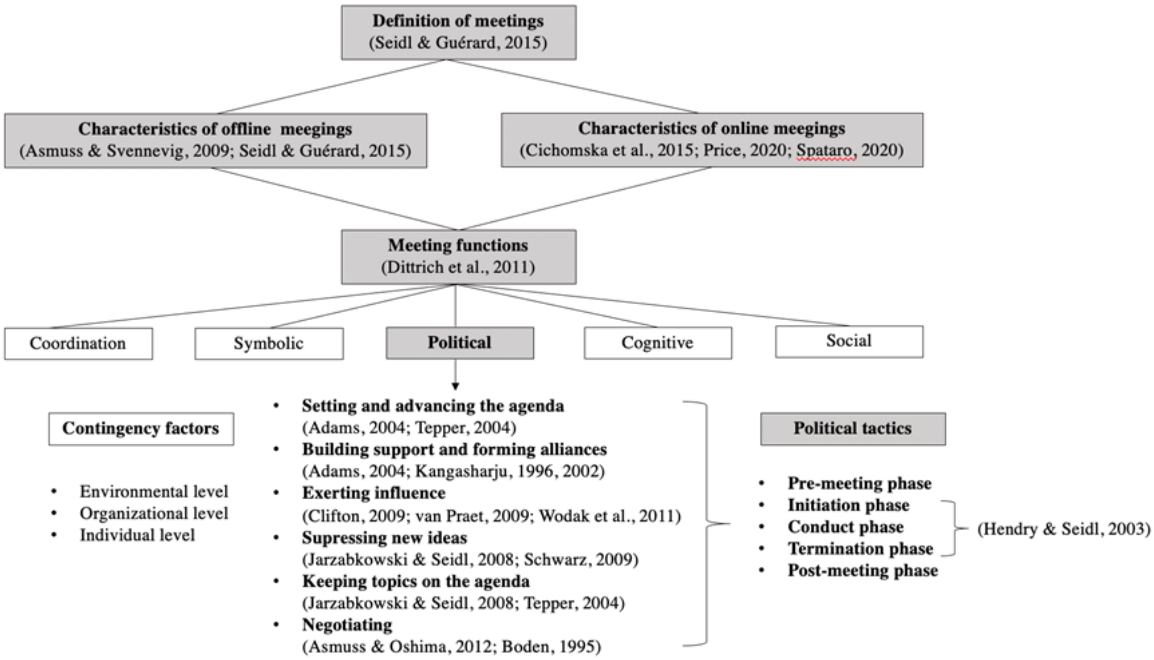

Figure 1: Overview of meeting literature; Source: Author's creation, in accordance with Dittrich et al. (2011), Seidl and Guérard (2015).

2015). For example, the chair of the group leader is often situated at the head of the table, which demonstrates authority over the other meeting participants (Asmuss & Svennevig, 2009). Furthermore, one could argue that a seating arrangement in which the chairs in the meeting room are set far apart could create a physical barrier between strategists and consequently lead to a more formal and distanced interaction approach. On the other hand, utilizing meeting equipment, such as whiteboards or flipcharts while presenting, is crucial for the nature of physical meetings (Asmuss & Svennevig, 2009; Seidl & Guérard, 2015). Hence, strategists may be better able to gain the attention and respect of their colleagues by standing in the front of the room and illustrating their ideas with physical tools. Another important characteristic to mention is the physical location where the meeting occurs (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008), as is further discussed below.

2.1.3. Characteristics of online meetings

Virtual meetings share many but not all of the characteristics of physical meetings. In line with the definition mentioned previously, they are also planned and episodic business gatherings where different forms of interactions occur (Seidl & Guérard, 2015). However, in comparison to physical meetings, those that occur over an electronic network involve other interaction forms and tools due to participants' virtual presence rather than face-to-face attendance. Meeting participants are no longer co-located in a physical room but rather linked online through the usage of audio, video and text. Suddenly, the office room and its furnishings as well as the location where the meeting occurs lose relevance while newly available tools gain importance (Cichomska et al., 2015).

There exist various platforms, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Hangouts, that enable online meetings. These online platforms are characterized by different features. For instance, employees can customize their backgrounds which allows them to stage themselves. A raise hand feature allows the moderator to control the discussion flow. Another important feature of online meetings is the team chat, which enables the exchange of files, information and ideas behind the scenes. Finally, meeting participants can either turn their cameras on or switch them off depending on the meeting occasion and mood (Spataro, 2020).

The new online format of meetings has advantages as well as disadvantages compared to physical meetings. On the one hand, it is argued that the meeting moderators are better able to control the discussion flow by privately texting other participants in the background. This backchannel conversation can therefore be utilized to encourage quiet participants to speak more and to inform more vocal people that they are contributing excessively. Such notes to other participants are not possible without being noticed in face-to-face meetings. On the other hand, electronic meetings are less personal. As a social species, humans are accustomed to seeing and reading the body language of other people, which is only possible to a limited extent in online meetings and assuming that the cameras are turned on (Price, 2020).

Virtual meetings have gained remarkable importance over the past few years. Increasingly, companies are conducting online meetings in addition to physical ones. Additionally, online meetings are often both less expensive and less time-consuming (Cichomska et al., 2015). Furthermore, the recent coronavirus outbreak has turned not only the world upside down, but also the way of strategizing. COVID-19 spread within a short time from person to person and thus from one country to another. When governments realized the threat, billions of establishments, schools, events and businesses were shuttered worldwide to avoid the spread of the virus. Hence, for companies, this meant that people were no longer allowed to enter their offices to conduct strategic work but had to remain at home, as the precautionary measures required (BAG, 2020). Consequently, firms had no other choice than to move strategy meetings online. Therefore, COVID-19 and the related shutdowns significantly accelerated the trend toward online meetings. Billions of people started working remotely full-time. The previously mentioned increase of per-day meeting minutes from approximately 900 million to nearly 2.7 billion corresponds to a 200% increase in online meeting minutes (Spataro, 2020).

2.1.4. Meeting functions

There are countless studies on meetings and researchers from various disciplines that have examined the characteristics of modern meetings. This has led to the lack of a universal theory of meetings; rather, many different concepts describe the role and dynamics of such business gatherings. Due to this large, fragmented stream of literature, Dittrich et al. (2011) conducted an extensive literature review in which they identify that meetings fulfill five purposes: *coordination*, *symbolic*, *social*, *cognitive* and *political functions*. Dittrich et al. (2011) call the first meeting function *coordination.* This relates to the administrative and organizational activities that occur during meetings, such as distributing information and planning the future of the organization. Second, meetings fulfill a *symbolic* function, which describes dimensions including rituals, social status and the legitimation of orders. Hence, this function is crucial for various actors to symbolically signal the established order within the organization. The third function describes meetings as a *social* practice that enables the establishment of relationships with colleagues and facilitates group affiliation. The fourth function is the *cognitive* function or the sense-making function because it relates to sense-making and critical reflection. Meetings are a sense-making device by providing a setting for the development of new idea and inputs. Finally, meetings can have a *political* function, as reviewed by Dittrich et al. (2011). This function describes the meeting participants' ability to take advantage of meetings by, for instance, asserting their own interests (Dittrich et al., 2011).

Dittrich et al. (2011) conclude that strategic work is influenced through these functions. Since the aim of this thesis is to analyze the relevance of power and politics in offline and online meetings, the political function is of particular interest and is discussed later in more detail.

2.1.5. Framework for studying meetings

To systematically study meetings as practices, Hendry and Seidl (2003) developed a conceptual framework by adapting Luhmann's social systems theory. From their viewpoint, strategy meetings and workshops are *strategic episodes* because they provide a "social mechanism by which reflective discourses can be pursued within the social system, but without necessarily disrupting the practices and routines by which that system is maintained" (Hendry & Seidl, 2003, 180). In other words, meetings are episodes that allow strategists to suspend and replace organizational structures for a limited period. The clearly specified beginning of the meeting enables them to switch off the context of the company while strategizing. The end of an episode can either be goal or time oriented in that the meeting ends when a specific goal or a predetermined time is reached. According to the framework, the distinct practices are be categorized into *initiation*, *conduct* and *termination* practices. The *initiation* phase describes the decoupling from the greater system of the organization. It must be decided who attends the meeting and which topics are included, such as which specific actors and issues are *bracketed in* or *bracketed out* (Boden, 1994). The *conduct* phase refers to the self-organization that is utilized during the meeting to conduct the meeting efficiently (Hendry & Seidl, 2003). Many studies have explored, for example, the phenomenon of turn-taking in meetings during the conduct phase (Angouri & Marra, 2010; Boden, 1994; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Schwartzman, 1989). As a kind of organizational form in discourses and conversations, turn-taking ensures that the discussion contributions are distributed among the individual participants. The *termination* phase relates to the conclusion and the recoupling act at the end of the meeting. Everything discussed during the episode must be taken back to the wider system of the company when the episode ends (Hendry & Seidl, 2003). Figure 2 illustrates the three meeting phases according to Hendry and Seidl (2003).

Contrary to Hendry and Seidl (2003), Hoon (2007) finds that that informal interactions around meetings are not less important than the more formal ones during meetings. For this reason, this author argues that it is necessary to extend the framework with a phase before and after the meeting. Hoon's (2007) findings are supported by Mirivel and Tracy (2005), who highlight that pre-meeting talk, which includes preparatory and work talk, can significantly influence the shape of the actual meeting. Further, Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) mention the importance of observing pre- and post-meeting talks to catch relevant intentions and opinions of participants behind the scenes. Given the importance of such "behind-the-scene-discussions" (Hoon, 2007, 939), this work seeks to extend the aforementioned framework by adding fourth and fifth phases, called *pre-meeting* and *post-meeting*. While the three meeting practices highlighted by Hendry and Seidl (2003) refer to the episodes of the actual pre-planned business gathering with an agenda, these additional practices neither have an officially planned agenda nor are they officially scheduled. Based on Hoon's (2007) definition of informal interactions around meetings, this author refers to these informal practices in the sense of information exchange by phone, mail or face-to-face in hallways and offices. It is argued that strategists can deploy informal pre- and post-meeting practices to influence strategizing. For in-

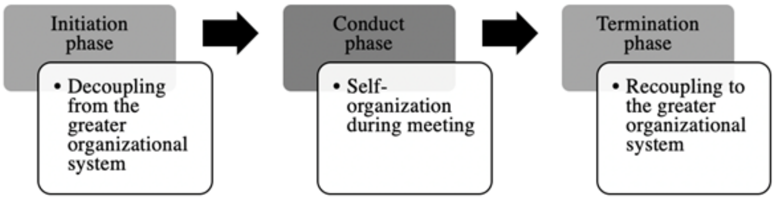

Figure 2: Framework for studying meetings; Source: Author's creation, in accordance with Hendry and Seidl (2003).

stance, spontaneous coffee breaks in the corridor of the office provide an informal platform not only for exchanging ideas, but also for cultivating business relationships and building collegial support, which can have profound consequences for the later outcome of the meeting. However, in this author's opinion, Hoon (2007) neglects the role of artifacts in her analysis of informal strategic conversation. One could argue that not only informal conversations, but also the way in which documents are prepared before the meeting and processed after the meeting can impact strategic work. Therefore, pre- and post-meeting practices not only include social interactions, but also document preparation and follow-up.

In sum, it is argued that the distinct meeting practices can be categorized into five phases, as the slightly modified conceptual framework of Figure 3 displays. This framework for studying meetings is a point of reference for the further analysis of meetings in this thesis.

2.2. Power and politics

Within this section, the need to integrate power and politics in the analysis of meetings is outlined. This is performed by first critically reviewing definitions and concepts of power. Second, various research findings on power issues in strategizing are presented, and a micropolitical approach is introduced.

2.2.1. The concept of power

The nature of power in organizations is ambiguous and often arbitrarily defined. Even in the literature, a general definition of power does not exist. Since the concept of power is difficult to determine, various perspectives of different research fields are presented.

In the late 1950s, social psychologists French and Raven (1959) conducted a notable study in which they define *social power* as the ability to psychologically change the behavior, attitudes, values or beliefs of others through the mobilization of the following five power bases: *reward, coercive, legitimate, referent* and *expert powers*. Hereby, the power of individuals and thus the ability to influence others increases with the strength of the respective power bases. Reward power stems from a person's ability to reward others by, for example, complementing, offering training opportunities or raising wages. Conversely, coercive power refers to the capability of mediating punishment. A person capable of rewarding or punishing others is in a superior power position and can thus make people perform tasks that they would not do otherwise. The third power base, legitimate power, is primarily based on an agent's hierarchical position within the organization. Basically, this type of power derives from an agent's perception that another agent is legitimized to exert influence over others due to an assigned or elected authority position. Consequently, this exertion of influence is often tacitly accepted by those whose behavior is indirectly determined. People with referent power tend to psychologically change others' attitudes and beliefs by respecting them and making them feel appreciated. Hence, referent power emphasizes identification, affiliation and similarity. The last base, expert power, originates from an actor's knowledge and expertise. An experienced person with considerable skills enjoys the respect and trust of others, which facilitates convincing them of certain ideas (French & Raven, 1959). A few years later, Raven (1965) added a sixth base to the power concept: *informational power*. This power base comes from possessing and controlling information that other actors need but only one actor has (Raven, 1965).

French and Raven's (1959) typology may be one of the most famous and most utilized power conceptualizations in research. Many power theories of mainstream management literature also assume that influence is exerted through the mobilization of power bases. Pfeffer and Salancik (1974, 1977), for instance, advance a model of organizational power by employing a strategic-contingency approach. They posit that power stems from the possession and control of "scarce critical resources" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1977, 4). Such sources of power include the control of reward and punishment, legitimate authority, control of and access to information, domain-relevant expertise, creation of credibility, contacts with superiors and the control of uncertainty, as has been mentioned by various studies in organizational mainstream theory (Crozier & Friedberg, 1979; French & Raven, 1959; Mintzberg, 1983; Pettigrew, 1973; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974, 1977; Raven, 1965). At this point, it must be emphasized that such lists of resources are far from complete since the inherent nature of power is not absolute but rather dependent on the context and its defined critical resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1977).

In social theory, however, power theories that conceptualize power as stemming from the possession and control of resources have been widely criticized. Foucault (1980, 1994), for instance, made a major contribution to power literature

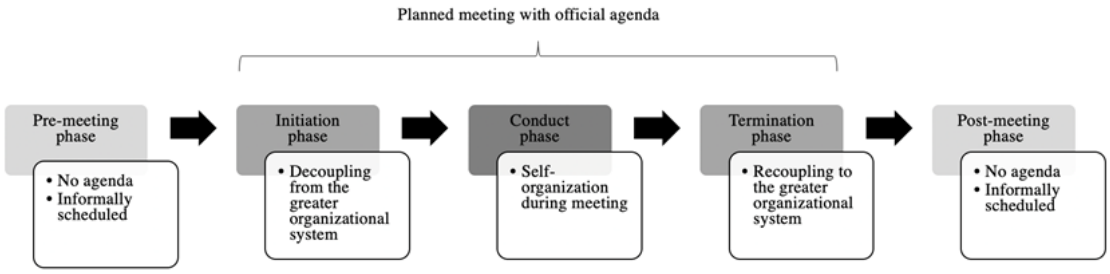

Figure 3: Extended framework for studying meetings; Source: Author's creation, in accordance with Hendry and Seidl (2003), Hoon (2007).

by introducing an *analytic of power* rather than another theory of power, in which he focuses on the micro-techniques of power. According to Foucault, power is significantly linked to knowledge and circulates through discourses that can be seen as a cluster of organized and coordinated relations Foucault (1980, 1994). In an interview, the founder of the discourse analysis mentioned that "power in the substantive sense, *le pouvoir* doesn't exist" (Foucault, 1980, 198). According to Foucault, power is not rooted in the possession and control of resources and cannot be defined by certain qualities but is rather characterized by power-knowledge relations at a certain place at a given time (Foucault, 1980, 1994). Foucault's analytic of power influenced other sociologists such as Giddens (1984), whose conception of power is based on a theory of *structuration*, also called the *duality of structure*, in which power is not conceptualized as a resource, a quality, or a position of certain actors but rather as a social factor. Consequently, in social theory, power is not only seen as something negative in the sense of suppressing or influencing others, but also as something positive that makes the dynamics of development and change possible through social interactions and practices (Foucault, 1980, 1994; Giddens, 1984).

As mentioned, there is no universality to the definition of power due to the wide variety of concepts with either negative or positive connotations. This author does not desire to eliminate one at the expense of others, which is why this study focuses on a broad definition of power in neutral terms. Hence, power can be a negative as well as a positive force to achieve goals in the sense that it

> concerns the ways that social relations shape capabilities, decisions, change; these social relations can do things and can block things unfolding. Power is ultimately about the choices that we make, the actions we take, the evils we tolerate, the goods we define, the privileges we bestow, the rights we claim, and the wrong we do. (Clegg et al., 2006, 3)

2.2.2. Power and politics in strategizing – A micropolitical approach

Authors Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) formulated in their introductory paper on strategizing five key questions that are theoretically as well as practically important for SAP research. The fifth question, "How can existing organization and social theory inform an analysis of strategy-as-practice?" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, 7), is of particular relevance for this thesis. The recent turn in strategy research is considerably influenced by contemporary social scientists such as Giddens and Foucault Whittington (2006). To analyze issues of power in strategizing, many scholars employ Giddens' (1984) structuration theory and Foucault's (1980, 1994) epistemological discourse analysis theory, which have been briefly presented above. In particular, Foucault significantly influenced the SAP discipline with the introduction of the discourse analysis to study power-knowledge relations. For instance, Knights and Morgan (1991) utilized Foucault's work to identify strategic discourse and strategy itself as power mechanisms by characterizing strategy as a discourse, which in turn constitutes a body of power-knowledge relations. According to their seminal paper, strategic discourse allows upper managers to rationalize their activities and to legitimize and to enhance their managerial power positions in strategizing (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Subsequent studies (e.g., Laine & Vaara, 2007, Mantere & Vaara, 2008, Samra-Fredericks, 2005) built on the findings of Knights and Morgan (1991) to further analyze power issues in strategizing. Laine and Vaara (2007), for example, not only note that different types of employees utilize certain strategy discourses to find themselves with new levels of power, but also highlight the role of resistance to uncover power dynamics in organizations.

