The role of visioning in business network strategizing

Morten H. Abrahamsen [a,*], Aino Halinen [b], Peter Naudé [c]

[a] BI Norwegian Business School, Nydalsvn. 37, 0484 Oslo, Norway
[b] Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, 20014 Turun yliopisto, Finland
[c] Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, Manchester M15 6BH, UK

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Visioning the future is an essential aspect of strategizing. However, how managers make sense of their networked business environment, future changes in it, and how this visioning informs their interaction and networking has hardly been explored. Drawing on organizational foresight and business network research, we enhance the visioning concept by conducting an abductive qualitative case study on its role in business network strategizing. By comparing forward-looking and backward-looking perspectives of managers in companies within a particular business network, the study reveals what managers can foresee, what limits their visioning, and to what extent visioning informs network strategizing. Our findings suggest that visioning helps managers to openly contemplate the future, to envisage structural changes, detect probable trends, and form strategic intentions, but individual cognitive frameworks and network constraints limit their visioning. The study contributes to the current sensemaking view of network strategizing by proposing a conceptual model where visioning forms an important step in between reflection and networking, and by showing how managers consciously prepare for the future.

1. Introduction

While established schools of thought in strategic management typically look at a single company forming a strategy in front of a faceless environment (Araujo & Easton, 1996), the business network view sees the external actors as active parties in the strategy process (Baraldi et al., 2007). Strategizing implies interacting and networking with strategic intent in the context of interconnected business relationships (Araujo & Easton, 1996; Baraldi et al., 2007; Gadde et al., 2003). In contrast to strategic planning activities undertaken at the top management level, strategizing in business networks refers to individual managers' cognitive processes and ongoing actions at the micro-level of managerial practice (Baraldi et al., 2007), very much in line with the strategy-as-practice perspective (Jarzabkowski, at al., 2007; Johnson, et al, 2003). In evolving network conditions, it is demanding but necessary for managers to anticipate future change and identify opportunities for strategic action, since the outcomes of acting are strongly contingent on other firms' actions and reactions in the network (Harrison et al., 2010). The anticipation of even the nearest future is a challenge (Ford & Mouzas, 2008).

The future perspective is particularly relevant for strategizing, where the anticipation of what may come next plays a key role (MacKay, 2009;

Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013; Cummings & Daellenbach, 2009). In order to know how managers strategize in business networks, we therefore need to understand how they perceive the future development of their network and anticipate other companies' strategic actions and behavior. In this study we examine these cognitive processes, which we define as *network visioning*.

The future perspective has not received much attention in business network research. The cognitive view of business network strategizing, which has emerged around the network picture concept (Henneberg et al., 2010; Henneberg et al. 2006; Ramos & Ford 2011), draws heavily on the sensemaking perspective (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015; Weick 1995) and has therefore directed attention to the present moment and interpretation of the past instead of the future (e.g. Henneberg et al., 2010; Mattsson et al., 2015; Penttilä et al., 2020). Strategizing has mainly been studied as something that companies do when purposefully acting or reacting to the actions of others, instead of investigating how managers anticipate future changes. However, network researchers have for some time stressed the need to develop a forward-looking perspective to strategizing. Medlin (2004) for instance argues that imagining the future is key in managing relationships in business networks. More recently, Andersen et al. (2017) have introduced network foresighting as one way to understand expectation building in business

---

interaction, and Naudé and Sutton-Brady (2019) propose studies on network visioning to better understand how managers envision the different strategic paths available to them.

In the network strategizing literature, visioning has indeed been identified as an essential cognitive process related to the formation of network pictures and the sketching of options for strategic action (Harrison & Prenkert 2009; Laari-Salmela et al., 2015; Möller & Halinen, 1999). However, what visioning means as a forward-looking activity and how it manifests itself in managers' cognition and subsequent strategic action has not been explored. Despite some efforts to examine the interplay between cognition and action (Abrahamsen et al., 2016; Corsaro et al., 2011; Laari-Salmela et al., 2015) we still know very little about visioning and the role it plays in network strategizing. Given that the mental models of individual managers influence strategizing (Abrahamsen et al., 2016; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Mattsson et al., 2015), it is fundamental to understand how managers envisage the future development of their company's networks.

Our study thereby seeks to enhance conceptual knowledge of visioning in business network strategizing. To achieve this target, we apply abductive reasoning, where the empirical phenomenon and theory are matched through systematic combining of the empirical data, data analysis and theory in several iterative rounds (Dubois & Gadde, 2014). Abduction is used as a method towards discovery with an intention to develop theory, rather than for verification (van Maanen et al., 2007). Based on an extensive qualitative case study conducted in a Norwegian-Japanese seafood distribution network, and theoretical inputs from the organizational foresight literature, we develop a conceptual model of business network strategizing, where visioning plays a key role. The foresight literature is valuable in providing a prospective perspective and proper concepts for describing visioning and its potential limitations in business networks, while the case study generates empirical evidence of visioning from a business network setting.

Approaching visioning as a cognitive process of business managers, we pose three questions for the empirical study. First, we examine what visioning entails in the context of network strategizing (RQ1). In other words, what it is that managers see when visioning, trying to understand the way(s) in which their network will change, and hence what strategic opportunities they perceive. Secondly, we examine the cognitive limitations of visioning (RQ2). We do this by retrospectively comparing those developments in the business network that the managers were able to anticipate with those that they did not. Finally, we examine the extent to which managers' visioning informs their subsequent interaction and networking with other companies within the network (RQ3).

The study adds to the scarce empirical knowledge of managers' visioning in network contexts. This knowledge is especially valuable for companies that operate in complex and systemic business environments, characterized by various interdependences and continuous change (Mele et al., 2015; Möller et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study contributes to our conceptual understanding of network strategizing by adding visioning and specifying its role within the current sensemaking framework, in the interplay between cognition and action.