As pointed out, there exist various studies that are concerned with power in strategizing. Nevertheless, Clegg, Carter and Kornberger (Carter et al., 2008; Clegg et al., 2004) argue that the role of power in SAP research remains under-researched, positing that "studies of power and strategy would advance our understanding of the practice perspective" (Carter et al., 2008, 93). Other authors emphasize that the SAP perspective pushes politics and power mechanisms into the background by focusing primarily on routine practices and techniques. They criticize the implicit assumption that practices are shared by various strategists, which indirectly excludes political behavior (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004). Motivated by this critique and referring to Jarzabkowski et al.'s (2007) fifth key question, Hansen and Küpper (2009) suggest integrating a micropolitical approach into the theoretical basis of the SAP perspective for a "power related contextualization of strategizing" (Hansen & Küpper, 2009, 24). From this perspective, it can be argued that organizations are influenced by politics, which can be described as "power in action" (Hardy, 1996, S3). According to Hardy (1996), influencing strategic work politically must encompass the following four power dimensions that integrate various aspects of the power theories mentioned above: *power of resources*, *processes*, *meaning* and *the system*. The first dimension integrates the mainstream approach (e.g., French & Raven, 1959, Mintzberg, 1983, Pettigrew, 1973, Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974, 1977), in which power stems from critical resources. By deploying critical resources, strategists influence the behavior of others, resist ideas and hence affect strategic action. Nevertheless, Hardy (1996) argues that power "restricted to the mobilization of resource dependencies" (Hardy, 1996, S6) provides an overly narrow conceptualization, so he suggests adding further power dimensions to analyze power and politics in strategizing. Therefore, the second dimension captures power that is rooted in decision-making processes and its underlying political tactics. For instance, individuals shape strategic work by indirect participation through the determination of participants and agendas. The third dimension incorporates power stemming from language, habits and symbols. In this dimension, strategists exert influence by legitimizing their own ideas and delegitimizing others (Hardy, 1996). This aligns with Pettigrew's (1977, 85) view that strategy formulation can be seen as a political process by defining "politics as the management of meaning." Later, Mueller, Whittle, Gilchrist, and Lenney (2013, 1191) contribute to the literature by indicating that sensemaking is a "political and power-laden process." Last, the fourth dimension resides in the power of the system, which can be traced to Foucault's work (1980, 1994) in which power is not considered to be an instrument of coercion and influence that individuals possess but rather as a positive, regularly embodied social phenomenon. In this sense, the fourth dimension excludes the idea that strategists mobilize the other three power dimensions to influence strategic work. The author of this thesis, however, agrees with Hardy's (1996) opinion that although managers may not be able to transform the system itself, they still deploy specific power dimensions to influence strategic work. Therefore, Hardy's (1996) fourth dimension — the power of the system — is put into the background and is not explicitly considered in this work. The three power dimensions in scope are summarized in Appendix 1.

Overall, this section has demonstrated that power conceptualizations do not necessarily exclude each other but can be utilized in combinations to study power and politics in strategic work. Strategic business gatherings are essential for shaping stability and change within an organization; therefore, *the exercise of power in meetings* deserves a closer examination. This is accomplished by comparing *political behavior in online and offline meetings*. According to the literature, it is necessary to dive deeper into the *political function* of meetings as identified by Dittrich et al. (2011). Altogether, a micropolitical view is integrated into the analysis of strategy meetings by conceptualizing meeting practices as routinized political behavior applied by strategists who act as *micro-politicians*. This perspective is based on Hansen and Küpper's (2009) paper on power. Political activity can, therefore, be utilized to advance personal as well as organizational goals, which is well in line with the neutral power definition of this paper.

2.3. A power-related perspective of meetings

The final section of this literature review combines the theoretical background on meetings with the notions of power and politics. The first part discusses the political function of meetings for a more comprehensive understanding of power and politics in meetings. The second part presents various micropolitical practices that have been identified in the strategy literature and thus serve as a basis for the empirical part of this thesis.

2.3.1. The political function of meetings

As previously mentioned, meetings have an inter-organizational political function which must be analyzed closely to capture the underlying power mechanisms in strategic work. Dittrich et al. (2011) reveal in their literature review that strategists politically utilize meetings to influence strategic work by *setting and advancing the agenda*, *building support and forming alliances, exerting influence*, *suppressing new ideas, keeping topics on the agenda* and *negotiating*. This section dives deeper into the concepts of power and politics by providing an overview of relevant research findings regarding these six dimensions of the political function of meetings. Therefore, it focuses on a wide range of papers outside the field of organizational research to illustrate comprehensibly how the political function of the meetings is identified.

Setting and advancing the agenda

Tepper (2004) analyzed the role of meetings as instruments of policymaking by determining whether strategic forums are important in "generating alternatives and setting agendas" (Tepper, 2004, 521). To answer this research question, he conducted an extensive literature review on nonroutine gatherings. Hereby, he identifies characteristics of meetings that serve a policy purpose, concluding that policymakers can utilize meetings as framing devices because they offer an opportunity to promote specific programs and alternatives (Tepper, 2004).

These results align with the findings of Adams (2004), who analyzed the sense in which public meetings encourage citizens to participate in policymaking processes. Contrary to his expectations, citizens cannot utilize meetings to directly influence the decisions of the government. Nevertheless, meetings offer citizens an opportunity to raise important issues and thereby to enhance their political power. Overall, Adams (2004) argues that meetings are a "tool that citizens can use to achieve political objectives" (Adams, 2004, 43). Overall, Adams (2004) and Tepper's (2004) findings suggest that strategy meetings can additionally be utilized politically by advancing a certain agenda and promoting interests.

Building support and forming alliances

Adams (2004) further finds that public meetings provide a venue for politicians to acquire support from the nation. Kangasharju (1996, 2002) reports that meetings provide not only a means for demonstrating and receiving support, but also for forming alliances or coalitions. According to Kangasharju's (1996) first study, such alliances are based on external factors, such as friendships, and are not necessarily relevant for the conversation itself. However, associations are consequential for the discussion when they are made visible to other committee members when both parties act as a team. Utilizing data from videotaped meetings of an institutional committee, she finds that the underlying interactive nature of meetings enables the spontaneous emergence of so-called "interactional teams" (Kangasharju, 1996, 291). More precisely, interactional environments, such as conflicts that arise in multiparty conversations, tempt participants to choose sides, which often leads to opposing groups that both establish their identities (Kangasharju, 1996). In a subsequent study on committee meetings, Kangasharju (2002) reinforces the importance of disagreements in meetings and the associated formation of oppositional alliances by highlighting that they are a "potentially powerful device which can be utilized to pursue important goals" (Kangasharju, 2002, 1460). Based on these findings, this author argues that team building before, during and after meetings enables collective action and opposition, which can considerably influence the power position of certain actors in the strategy-making process.

Exerting influence

Other studies report that meetings exert influence through the usage of power (Clifton, 2009; van Praet, 2009; Wodak et al., 2011). For instance, Wodak et al. (2011) investigated to what extent CEOs influence meeting outcomes by building team consensus in strategy meetings. According to the findings, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) positively as well as negatively affect the results of a meeting by deploying distinct discursive practices, as is further discussed below. On the one hand, leading managers hinder the formation of a general agreement. On the other hand, they are in the hierarchical position to control team interactions and foster team consensus (Wodak et al., 2011). Moreover, Clifton (2009) analyzed the extent to which not only managers, but also subordinates employ specific discursive practices to influence decision-making and thus the meeting outcome. In his study, influence is conceptualized as "a fluid process or set of potentials within teams" rather than a possession of certain meeting participants (Clifton, 2009, 60). It must be emphasized, however, that spontaneous and reflexive skills are necessary to exploit such potential and that certain resources are only available to superiors (Clifton, 2009). Finally, van Praet (2009) contributed to this dimension by exploring power relations at a British embassy. He analyzed to what extent ambassadors as political leaders utilize their central role in meetings to sensitize and legitimize the ideology they have developed. By following Goffman's interaction theory and applying a multiple data collection method, van Praet (2009) further finds that meetings are politically utilized by the central player to exert influence over other participants. According to the participants' perceptions, "contributing to the meeting is perceived as an act of obedience and commitment to the Ambassador's will and to the projected group norm of solidarity, participation and involvement" (van Praet, 2009, 93).

Suppressing new ideas

Another dimension of the political function of meetings is the opportunity to suppress new ideas from meeting members as outlined in Dittrich et al.'s (2011) literature review. Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008), for instance, observed 51 meetings in a university context to address their research question of how meetings are utilized to influence the stability of strategic direction, such as the stabilization of existing strategies, as well as to promote changes, such as the destabilization of existing strategies. They report that the person who chaired the meeting was to some extent legitimized to determine who may attend the meeting and speak during the conduct phase. Hence, the chairperson who was in favor of stabilization rather than destabilization of existing structures suppressed new ideas utilizing certain discussion modes. Further, the authors add that the chair could further strengthen the structural authority by devaluing other participants' proposed variations (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008). One year later, Schwarz (2009) contributed to the literature by conducting a longitudinal case study in which she also analyzed how strategy workshops are utilized to constrain strategy formulation. She concludes that workshop participants offer resistance and reject participation when they want to circumvent ideas developed by others (Schwarz, 2009).

Keeping topics on the agenda

Other studies find that meetings fulfill a political function in that they are utilized as a holding place. Tepper (2004) reveals that meetings offer an opportunity to keep certain items on the political agenda until a decision can be made (Tepper, 2004). These results align with the findings of Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008).

Negotiating

Finally, meetings serve a political function in negotiating, as identified by Dittrich et al. (2011). According to Boden (1995), however, everyday negotiations in business gatherings are defined as “sequentially structured rather as determined by relations of power” (Boden, 1995, 84). In his view, negotiation is framed through everyday language and talk. Specifically, actors construct conflict and consensus environments by utilizing certain linguistic devices (Boden, 1995). Asmuss and Oshima (2012, 67) further highlight the negotiation dimension by stating that meetings provide a venue for employees to constantly negotiate their positions, which they call “the negotiation of entitlement.” In their opinion, entitlement to make proposals and accept or reject them is not a predefined characteristic of meeting participants but is negotiated by interacting closely (Asmuss & Oshima, 2012).

Altogether, the six dimensions of the political function of meetings as identified by Dittrich et al. (2011) allow individuals to utilize meetings politically. At this point, it is important to mention that these dimensions do not exclude each other but are often combined.

2.3.2. Micropolitical practices in meetings

For a fuller understanding of how power is utilized to influence *strategic work*, this subchapter focuses closely on meeting practices that are applied by different *strategists*. Hereby, relevant research findings on meeting practices, referred to as *political tactics*, are outlined by dividing them into the five episodes according to the extended framework displayed in Figure 3. This method of analysis is motivated by Jarzabkowski and Seidl’s (2008) study, who applied the original framework suggested by Hendry and Seidl (2003) to study meeting activities.

Pre-meeting phase

According to the modified framework for studying meetings, pre-meeting practices include social interactions as well as other practices, such as document preparation. Hoon (2007) highlights the importance of “strategic conversations” (Hoon, 2007, 927) between senior and middle managers around meetings. Referring to Balogun, Gleadle, Hope-Hailey, and Willmott (2005), Hoon (2007) notes that such “back-stage activity can be understood as a preparation for front-stage activity and it is used to manipulate these front-stage activities” (Hoon, 2007, 945). These practices entail creating understanding and alignments as wells a making pre-compromises; they align with the second dimension of the political function of meetings — building support and forming alliances.

Kaplan (2011) further highlights the usage of PowerPoint as a powerful technological communication device. She mentions that the “connections between cognition and politics are unavoidable” when analyzing PowerPoint usage in strategic work (Kaplan, 2011, 343). Furthermore, she finds that so-called PowerPoint affordances that are accessible to different strategists are utilized for different purposes, such as setting the boundaries around strategic work and facilitating the negotiation of meaning through collaboration. In her opinion, such boundary work or cartography is politically relevant in deciding which topics are addressed in the decision-making process during meetings. Hence, she emphasizes that strategists who control which slides are included or excluded in the document can promote their own interests by highlighting specific ideas and providing direction (Kaplan, 2011). Based on her findings, it can be argued that documents are a power mechanism when they embody certain ideas that are generated and selected by actors in the pre-meeting phase.

With regard to online meetings, it is unclear to what extent people utilize events before the meeting to influence strategic work. Especially if, as during COVID-19, companies rely entirely on home offices, informal talks in the hallways before the meeting are no longer possible. Additionally, the collaboration for the preparation of documents is more difficult if the responsible persons are not in the same office but have to coordinate virtually. Nevertheless, careful document preparation may become increasingly important to set boundaries in advance.

Initiation phase

Switching off the organizational context is the critical aspect of the initiation phase, as previously introduced (Hendry & Seidl, 2003). Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) highlight the deployment of orientation practices to decouple meeting structures from the greater system. Furthermore, they reveal that meeting practices such as “bracketing participants in central location,” “setting the agenda” and “chairing” during the initiation phase can leverage the authority of upper management (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008, 1401-1403). In other words, an upper manager’s authority is physically as well as symbolically privileged if the meeting members assemble at a place chosen by the manager because upper managers are often situated at the central location while other participants are not. Furthermore, by setting and introducing the agenda, upper managers decide what will be discussed in the meeting, which significantly shapes the structure of the meeting (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008). These findings align with insights from the political studies that have been introduced above (Adams, 2004; Tepper, 2004). Finally, the authors find that upper managers who are frequently responsible for chairing the meeting further increase their authority by determining the meeting procedure of the next meeting phase — the conduct phase (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008). These results are supported by other meeting analyses outside the strategizing context (Angouri & Marra, 2010; van Praet, 2009) and especially express the first dimension of the political function of meetings — setting and advancing the agenda. In addition to the previously mentioned findings, the entrance of the ambassador — the political leader — as well as a potentially lengthy monologue to open a meeting are highlighted as power demonstrations. The leader’s powerful appearance and speech at the beginning of the meeting remind other participants of the manager’s superior position, which keeps other participants from speaking (van Praet, 2009).

With the increasing trend toward online meetings, the question arises whether power stemming from physical and symbolic authority vanishes when people no longer gather within the organization. If meetings are conducted online from home, then upper managers no longer determine the location. Conversely, participants are in their familiar surroundings, which may make them feel more comfortable. Furthermore, the opportunity to demonstrate authority through a powerful entrance and appearance at the beginning of the meeting is removed when meetings are held online. According to the author's view, online meetings could, therefore, leverage the power of other employees to politically utilize meetings while decreasing the power of upper management due to the loss of physical and symbolic authority. Therefore, it is important to closely investigate the power of orientation practices in the context of online meetings.

Conduct phase

Conduct practices are likely the most important meeting practices because they define the effectiveness of business gatherings, which significantly depends on self-organization (Hendry & Seidl, 2003). As mentioned previously, turn-taking as a type of organization in discourses is utilized by actors to determine which participant is allowed to speak at a given time. The author of this thesis argues that an actor who regulates the granting of the right to speak thus politically utilizes meetings. Especially in formal meetings, chairpersons are often granted the power to control the flow of the discussion by utilizing specific linguistic devices (Angouri & Marra, 2010). Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008), for instance, find that the chairperson can hinder the emergence of a new strategic orientation in meetings by appointing the speakers in different discussion modes, such as *restricted discussion*, *restricted-free discussion* and *administrative discussion*. Such meeting practices are political tactics and are represented by the suppressing new ideas dimension. Furthermore, van Praet (2009) concludes that leaders are likely to control turn-taking to enhance their central position during meetings. The author of this thesis questions to what extent meeting participants other than the chairperson are endowed with the authority and power to control turn-taking in conversations.

Wodak et al. (2011) offer similar findings by analyzing how CEOs politically utilize meetings by controlling team interactions and fostering team consensus. They describe five specific discursive practices that are likely to be employed by leadership to influence decision-making in meetings: *bonding, encouraging, directing, modulating* and *re/committing* (Wodak et al., 2011). Bonding refers to constructing identity and building consensus during team meetings. By utilizing sentences starting with *we* instead of *I,* chairpersons, on the one hand, accept and, on the other hand, avoid personal responsibility. Furthermore, those meeting members who have different opinions are often excluded from group thinking that could further weaken the leader's relational power position. Encouraging describes the chairpersons' relaxation of power insofar as they support the participation of other meeting members (Wodak et al., 2011). This author questions to what extent leaders indirectly exercise power by encouraging only selected participants to speak while discriminating against those with different opinions. Gathering selected opinions could thus strengthen the power position of leaders in a rather subtle and vague way. Directing is the practice of closing a discussion. For instance, chairpersons can utilize their authority to promote personal interests by not inviting other participants to more dialogue. Finally, modulating and re/committing are identified as practices utilized to invite other meeting participants to action. However, while modulating is utilized to stress the urgency to react, re/committing is more likely to remind others of their personal obligations to take appropriate measures (Wodak et al., 2011). Wodak et al.'s (2011) identified practices align with the political dimensions labeled as suppressing new ideas and exerting influence. Therefore, it is important to mention that the exercise of power can have negative as well as positive consequences on the meeting outcome depending on the combination of these five discursive practices. In a subsequent study, Kwon et al. (2014) identify the following discursive practices that leaders utilize to develop a shared view in team meetings: *equalizing*, *re/defining*, *simplifying*, *legitimating* and *reconciling*. In the context of power and politics in strategy meetings, it is necessary to emphasize the fourth practice — legitimating — as a potential micropolitical practice. In strategic discussions, strategists gain control through highlighting the relevance of their beliefs and underlying assumptions.

Further, Clifton (2009) identifies that specific *formulations* are a powerful mechanism for managers to close topics. As an implicative for the end of a discussion, managers can stop the emergence of further arguments that could threaten their decision. Such deletion of other voices and the related reduction of decision-making conversations, as identified by Clifton (2009), are exploited by upper managers to utilize meetings politically during the conduct episode in which decisions are made. Subordinates, however, can gain influence over decision-making conversation by "maneuvering the decision-maker into alignment" (Clifton, 2009, 68). Hence, meeting participants at lower hierarchy levels steer the discussion outcome into a preferred direction by gaining the vote and support of the chairperson or superior person by creating alignment (Clifton, 2009).

Fewer studies analyze the role of specific linguistic devices and bodily activities that underlie discursive practices during the conduct phase. Nevertheless, the display of emotions through tone or facial expression is a powerful political tactic because it generates different interpretations (Liu & Maitlis, 2014). Kangasharju (1996, 2002), for instance, finds that various devices are utilized to indicate affiliation or disaffiliation with other participants. *Repeating and paraphrasing* another speaker's arguments are employed to signal team alliances. Moreover, nonverbal behavior such as *eye contact*, *posture* and *gestures* not only indicate agreement or mutual understanding, but also disagreement and distance. Finally, the author mentions *smiling and laughter* as means of demonstrating affiliation (Kangasharju, 1996, 2002).

Clifton (2009) additionally finds that laughter can be utilized to exert influence. Liu and Maitlis' (2014) study is one of the first that uncovers the underlying emotional dynamics in executive management meetings and their indirect effects on strategic work. Thereby, they distinguish between the display of positive and negative emotions; positive emotions, such as *energetic exchanges* and *amused encounters,* strengthened team relationships, which in turn, led to more collaborative strategic work. Contrarily, the display of negative emotions, such as *discord interactions*, *recurrent confrontations* and *depleting barrages,* forced team members apart, which resulted in decision postponement and prevention of strategic actions due to missing commitment and consensus. Altogether, these systematic ways of signaling proximity and alliance or distance and opposition in meetings are interpreted as political practices.

Again, the question arises regarding the extent to political tactics change if meetings are online. For instance, turn-taking becomes a more powerful tactic in online meetings if the chairperson mutes and unmutes individual participants during the meeting. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent it is possible to control team interactions by utilizing specific discursive practices. Finally, if the cameras are switched off, then it is no longer possible to have eye contact and observe facial expressions of other participants. Kangasharju (1996) finds that alliances must be made visible to other members to be relevant for the meeting outcome; therefore, it can be claimed that it is no longer possible to form alliances during online meetings. Even if the cameras are on, reading facial expressions of other meeting members may become an issue and change the political usage of meetings.

Termination phase

As mentioned, termination practices refer to the dissolvement act of specific meeting structures by recoupling the process with the wider system of the organization. Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) identify various practices that are regarded as political when terminating a meeting: *rescheduling*, *setting- up working groups*, *voting* and *stage managing*. Rescheduling and creating working groups that carry topics from meeting to meeting are tools utilized to keep certain topics on the agenda until a suitable time. These practices express the fifth dimension of the political function of meetings — keeping topics on the agenda. Furthermore, voting is likely to be associated with the deselection of proposed strategic alternatives and could therefore be utilized by powerful strategists to eliminate them. In contrast to voting, stage managing is likely to be utilized to destabilize existing strategic orientations by increasing acceptability and legitimacy of new strategic initiatives (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008).

When meetings occur online, it does not seem to have a particular impact on these identified micropolitical practices. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to examine this in more detail in the empirical part of this paper.

Post-meeting phase

Post-meeting practices extend the framework of Hendry and Seidl (2003) by adding practices after meetings end; however, they are worth consideration for the analysis of how meetings are utilized politically. Accordingly, these types of practices are similar to pre-meeting practices, which have been discussed previously.

Overall, based on the existing literature, micropolitical practices in strategy meetings are categorized as discursive and orientation practices (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008, Kwon et al., 2014, Wodak et al., 2011) that are underscored and supported by linguistic and technological devices (e.g., Kaplan, 2011) as well as bodily actions (e.g., Liu & Maitlis, 2014). According to Seidl and Guérard (2015, 11), discursive practices are defined as the "patterns of saying and the discursive devices that people use," whereas orientation practices refer to logistic facilities necessary for successfully holding a meeting (Seidl & Guérard, 2015, 11). Additionally, meeting practices are constantly shaped by factors such as different cultures, values, beliefs, leadership styles, individual characteristics and personal skills as well as formal positions. Furthermore, the literature review of potential micropolitical practices in meetings provides clear indications that different power dimensions, as introduced by Hardy (1996), are active when analyzing political behavior in meetings. Hence, the relationship of different factors and power dimensions is analyzed in more detail in the empirical part of this thesis. In this sense, the purpose of this work is to close the research gap between power and meetings in strategizing by integrating existing organizational and social theory into the analysis of SAP.

Moreover, the analysis of political tactics has revealed that few studies in SAP research address the usage of technology in meetings. Similar to Whittington (2006), Orlikowski (2000) suggests, therefore, a "practice-oriented understanding of the recursive interaction between people, technologies, and social action" (Orlikowski, 2000, 405). According to Orlikowski and Scott (2008), approximately 95% of organizational research does not consider the role of technology while conceptualizing social and technological aspects separately and thus neglects the importance of technology in organizations themselves. Vaara and Whittington (2012) built on this argument by highlighting that SAP research must address the role of materiality systematically to capture the importance of material technologies, such as virtual meetings, in strategic work. Consequently, the way in which technology that is fundamental to contemporary organizations is utilized is not sufficiently explored from a practice-based perspective (Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

Given the theoretical background of meetings, power and politics as well as the need for future research, this thesis poses the following research question:

> How do strategists politically utilize offline and online meetings to influence strategic work?

Specifically, this thesis focuses on two aspects: On the one side, it examines how strategists mobilize different dimensions of power and rely on different power mechanisms to promote their ideas and gain control over meeting discussions. On the other side, it explores how strategists' political tactics are changing due to the increasing trend toward online meetings, as has been outlined. By comparing applied political tactics in virtual meetings to those in physical meetings, this thesis stresses the importance of focusing closely on the political function of online meetings from an activity-based view. To answer the research question, a case study based on PCIs is conducted, as is outlined in the next chapter.

3. Empirical Setting and Method

The previous chapter explored existing literature on power and politics in meetings; this chapter focuses on the empirical setting and method necessary to answer the research question. The first part discusses the motivations behind the chosen research design. The second part focuses on the data collection method by introducing PCIs. The last part outlines in detail how the data was analyzed, utilizing first- and second-order concepts based on a grounded theory approach.

3.1. Research design

This section provides an overview of the chosen research design. It highlights that political behavior in meetings must be analyzed from various perspectives, and justifies the determination of an appropriate research strategy. Finally, it discusses the selection of cases by presenting an overview of the research setting and sample.

3.1.1. Beginning phases of research

The focus of this empirical work is on strategists, also called *practitioners*, who utilize meetings politically to influence strategic work. Practitioners are the actors who perform and execute strategy. The practitioners' origins, their personal identities and the actions as well as practices that they choose are crucial to strategic work. The two primary groups of actors are upper and middle managers, as they are the prime movers of strategy. Since SAP research attempts to avoid the typical view of top-down strategy processes, various studies additionally focus on the importance of middle managers in strategizing (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Balogun and Johnson (2004) note that middle managers guide other employees toward new strategic ideas by making sense of strategic changes. Hope (2010) builds on this study and finds that middle managers employ specific power resources, such as special expertise, to politically influence the strategy change outcome. Nevertheless, there exists a rising criticism that practice-based research on strategy as well as power literature conceptualizes power as a commodity of upper managers while neglecting the potential abilities of middle-level employees to influence strategic work (Hansen & Küpper, 2009; McCabe, 2010). According to Hansen and Küpper (2009, 9), "strategies evolve in a micropolitical context and are the result of a negotiating process of micropolitical interested actors on all levels of the hierarchy." Hence, especially with regard to power in meetings, the role of middle managers has not yet been examined to the same extent as that of upper managers. Therefore, various researchers indicate that meeting practices should not only be analyzed from the perspective of upper managers, but also from the view of middle managers and other employees (e.g., Dittrich et al., 2011, Seidl & Guérard, 2015). Seidl and Guérard (2015) expect that specific meeting functions — here, the political function — differ significantly between higher and lower organizational levels because all meeting participants have distinct cognitive skills and resources that they utilize, which allow them to steer discussions and influence meeting outcomes (Asmuss & Oshima, 2012). Building on these findings, this author argues that it is important to analyze political behavior in offline and online meetings from various angles. Consequently, capturing different perspectives of upper and middle managers is crucial to investigate how strategists politically utilize meetings to influence strategic work.

3.1.2. Determination of the research strategy

To define a suitable research strategy that properly answers the research question, various methods were considered. The different research approaches, such as the analysis of archival information, histories, experiments, surveys and case studies, have their own advantages and disadvantages (Yin, 2003). According to Yin (2003), the following three key conditions determine the appropriate strategy: (1) *the formulation of the research question*, (2) *the degree of control that the researcher has over behavior and events* and (3) *the focus on contemporary or historical issues*.[1] This thesis seeks to answer a *how* question by aiming to analyze *how* strategists politically utilize meetings. Further, no control of the investigator over behavioral events is required to analyze and answer this research question, which eliminated the usage of experiments. Finally, the study of physical and online meetings is based on a set of contemporary events as opposed to historical events. Based on these conditions, the author considered a case study, which is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 2003, 13) to be the appropriate research strategy for this paper. Yin (2003) distinguishes between four case study designs, depending on *how many units of analysis* and *how many contexts* are studied. This study covers the analysis of people's perspectives about the political function of meetings from several companies, whereas each company is the subject of an individual case. Consequently, a holistic multiple case study design was applied. The motivation behind the application of this case study type is further outlined in Section 3.1.3.

[1] A clear presentation of the different possible research strategies according to Yin (2003) is found in Appendix 2.

Moreover, a qualitative research approach seemed to be suitable for the following reasons. In contrast to quantitative approaches, which objectively assess reality on the basis of considerable datasets, qualitative approaches analyze the complexity of a phenomenon more deeply from the perspective of the researcher by purposefully collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. Furthermore, qualitative research enables the researcher to formulate and build new theories rather than testing pre-existing theories (Williams, 2007). Since this work is about analyzing the political tactics of employees in the context of offline and online meetings, it makes sense to utilize a qualitative research approach so that the social phenomenon can be examined from the researcher's perspective (Williams, 2007), which allows deep insight into the individual case (Flick et al., 2000). In the literature that focuses on the political function of meetings, a wide variety of qualitative methodologies are applied. For instance, van Praet (2009) and Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) report results from ethnography, while Tepper (2004) conducted a case study. To study meeting practices, the majority of studies in SAP research utilize critical discourse analysis to analyze the written and spoken language in strategy meetings (e.g., Kwon et al., 2014, Wodak et al., 2011).

3.1.3. Selection of cases

To provide an overview of the selected cases, the following three parts present how access to the case study sites was gained and highlight relevant characteristics of the research setting and sampling.

Research access

Access to the case study sites was obtained primarily via accessibility to key persons, also called *gatekeepers*, as is likely to occur in qualitative research investigations (Merkens, 2000). According to Merkens (2000), gatekeepers are persons within an organization who are accessible to the researcher. Hence, the author contacted various acquaintances working in different companies that regularly hold online and offline meetings. At this point, it must be stressed that the researcher deliberately decided against conducting an in-depth case due to the following reason. If the selection of study participants is based on accessibility instead of selection criteria, then there is a risk that the research investigation will strongly depend on the accessibility to a single case and thus on the perceptions, motives and attitudes of the people working in the respective company (Merkens, 2000). Hence, the findings of this work would have been significantly influenced by the meeting culture and the workforce of a single company. To supplement and complete the findings, Merkens (2000) suggests extending the single case to a case group. Therefore, a holistic multiple case study design instead of a single case study design was chosen.

The selection of additional participants from each company was initially based on the snowball principle, a sampling technique in which the primary data source names other potential interview partners who possess research-relevant characteristics (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The gatekeepers of the respective companies thus were central because they were able to recommend and motivate people for interviews. However, the author carefully selected suitable candidates from these referrals based on the ongoing analysis of the existing data. More precisely, subsequent sampling was integrated with data collection and analysis, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss's (1967) concept of *theoretical sampling,* which is an established method of case selection in explorative-qualitative research design and contrasts representative random sampling methods. Thereby, case selection decisions are based on pre-developed categories and concepts rather than on preconceived assumptions and frameworks (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Consequently, no pre-determined sample of interview partners existed at the beginning of the empirical process. Conversely, interview partners were further selected according to the criteria of *theoretical relevance,* which states that the researcher only chooses comparison groups that enable the development of emerging categories and concepts. Thereby, the control over differences and similarities is a predominant factor (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since the goal of the thesis is the general exploration of political behavior in online and offline meetings, the most heterogeneous cases were considered. Hence, by maximizing the differences between the companies and the interview partners in the same group, the aim was to detect basic patterns to the greatest extent possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In theoretical sampling, researchers usually stop adding cases when no new insights can be gained, which means that the list of categories is theoretically saturated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the context of this master thesis, however, time constraints made the usage of *theoretical saturation* possible only to a limited extent. The next two sections provide a detailed overview of the companies — the research setting — as well as the interview partners — the research sample.

Research setting

Utilizing the snowball method, which started with gatekeepers, it was possible to gain access to eight companies. Five of these eight companies were finally selected for the study. The selection criteria that emerged in the course of the research process can be summarized as follows:

- Online versus offline meetings. For a careful comparison of online and offline meetings, it was necessary to choose only those companies that were already experiencing the usage of offline *and* online meetings.[2]

- Camera policy. To analyze the importance of physical and virtual presence, a setting consisting of firms with different camera policies was chosen.

[2]The usage of online meetings is not just temporary due to COVID-19.

- Company characteristics. Throughout the analysis, it became clear that there exist significant differences in the evaluation of power in meetings depending on environmental as well as organizational factors. Therefore, considerable care was taken to select companies that are as heterogeneous as possible to generalize the findings on political behavior in meetings. The selected companies differ in the economic and business sectors they operate in, the location of the headquarters, their annual revenues, the number of employees and their organizational structure. In particular, the different structures of the companies ensured that the results were not limited to firms having a certain hierarchical order.

Further detailed characteristics of the five case companies are provided in the table displayed in Appendix 3. It is important to stress that the role of companies is secondary in this work, as the focus of the analysis is on the perspective of upper and middle managers rather than the differences between companies. Therefore, the author refrains from significant elaboration on company characteristics.

Research sampling

As previously mentioned, the subsequent sampling was based on the principles of grounded theory. In the sense of multi-perspectivity, care was taken that only those people were chosen who were useful for the development of the theory. Hence, the sampling group within the same company consistently came from *two* different hierarchical levels. Specifically, each company's sampling group included one person having a *higher* position (*upper management*) and one person having a *lower* (*middle management*) position relative to the other. In all five companies, the relatively lower person directly reported to the superior person. Furthermore, the respondents regularly participated together in virtual and physical meetings. This allowed a direct comparison of the participants' perspectives on the political function of meetings.

At the end of the research process, five upper and five middle managers from five companies were interviewed to capture employees' perspectives about the exercise of power in meetings. The respondents differed not only with respect to their position in the company, but also with respect to their experience, age and gender. The number of persons either directly or indirectly subordinate to the respondents varied between two and 300 persons. Two women and eight men were interviewed; all were between 34 and 65 years of age and had between 1 and 30 years of experience in their respective companies. The research sample is presented in Table 1 and further documented in Appendix 4.

As portrayed, the interview partners comprised a wide range of employees working in companies with different organizational structures. Such a heterogeneous sample offered the opportunity to acquire an understanding of how different types of individuals politically utilize meetings and how actors from different hierarchical levels perceive the political function of meetings. Furthermore, the diverse sample enabled the researcher to make comparisons between two hierarchical levels within the same company as well as between different hierarchical levels across companies.

3.2. Data collection

According to Yin (2003), a carefully conducted case study should include several sources of information because each source has its own advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, Yin (2003) suggests triangulating data. The approach to multiple sources of evidence can be based on data collection methods such as documentation, interviews, archival records and direct observation (Yin, 2003). However, due to time constraints and COVID-19, which required personal contacts to be kept to a minimum, triangulating data was possible only to a limited extent. Hence, the main sources of evidence were interviews complemented by constantly writing notes regarding respondents' behavior as well researching company characteristics on websites and in annual reports.

3.2.1. Data collection method

Since this work investigates the political behavior in offline and online meetings, interviews were well suited as a primary data collection method because they enabled the researcher to inquire regarding motives for action and situational interpretations in a generally open form. Furthermore, interviews are utilized to capture and reconstruct the subjective perspectives of the respondents (Hopf, 1978). When deciding on the appropriate interview form, Hopf (1978) names three relevant factors: (1) *the openness of the questions and the respect of their sequence*, (2) *the concentration on specific constellations of topics, situations and questions* and (3) *the narration of the interviewed person*. Considering these three questions, this author chose a compromise between semistructured and narrative interviews, also called PCIs. Hereby, the researcher follows an interview guideline although the questions are open, and the sequence of questions is freely selectable (Hopf, 1978). The methodology of PCIs is widely utilized in qualitative social research and is traced to Andreas Witzel. It focuses on respondents' individual reflections, perceptions and experiences on a certain problem or topic — here, the exercise of power in online and offline meetings. PCIs combine inductive and deductive procedures. On the one hand, the researcher acquires a theoretical, scientific understanding via a literature review. On the other hand, a so-called principle of openness is realized by utilizing respondents' narratives to modify the more theoretical concepts (Witzel, 2000).