This paper starts by introducing a theoretical framing based on organizational foresight theory, where we explain how visioning can contribute to developing the concept of strategizing in a business network context. Based on the literature review we pose the research questions for empirical study. The methodology section presents our research design of key actors in a distribution network interviewed at two points in time, and the temporal comparative analysis between their future visioning and their reflection of the past. Our findings of visioning, its limitations and influence on subsequent networking provides the basis for a comprehensive model of business network strategizing presented at the end. The discussion section explains the implications of the study, and deliberates its limitations and the avenues for further research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Strategizing in business networks

A business network, as understood in this study, refers to an established theory of business marketing where markets are described as webs of interactive relationships between companies (Ford & Håkansson, 2006; Håkansson et al., 2009). The business network view (also known as the IMP approach) brings the interdependence created by existing business relationships to the fore. Various actor bonds, activity links and resource ties bind the actors together into relatively stable and tightly knit networks, where at the same time the directly and indirectly connected relationships create conditions of continuous change and dynamics (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). Hence, the single company's ability to develop its business relationships is dependent both upon its own capabilities as well as how its relationships are connected into the wider network of relationships. As such, the business network represents both an opportunity and a constraint for business actors.

Managers strategize in order to change their network and their company's position in it, they make choices with respect to how they interact with their business partners (Håkansson et al., 2009; Johansson & Mattsson, 1992), and seek to influence and mobilize actors through their relationships (Abrahamsen et al., 2016; Gadde et al., 2003). At the same time, managers' strategizing is contingent upon other actors' activities and reactions that influence both the development of the network and the strategic outcomes for the individual actor (Håkansson et al., 2009; Håkansson & Ford, 2002). Strategizing thereby implies developing relationships with key partners (Aaboen et al., 2013) or involving counterparts in strategic initiatives by various means (Harrison et al., 2010), even by forming strategic nets (Möller & Rajala, 2007; Möller & Svahn, 2003). Visioning of the potential network environment and the strategic options it offers (Abrahamsen et al., 2016; Laari-Salmela et al., 2015) and the adaptations required in business interaction are essential strategizing activities for managers (Harrison & Prenkert 2009).

The business network view does not distinguish clearly between the collective and the individual level, as the term "actor" is often used synonymously. In this study, we approach strategizing from the perspective of the individual manager making sense of the network context as representing his/her organization. Strategizing is thus viewed as a cognitive sensemaking process (Laari-Salmela et al., 2015; Abrahamsen et al., 2012), with strategizing occurring through cognitive framing and actual business interaction, at the level of individual actors responsible for managing relationships with external actors.

Inspired by the Weickian concept of sensemaking (Weick 1995), network researchers have conceived of strategizing as an interplay between cognition and action (Henneberg et al., 2010; Mattsson et al., 2015), and an organic and incremental process (Laari-Salmela et al., 2015). The idea of cognition is encapsulated into the concept of network pictures, i.e. managers' mental representation of their surrounding business network (e.g. Corsaro et al. 2011; Henneberg et al. 2006; Öberg et al, 2007). Network pictures have been considered as an important cognitive structure informing strategizing (Abrahamsen et al., 2016; Möller 2010) but the issue of how different cognitive processes influence strategic action has received limited scholarly attention. Corsaro et al. (2011) demonstrate how the different characteristics of network pictures are associated with networking behavior. Emphasizing the dynamic nature of strategizing, Abrahamsen et al. (2016) introduce network picturing as a key process connecting the cognitive frames of managers to their strategizing activity. Laari-Salmela et al. (2015) propose network visioning as an important situational mechanism of strategy formation, giving it an intermediating role between managerial cognition and action – between what "managers see of their network context and how this is related to what they do" (p.117).

We thus conclude that researchers have called for further attention to strategizing as an ongoing process where cognition informs action, and

where the future perspective – especially visioning – plays an important role between the perceived network and subsequent action. We take this as our starting point for developing the concept of visioning as part of business network strategizing. For that purpose, we will review how business network research has integrated the future perspective in its studies.

2.2. Visioning in network strategizing

Studies of network strategizing have rarely taken a forward-looking perspective. At the company level, Low and Johnston (2009) scrutinize how companies prepare themselves for emerging technologies and identify network positioning paths for companies from their present position going forward. Harrison and Prenkert (2009) investigate the strategizing trajectories of a meat processing company, describing its scenarios with respect to network connections. In most studies, an individual's future perspective is treated as an implicit dimension of managerial thinking or as an aspect embedded into the research design that receives little attention, as in the case of agenda construction for the development of new business fields (Möller, 2010) or making sense of the network change necessary for future business (Medlin & Törnroos, 2014).

Visioning has been identified as an essential cognitive process in business network strategizing (Harrison & Prenkert 2009; Laari-Salmela et al. 2015), but it has not been conceptually elaborated or empirically investigated in any depth. Möller and Halinen (1999) introduced visioning as an important network management activity, defining it as the creation of valid views of the network and its evolution (see also Tikkanen & Halinen, 2003). Later Möller and Svahn (2003) examined visioning as an important organizational capability in managing radical innovation. As a sensemaking activity, visioning has been seen to entail an understanding of the surrounding network, an evaluation of what is occurring in the network and a clear strategic conception of what a company should do in the given network context (Laari-Salmela et al., 2015).

In order to extend our knowledge of this concept and managers' cognitive limitations in visioning, we draw on the organizational foresight literature. This is well suited for our purpose, as it sees visioning as a specific type of foresight needed in strategizing.