3.2.2. PCI instruments

Usually, four instruments are utilized to conduct such PCI: (1) a *short questionnaire*, (2) an *interview guide*, (3) the *interview recording* and (4) *postscripts*. In the following section, these four instruments are briefly introduced.

Table 1: Overview of interview partners; Source: Author's creation

Interviewee*	**Position of interview partner**	**Number of subordinate persons**	**Corporate structure of the company**
I.1A	Upper management	Direct: 25; indirect: unknown	Typical matrix organization
I.1B	Middle management	Direct: 7-9	
I.2A	Upper management	Direct: 7; indirect: 30	Decentralized organization
I.2B	Middle management	Direct: 5	
I.3A	Upper management	Direct: 6; indirect: 47	Matrix organization
I.3B	Middle management	Direct: 1	
I.4A	Upper management	Direct: 20; indirect: 300	Centralized organization (hierarchical)
I.4B	Middle management	Direct: 9	
I.5A	Upper management	Direct: 12; indirect: 230	Decentralized organization
I.5B	Middle management	Direct: 2	

*For each company, the person having a higher position is marked in dark grey and the person having a lower position is marked in light grey. For reasons of anonymity, no more detailed information is given.

Short questionnaire

The first instrument utilized for PCIs is the short questionnaire, which has two functions. It collects sociodemographic data from the interviewees (Witzel, 2000), and as Witzel (2000) highlights, a short questionnaire at the beginning of the interview avoids interrupting the flow of the conversation. According to Witzel, a question-answer structure during the interview itself can disturb the subjective views of the respondents (Witzel, 2000).

Interview guide

The second instrument, the PCI guide, enables the researcher to cover important topics by encouraging storytelling through certain communication strategies. The following four communication strategies are applied to stimulate a free narrative and concurrently structure the interview: (1) *preformulated introductory question*, (2) *general explorations*, (3) *specific explorations* and (4) *ad-hoc questions*. A preformulated introductory question opens the interview. This question should be as open as possible and cover a broad spectrum without focusing on specific problems. Therefore, particular attention must be paid to avoid a predefined direction in the conversation that could occur in a traditional question-answer game (Witzel, 2000). According to Witzel (2000), general explorations allow the interviewer to further explore the subjective perspectives of the respondents and to elaborate on the actual research question by requesting examples and prompting details. Specific explorations examine in detail what has already been said. The statements of the interviewees are reflected, questions of understanding are posed, and further perspectives are promoted through confrontation (Witzel, 2000). Finally, ad-hoc questions supplement the interview answers with the missing aspects that are important for the study. These are preformulated questions from the interview guide rather than spontaneous questions. Such preformulated questions ensure that the findings of the various interviews can be compared (Witzel, 2000).

The interview guideline utilized the SPSS method, as suggested by Helfferich (2011). These four letters stand for the German terms *sammeln* (English: collect), *prüfen* (English: check), *sortieren* (English: sort) and *subsummieren* (English: subsume). In a first step, the potential interview questions relevant for answering the research question are collected and compiled. In a second step, the questions are checked for suitability. Hence, unsuitable questions, such as suggestive and closed questions, are deleted from the list. In a third step, the remaining questions are sorted by topics and question types, such as open questions, questions for maintaining a topic and further as well as detailed questions. Finally, the questions are subsumed by placing them in the appropriate place in the interview guide (Helfferich, 2011).

Altogether, the interview guide for this thesis reflects the PCI type proposed by Witzel (2000) and the principle for guideline construction as recommended by Helfferich (2011).

Interview recording

Interview recording is the third instrument of PCIs. According to Witzel (2000), the interviewer focuses precisely on the conversation by recording the interview rather than writing notes. Moreover, it is common practice to transcribe the recording completely after the interview to facilitate the later data analysis (Witzel, 2000).

Transcripts complement the audio recordings by graphically depicting the different aspects of people's behavior (Kowal & O'Connell, 1995). Kowal and O'Connell (1995) distinguish between four types of transcriptions, which depend on the accuracy of the representation of these aspects. For this work, a standard orthography was chosen because this type is closest to the written language and thus facilitates the transcription of the interviews (Kowal & O'Connell, 1995).

Postscripts

Immediately after the interviews, postscripts are utilized to complement the recordings. Thereby, any comments on individual answers and on the atmosphere are composed to better capture respondents' subjective views. Furthermore, spontaneous ideas and first attempts at interpretation by the researcher are the basis for the later analysis and comparison of the interviews (Witzel, 2000).

3.2.3. Interview procedure

The procedure of PCIs compromises all four instruments that have been described above. Through the aforementioned SPSS principle, an interview guide consisting of four sections with predefined keys and further questions was developed. Section 1 welcomed the interview partners, clarified organizational matters and introduced the master thesis topic as well as the style of the interview.[3] Additionally, questions regarding sociodemographic and individual characteristics from the short questionnaire were posed at the beginning of the interview (see Appendix 6). The short questionnaire was important for reporting the heterogeneity of the research sample group. In other words, the interview partners were asked about their origin, their mother tongue, their age, their length of employment in their respective company and their current position as well as the number of directly and indirectly subordinate persons within the company. Section 2 built the core unit of the interview by inviting the participants *to tell* how they perceived the exercise of power in online and offline meetings. The following four open questions guided the interview:

1. How would you define power in meetings (positive, negative or neutral)?
2. What kind of power do you consider particularly important in meetings?
3. What are political practices that are utilized to influence the outcome of meetings?
4. What influence do contingent factors have on the exercise of power in meetings?

[3]Furthermore, all interviewees were made aware of the confidentiality agreement which was sent to them a few days before the conduct of the interview. The template of the agreement cais displayed in Appendix 5.

Furthermore, respondents were asked how their answers to these questions changed with the trend from physical to virtual meetings. These introductory questions began a narrative sequence in which the participants reported their experiences on power in online and offline meetings. This communication strategy, as suggested by Witzel (2000), was central due to the research gap regarding the exercise of power in online meetings. Furthermore, questions promoting details were asked, and examples were explicitly requested to explore the statements. By generating storytelling as well as requesting details and clarifications, new important insights regarding the political behavior in offline as well as online meetings were gained. Section 3 ensured that all important topics were covered and that the findings could be compared. As recommended by Witzel (2000) and Helfferich (2011), various thematic areas were added by writing key points or specific questions on certain topics, such as the meeting setting, different meeting episodes, power mechanisms and meeting types. These questions were only asked if the interviewee had not already answered them during the interview. At this point, it must be mentioned that the interview questions were adapted and expanded during the data collection process to include emergent and important topics, as recommended by Yin (2003). In particular, detailed further questions that were based on the statements of the preceding interview partners were added continuously. The final version of the interview guide, containing all further and detailed questions, is displayed in Appendix 7. In Section 4, the insights were summarized by the interviewer. Furthermore, the participants were provided with the opportunity to raise any important but not yet mentioned topics before concluding the interview. The interviews lasted approximately 50-60 minutes and were, in the majority of cases, conducted in German, which is the native language of the researcher as well as of the majority of the interview partners. Speaking German facilitated the flow of speech and understanding. Furthermore, 20 minutes were utilized immediately after each interview to write the aforementioned postscripts (see Appendix 8), as suggested by Witzel (2000). The noted inputs and ideas from the postscripts were consistently added to further interviews to obtain as many and comparable results as possible.

Due to the extraordinary situation of COVID-19, the interviews were primarily conducted utilizing Microsoft Teams or Zoom. This interview setting complicated the observation of nonverbal aspects for the interpretation of the answers, as proposed by Witzel (2000). Nevertheless, this interview procedure further underscored the importance of virtual meetings in today's business and research society.

During the subsequent transcription of the interviews (see Appendix 8), conversations during introduction sections as well as characteristics of the interviewees' behavior that were irrelevant for answering the research question were not transcribed. Furthermore, linguistic and paralinguistic peculiarities were omitted, as is usual for standard orthography, according to Kowal and O'Connell (1995). However, care was taken to ensure that no changes in content were made.

Moreover, linguistic and paralinguistic peculiarities central for further data analysis were reported in the postscripts. This procedure aligns with the recommendations of Flick et al. (2000) to transcribe only research-relevant data, as is the suggestion not to report subjective perceptions as objective measurements in the transcripts themselves.

3.2.4. Pretest

Before the interviews with the sample group were conducted, the interview guide was pretested for comprehensibility, logic in the sequence of questions, duration and recording possibilities (Meulemann, 2002). Particular attention was paid to whether the questions were formulated in a sufficiently open fashion to introduce new ideas that the researcher had not yet identified in the literature research. Furthermore, it was possible to test whether the majority of the questions in the interview guide could be answered within one hour and whether the quality of the recordings met all requirements. Finally, the pretest offered the author an opportunity to practice the interview in a familiar environment before speaking to businesspeople formally about the political function of meetings. The first version of the interview guide utilized for the pretest is found in Appendix 9.

The pretest revealed that some key questions in Section 3 were overly detailed. According to the test persons, narrowly formulated questions could prevent the emergence of new inputs that the researcher may not have considered before the interview. Consequently, the interview guide was revised. The key questions in Section 3 were formulated more openly, and the detailed questions were retained as backup in case the respondents did not provide sufficiently detailed information. Furthermore, questions such as "How does this political behavior differ between online and offline meetings?" were added to the majority of the sections to secure an explicit comparison of the political behavior in online and offline meetings.

Additionally, both test persons stated that it would make little sense to send the whole interview catalog to the participants in advance, especially as people from higher levels would not have the time to prepare proactively for questions before an hour-long interview. Moreover, both test persons considered a free narrative to be considerably important to gain interesting research findings. Therefore, a shortened list of questions was designed, which contained only the topic introduction and the key questions relevant for the thesis. The abridged list of questions sent to the interviewees two days before the respective interview is displayed in Appendix 10.

3.3. Data analysis

This section provides a detailed overview of the data analysis. It discusses the grounded theory approach and introduces the usage of first- and second order concepts. Further, it presents the different stages of the theory development of this work.

3.3.1. A grounded theory approach

Qualitative research has often been criticized for its lack of rigor because theory development is often based on the expansion of existing knowledge to gain new insights (Gioia et al., 2013). Gioia et al. (2013, 16), however, highlight that "advances in knowledge that are too strongly rooted in what we already know delimit what we can know." On the one hand, scientific standards must be met for theory advancement. On the other hand, more inductive approaches are necessary to gain new, valuable insights. To address both requirements, Gioia et al. (2013, 16) devised a "systematic inductive approach to concept development" by presenting data systematically in first- and second-order analyses, as recommended by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991). This thesis also utilizes first- and second-order concepts to categorize and interpret collected data; "first-order concepts are the *facts*" while "second-order concepts are the *theories* an analyst uses to organize and explain these *facts*" (van Maanen, 1979, 2). In SAP research, these concepts have widely been applied by various researchers (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004, Hope, 2010).

The evaluation technique utilized in the interviews depends on the objective, the question and the methodological approach. Qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2015) and coding in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) are thereby two frequently utilized methods. The latter, qualitative analysis in grounded theory as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is an open methodology in which data collection and evaluation are intertwined. In contrast to content analysis, there is no "royal road" to data categorization. This significantly complicates the procedure. Nevertheless, this thesis applied an open analysis due to the rather explorative character of the study. A general category definition, according to Mayring (2015), would have been overly restrictive for an insightful evaluation of the material and would not have been theoretically conclusive.

3.3.2. The constant comparative method

In grounded theory, the analyst can either code all relevant data before analyzing and constituting proofs for hypothetical propositions or generate theory by constantly redesigning the analysis without explicitly coding data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A combination of these two forms of analyses, called the *constant comparative method*, was utilized for this thesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 101). Hereby, theory is developed more systematically "by using explicit coding and analytic procedures" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 102). Furthermore, the constant comparative method involves a continuous comparison of data, codes, categories and concepts to build new theory.

In accordance with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method, the following outlines in detail how the transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed utilizing first- and second-order concepts. This author relied on specific coding techniques for qualitative data analysis, as introduced by Miles and Huberman (1984) as well as Strauss and Corbin (1990). For the sake of clarity, the procedure is presented in four stages, which, however, occurred in parallel. The data analysis process described below is graphically illustrated in Figure 4 and further documented in Appendix 11. All final coded interviews are in Appendix 12.

Stage 1: Provisional start list of codes

In the first-order analysis, raw interview material was reviewed by coding and categorizing the data. According to Miles and Huberman (1984, 56), *codes* are "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information during a study." As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984, 58), data was precoded by creating a "provisional start list" of codes with preliminary definitions to speed analysis.[4] In this process, the extended framework of Hendry and Seidl (2003) with the five meeting phases was a guideline. Further, the list was supplemented by codes and subcodes that related to a particular topic, such as contextual factors and power dimensions, or particular settings, such as online and offline or strategic and operational meetings. The list of abbreviations of the predefined codes was then imported into the MAXQDA software, which considerably facilitated the coding procedure that followed.

Stage 2: Comparison within a single company

By attaching the preliminary defined codes of the start list to chunks, such as words, sentences or paragraphs, each interview was first organized utilizing MAXQDA.[5] Furthermore, new codes were attached to interview statements that pointed toward political behavior in online and offline meetings. This rather inductive coding technique, despite the provisional start list of codes, allowed an open-minded analysis, which is in accordance with the grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967). Moreover, the actual words of the interview partners, which are referred to as *in-vivo codes* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), were particularly fruitful to gain insights into people's perceptions of power and politics in meetings. Throughout the analysis, particular attention was paid to the comparison of statements from the two hierarchical levels within the same company. Hence, the coded segments of the interviews within the same company were constantly compared to each other to reduce redundancies and to combine similar codes into one overarching code.[6] This coding technique aligns with Miles and Huberman (1984), who recommend constant redefining, adding and discarding of codes. Further, detailed codes that related to a particular theme or construct were clustered into broader *categories*. In the literature, this process of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" is called *open coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 61).

Stage 3: Comparison between companies

Once interviews from more than one company were coded, the constant comparison between the interviews from different companies began.[7] Hence, previously coded interviews were periodically reread and recoded to uncover differences and similarities. Glaser and Strauss (1967, 106) define an initial rule for the constant comparative method that describes this process: "While coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category." The comparisons within as well as between the different hierarchical levels and companies allowed networks of connections to be made, which is similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 96) notion of *axial coding*.

As the analysis progressed, the constant comparison of incidents allowed the researcher not only to reduce the number of categories to a manageable quantity, but also to develop specific characteristics of categories to generate theoretical properties, also called *higher-level concepts* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).[8] These concepts became increasingly integrated through further comparisons and thus provided the basis for the abstract second-order analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Finally, the wide variety of interrelated topics that were identified during the process were summarized in so-called memos, as Glaser and Strauss' (1967, 107) second rule highlights: "Stop coding and record a memo on your ideas." Hence, memo writing of interpretation ideas considerably assisted further comparisons as well as the *theory* development during the analysis.[9]

Stage 4: Delimiting and writing the theory

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, 113), "delimiting a universe of collected data" forces the researcher to spend effort only on the data relevant for the main theoretical categories and concepts. Hence, delimiting features were applied as the theory solidified and focused categories and concepts emerged. As recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the first level for delimiting occurred at the theory level by reducing and generalizing the terminology. This was performed by referencing the concept of power, which was introduced in Chapter 2.2.2. Specifically, the identified patterns and relationships were analyzed at an abstract level by referencing Hardy's (1996) power dimensions — the powers of resources, processes and meaning. This process was simplified by the provisional start list of codes, which differentiated

[4]The provisional start list of codes is found in Appendix 11 (see excel tap: provisional start list).

[5]The comparison between the two different levels within the same company is found in Appendix 11 (see excel tap: within).

[6]The final list of codes is found in Appendix 13 (see also excel tap of Appendix 11: final list of codes).

[7]The comparison between the different levels and companies is found in Appendix 11 (see excel tap: between).

[8]The final list of core categories as well as the higher-level concepts is found in Appendix 11 (see excel taps: core categories and concepts).

[9]The memos on the author's ideas are found in Appendix 11 (see excel tap: memos)

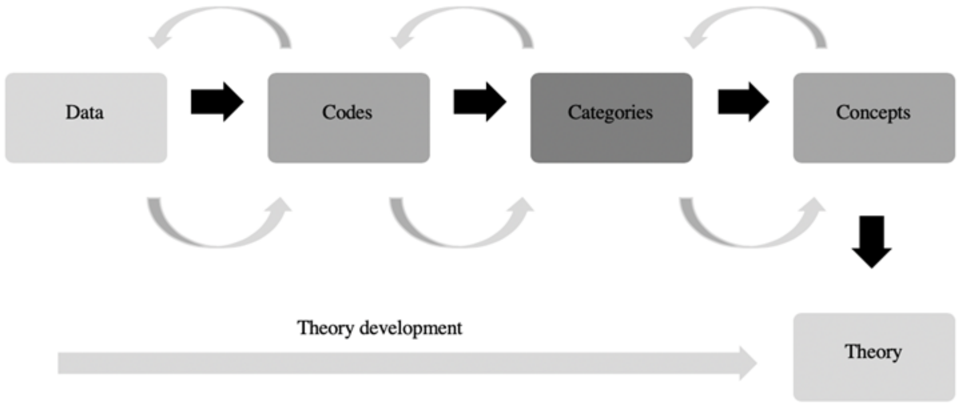

Figure 4: Overview of qualitative data analysis; Source: Author's creation, in accordance with Glaser and Strauss (1967), Miles and Huberman (1984), Strauss and Corbin (1990).

these power dimensions. The second level for delimiting concerned the reduction of the list of categories to eight main categories which allowed the researcher to dive deeper into the constant comparison of coded segments within these core categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach can be compared to Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 116) *selective coding* technique. Under the terms of grounded theory, coding for categories is further delimited when theoretical saturation is accomplished (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, only incidents that offered new insights were coded and compared as the interview analysis progressed. Furthermore, if new categories emerged over time that were not theoretically saturated, then the author recontacted the respective interview partner with specific queries.[10] Nevertheless, some questions remained open in the end, as the timeframe of this work limited the usage of theoretical saturation.