2.3. Visioning in organizational foresight

Organizational foresight entails the idea of an explorative anticipation of potential futures (Voros, 2003). It refers to "organizational ability to explore and recognize the underlying structure of the business environment—*seeing* the drivers of change before they manifest in near-term events" (Burt & Wright 2006, 887). The future is seen as inherently unknowable, open-ended and typically full of surprises, and thus impossible to predict accurately (Nayak, 2009; Tsoukas & Shepherd, 2004; cf. Ford & Mouzas, 2008). Foresight scholars tend to take a pre-active (anticipating change) or proactive (provoking change) approach to future, and assume that firms and individuals have an active role in creating the future instead of discovering it as something that exists "out there" independent of human actions (Godet & Roubelat, 1996; Cunha et al., 2006).

Foresight scholars have recently emphasized the nature of foresight as "a contextual practice of 'way finding'" (Sarpong et al., 2013) or even as a real-time improvisation (Cunha et al., 2012). In so doing, they have distanced themselves from the analytic and technical view of foresight, and examined it as a social practice and an on-going collective process where managers are perceived to create the future along the way, as the present unfolds (Cunha et al., 2006; Sarpong & Maclean, 2016). This particular view on the future is very much in line with the network strategizing concept, where strategizing is seen as continuous interaction and networking with other business actors for the purpose of implementing strategic intentions.

Visioning can be considered as a specific type of foresight along with strategic planning, scenario thinking, and planned emergence (Cunha et al., 2006). These differ based on how far into the future the foresight extends, and also by the level on which it is considered (i.e. as macroscopic analysis or microscopic practice). Visioning as a concept emphasizes the micro level of business practice: it occurs in every-day business interaction and is performed by managers and key decision makers. Based on this view, we may define visioning as a cognitive process, where the manager takes an explorative view on future changes in business markets and considers the future at a relatively short time horizon.

Managers responsible of strategizing are the key actors in visioning; they do the visioning and act as change agents (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2009). To cope with an uncertain and unpredictable future, managers need to create a vision or a mental model of the given business environment (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). The development of a firm's vision is an interplay between expected external changes in its environment and internal ambitions as to how the firm wants to position itself in that environment (van der Duin et al., 2014). Our concept of visioning should, however, not be confused with a strategic vision that is created in a strategic planning process at the corporate level and which is typically expressed in the form of an ideal future state or desired image for a company (Cunha et al., 2006; MacKay, 2009). In this study we consider visioning as a process, and not as an outcome. This process, as noted above, can take place at the individual level, or it can be a collective endeavor in which managers are working together to envisage the future. In this study, we focus on the individual level.

2.4. The limitations of visioning

Strategizing managers are expected to make sense of their environment on an ongoing basis and to respond to change at short notice. In this light, we have limited understanding about what managers can actually foresee and what potentially constrains their visioning in business networks. It has been noted that managers' subjective network pictures may in themselves limit their view on the relevant actors and strategizing activities (Abrahamsen et al., 2012; Abrahamsen et al., 2016). Besides network pictures, the perceived strategy picture and how one evaluates the company's ability to change the situation are also likely to constrain visioning (Laari-Salmela et al., 2015; Penttilä et al., 2020).

Business networks are likely to attribute particular contextual cues as well as constraints for visioning. The perceived network horizon, i.e. how far beyond the direct counterparts in the network structure one can see, is limited (Holmen & Pedersen, 2003). Recent research shows that managers tend to be myopic, noting mainly vertical and direct relationships and ignoring indirect and other value-creating relationships (Czakon & Kawa, 2018). Tatli & Özbilgin (2009, 254) point out that the contextual circumstances and network of relationships frame managers' "ability to foresee and identify path dependencies…and temporal fluctuations as well as direction of contextual and relational shifts." The business network as a web of interdependent relationships, is likely to give rise to various unforeseeable effects on a company's operations, increasing uncertainty and giving rise to events that come as a surprise to the managers involved.

Future developments can effectively be seen through events and event trajectories or through trends detectable based on the past (Bruun et al., 2002; Halinen et al., 2013). Alternatively, one may construct a future outlook in a conventional manner, from the point of view of expected temporal contingencies, or unconventionally by expanding the perspective to events and trends that occur in domains that probably have less influence in the focal business context (Bruun et al., 2002). In strategic foresight research, the need to develop peripheral vision has been emphasized (MacKay, 2009), which refers to "a cultivated sensitivity to the marginal, the hidden, the obscured and to what lies outside the frame of conscious attention" (Cunha & Chia, 2007, 561). This is not

easy, however, as people tend to defend their existing mindset. They adhere to their cognitive frames, they use new information to validate their existing beliefs and conform to group pressures (Cunha & Chia, 2007).

In fact, many of the cognitive constraints addressed in foresight studies relate to individual managers as human beings or foresight as an organizational, strategic task. Psychological stress, adherence to managerial recipes, and risks perceived to be linked to current or alternative courses of action may effectively prevent managers from seeing alternatives or even in engaging in forward-looking activities (Burt & Wright, 2006). Creeping excessive determinism and hindsight bias may prevent managers from seeing strategic options (MacKay et al., 2006). Strategic inertia, or groupthink (Burt & Wright, 2006) and the dominant logics developed by organizations also function as cognitive constraints (Cunha & Chia, 2007). By looking hard in one particular direction, managers may easily overlook important aspects of the wider context (Neugarten, 2006).

2.5. The guiding role of visioning

In the business network view, it is assumed that individual managers' mental models, as biased as they might be, importantly influence their strategizing actions (Abrahamsen et al., 2016). Often the effects of cognitive frames on outcomes of action are however left unnoticed in research (Mattsson et al., 2015). Similarly, the extent to which visioning ultimately guides strategizing and creates the desired outcomes for a firm has remained an open issue.

Managers' cognitive limitations are likely to distort visioning as described in the previous section, but research has also shown that continuous network picturing equips managers with a better understanding of the potential network effects on their strategizing (Abrahamsen et al., 2016). It is also well known that companies operating in business networks have limited freedom to act. The strategic actions and choices made by other connected companies affect the outcomes of strategizing for a focal company (Baraldi et al., 2007; Harrison et al., 2010) and strategizing is likely to create both intended and unintended outcomes (Öberg et al., 2016). While empirical evidence is scarce, we should ask how the visioning related to the network development and strategic intentions ultimately turn into realized networks and strategic outcomes for the firm over time.