Finally, the grounded theory data was written on the basis of the reduced list of categories and concepts as well as the memos that were collected throughout the interview analysis.

4. Research Findings

As mentioned, collected data was organized utilizing first- and second-order analyses (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 2013; van Maanen, 1979). In the following two sections, the findings are discussed in considerable detail. Due to the fact that the interview partners had different views on strategy meetings, the next two sections first explain the exercise of power in meetings generally. Subchapters 4.1.3 and 4.2.3 are specifically dedicated to the exercise of power in strategy meetings.

4.1. First-order findings

The objective of the first-order analysis is to document and replicate the story of the interviewees as truthfully as possible (van Maanen, 1979). In this thesis, this is performed by quoting important statements from the interviews.[11] Although care has been taken to ensure that the analysis is as objective as possible, it should be noted that the first-order results contain relatively subjective elements, as they are based on the perceptions of only 10 interviewed individuals.

4.1.1. The evaluation of power

All interview partners were asked at the beginning of the interview how they would define power and what kind of power they considered to be particularly important in meetings. Overall, the analysis of the interviews reveals that individuals from different levels and companies perceive power as neutral, which aligns with the power definition of this paper. Power is utilized to lead and motivate a team as well as to make efficient decisions in the interests of the stakeholders and for the benefit of the company. However, power concentrated in one person — primarily due to a superior hierarchical position — can be utilized negatively by enforcing one's own interests.

> Es kann beides sein. Es kommt immer drauf an, wird sie benutzt, um persönliche Interessen vielleicht durchzubringen oder wird sie benutzt, um die Ziele des Unternehmens zu erreichen. (I.2B, Pos. 7)
>
> *It can be both. It always depends whether it is used to push through personal interests or to achieve the goals of the company.*

[10] For instance, people were asked about the organizational culture, as the analysis showed that the exercise of power in meetings is strongly related to the culture of the company.

[11] The quotes are presented in the language in which the interviews were conducted (black). For German quotes, the English translation is added in grey.

Of note is that the interview partners commonly identified various contextual factors as crucial for the meeting culture. It has been reported that contextual factors on different levels, such as the country and the company, significantly influence the political function of meetings. For instance, the interview partners of the two multinational companies headquartered in France (Comp. 1 and Comp. 2) stated that the rather steep French hierarchical structure, known for its top-down instructions, is also reflected in the meeting rooms of Swiss branches. In contrast, interviewees from Company 5 stated that the hierarchical "pyramid is disappearing more and more" since they "have clear proof that a hierarchical way of working doesn't work" (I.5B, Pos. 161). Hereby, it has been suggested that the corporate culture is particularly important for large and international companies to create a common basis among employees. Moreover, individual values and backgrounds further shape political behavior in meetings.

> Das ist eine französische Firma. Da ist vom Grundsatz her viel mehr Politics als bei anderen Firmen. Das ist einfach so. Das ist nicht einfach dahergeredet, sondern das ist so. Das heißt, Politics im Sinne von Top-down. (I.2A, Pos. 15)
>
> *This is a French company. There is a lot more politics than with other companies. That is simply the case. That's not just talking out of turn, that's just the way it is. That is, politics in the sense of top-down.*
>
> Und dort spielt dann die Firmenkultur eine riesige Rolle, weil das ist quasi dann der Konsens für diese 35 Repräsentanten und 35 Länder und 50 Sprachen und 19 weiß nicht was, um miteinander zusammen zu arbeiten. (I.5A, Pos. 17)
>
> *The corporate culture plays a huge role, because that is the consensus for these 35 representatives and 35 countries and 50 languages, and 19 don't know what to do to work together.*
>
> Aber ich glaube, es hat schon auch mit der Funktion, der Kultur, Headquarter, Nicht-Headquarter, auch ... mit dem Charakter eines jeden Menschen zu tun, inwieweit es der Person auch wichtig ist, Macht auszuleben. (I3B, Pos. 43)
>
> *But I think it also has to do with the function, the culture, headquarters, non-headquarters, [and] also ... with the character of each person, to what extent it is important for the person to live out power.*

As these quotes illustrate, the rather open interview style allowed the researcher to gain important insights not yet examined in the literature.

4.1.2. Applied political tactics

The following five sections, which are based on the five phases of the extended framework (Hendry & Seidl, 2003), outline in detail the reported applied political tactics in meetings. Thereby, the practices are discussed in the settings of offline as well as online meetings. Figure 5 provides an overview of the general identified political tactics in the five meeting phases.

Pre-meeting phase

Offline meetings:

During the interview process, it became clear that the pre-meeting phase is a central factor for utilizing meetings politically. Interview partners from both levels stated that self-management techniques are the lifeblood for successfully exerting power during meetings by causing one to prepare a personal set of arguments and written documents as well as answers to potential questions from other meeting participants.

> Man sollte ... gut vorbereitet sein und vielleicht auch einen roten Faden haben, eine Argumentationskette, mit der man da durchkommen möchte. Und hat dann so auf diesem Wege einen Vorsprung, der einen dazu befähigt, diese Macht durchzusetzen, das als Machtmechanismus einzusetzen. (I.1A, Pos. 19)
>
> *You should ... be well prepared and perhaps also have a red thread, a chain of arguments that you want to get through. And in this way, you have a head start, which enables you to enforce this power, to use it as a power mechanism.*
>
> ...dass die Vorbereitung auch ein Element ist, dass jemand, der bewusst steuern will, sich besser vorbereitet. (I.4B, Pos. 49)
>
> *Preparation is also an element ... someone who wants to steer consciously is better prepared.*

Additionally, people chairing the meeting can influence the meeting outcome by making key decisions in advance. Interviewees claimed that they make a conscious decision to set the strategic course of action prior to the meeting. Hence, by setting the agenda, selecting the participants and defining the intended objectives and outcomes of the meeting, they steer the subsequent discussion in their preferred direction and thus limit the exercise of power by other meeting participants.

> Man hat seine eigene Agenda und sagt: 'Ich möchte jetzt ein Meeting und das ist die Agenda.' Man fragt den anderen nicht .... Also da schränkt man schon mal den Meeting Scope, die Ziele, schon mal sehr stark ein. (I.2A, Pos. 19)
>
> *You have your own agenda, and you say, 'I want a meeting now, and this is the agenda.' You don't ask the other person .... So, you cut down the meeting scope and the goals.*

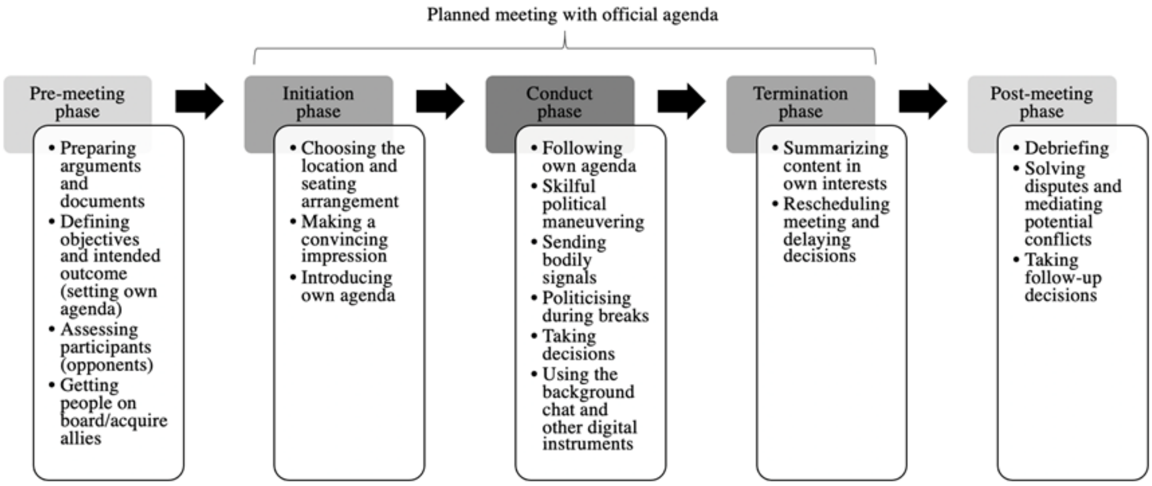

Figure 5: Overview of applied political tactics in different meeting phases; Source: Author's creation.

> . . . Berufung von Experten oder Einberufung von Experten ins Meeting, wenn man in einem meritokratischen Umfeld arbeitet, ist es nämlich auch wirkungsvoll, wenn man einen Technokraten, jemand, der das Thema voll durchdringt, reinbringt, der hat eine hohe Believability und kann möglicherweise den Kurs, ohne eine Stimme zu haben in der Abstimmung, gänzlich steuern. (I.5A, Pos. 33)
>
> *If you are working in a meritocratic environment, it is also effective to bring in a technocrat, someone who is fully engaged in the subject, who has a high degree of credibility and can possibly steer the course without having a voice in the vote.*

Moreover, interview partners from upper management levels especially saw the prior assessment of other meeting participants as important. According to these managers, a so-called key stakeholder matrix is crucial to anticipate the positions, interests, values and cultures of others. Doing this allows them to neutralize potential opponents in advance and to adapt accordingly during the meeting.

> Du musst dir sehr klar Gedanken machen, wenn du Widerstand hast vor einem Meeting, wo du ein Ziel erreichen möchtest, wie teilst du die Key Stakeholder ein? Also sind das Unterstützer, sind das eher Neutrale oder sind das Gegner? Das ist das klassische Schema. (I.2A, Pos. 74)
>
> *You have to think clearly: if you have resistance before a meeting where you want to achieve a goal, how do you divide the key stakeholders? So, are they supporters, are they rather neutral or are they opponents? It's the classic pattern.*
>
> Position und Interesse, wenn wir das jetzt so sagen wollen. Auf jeden Fall, dass man vorher antizipiert, was denn die anderen tun werden in dem Meeting und sich darauf ein paar eigene Argumente zurechtlegt. (I.1A, Pos. 27)
>
> *You have to know their positions and interests. In any case, anticipate what the others will do in the meeting and make your own arguments.*

Of note is that interview partners from the relatively lower level reported that the predominantly important political tactic is to acquire allies by starting a convincing process before the scheduled meeting occurs.

> There's always a preparation phase, where you make sure that all the people in the room will be in agreement with you in advance, and there will be no surprises or discussions. So, this is one of the most used tactics. (I.5B, Pos. 13)
>
> Mehrheiten zu gewinnen, dass man sich vielleicht vor dem Meeting bereits abstimmt mit den Parteien, die daran teilnehmen, damit man mit Sicherheit weiß, dass im Meeting selber die eigene Meinung unterstützt wird. (I.2B, Pos. 11)
>
> *To win majorities, . . . perhaps before the meeting, you coordinate with the parties that are participating, so that you know for sure that your own opinion is supported during the meeting itself.*

It is important to mention that middle and upper managers influence and motivate people to form alliances, generate support and align interests differently across companies. For instance, while interview partners from one company (e.g., Comp. 1) stated that they neutralize opponents in informal discussions over lunch or coffee breaks, others stated that they conduct convincing work in more formal, one-on-one meetings before the actual meeting occurs (e.g., Comp. 4 and Comp. 5).

Online meetings:
If meetings are held online, then the aforementioned political practices of the pre-meeting phase are utilized differently. Due to the setting and a greater social distance between meeting participants, some tactics become ineffective while other tactics become more important. As expected, both assessing the interests of key stakeholders and getting people on board by generating support and forming alliances becomes more difficult with an online setting.

> Diese berühmte Unterscheidung zwischen Position und Interesse finde ich online viel schwieriger . . . (I.1A, Pos. 163)
>
> *I find this famous distinction between position and interest much more difficult online.*
>
> Weil alles was so informell läuft in der Firma, also nicht öffentlich, was nicht über Kommunikation weitergegeben wird, das hörst du an der Kaffeeecke, beim Mittagessen. Und das fehlt natürlich. Die sozialen Kontakte fehlen auf jeden Fall. (I.1B, Pos. 31)
>
> *Because everything that happens so informally in the company, i.e., not in public, that is not passed on through communication; you can hear that at the coffee corner, at lunch. And that's missing, of course. Social contacts are definitely missing.*

Additionally, if pre-meetings for online meetings are not explicitly and officially scheduled, then participants consciously avoid the convincing process by not being available prior to the meeting. This tactic limits the exercise of power by other participants.

> You need to schedule the meeting and make sure that the time slot is available. It's not that you cross someone in the office now. (I.5B, Pos. 29)
>
> Unsere Kommunikation findet eher über E-Mails oder ein zusätzliches Meeting in dem Sinn statt. Wenn jetzt die Person physisch im gleichen Office wäre, dann wäre es vielleicht einfacher, man trifft sich einfach auf einen Kaffee und geht gemeinsam Essen. (I.2B, Pos. 57)
>
> *Our communication is more likely to take place via email or an additional meeting in that sense. Now, if the person was physically in the same office, it might be easier to just meet for coffee and have lunch together.*
>
> They do not engage in this [type of] chat; it's a quick chat about personal things. Because they want to keep the distance so they do not show their weaknesses, I would say. Showing your personal things is . . . showing your weaknesses. And I've seen many people putting this big distance in the meetings to be perceived as more powerful. (I.5B, Pos. 121)

Thus, during the interviews, it became clear that power mechanisms based on the exploitation of social relationships and contacts must be compensated with better self-preparation if one aims to utilize meetings politically.

> Ich kann mich auf ein Online-Meeting mehr schriftlich vorbereiten und das auch ausnutzen. Ich glaube aber, dass es das auch braucht . . . (I.1A, Pos. 37)
>
> *I can prepare for an online meeting more in writing and take advantage of that. But I believe that it needs this.*

Comparing the aforementioned political practices in the pre-meeting phase of offline and online meetings, it can be concluded that the trend toward online meetings implies a shift from acquiring allies to better self-management techniques and preparation practices to utilize meetings politically.

Initiation phase

Offline meetings:
During the initiation phase, in which the organizational context is switched off, various political practices are applied to demonstrate power relations and highlight role allocations. First, upper managers from different companies reported that they may deliberately choose their own office as a meeting location to make a statement and signal that they are in a higher position. Furthermore, interviewees who are not part of upper management teams stated that the seating arrangement in the physical room is utilized to visualize power relations.

> Aber es ist schon noch sehr klassisch, dass am Kopfende eigentlich der Chef sitzt. Und das hat man eben im virtuellen Raum nicht. (I.3B, Pos. 25)
>
> *But it is still classic that the boss is actually sitting at the head end. And you don't have that in virtual space.*

Nevertheless, even if the choice of the meeting place as well as the seating arrangement are important tactics for employees in upper management positions, it is important to highlight that this political tactic considerably depends on ones' personality, as the following quote states.

> Die Sitzung findet beim Mächtigeren statt . . . , das findet man in den meisten Unternehmen als Ausgangslage, Basis. Jetzt gibt es Gründe, um von dem abzuweichen . . . . Und das hängt etwas mit den persönlichen Präferenzen zusammen. Es gibt solche Autoritätspersonen, die sagen: 'Ich gehe zum Tiefergestellten, um eben dieses Machtgefälle etwas zu nivelliere.' (I.5A, Pos. 73)

The meeting takes place where the more powerful person is . . . , which is in most companies a starting point, a basis. Now there are reasons to deviate from that. . . And that has something to do with personal preferences. There are such authority persons who say, 'I'm going to the lower level, to level out the power difference.'

Second, the impression that strategists provide at the beginning of the meeting by having a strong appearance or a powerful speech is significantly important to secure one's position and to gain other meeting participants' support. This political tactic is typically applied by people from the upper management level because they want to signal their hierarchical position and legitimate authority to exercise power.

> Was auch recht häufig kommt, ist das plakativ gleich am Anfang mal reinkommen und sagen: 'Wir müssen da und da hinkommen.' Sowieso die Formulierung 'wir MÜSSEN irgendwas.' (I.1A, Pos. 107)
>
> *What also happens quite often is the bold way of coming in right at the beginning and saying, 'We have to get there and there.' Anyway, the phrase 'we HAVE to do something.'*
>
> Das ist auch Machtausübung, dass man nicht in Time ist, sondern ganz bewusst, fünf, sieben Minuten später kommt. Ja, ich bin der Stärkere, ich bin der Chef, ich darf das. (I.2A, Pos. 23)
>
> *That's also exercising power, that you're consciously not on time, but you come five, seven minutes later. Yes, I'm the strongest, I'm the boss, I'm allowed to do it.*

Third, participants identified that not only are setting the agenda and defining objectives in the pre-meeting phase crucial to limit the power of others, but also essential are communicating the agenda and the goal of the meeting at the beginning. No matter which hierarchical level the person belongs to, introducing the agenda and chairing the meeting provide an opportunity to lead. Hence, if one's agenda is to suppress the ideas of others and reach a specific goal, then this becomes clear by stating the intended outcomes and not inviting other participants to raise their opinions throughout the meeting.

> . . . was ist die Zielsetzung und ich gebe den Rahmen, in welchem ich über Strategie . . . sprechen will und bereit bin dazu. Und das ist wichtig, das ist nämlich eine Machtausübung meinerseits, indem ich hingehe und sage: 'Das ist der Rahmen.' (I.5A, Pos. 23)
>
> *What is the objective, and I give the framework in which I want to talk about strategy . . . and I am prepared to do so. And that is important because that is an exercise of power on my part, by going and saying, 'That is the framework.'*

Online meetings:
In virtual meetings, the aforementioned political tactic of introducing the agenda in one's interests is the same. However, the exercise of power by utilizing certain symbols loses much of its importance. On the one hand, superiors no longer have the ability to choose the meeting location, which may lessen the appearance of their authority. On the other hand, one's physical appearance no longer implicitly symbolizes power over the conduct of the meeting.

> And when you had to go to an important meeting . . . having a bright color or the way you were wearing the clothes was super important. Now with the trend toward online meetings, this has completely disappeared. . . It's not important anymore. Why? Before it was an important symbol of power. (I.5B, Pos. 57)

Generally, it was found that exercising power in the initiation phase is more challenging in online than in offline meetings because symbols of power cannot be deployed to the same extent.

Conduct phase

Offline meetings:
During this phase, power can be exercised by following one's own agenda strictly. Hence, the person who sets and introduces the agenda controls the flow of the discussion according to personal interests by following the pre-defined agenda.

> Wenn ich persönlich irgendeine eigene Agenda habe und ich muss sie durchbekommen, dann würden wir das sicher auch als politisches Handeln bezeichnen, wenn ich dann meine Macht nutze, um Leute zu überstimmen oder mit verschiedensten Mitteln . . . zu beeinflussen. (I.1A, Pos. 13)
>
> *If I have a personal agenda, and I have to get it through, then we would certainly call it political action when I use my power to outvote people or influence them by various means.*
>
> Dann das Meeting relativ straff führen in dem Sinne, dass jeder eine kurze Sprechzeit hat. (I.2A, Pos. 45)
>
> *Then [I would run] the meeting relatively tightly in the sense that everyone has a short speaking time.*

It is important to mention that turn-taking is not utilized to the extent expected. In particular, upper managers stated that the implicit exercise of power through skillful and strategic maneuvering is more central to following a personal agenda. Specifically, asking clever questions, encouraging certain people to state their opinions and interrupting others advances one's own interests. One person from a relatively higher position further claimed to consciously allow another person to lead the meeting, knowing that this person is well accepted by the opponents and has already neutralized them in advance.

> Was aber auch vorkommt ... dass jemanden nicht aussprechen lassen oder nicht zu Wort kommen lassen, unterbrechen, in das Wort fallen. (I.1A, Pos. 113)
>
> *What also happens is that you don't let someone speak, or don't let them speak, interrupt, fall into the word.*
>
> So sometimes you show power in the way you ask [for] reactions from them; you're not asking them for feedback, you're just asking them, [and] their action is to embrace it. And you close the opportunity to give feedback if it's what you want. (I.5B, Pos. 171)
>
> Und ich überlasse ihm die Diskussion mit diesem Gegner, den er hoffentlich schon vorher getroffen hat, dass er schon gar nicht mehr Gegner ist. (I.2A, Pos. 76)
>
> *And I leave him to discuss with this opponent, whom I hope he has met before, [so] that he is no longer an opponent at all.*

Interestingly, writing the meeting minutes in one's interests to utilize meetings politically is not a common tactic in the majority of the companies because meeting minutes are usually reviewed and double-checked. However, both upper and middle managers from Company 4 were of a different opinion.

> Und weil ja meistens der Meeting Chair oder Prozess Manager die Meeting Minutes schreibt, kann man dort relativ stark noch beeinflussen, was dort steht. (I.4A, Pos. 113)
>
> *And because it is usually the meeting chair or process manager who writes the meeting minutes, you can still influence what is written there.*
>
> Die Machtausübung kommt eigentlich mit dem Protokoll, weil das Protokoll am Schluss maßgeblich ist. (I.4B, Pos. 99)
>
> *The exercise of power actually comes with the protocol, because the protocol is decisive in the end.*

Skillful political maneuvering by utilizing certain formulations and tactics is underscored by linguistic and bodily signals. By consciously choosing the tone of voice and being in command of the meeting language — being a native speaker — certain persons can maneuver others into alignment. Additionally, sending bodily signals is often utilized by various practitioners to influence the behavior of others.

> ... dann gibt es jemanden, der sich sehr eloquent im Englischen ausdrücken kann, macht natürlich auch etwas aus. Dann hört man eher der Person zu, so dass sie eben steuern kann, wenn sie will. (I.4B, Pos. 31)
>
> *Then there is someone who can express himself eloquently in English; of course it makes a difference. Then you listen more to the person, so that he or she can steer when they want to.*
>
> ... dann sind da sehr viele körpersprachliche Signale, die da auch natürlich mitspielen, die physisch im gleichen Raum sehr viel steuern können bei den Leuten. (I.4B, Pos. 23)
>
> *There are a lot of bodily signals that naturally play a part in this, which can physically control a lot of people in the same room.*

A further political tactic that is commonly applied by upper managers is to exploit the hierarchically superior position to make decisions alone or to deliberately block certain decisions. However, it is important to mention that the power that stems from decision-making processes is often perceived as a positive form of power since greater efficiency is achieved when a specific person is in charge of deciding.

> Wenn er einfach keine Lust hat, aus hierarchischer Sicht entscheidet er. (I.2B, Pos. 17)
>
> *If he just doesn't feel like it, he decides from a hierarchical standpoint.*
>
> Natürlich, wenn es einen Entscheid braucht, dann muss klar sein, dann habe ich die Macht. Ich entscheide schlussendlich. Es gibt keinen Konsensentscheid ... (I.2A, Pos. 33)
>
> *Of course, if it needs a decision, it must be clear, then I have the power. I make the final decision. There is no consensus decision.*

Finally, meetings are utilized politically by politicizing during breaks. According to upper and middle managers, breaks are often employed to form alliances, obtain support, negotiate meeting topics as well as approach and gently admonish participants to back off when they are overly confident in expressing their personal opinions during the meeting.

> Und wiederum andere verziehen sich kurz und begegnen sich 'zufällig' dann, um kurz bilateral abzusprechen. Und eben versuchen, so Allianzen zu bilden. (I.3A, Pos. 101)
>
> *And others again leave for a short time and meet 'by chance' to discuss things bilaterally. This way they try to form alliances.*

Online meetings:
When meetings are conducted online, physical aspects are completely lost if cameras are switched off and to some extent are lost when cameras are switched on.

> Wenn ich an einen Kollegen denke, der es liebt, sich ausbreiten, seine Sachen zu positionieren und sein neues Mobiltelefon hinzulegen, all solche Signale sendet man ... im Kopfausschnitt weniger, als wenn man sich seinen Raum nimmt, sich ausbreitet und auch etwas demonstriert. (I.3B, Pos. 25)
>
> *When I think of a colleague who loves to spread out, arrange his things and put his new cell phone down, all such signals are sent less with online meetings where you can only see the face than when you take your space in a physical room, spread out and also demonstrate something.*
>
> You can easily see across a screen with 20 people if they are happy with what you're commenting, or they are not happy, or they have a comment, they have a question, they want to talk. It's easier to manage. (I.5B, Pos. 87)

Therefore, all interview partners agreed that the exercise of power now occurs primarily through appropriately choosing arguments and utilizing conscious formulations.

> So now everything comes down to the conversation, and what ... you bring to the conversation. You need to think more about the verbal part of the meeting, rather than all the other aspects, like position, clothing, ... so attitude and the verbal expression gets more important. (I.5B, Pos. 59)
>
> Die Wahl der Worte im Online-Meeting ist sogar noch wichtiger, weil einfach durch die Technik der Klang der Stimme sowieso verfälscht wird. (I.2B, Pos. 105)
>
> *The choice of words in an online meeting is even more important because simply by the technology the sound of the voice is distorted anyway.*
>
> Das spürt man schon auch bei Leuten, die sprachlich gewandt sind, dass denen von Vorherein mehr Macht gegeben wird, weil der Ausdruck sehr viel Bedeutung hat . . . Vor allem die klare Aussprache, also die Deutlichkeit ist im virtuellen Raum von Wichtigkeit. (I.3B, Pos. 43-45)
>
> *You can feel that more power is given to people who are linguistically adept, because the expression has a great deal of meaning... Above all, clear pronunciation, i.e., clarity, is important in virtual space.*

Interview partners further stated that meeting participants are less attentive in online meetings. In particular, the lack of a visual image decreases people's awareness, which can be exploited by certain actors and enhances their decision-making power.

> Und das ist sehr gefährlich, weil die Leute sind nicht wirklich hundert Prozent anwesend, es werden Entscheidungen getroffen und plötzlich merkt man, ups, da hätte ich etwas anders machen sollen. (I.2B, Pos. 39)
>
> *And that's dangerous, because people aren't really 100% there. Decisions are being made, and suddenly you realize, oops, I should have done something different.*

Nevertheless, the interview partners commonly thought that exercising power is more difficult in online meetings when people are inattentive because the virtual setting implies a distance between the meeting participants, which in turn, decreases the control over the flow of discussion and people. Consequently, interview partners from different levels perceived that encouraging a structured conversation by following the agenda is a promising tactic to further exercise power in online meetings.

> There's a lot of chance that they are not listening to what you're saying. And you cannot control that. (I.5B, Pos. 157)
>
> Das Klügste wäre, ich würde sagen: 'So, jetzt hören wir uns mal den an, dann die.' (I.1A, Pos. 49)
>
> *The smartest thing to do would be to say, 'Let's hear this person, then this person.'*

Furthermore, the majority stated that online meetings are more strenuous and tedious than physical meetings, which is why inserted breaks are utilized to relax rather than to politicize. Nevertheless, the invisible background chat compensates for the political purpose of breaks. However, the extent to which the chat is utilized in meetings significantly depends on the person's position and other individual factors. While interviewees from the relatively lower level said that they utilize the group chat for comprehension questions and background information, interviewees from the relatively higher level reported that they occasionally utilize personal chats to signal colleagues that they expect a statement that supports their opinion.

> So kannst du Background Informationen sammeln. Das ist extrem wichtig. (I.1B, Pos. 41)
>
> *You can gather background information. This is extremely important.*
>
> Also wenn ich beispielsweise feststelle, dass ein Thema in der Diskussion sich nicht in die richtige Richtung entwickelt, dann kann ich per Chat den einen oder anderen darauf aufmerksam machen: 'Ich wäre doch froh, wenn wieder mal ein Statement käme, das in meine Richtung zeigt.' (I.3A, Pos. 79)
>
> *For example, if I notice that a topic in the discussion is not developing in the right direction, I can use chat to draw the attention of some people to it, 'I would be happy if a statement could be made that points in my direction.'*

In addition to the background chat, other technical tools are utilized to gain power throughout the discussion by gaining a knowledge or informational advantage. For instance, this advantage can be acquired by relying on specific background applications.

> Ich kann ... Dinge googeln oder auf Youtube suchen, die ich direkt in die Diskussion einbringe, ohne dass die das merken. (I.5A, Pos. 111)
>
> *I can google things or search on YouTube, which I can bring directly into the discussion without them noticing it.*

Furthermore, younger people who are keen on influencing other meeting participants and courageous to shape the meeting outcome are especially able to strengthen their position in online meetings as opposed to offline meetings.

> Und ich muss schon sagen, gefühlt ist das ein Generationsthema. Ich denke, ältere Generationen tun sich nach wie vor schwerer mit diesem virtuellen Raum. Ich persönlich zähle mich mit 34 Jahren noch eher zum jüngeren Semester und finde, dass es eher von großem Vorteil ist. (I.3B, Pos. 15)
>
> *And I have to say, it feels like an issue of generations. I think older generations still find it harder to deal with this virtual space. Personally, at 34 years of age, I still tend to count myself with the younger generation and think that it is a great advantage.*

Consequently, interviewees from different firms felt that online meetings allow participants to start from a more equal basis, in which both younger and subordinate participants become more courageous to ask critical questions and express their ideas.

> Ich finde schon, das Virtuelle unterstützt es, alle mit der gleichen Basis starten zu lassen. (I.3B, Pos. 27)
>
> *I think that virtual meetings support letting everyone start at the same base.*
>
> Die machen alle irgendwie etwa ein bisschen gleicher. (I.4A, Pos. 25)
>
> *They all kind of make everyone a little bit more alike.*

Overall, the analysis reveals that while in offline meetings, power is often exercised by physically demonstrating authority, in online meetings, verbal expression and skillful argumentation become more important. Moreover, personal attitudes as well as generational differences impact the political usage of technological devices.

Termination phase

Offline and online meetings:
Termination practices refer to the dissolvement act of specific meeting structures by recoupling the process with the wider system of the organization. Thereby, actors exploit the situation when people become impatient and inattentive at the end of the meeting by summarizing different opinions in a desired form and not asking for further input and feedback.

> Der Abschluss des Meetings kann natürlich auch eine Möglichkeit sein, Macht auszuüben, weil man dann zusammenfassen kann ... die gewünschte eigene Version zusammenfassen, so dass die Leute dann in dem Moment nicht mehr reagieren. (I.4B, Pos. 85)
>
> *The conclusion of the meeting can, of course, also be a way to exercise power, because then you can summarize ... your desired version so that people do not react.*
>
> Ich versuche das Gesamtbild zu machen, zusammenzufassen und dann mache ich aber kein Voting. (I.2A, Pos. 50)
>
> *I'm trying to get the big picture, summarize it, and then I'm not letting people vote.*

Additionally, a commonly utilized tactic is to reschedule meetings and delay decisions in one's interests to keep certain topics on the agenda until decisions can be made.

> Andere Formen von Macht, da denke ich an Verzögerungstaktik, dass man einfach auf gewisse Dinge nicht eingeht, sodass die Zeit des Meetings abläuft und man hat noch nichts entschieden dazu. (I.2B, Pos. 11)
>
> *Other forms of power, I think of delaying tactics, [are] that you just don't go into certain things so that the time of the meeting runs out, and you haven't decided anything yet.*
>
> Aber viele Meetings sind dann halt so: Man geht auseinander und nichts wird richtig dokumentiert und dann hat der eine andere Position als ich oder ein anderes Verständnis. Man kann das auch gut beeinflussen, indem man bewusst keine Klarheit schaffen will am Ende eines Meetings. (I.4A, Pos. 105)
>
> *But many meetings are like this: You go apart, and nothing is documented properly, and then the person has a different position than I do or a different understanding. You can also influence this by deliberately not wanting to create clarity at the end of a meeting.*

In contrast to the other meeting phases, neither differences in political behaviors of upper and middle managers nor in offline and online meetings were identified throughout the analysis.

Post-meeting phase

Offline meetings:
As hypothesized, the political behavior in the phase after the meeting is significantly similar to the exercise of power before the meeting since numerous informal activities occur. Interview partners, especially those from relatively lower positions, stated that they occasionally utilize the walk back to the office or business lunches to reflect on issues and build support for subsequent meetings.

> Mittagessen. Und dort wird über Kreti und Pleti diskutiert oder was war jetzt wichtig. Also viel so informell wird sich dann ausgetauscht: 'Wie machen wir jetzt das? Hat noch jemand eine bessere Lösung?' (I.1B, Pos. 111)
>
> *Lunch. And there we discuss different things. So, there is a lot of informal exchange, 'How do we do this now? Does anyone else have a better solution?'*

Conversely, actors at relatively higher levels perform more educational work by approaching certain people to resolve disagreements and avoid potential frustration that could negatively affect people's credibility about their capability to make decisions.

> Also die Klärung, die Zeit zu nehmen, auch Aufklärungsarbeit zu leisten . . . nach dem Meeting, scheint mir ganz wichtig. (I.2A, Pos. 78)
>
> *So, the clarification, to take the time, also to do educational work . . . after the meeting seems to me to be important.*
>
> Und einfach so auch respektiert und also Respekt und Wertschätzung der Person gegenüber bringt. Ansonsten könnte das natürlich Frust auslösen. (I.3A, Pos. 113)
>
> *And, therefore, show respect and appreciation to the person. Otherwise, of course, it could cause frustration.*

A further micropolitical practice that is more likely to be applied at higher levels is to make decisions after adjourned meetings in a smaller setting.

> Oder wenn es heißt hinterher dann: 'Es wird vertagt.' Und dann klären wir das so. (I.1A, Pos. 69)
>
> *Or it is said, 'We postpone the meeting.' And then we decide afterward.*
>
> Das heisst eigentlich: Man schliesst den Rest der Gruppe aus und macht dann One-to-One einen Follow-Up und entscheidet dann etwas, was man der Gruppe zurückspielt. Das ist ein relativ gutes Instrument, um die Leute auszuschliessen, die sich nicht in dem Moment melden, wenn man sagt, man mache einen Follow-Up. (I.3A, Pos. 127)
>
> *That actually means [that] you exclude the rest of the group and then do a one-on-one follow-up and then decide something to give back to the group. This is a relatively good way to exclude people who don't come forward the moment you say you're doing a follow-up.*

Online meetings:
If the meeting occurred online, then the communication after the meeting is more consciously chosen as a tool to influence the meeting. According to the interviewees, the telephone is only utilized when major issues still need to be reflected upon and discussed.

> Es fällt deutlich schwerer, dann wieder den Telefonhörer in die Hand zu nehmen . . . (I.3B, Pos. 35)
>
> *It is much more difficult to pick up the phone again.*

According to one upper manager, however, the willingness to make decisions in online meetings is lower than in offline meetings, which increases the tendency of making follow-up decisions in a more informal setting.

> Das ist meine subjektive Empfindung, dass man in Online-Meetings ein bisschen vorsichtiger herangeht und eher noch ein Folgeveranstaltung braucht oder den eben besprochenen Mechanismus nutzt, um es hinterher offline zu klären. (I.1A, Pos. 83)
>
> *That is my subjective feeling — that in online meetings, one approaches things a bit more cautiously and rather needs a follow-up event or uses the mechanism just mentioned to clarify things offline afterward.*

4.1.3. Evaluation of strategy meetings

In the course of the interviews, the researcher learned that it is difficult to understand the term *strategy*. The definition of strategy meetings thus varied significantly between companies, hierarchical levels and, generally, between the individual interview partners. While some stated that strategic work is part of a process with many iterations and small meetings, others stated that sizable strategy meetings usually occur outside the office over several days. Nevertheless, it was jointly agreed that collaboration and social interaction are more central to strategic meetings than to operational meetings. Operational meetings aim at making quick and pragmatic decisions in order to move day-to-day businesses forward while strategy meetings aim to discuss key strategic issues of a department or the entire company and to make medium- to long-term decisions. To develop a strategy together, it is therefore important to listen to the arguments of all participants and to create space for creativity and innovative ideas.