2.6. Research gaps

The literature review above suggests that there is a need to extend our conceptual understanding of visioning as part of business network strategizing, and to study it empirically in order to reveal its relevance for strategizing. We start from the premise that visioning is an individual cognitive process that guides managers' strategizing in business networks. While visioning, the manager takes an explorative view on future changes (Cunha et al., 2006) especially in relation to the forthcoming network development and builds a conception of what a company should do in this context (Laari-Salmela et al., 2015). Beyond this, we have little understanding of what visioning entails (RQ1), in other words, to which aspects of networks and network change managers direct their contemplation of the near future.

Based on the literature review and inputs from organizational foresight, we may form an understanding of the type of cognitive limitations that potentially affect managers' visioning either relating to individual managers, the strategic task, or the network context (Abrahamsen et al., 2016; Burt & Wright, 2006; Cunha & Chia 2007; Laari-Salmela et al., 2015; Penttilä et al., 2020). We may also presume that various network constraints – simply how other companies act and react – impede visioning from materializing in intended strategic action and outcomes (Baraldi et al., 2007; Harrison et al., 2010; Öberg et al. 2016). What we do not know however, is which of these limitations are valid for visioning in business networks (RQ2). Empirical evidence of the

influence of visioning on subsequent interaction and networking is also scarce. Assuming that various cognitive limitations and network constraints interfere in the process of visioning, it is relevant to ask to what extent visioning actually informs strategizing activities (RQ3). We now turn to the empirical study to find answers to these research questions. At the end the results will be integrated with our theoretical preunderstanding of business networks and the conceptual inputs from organizational foresight literature to produce a theoretical model of strategizing in business networks.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

To address our research questions, we have undertaken a qualitative case study of a Norwegian- Japanese seafood distribution network, studying its key companies over time and using temporal comparison as a method of analysis. This context was chosen because it provided a good opportunity to study a changing network structure, the visioning of the individual managers involved, and the implications and challenges for the companies they represent. Japan has long been an important market for Norwegian seafood, and some Norwegian seafood companies have been present in Japan for over 40 years. Japan is Norway's second largest seafood export market in Asia (Abrahamsen & Håkansson, 2016), of which the two exporters in our study together represents a market share of 21 percent of fresh salmon exports to Japan. Traditionally, seafood has been distributed to a large number of smaller Japanese retailers and restaurants via large wholesale markets such as the Tokyo wholesale fish market, also known as the "Tsukiji" fish market (Bestor, 2004). However, in recent years this system has come under pressure to become more efficient, with foreign exporters and Japanese importers increasingly bypassing the wholesale markets and building direct relationships with Japanese retailers. The three importers featuring in our study are central in this transition as they together represent 27 percent of all fresh salmon imports to Japan. Fig. 1 depicts the linkages between the companies in the focal network that include two Norwegian exporters, three Japanese importers, the wholesaler market, and a variety of retailers.

To enable temporal comparison, we use a method of point mapping (Halinen et al., 2012), i.e. collecting data at two points of time (Time1 and Time2), but using a different temporal orientation in data collection at each point (cf. Aaboen et al., 2013). At T1 we applied a prospective (i. e. visioning) orientation, asking the respondents how they expect their network to have changed in 5 years' time, and at T2 a retrospective (i.e. reflecting) orientation, asking them to reflect on what was achieved. A temporal comparative analysis between T1 and T2 enabled us to learn about visioning and its relevance for strategizing in the context of the
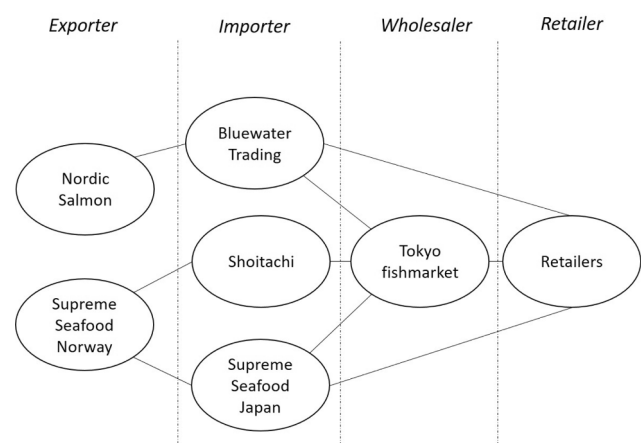

Fig. 1. Actors in the focal network.

business network studied from the perspective of individual managers.

3.2. Data collection

Our data are based mainly on twelve personal in-depth interviews conducted in November 2007 (T1) and then again in the period between late 2013 and early 2015 as part of a follow-up study (T2). Additionally, a rich description of the seafood distribution network has been generated based on extensive interviewing, site visits and documentary sources. The managers selected as informants represent their companies and occupy key positions in their organizations with respect to strategizing. They had followed the development of this particular industry closely and had in-depth knowledge about their company's activities over the studied period. Table 1 provides a list of informants and a short description of the companies they represent in the network.

The prospective interviews at T1 were conducted as part of a research project on the distribution of Norwegian salmon in Japan. The aim of this original study was to understand network dynamics by analysing managers' network pictures. As part of the study, data was additionally collected on how managers envision the future development of their network. This data is used as T1 data in the study reported here. The companies in the studied network were initially identified by crosschecking information from preliminary discussions with industry representatives and official Norwegian export statistics. The earlier project thus facilitated access to an established business network and provided an opportunity to collect valuable follow-up data at a later stage.