> In strategischen Meetings liegt der Fokus viel mehr in der Kollaboration, in der Diskussion und im gemeinsamen Austausch von Ideen, wo auch weniger Struktur dann gegeben ist. (I.4B, Pos. 107)
>
> *In strategic meetings, the focus is much more on collaboration, discussion and the exchange of ideas, and there is less structure.*
>
> Es sollte viel mehr Raum da sein für die Reflektion. Jeder sollte da angehört werden, jeder sollte auch einen Stake haben. Man sollte auch sich selbst viel mehr challengen. (I.2A, Pos. 80)
>
> *There should be much more room for reflection. Everyone should be listened to; everyone should have a stake. You should also challenge yourself much more.*
>
> Da ist das Zusammenspiel der Einzelteile wichtig. Und dann muss sich am Schluss irgendwas herauskristallisieren. (I.1A, Pos. 135)
>
> *The interaction of the individual parts is important. And then something must crystallize in the end.*

Nevertheless, when examining respondents' evaluations of power in meetings, it is important to mention that power structures are considered to be stronger and clearer in strategic than in operational meetings.

> Strategie-Meetings sind ja in der Regel sehr Top-Down. (I.3B, Pos. 47)
>
> *Strategy meetings are usually top-down.*
>
> . . . showing power and using these mechanisms will be more important in strategic meetings. (I.5B, Pos. 141)
>
> Das heißt, der Chef, der muss nicht nur den Rahmen setzen, er muss auch Ordnungshinweise geben. (I.4A, Pos. 25)
>
> *That is, the boss, he must not only set the framework, he must also give instructions for order.*

Within this circle of employees, which is part of strategic work, careful preparation and skillful argumentation are the predominantly important political practices. In contrast to operational meetings, power is not significantly generated by physical aspects but rather by objective persuasion both during and outside meetings.

> . . . in einem Strategie-Meeting ist dann jeder auch vorbereitet und weiß, was er für richtig hält. Und damit kommt dieses Argumentieren und sachliche Beeinflussen mehr als Machtmechanismus zum Tragen. Aber weniger die anderen genannten, die nicht auf Argumentation basieren, sondern mehr emotional, körperlich sind. (I.2A, Pos. 139)
>
> *In a strategy meeting, everyone is prepared and knows what they think is right. And thus this argumentation and factual influencing is more of a power mechanism. But not so much the others mentioned, which are not based on argumentation but more emotional, physical aspects.*
>
> Strategische Meetings sollten sehr viel mehr Vorbereitung haben, Nachbereitung. (I.2A, Pos. 80)
>
> *Strategic meetings should have much more preparation [and] follow-up.*
>
> Oft werden wichtige Entscheidungen dann gefällt beim Mittagessen oder beim Abendessen oder entscheidend beeinflusst, dass am anderen Tag dann viel einfacher eine Entscheidung gemacht werden kann. (I.2A, Pos. 82)
>
> *Often, important decisions are made over lunch or dinner or are so influenced that a decision can be made much more easily the next day.*

Regarding online strategy meetings, the interview partners were rather critical, as the exchange of information before and after the meetings as well as the joint development of the strategic orientation is central. The majority of respondents criticized online meetings for the lack of social interaction, preventing the generation of innovative ideas.

> Strategische Meetings, ausgenommen jetzt in der aktuellen Situation, in der man einfach nicht zusammenkommen konnte, finden eher weniger online statt. Meiner Meinung nach passiert das aus gutem Grund, weil eben doch sehr viel Körpersprache mitspielt, weil man zusammenarbeiten muss und weil man auch die Gelegenheit benötigt, in den Pausen individuelle Gespräche zu führen. Das ist ein bisschen ähnlich wie politisieren. (I.4B, Pos. 117)
>
> *Strategic meetings, except now in the current situation where you simply couldn't get together, tend to take place less online. In my opinion, this happens for a good reason — because a lot of body language is involved, because you have to work together and because you also need the opportunity to have individual conversations during the breaks. That's a bit like politicizing.*
>
> . . . diese Strategie Offsites sind ja meistens so, dass man auch Zeit weg vom Büro hat. Und man hat dann eben auch den Abend, das Nachtessen oder die Bar. . . Ich glaube, das ist qualitativ etwas ganz anderes, was man mit Online-Meetings nicht fertigbringt. (I.4A, Pos. 171)

> *These strategy offsites are usually constructed in such a way that you have time away from the office. And then you also have the evening, dinner or the bar. . . I believe that this is qualitatively something completely different, which you can't achieve with online meetings.*

However, participants revealed that the attitude toward online strategy meetings depends considerably on the experience the company already has with virtual tools. The interview partners from Company 5 emphasized how efficiently online meetings can be conducted in the strategic area. The majority of the respondents additionally stated that a mix of online and physical meetings would make sense to take advantage of the benefits of online meetings without having to completely forego physical interaction.

> Also alles, was man zur Verfügung haben muss, kann man elektronisch aus meiner Sicht besser abbilden als in physischen Meetings. (I.5A, Pos. 99)
>
> *So everything you need to have at your disposal can, in my opinion, be better represented electronically than in physical meetings.*
>
> Aber gerade so in der Phase der Findung und der Auslegung braucht es immer wieder die physischen Meetings. (I.3A, Pos. 173)
>
> *But it's in the phase of finding and interpreting that physical meetings are needed again and again.*

Overall, the reported findings of the first-order analysis were grouped and summarized in eight core categories. The full list of categories with evidence are in Appendix 14.

4.2. Second-order findings

The first-order analysis has identified various political tactics in online and offline meetings. The objective of this second-order analysis is to explore and explain the identified patterns of the first-order analysis and to arrange them in a theoretical context (van Maanen, 1979) without explicitly referring to the five meeting phases. According to van Maanen (1979, 3), such insights are called "interpretations of interpretations".

4.2.1. Differences between upper and middle managers

Following the reasoning set forth by Seidl and Guérard (2015) and Asmuss and Oshima (2012), it was hypothesized that the political behavior in meetings differs significantly between upper and middle managers. Based on the first-order analysis, several noteworthy results are revealed regarding political behavior of employees on different hierarchical levels. First, the role of upper managers is anchored on a solid foundation that allows the direct exercise of power by relying on physical signals and making key decisions without the consensus of other meeting participants. Second, from the interviews, it is apparent that upper managers are more likely to apply self-management techniques and assess potential opponents in advance, while middle managers build support and form alliances by informally talking to other meeting participants in pre- and post-meeting phases. Nevertheless, the results regarding differences between the political behaviors of upper and middle managers are objectively inconclusive for several reasons. First, the way in which certain power resources are mobilized, how meetings are moderated and how phases before and after meetings are utilized depends more on individual preferences and personal attitudes than on relative positions. Accordingly, it is important to distinguish whether one wants to exercise power *over* or *with* other meeting participants. Moreover, interview partners had different perspectives on their relative positions in the respective companies. For example, while some middle managers highlighted their superior positions (e.g., I.1B and I.2B) in meetings, others reported from the perspective of subordinates and highlighted the political behaviors of their superiors (e.g., I.4B). Finally, it is identified that middle managers have a secondary role in strategy meetings and only have the lead in operational-type meetings, which restricts their exercise of power in strategic meetings. Overall, it is summarized that while these reasons make it difficult to distinguish the political behaviors at different hierarchical levels, they also make it possible to generalize the exercise of power in meetings by treating personality as a crucial factor. This significantly simplifies the development of the theoretical framework mentioned below.

4.2.2. Framework

This subchapter is dedicated to the developed theory. It demonstrates how power is generally exercised in meetings, and it focuses closely on the comparison between online and offline meetings.

Emergent framework

The core categories of political tactics identified above align with the findings of Dittrich et al.'s (2011) six dimensions of the political function of meetings: *setting and advancing the agenda* (Adams, 2004; Tepper, 2004), *building support and forming alliances* (Adams, 2004; Kangasharju, 1996, 2002), *exerting influence* (Clifton, 2009; van Praet, 2009; Wodak et al., 2011), *suppressing new ideas* (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Schwarz, 2009), *keeping topics on the agenda* (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Tepper, 2004) and *negotiating* (Asmuss & Oshima, 2012; Boden, 1995). These six dimensions have, however, been supplemented with further dimensions, as among other things, both pre- and post-meeting phases and physical aspects have been considered. Nevertheless, to find a theoretical explanation for this political behavior, it is necessary to dive deeper by considering power concepts of social science. Therefore, in this thesis, the core categories are analyzed at an abstract level by referring to Hardy's (1996) power dimensions: *power of resources, power of processes* and *power of meaning* to determine a theoretical explanation for the findings outlined above. The second-order analysis reveals an explanatory framework, which is displayed below. Figure 6 illustrates that power dimensions are shaped by the contextual factors that were identified throughout the analysis. These are related to each other as signaled by the arrows.

First, the analysis of the interviews reveals that power in meetings is understood as either positive or negative depending on the context. Hereby, (1) *environmental factors*, (2) *organizational factors* and (3) *individual factors* play central roles. First, environmental factors refer, in this thesis, to national and regional cultures. It has been identified that both the degree of internationalization and the culture of the country where the company is headquartered significantly influence the extent of certain power relations within the company (e.g., Comp. 1 and Comp. 2). Because cultural differences are actively pursued during meetings, it is important to know the environment and adapt accordingly. Second, organizational factors, such as the historical background of the company, firm values and beliefs as well as company experiences, are a direct outflow of environmental factors. In other words, the national culture shapes the power relations of the organizational culture in both positive and negative senses. Consequently, it has been argued that the more international the company is, the more important the corporate culture is in laying common ground for the meeting culture and its power relations. Third, individual factors determine the subjective perception of power and the extent of one's political behavior. The analysis reveals that the extent to which a person is driven by power depends on individual values and sociodemographic characteristics, domain-relevant expertise and the perception of the legitimized authority to exercise power due to an appointed position, as summarized in the previous section. For instance, although a company may be hierarchical, such as Company 4, it is up to the individual person to decide on the degree to which this hierarchical order is lived. This means that the personality of each individual has an especially significant influence on power relations and dynamics in meetings. This insight further justifies the reason that no particular level- or company-specific differences in the political behavior in meetings were found.

Overall, it is important to study in greater detail the whole picture to understand the exercise of power in strategy meetings. In other words, short-, medium- and long-term dimensions display additional elements that must be considered to analyze political behavior in online and offline meetings. These identified results can be compared to the literature review by Dittrich et al. (2011), which concludes that the way meetings are conducted is considerably influenced by contingent factors on environmental, organizational and individual levels. In the context of power, it is additionally derived that Hardy's (1996) three power dimensions are shaped by such contextual factors (see Arrow 1 in Figure 6). Specifically, contextual factors have a direct influence on Hardy's (1996) first power dimension, called the *power of resources*. Depending on the context, different individuals from different companies attributed different weighting factors to the importance of critical resources. Consequently, the evaluation of power is ambiguous. Most importantly, nearly all interview partners reported that power stems from the hierarchical order within the company or from an elected authority position that legitimizes certain actors to exert influence over the meeting process. For instance, the meeting chair is, by virtue of the assigned role, automatically legitimated to exercise power in establishing and performing the agenda. This perception of power is similar to French and Raven's (1959) power base, which is called *legitimate power.* Power that is solely rooted in a superior hierarchal position, however, was primarily perceived as a rather negative force, which aligns with the traditional power perspective of Pfeffer (1992, 30), who defines power as "the potential ability . . . to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do." In the context of meetings, this power source is an overarching power relationship anchored within the company. Furthermore, power that stems from contacts compensates and complements legitimate power. Employees, especially those in middle management positions, rely on political practices based on discourse with other meeting participants to build support, align interests and form alliances. However, employees in upper management positions depend rather on certain contacts to anticipate and assess the interests of other meeting participants. Hence, power stemming from contacts is crucial for formal and informal convincing processes in pre- and post-meeting phases. The finding that personal power is exercised within interpersonal relationships by psychologically changing people's attitudes rather than exerting control through superior position aligns with the *referent power* base (French & Raven, 1959). Moreover, power originates in domain-relevant expertise, knowledge and individual skills, as the analysis of the interviews from Company 5 reveals. In their opinions, power that is based on technological knowledge and expertise, also called *expert power* by French and Raven (1959), is independent of the hierarchical order within the company. Hence, it can be derived that knowledge advantages impact the majority of the identified political actions by causing the one who possesses them to be better prepared and more confident and decisive. This power base is also closely linked to *informational power* (Raven, 1965) because people who possess relevant information are in powerful positions.

Overall, the analysis reveals that various power resources, such as hierarchy, legitimized authority, information, domain-relevant expertise and contacts lay the foundation for the exercise of power in meetings. Hence, Hardy's (1996) first power dimension, which unites these resources, is a pre-condition for Hardy's (1996) other two dimensions: the *power of processes* and the *power of meaning* (see Arrows 2a and 2b in Figure 6). To have the power of processes, actors must draw on their hierarchical positions and legitimized authority as power resources (see Arrow 3a in Figure 6). Defining the four Ps of a meeting — determining the *purpose*, inviting selected *participants,* managing the *process* and planning the *product* — and thus limiting the meeting scope are not possible without access to these resources. Furthermore, if power is viewed as influence and an ability to make decisions, then it is important to build a network

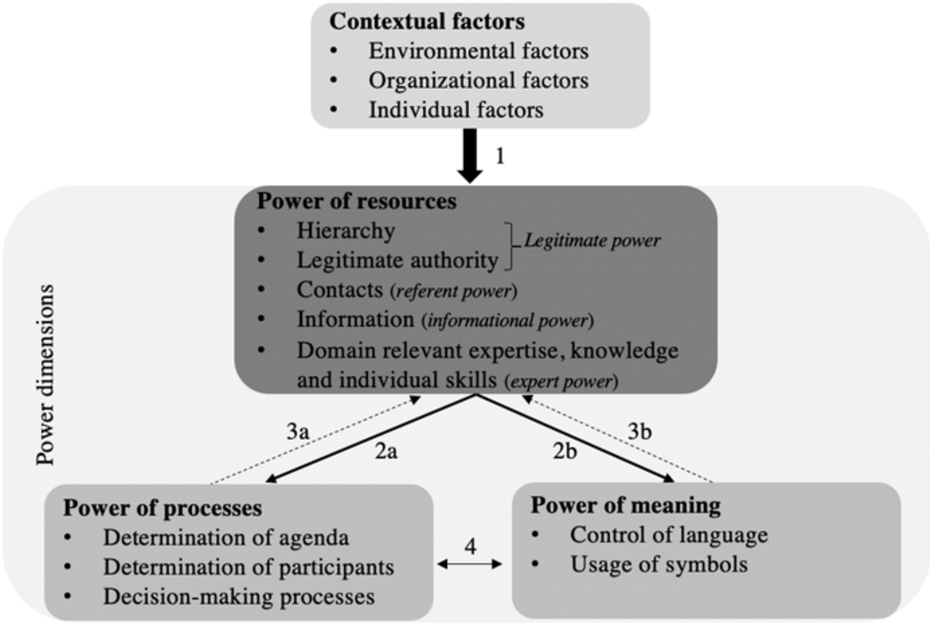

Figure 6: Overview of developed theory regarding the exercise of power in meetings; Source: Author's creation.

of contacts to gain trust and support. According to I.5B, the employees "give you this power to decide because they have trust in you." However, the power of meaning, which is created through the conscious control of language and the usage of certain symbols, is only possible by employing resources, such as information, expertise or hierarchy (see Arrow 3b in Figure 6). Specifically, it has been identified that linguistic devices politically maneuver other meeting participants into alignment by utilizing specific formulations and changing one's tone of voice. In this respect, intelligent participants who are eloquent and thus steer others have a clear advantage in being able to utilize meetings politically.

The first-order analysis further indicates that upper managers in particular utilize political practices based on physical aspects, such as the location, the seating arrangement and the convincing appearance at the beginning of the meeting, to demonstrate power relations and dynamics. Hence, especially by utilizing certain symbols, relative superiors exercise power in meetings. Finally, a relationship between the power of processes and the power of meaning is identified, in that controlling language and utilizing symbols underscores political tactics related to the agenda as well as to decision-making practices (see Arrow 4 in Figure 6).

It has been revealed that Hardy's (1996) three power dimensions, which capture various power conceptualizations, are interdependent. Hence, when analyzing how individuals exert influence by utilizing meetings politically, these power dimensions cannot be considered in isolation. This is because Dittrich et al.'s (2011) five meeting functions are not mutually exclusive but are related to each other (Seidl & Guérard, 2015). For instance, former studies have identified how sense-making (Weick, 1995) or social ties in meetings (Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson, & Schwarz, 2006) have profound consequences for strategic work.

Extended framework

By comparing political behavior in physical and virtual settings, the author understood that the importance of certain elements of the three power dimensions increase or decrease when meetings are conducted online. Based on the framework displayed previously, Figure 7 illustrates with symbols, such as arrows pointing up or down as well as equals signs, how the weight of individual subdimensions is changing in online settings.

Most importantly, a shift in the power sources that employees utilize is occurring. When meetings are conducted online, power is mainly dependent on *information* and *domain-relevant expertise* because power that stems from a superior hierarchical or appointed authority position as well as from contacts becomes more difficult to demonstrate and exercise in an online setting. It has been identified that political practices based on the usage of symbols, such as choosing the location, sitting at the head of the table or utilizing bodily activities to signal a superior power position, are to a considerable extent, lost in web conferences. However, political tactics, such as forming alliances and building support as well as anticipating the interests of opponents, are not equally efficient when there is no opportunity to meet personally and exploit interpersonal relationships or social interactions. Because these power resources are becoming less important, strategists control other power resources in online meetings to a greater extent than in offline meetings. For further clarification, individuals from different hierarchical levels stated that the possession of information as well as knowledge advantages, such as domain-relevant expertise,

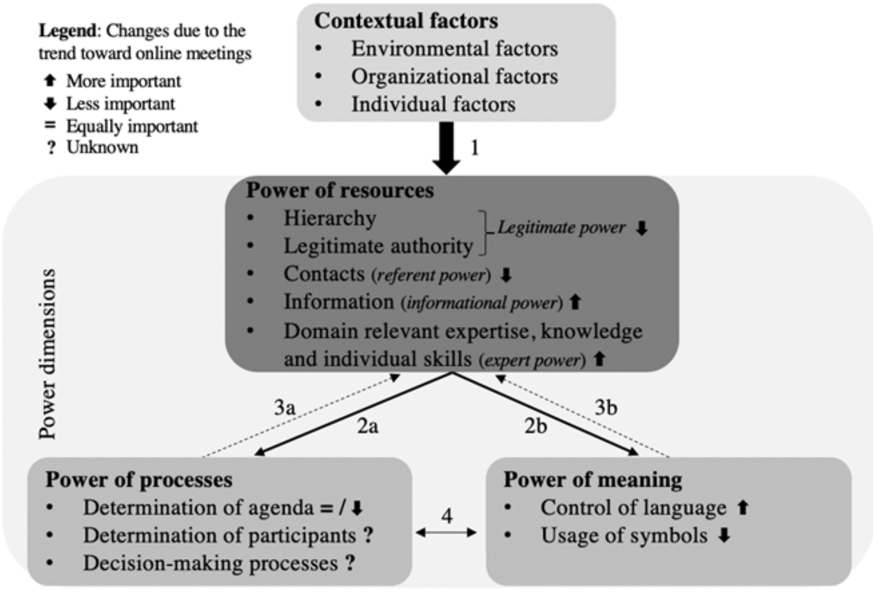

Figure 7: Overview of changes in the power dimensions due to the trend toward online meetings; Source: Author's creation.

are crucial to utilize online meetings politically. Some individuals mentioned that they can better exploit a prepared chain of arguments in online meetings to appear confident. Others stated that digital tools, such as the background chat and applications, are utilized to gather information that is brought into the discussion without others noticing. Power in online meetings is thus concentrated in experienced people who possess and control relevant information and skills. Consequently, the verbal part of meetings gains considerably in importance. Hence, the power of meaning is primarily created through the control of language rather than the usage of symbols in an online setting. By paying particular attention to careful formulations and the appropriate tone of voice, meeting participants from different levels gain respect and enforce their ideas to influence the meeting outcome.

Regarding the power of processes, the findings of the interviews are less straightforward. While it is true that the power of processes is primarily rooted in a superior hierarchical or appointed authority position, the fact remains that certain issues, such as technical problems, participants' inattention and background noises, complicate this way of exercising power. For instance, it has been argued that it is more difficult to strictly follow one's agenda in one's interests. However, based on the interviews, it is still unclear how exactly the online setting affects the political tactics based on participant determination and decision-making processes.

Finally, the influence of contextual factors on the interrelation of the power dimensions and the respective subdimensions must be discussed. In particular, organizational and individual factors are crucial. Political action in online meetings depends on the technical possibilities and gathered experiences of each organization. Eloquent expressions are becoming increasingly important in online meetings regardless of the company's camera policy; nevertheless, it is clear that the usage of cameras promotes self-staging activities and the assessment of other reactions (e.g., Comp. 5). Hence, it is deduced that the usage of symbols is more important in companies in which cameras are switched on during meetings. Further, employees who have considerable experience with online meetings over the last few years are more confident and thus in stronger positions. However, based on the interviews, younger generations who have grown up with technological devices have an advantage over older generations (e.g., Comp. 3). Suddenly, the younger age group, who has more affinity to digitality, is more present and secure, while the older age group has difficulties in finding their way around in virtual space.

To summarize, virtual meetings allow meeting participants to start from a more equal basis due to a redistribution of power. While those who mainly refer to their hierarchical positions or utilize personal relationships are losing importance, those who possess information and domain-relevant expertise are gaining importance. Consequently, those employees who create meaning not only through symbols, but also through the control of language by utilizing appropriate formulations are better prepared to utilize meetings politically in the future.

4.2.3. Evaluation of strategy meetings

According to the framework developed above, it is assumed that a shift from offline to online meetings will accordingly result in a shift of power resources in strategic areas and thus in a redistribution of power. However, this will only be the case if employees outside the upper management team are allowed to participate in strategy meetings. Furthermore, the first-order analysis reveals that not all power dimensions and mechanisms mentioned can be applied to the same extent in strategic matters. For instance, political tactics based on informational and knowledge advantages as well as on domain-relevant skills are more important in strategic meetings than in operational meetings. Power is thus mainly exercised by those who possess the credibility for the thematic framework. Consequently, such a trend would have a positive effect on the way meetings are utilized politically to influence strategic work.

Nevertheless, the first-order analysis additionally demonstrates that the conduct of online meetings in the strategic area is viewed rather critically. Although there exist clear power relations in strategy meetings, the joint development of strategic orientations is important. In contrast to operational meetings, the primary goal of strategy meetings is not to push and rush through topics to make quick decisions for everyday business life but rather to jointly develop new ideas and drive innovation to be prepared for the future. This view from the interview partners is consistent with Jarzabkowksi and Seidl's (2008, 392) and Seidl and Guérard's (2015, 5) definition of strategy meetings as "social practices" and "communicative events," respectively. In virtual space, however, collective work was judged to be difficult by the majority. As long as such work is possible during COVID-19, employees from both levels, therefore, favor a mix of online and physical meetings to promote collaboration and innovation.

Whether strategy meetings are increasingly being held online depends not only on the current situation caused by COVID-19, but also on the overall experience of the companies, as the discussions revealed. On the one hand, respondents from those companies that already utilize video conferences and virtual tools for brainstorming and generating ideas were more confident regarding the conduct of online strategy meetings (e.g., Comp. 5). On the other hand, interview partners from companies that do not utilize cameras saw the virtual implementation of strategy meetings as problematic (e.g., Comp. 1). However, the meeting situation as it was observed before COVID-19 hardly seems likely to return to its precrisis state in the foreseeable future, and the majority agreed that companies now must learn to utilize a combination of digital tools and virtual forms of collaboration to efficiently conduct strategy meetings not only physically, but also virtually. If companies succeed in this, then it is assumed that the usage of online meetings will additionally contribute to a democratization of opinion formation in strategic work, as is already observed in Comp. 5 (I.5A and I.5B). In this company, the political usage of meetings is a rather positive phenomenon for strategy because it emphasizes the usage of informational and expert power bases.

However, it is not yet clear to what extent this paradigm shift from hierarchical gravitation toward expert knowledge and credibility is anchored in strategy meetings. Since the personalities of the strategists has been identified as one of the most important factors influencing the exercise of power in meetings, it is assumed that power-driven people will in the future learn to assert themselves, to orchestrate and thus to influence strategic work not only in positive, but also in negative ways. Furthermore, how efficiently strategic online meetings can be utilized politically will probably only become apparent in the near future. Nevertheless, based on the first- and second-order analyses, it is concluded that only those strategists who know how to manage digitization and technological developments are well prepared to utilize meetings for political purposes.

4.3. Discussion

This chapter critically discusses the thesis. It reveals how the study enhances academic and practical understandings of the exercise of power. Advantages and disadvantages are highlighted and avenues for future research are presented.

4.4. Contributions and implications

By analyzing power in offline and online meetings, this thesis not only reveals the micropolitical dimension of the SAP literature, but also raises important issues relevant for firms. Hence, the following two sections discuss the extent to which this thesis contributes to theory and implicates praxis.

4.4.1. Theoretical contributions

The SAP stream of literature has gained considerable importance over the past 15 years by emphasizing the many micro-actions that strategists utilize to shape strategic work (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007, 2003; Whittington, 2006). However, according to Clegg et al. (2004, 25), the "understanding of strategy necessitates an engagement with power and politics." Hence, this thesis contributes to the existing meeting literature by integrating a micropolitical approach into the analysis of strategy meetings. In particular, the behavioral activities of strategists are placed in the context of power and politics by conceptualizing meeting practices as routinized types of political behavior, as has been suggested by Hansen and Küpper (2009). Such a micropolitical approach illuminates the exercise of power in meetings not only as a negative, but also as a positive force. Moreover, the extension of Hendry and Seidl's (2003) framework with pre- and post-meeting phases elucidates the importance of political practices around meetings. Thus, it is demonstrated that the theoretical analysis of meetings should extend beyond the actual planned meeting time.

Additionally, this thesis addresses the research gap of online meetings in SAP research. Although this study is far from closing this gap, it indicates the importance of integrating the trend toward virtual meetings into the micro-perspective of strategy. Altogether, this thesis paves the way for further studies in SAP to analyze the development of power mechanisms due to arising possibilities and tools in technology.

4.4.2. Practical implications

The study of the political function of offline and online meetings provides useful insights for managers' everyday interactions in business gatherings. The practical implications of this thesis are summarized as follows. First, many interview partners mentioned that they had not previously actively considered the exercise of power in meetings. Therefore, this study raises employees' awareness concerning the mobilization of power mechanisms in meetings to shape strategic work. On the one hand, strategists can learn to consciously utilize certain resources not only to demonstrate power and authority, but also to gain recognition, respect and appreciation. On the other hand, strategists are made more aware of micropolitical practices deployed by other meeting participants. It is important that employees learn to assess and classify other meeting participants' political tactics to predict consequences for strategic work. Second, by incorporating power into the analysis of strategy meetings, various power games and political dynamics are made visible. If such mechanisms are visible, then potential abuses of power in and around meetings can be detected, identified and, if necessary, suppressed. Third, a broader knowledge of power and politics in meetings provides a company with the opportunity to train workers to learn to manage the three dimensions of power and to utilize the underlying power mechanisms to have a positive influence on strategic work in meetings. Moreover, employees should not only be trained to utilize physical meetings efficiently, as may have been the case so far, but they should also become familiar with new challenges and opportunities of virtual meetings. In other words, the paradigm shift should, in addition to the organization level, be aimed at the career level to ensure power relations and dynamics in meetings with positive consequences for strategy outcomes.

4.5. Limitations

Like all other studies, this thesis has strengths and weaknesses. The following two sections provide an overview and highlight that the results and their external validity should be interpreted cautiously.

4.5.1. Strengths of the study

The first strength of this study is that it builds on interviews as its primary data collection method. Interviews offer several advantages over other methods because they enable the researcher to focus directly on the unit of analysis — here, meetings — and to reveal insightful findings through causal inference (Yin, 2003). Moreover, the chosen methodology of PCIs based on Witzel's (2000) work combined inductive and deductive procedures, which considerably encouraged an open-minded analysis of power without the constraints of theoretical concepts. Another strength of this study is that multiple companies from different sectors were considered. Therefore, it was possible to identify that power relations and dynamics in meetings depend to a significant extent on environmental and organizational factors, such as organizational culture, historical background and degree of internationalization. Finally, the interview partners formed a heterogeneous sample group with regard to position, experience, background and age. Hence, incorporating different perspectives and experiences led to interesting research results and highlighted the importance of individual factors when analyzing the exercise of power in meetings.

4.5.2. Weaknesses of the study

There exist some concerns regarding the external validity of the conducted study, which are worthy of being discussed. External validity refers to the extent to which the insights of this thesis are generalizable to other firms and individuals holding meetings in physical and virtual forms. Hereafter, research design and data collection are critically analyzed (Yin, 2003).

Regarding the empirical context of the research design, it was not possible to capture the political function of meetings in different countries and cultures to the fullest extent. Nevertheless, the companies of interest were sufficiently diverse regarding environmental factors to identify that there exist significant differences in the applied tactics depending on the country and the degree of internationalization.

Regarding the data collection method and referring to Yin (2003), several weaknesses must be highlighted. First, interviews are subject to potential biases from the interviewer as well the interviewees. There is a risk that the interview questions have been poorly constructed by the interviewer, which may limit the answers from interviewees. Furthermore, it is difficult to verify whether the interviewee is simply providing answers that the interviewer expects. Second, a poor recall of the interview answers can confound the research results (Yin, 2003). This problem was mitigated in this thesis by recording and transcribing the interviews, although it would have been reasonable to complement the information from the interviews with participant observations and documentations. Observing actual interactions in offline as well as online meetings and collecting documents, such as minutes and presentations utilized or developed in meetings to steer discussions, could have been useful second and third data sources for triangulation purposes and a more rounded analysis of the research question (Yin, 2003).

Finally, interpersonal relations between the researcher and some key persons initiated the snowball access. According to Merkens (2000), a group selection based on accessibility indicates that the investigation is conducted within some self-determined limits. Nonetheless, since the participants referred by the gatekeepers met inclusion criteria based on the research progress, this problem was circumvented to a certain extent.

4.6. Avenues for future research

Although the findings of this thesis are indicative and provide some initial insights regarding the differences between the political function of offline and online meetings, further analysis must be conducted. Based on the findings, the author is of the opinion that meeting functions in addition to the political function should not be completely neglected for the analysis of power in meetings. This finding aligns with Seidl and Guérard (2015), who argue that more research must be conducted to understand how different meeting functions are combined and relate to each other. Hence, by focusing systematically on the interrelation of the *coordination*, *symbolic*, *social* and *cognitive* functions of meetings rather than relegating them to the background, one may capture the *political* function and its power mechanisms to the fullest extent.

Another promising direction for future research could be personal and direct observation of micropolitical practices in physical and virtual meetings. Conducting an ethnographic study would enable greater depth (Creswell, 2003) by allowing the researcher to analyze the political function of offline and online meetings not only from the perspective of a researcher, but also from the perspective of a participant. In physical meetings, the researcher could mingle with employees to identify key persons whose verbal as well as nonverbal behavior in strategy meetings is worth analysis. Furthermore, being personally present would enable the researcher to observe informal talks before and after the meeting.

Referring to Cornelissen and Cienki (2010), who recorded interactions among individuals on videotape, Seidl and Guérard (2015, 29) suggest conducting video ethnography as a method to "capture more effectively how body, materiality and discourse interact in meetings and how they relate to strategy formulation." In web conferences, on the contrary, it would make sense to participate virtually and to record strategy meetings to identify differences from in-person meetings. Additionally, it would be advisable to support the researcher's onsite observations with self-reporting methods (Balogun, Huff, & Johnson, 2003). Careful evaluation of political behavior via the computer could prove difficult and lead to misinterpretations; therefore, reflection and perception diaries of online meeting participants could serve as a complementary data collection method when applying an ethnographic approach. Furthermore, it would be exciting to empirically test the extent to which the exercise of power affects the efficiency of meetings. As the analysis of efficiency would extend beyond the scope of this work, it is all the more important to draw the attention of future researchers to it. According to the results of this study, the question then arises whether the redistribution of power resources caused by the online meeting trend should be assessed positively or negatively in terms of efficiency. However, since SAP literature on power and politics in online meetings barely exists, it is worth first analyzing power mechanisms of online meetings at a theoretical level. This could be performed by developing solid frameworks that study the politics of online meetings from an activity-based view.

To summarize, many companies have recently started to offer employees the option to work from home and virtually participate in meetings on a regular basis, although the majority of the companies analyzed stated that the trend toward online meetings, which was accelerated by COVID-19, will continue to grow for several reasons including work-life balance and costs. Therefore, future research must capture the underlying political function of online meetings and its related tactics to draw conclusions about the overall development and consequences of politics in strategy meetings.

4.7. Conclusion

> Macht ist wie Energie. Und ohne Energie passiert überhaupt nichts. (I.5A, Pos. 57)
>
> *Power is like energy. And without energy nothing happens at all.*

This master thesis opened with a quote that describes meetings as the heart of a successful company and is closed by a respondent's statement that indicates that power, like energy, is a required strength to put activities in motion. The aim of this thesis was to engage with the analysis of power in meetings by uncovering how strategists utilize online and offline meetings politically to influence strategic work.

The first part of this thesis comprehensively illustrated that past research identifies various political practices in physical meetings. Moreover, the need for investigating power issues in depth by focusing not only on physical, but also on virtual meetings was outlined. Therefore, the second part of this thesis conducted a holistic multiple case study to compare political behavior in offline and online meetings. In doing so, it focused on a wide range of strategists working in diverse companies. The primary discoveries of the empirical study are summarized as follows: First, environmental, organizational and individual factors influence power dimensions in meetings. In particular, personal attitudes that are, to a significant extent, independent of the formal position determine the way that meetings are utilized politically. Individual preferences are more important than appointed power positions; therefore, it further explains why, generally, no fundamental differences between upper and middle managers were found. Second, the comparison of the political behavior in offline and online meetings reveals that employees utilize specific power resources depending on the setting. Hereby, power that stems from hierarchy, legitimate authority and contacts loses importance in virtual meetings, while power rooted in information and domain-relevant expertise gains importance. Consequently, applying eloquent expressions and careful wording become more relevant than utilizing symbols to employ online meetings politically. Third, businesspeople are rather critical of developments toward virtual business gatherings in strategic areas to the disadvantage of innovation and collaboration possibilities. However, as video meetings become more user-friendly and closer to real-life scenarios, their popularity will continue to grow even among strategists. Hence, it is of utmost importance that they learn to manage new digital collaboration tools to produce positive power dynamics and capacity to effectively conduct virtual strategy meetings. Altogether, it is concluded that the way power is exercised in meetings is changing with the trend from offline to online meetings. However, the extent to which this will influence strategic work will only become clear in the near future. These three key findings have important implications for theory and practice but should nevertheless be treated with considerable caution due to the absence of literature regarding online meetings and the aforementioned weaknesses of the designed study.

Finally, after having analyzed the political behavior in meetings, it is concluded that power is indeed conceptualized as the fuel that runs today's companies by providing the necessary strength to make decisions and reach efficient meeting outcomes. Consequently, it is important to note that energy levels and thus power dynamics in physical and increasingly in virtual meetings must be actively managed to ensure positive consequences for strategic work.

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