During the T1 interviews a number of open-ended questions were posed related to the present and envisioned future. The informants were asked how they interacted with their main counterparts, what changes they experienced in their business environment, and what they envisaged that their network would look like in the forthcoming years (see Table 2). To enhance their capacity to process mental content, informants were asked to provide network picture drawings related to their visions. Network pictures are managers' subjective representations about their surrounding network and help to understand what managers perceive to be important (Henneberg et al., 2006). They were used as a research tool to capture how managers visualised their network (Ramos & Ford, 2011). For examples of network picture drawings collected, see Appendix A. In our study, we used the managers' network pictures as a guide for probing into key interview themes (for a similar method see Aaboen et al., 2012; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). The visioning of the informants was not limited in any way, except by asking them to focus on their own company's network. At T2 the same companies were subsequently revisited to ascertain to what extent the changes anticipated by the informants at T1 had materialized. A similar open interview style was followed, with questions adapted to study the recent past (retrospective interviews) (see Table 2). Each interview at T1 and T2 lasted between 1.5 and 2 h. The interviews in Norway were conducted in Norwegian and interviews in Japan were conducted in English. No interpreter was used because all the respondents used English as their business language. Written notes were taken during the interviews, and transcriptions were made immediately after each interview to ensure "freshness" of the data. In a few instances the respondents were contacted a second time to clarify content and meaning.

Due to the hectic schedules of the participating actors, the interviews at T2 were conducted at different points in time: the interviews in Japan as part of a research trip in November 2013, and those in Norway between the end 2014 and start of 2015. We contacted the same informants as in T1 but in case they had left the company, we approached those who had taken over their responsibilities. For the follow-up study it was critical that the informants were well informed of their companies' strategic path over the period studied. A summary of the initial answers at T1 was given to the interviewees as material for reflection. Despite these adjustments, the data presented in this study provides a valid picture of how managers, representing their companies, viewed

Table 1
Companies and informants in the focal network.

Company description	T1 informant	T2 informant
Nordic Salmon		
Large Norwegian salmon producer First exporter to introduce chartered salmon flights, where salmon is collected at a fish farm in Norway, shipped by air to Tokyo and distributed to restaurants and retailers within days. This is now the primary mode of transportation. Nordic Salmon has two importers in Japan, one being Bluewater Trading. This relationship goes back many decades	**Marketing manager** Responsible for sales and distribution of salmon to the Japanese market Left the company during the study period	**Asia manager** Replaced the marketing manager at T1 as informant Was promoted from a similar position in Nordic Salmon Had worked at the company during T1 and T2
Bluewater Trading		
Japanese salmon importer Buys from Nordic Salmon Sells mainly directly to retailers and to primary and secondary wholesalers at the traditional fish markets Cooperates closely with independent processors	**Marketing manager** Responsible for business relationship with Norwegian salmon producers and for distribution of salmon to the Japanese market	**Vice president** Same informant as at T1 Had by then become vice president of the company with wider responsibilities
Supreme Seafood Norway		
Large Norwegian Salmon producer Has a long presence in Japan Norwegian salmon was first introduced to the Japanese market in the 1970s Farmed salmon is free from parasites found in wild salmon and is perfect for sushi. Supreme Seafood has its own subsidiary in Japan (Supreme Seafood Japan) which serves as an importer and processor	**Asian region manager** Responsible for the Asian market including sales and operations in Japan. Left the company during the study period.	**Marketing manager Asia** Replaced the Asia region manager at T1 as informant Was promoted from a similar position in Supreme Seafood Norway Had worked at the company during T1 and T2
Supreme Seafood Japan		
Japanese salmon importer and processor Supreme Seafood sells around 20 % of its salmon through the traditional fish market distribution Direct sales to retailes are increasing	**Manager of operations** Responsible for sales and distribution of salmon in Japan and other Asian markets	**Marketing Manager** Same informant as at T1 Had by then become Marketing Manager, being responsible for the Japanese market

Table 1 (*continued*)

Company description	T1 informant	T2 informant
Shoitachi Co.		
Japanese seafood importer Buys from several Norwegian exporters such as Supreme Seafood Norway Sells primarily directly to retailers and to primary and secondary wholesalers at the traditional fish markets	**General manager, Tokyo branch** Responsible for Norwegian supplier relationships and seafood sales in Japan	**General manager, Tokyo branch** Same informant as at T1, but now with wider responsibilities
Tokyo wholesale fish market		
Japan's largest wholesale fish market Imports, handles, processes, stores and sells seafood from all over the world Buys seafood from Japanese importers and sells to retailers and restaurants Consists of seven large primary wholesalers and over 1000 secondary wholesalers	**Operations manager** Representing one of the seven primary wholesalers at the fish market Handles business relationships with Norwegian suppliers and Japanese importers of salmon	**Two operations managers** #1: Replaced the operations manager at T1 as informant. Similar responsibilities as T1 informant. #2: Manager representing another primary wholesaler. Provided additional information about industry changes since T1. Similar responsibilities as T1 informant. Both informants had worked at the company during T1 and T2

Table 2
Interview guide.

Prospective interview themes (T1)	Retrospective interview themes (T2)
• What does your network look like today? What are the main changes you experience? Why are they happening? What will your network look like in five years' time? What will this development represent for your company?	• What have been the main developments in your network since our last interview? Or in the last five years? Why have these developments taken place? What implications have these developments had for your company?

their network and strategy at the two selected points in time.

3.3. Data analysis

Qualitative analysis requires the turning of transcripts into meaningful data fit for intended analysis (King, 2004). In our analysis, we combined the idea of point mapping and temporal comparison (Halinen et al., 2012) with the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012). The Gioia methodology draws heavily on the Grounded Theory by Glaser & Strauss (1967), providing a systematic way of constructing conceptual language from raw data. It assists in producing a structural but static understanding of the concepts studied (the components of visioning and strategizing), while point mapping offers methodological tools to reveal

the temporal link between visioning and strategizing and the limitations of these activities in time.

Our data analysis proceeded in line with abductive reasoning, iteratively combining the empirical inputs with the available theoretical understanding (Dubois & Gadde, 2014). Guided by our preliminary definition of visioning and understanding of business network strategizing, we established a four-category framework as a starting point for our data analysis (see Fig. 2). As we were interested in visioning as the manager's cognitive process related to strategizing in their company's network, we first derived two main categories at T1, labelling them the *prospective network* ("what we expect to see") and the *strategic intentions* ("what we intend to do"). Similarly, we derived two main categories at T2. Here we were interested in studying the managers' cognitive perceptions of their companies' current networks at this later point in time and their strategic achievements or outcomes. We labelled these two categories the *perceived network* ("what we see now"), and the *strategic outcomes* ("what we have achieved") (see Fig. 2).

First, following the steps of conventional content analysis and progression from empirical data to higher-level abstract conceptual categories, two researchers separately analysed the transcripts and identified six broad themes that the informants had identified during the interviews at T1 and T2. When interpreting the data and identifying these themes, we drew on our prior knowledge of distribution networks (the empirical context of the study), and the key theoretical concepts of business network theory that offer a more abstract level of conceptualization. We labelled the themes as 1. "Changes in the distribution network structure", 2. "Increasing power of retail actors", 3. "Changing role of wholesale actors", 4. "Interaction and integration", 5. "Resource development and utilization" and 6. "Activity links and coordination". This step corresponds to the second order analysis in the Gioia methodology, where investigators are "firmly in the theoretical realm, asking whether the emerging themes suggest concepts that might help us describe and explain the phenomena we are observing" (Gioia et al., 2012p. 20). Advancing to Gioia et al.'s third order analysis, the abstraction of aggregate dimensions, we assigned data from these six broad themes to the four analytical categories first developed to enable a meaningful temporal comparison: i.e. data concerning prospective network and perceived network, and data concerned with strategic intentions and strategic outcomes. Finally, we proceeded to the temporal analysis, comparing past expectations (prospection) with current experiences (retrospection), in line with the recommendations by Konlechner et al. (2018).

Our data analysis facilitated addressing our research questions in the following way. We first analysed in more detail the visioning of the informants related to their prospective network and their strategic intentions at T1, thereby addressing RQ1 ("what does visioning entail in the context of network strategizing?"). Then, to answer RQ2 ("what are the cognitive limitations of visioning?"), we proceeded to the temporal comparative analysis comparing managers' initial prospective network at T1 with the network perceived later at T2. To deepen the analysis, we established further sub-categories for comparison by identifying those developments that had been anticipated in T1 and also those that had occurred, but which had not originally been anticipated. Finally, comparing the strategic intentions (T1) and strategic outcomes (T2) using the categories of planned outcomes and not anticipated outcomes enabled us to address the third research question RQ3 ("how does managers' visioning inform their subsequent interaction and networking?").

4. Empirical findings

The findings are presented in three parts, focusing first on the prospective network development and strategic intentions which the managers identified at T1, and then advancing to the comparative analysis described in Fig. 2, revealing the limitations of visioning and the extent to which visioning informs network strategizing. To save
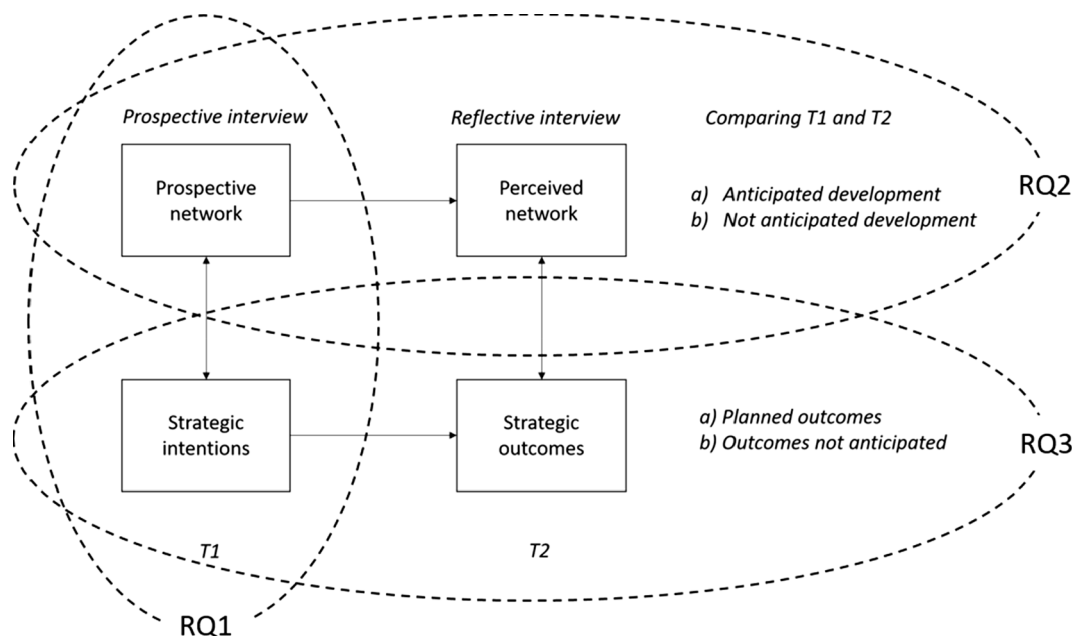
Fig. 2. Analytical framework.

Table 3
Overview of results from the empirical study.

Prospective network "What we expect to see"		Perceived network "What we expect to see" compared to "What we see now"	
Main themes		**Anticipated development**	**Development not anticipated**
1: Changes in the distribution network structure	• Shorter distribution channel with fewer intermediaries Increasing direct sales to retailers Reduced sales to traditional wholesalers	• Direct distribution has increased More sales directly to retailers	• Extent of cooperation: increased production, extensive promotion, new brands introduced Speed and extent of changes
2: Increasing power of retail actors	• Retailers will want closer cooperation with producers to ensure product quality, efficiency and cost reduction Retailers will demand a wider product range Smaller retailers will go out of business	• Japanese retailers have become more powerful Retail concentration has increased: Top 15 retail customers now account for 80 % of Supreme Seafood Japan's turnover	• Japanese retailers are still very traditionalJapanese retail structure is still very fragmented (3 000 companies serve over 40 000 retail shops)
3: Changing role of wholesale actors	• The number of wholesalers will be reducedTraditional distribution (the fish market) will not disappear entirely The fish market serves a purpose for smaller retailers	• Fish market still important, but suppliers studied are less involved	• The number of fish market wholesalers is unchangedThe fish market has taken on new roles and functions to become more attractive (storage, processing and transport)

Strategic intentions "What we intend to do"		Strategic outcomes "What we intend to do" compared to "What we have achieved"	
Main concerns		**Planned outcomes**	**Outcomes not anticipated**
4: Interaction and integration	• Companies will take steps to become more integrated Ownership and joint ventures are likely Increased cooperation and commitment between the actors	• The actors have taken steps towards a more integrated structure (ownership and preferential partner agreements) The actors have a stronger market presence and a larger market share	• The range of operations in Japan and level of cooperation with partners is more profound than anticipated One customer is lost because of closer integration between actors Speed and intensity of change is higher
5: Resource development and utilization	• New products will be introduced Existing products will be adaptedNew concepts (packaging, logistics, feed mix at the fish farm, category management, menu development with restaurants) will be developed	• Sales and production volumes have increased Salmon fillets and a range of value-added products have been developed Increased demand for high quality salmon	• Introduction of salmon brands specifically for the Japanese market Continued competition with Chilean salmon Japan continues to be a highly expensive market
6: Activity links and coordination	• Increased cooperation concerning location of activities (filleting in Norway or Japan) and performance of activities will be undertaken	• Designated production facilities in Norway have been established Fillets produced in Norway have become industry standard	• Less conflict about location of activities than anticipated

space, we report the results and supporting evidence briefly and proceed to the discussion. The overall findings are presented in Table 3.

4.1. What does visioning entail?

Our first research question concerns what visioning entails in the context of network strategizing. Here we are interested in what managers see while visioning developments in their network, and what strategic actions they plan to undertake.

Looking at our managers' prospective network at T1, our results suggest that visioning is an important cognitive process for managers when they attempt to make sense of their company's business environment and the potential strategic actions to take. During the interviews, conversations about the surrounding business network, its future development, and the role of connected actors frequently occurred and provided detailed accounts of the managers' views of their organizations' anticipated future paths. Independent of their network position, the managers all seem to anticipate the same future developments in this distribution network: increasing direct distribution where the traditional wholesale markets are bypassed, but where the wholesale markets will continue to play a role: "*The distribution channel becomes shorter and levels are bypassed. What we have waited to happen in Japan for 15 years is now happening, but very slowly*" (Region manager, Supreme Seafood). Similar views are held by the informants representing Supreme Seafood Japan, Shoitachi and Nordic Salmon: "*We will increase our turnover in the direct market. This is where the growth will be. We will have a much greater part of our turnover in direct relationships with the main retail chains, both in the supermarket and the restaurant segments*" (Marketing manager, Nordic Salmon).

The managers believe this bypassing is happening because of the increasing power of retailers: "*The Japanese retailers are becoming increasingly powerful. The retailers want to buy a whole range of products and we need to form alliances to have the fish processed in Japan. They want to cut costs. If I approach the retailer directly he gets the fish cheaper*" (Region manager, Supreme Seafood Norway), and further "*Now, we discuss how to increase our contact with the retailers at the expense of the fish market*" (Marketing manager, Bluewater Trading).

However the informants believe that the traditional wholesale markets will survive, as they facilitate access to a large number of smaller Japanese retailers: "*We have no plans to downscale our turnover at the fish market. To target the traditional sushi restaurants, direct distribution does not work. You have to be present at the [wholesale] fish market.*" (Marketing manager, Nordic Salmon). This means that the future change towards more direct distribution will be a slow one. "*For instance,*" the region manager at Supreme Seafood Norway argues, "*I don't think the system will change that much in the future. I have worked with Japan now for 15 years, and there has hardly been a change.*".

Visioning, as openly contemplating the future with respect to the company's business networks and strategic intentions, is obviously a process which helps managers to cope with uncertainty and to attach meanings to cues noticed in the business environment (Neugarten, 2006). Visioning helps companies identify network positioning paths with respect to how other actors may position themselves (Low & Johnston, 2009) and, if extending the temporal frame, to describe apparent scenarios for network connections (Harrison & Prenkert, 2009). Our findings give further support to the idea that visioning is an integral part of network strategizing (cf. Möller & Halinen, 1999; Laari-Salmela et al., 2015).

Comparing the informants' prospective network and their strategic intentions at T1, we further find that managers' visioning of their network is intimately linked with their intended action (and reaction), i. e. their strategizing. We notice that there are several similarities in the way in which they envisage the development of their network and the strategic measures they plan to take. Supreme Seafood Norway, for instance, has a clear ambition to set up its own processing operations in Japan, serving the needs of the retailers which they expect to be playing

an increasingly important role. Similarly, the Supreme Seafood Japan informant talks about a need to develop close ties to the retailers and other actors such as restaurants. Closer ties mean that the actors will adapt their products to better suit the needs of their customers. For instance, the retailers are increasingly interested in ready-made fillets: "*Now the majority is fish with head, tail and bones. We are selling more fillets now, and this percentage will increase…Filleting will be even more popular*" (General manager, Supreme Seafood Japan). The Bluewater Trading manager points to a similar development: "*There will be increased demand for processed products.*" The increased retail power implies that the exporters need to come up with new products: "*Additionally, we have an ambition of moving into new species. The customers may go elsewhere if we don't*" (Region manager, Supreme Seafood Norway). For Nordic Salmon, the closeness to their customer is even more fundamental, and the respondent mentions a range of resource ties that needs to be developed: "*We will develop concepts together in the direct system. These concepts can be regarding packaging, logistics, special product quality, feed mix at the fish farm, category management together with the supermarkets, and menu development with the restaurants.*" (Marketing manager, Nordic Salmon). Overall, these results point to the fact that the companies will take steps to become more integrated with their strategic partners and they intend to cooperate closely by utilizing resources and coordinating activities effectively.

Our findings correspond with van der Duin et al.'s (2014) claim that visioning is an interplay between expected changes in the environment and how the company wants to position itself in this environment (see also Laari-Salmela et al., 2015). Our results provide empirical support for the intermediating role of visioning between cognition and action in network strategizing, and confirm that envisioning future development helps managers to evaluate options available for strategic action (Abrahamsen et al., 2016; Mattsson et al., 2015). Our findings further suggest that in a slowly changing industry, managers pay attention to its basic structure (the actors, activities and resources), their network positions and the direction of change when visioning their network. These findings are in line with foresight studies indicating that it is easiest to foresee trends detectable based on the past and occurring in domains that are likely to have an influence on the focal network (Bruun et al., 2002), and to focus on issues that do not require peripheral vision (Cunha & Chia, 2007). Our informants clearly concentrated on the most probable trends within their network context. They did not extend their view beyond the most evident business horizon, in this case beyond the key actors and relationships of the distribution network, which supports earlier findings (Holmen & Pedersen, 2003; Czakon & Kawa, 2018).

4.2. What are the limitations of visioning?

Our second research question concerns the limitations of visioning. Here we are interested in network developments which were not originally foreseen by the managers at T1. To address this research question, we compare the managers' prospective network at T1 to the perceived network at T2, and do this by analysing the "anticipated developments" and "not anticipated developments" (see Table 3). This helps to determine the extent to which their prospective network was later realised and whether the more granular developments were foreseen or not, thereby highlighting the limits of managers' visioning.

Our results indicate that there are several changes reported at T2 that did occur, but the managers at T1 did not foresee these developments. One important factor is the changing role of the fish market. While the drop in business via this route was clearly apparent, our informants did not anticipate that the fish market would retain a share of the new business. For instance, the Bluewater informant says "*the wholesalers at the fishmarket have become sub-distributors to the importers such as us. I think that these wholesalers still have an important role to play but in a slightly more modern way. The fish market still has a large market share because of the kind of services it provides.*" Such services involve storage, processing and transportation and moving its operations to new

premises to become more attractive. The fishmarket continues to be used but for other purposes, suggesting that the same type of actors are involved but they have taken on new roles. Secondly, the informants did not foresee the increasing intensity of the interaction with other parties. Supreme Seafood Japan has for instance developed new products and a brand for the Japanese retailers and are helping them become more efficient. Likewise, the vice president of Bluewater Trading says that *"… the retailers now want to have information about the Norwegian products. They also want to cooperate on promotion activities."* This extensive collaboration was not foreseen. The third commonly shared surprise had to do with the speed of the change. While the informants at T1 seemed to have been able to anticipate the direction of change, the developments reported at T2 indicate that they were far less adroit at ascertaining the timing involved. For example, the closer interaction with the retailers happened faster than expected, requiring organizational actions and reactions by their company that they had not anticipated. For instance, the Shoitachi general manager reports that: *"there has been a tremendous change in the network since our last conversation. The direct sales to retailers have increased and our turnover has doubled. At the same time the number of intermediary wholesalers at the Tokyo wholesale market has been reduced.".*

The results thereby point to the fact that when visioning, managers are relatively good at identifying the future trends and hence the structure of their industry. What they are less good at foreseeing is what their own required response should be. Just what events will occur in their interactions with their counterparts is something that occurs more idiosyncratically and unpredictably. Both the speed of the response required and the identification of the actors that needed to be involved in dealing with the unfolding events often came as a surprise. So while the direction in which the industry develops is relatively easy to anticipate, the exact road by which the companies get there is not.

This is a somewhat counter-intuitive finding. When thinking of the necessarily limited network horizons and the myopia that limits managers' view on the horizontal and indirect relationships (Holmen & Pedersen, 2003; Czakon & Kawa, 2018), it seems logical to think that managers would see more clearly things that are 'closer' to them rather than those that are more peripheral to the network. Those changes that are closer to them are those over which they can be assumed to have more control, and hence to be able to influence them more directly. But we found this not to be the case. An alternative interpretation here may be that while the managers could envisage the more technical aspects of how the interaction with their counterparts might develop, they were less able to judge the way(s) in which social interaction and organizational processes would change.

To explain this, it is important to differentiate between the network-level trends from the dynamics of everyday interaction. Managers' outlook on the network structure and who they notice as important actors is necessarily limited. At the same time, their visioning related to general network level trends may be extensive and vivid, which coincides well with the findings of Bruun et al. (2002). These two perspectives are thus not in conflict but may co-exist. Our findings on managers' limited ability to envision how the trend of structural change will impact their own interactions and the reactions of other parties gets support from an earlier foresight study that warns of managerial hyperopia: top management in particular tends to see more clearly what is far away, rather than what is required in the near-field managerial issues (Burt et al., 2015). The findings also support Tatli and Özbilgin's (2009) suggestion that a network represents a context where relational shifts are difficult to anticipate.

Another explanation may be that actors working in close collaboration may have overlapping cognitive frameworks of their common context (Mattsson et al., 2015). In the studied case, the focal strategizing companies (seafood exporters) and their key partners in the distribution network (importers) shared a fairly similar outlook on the future. It may be that the close network relationships even encouraged conditions of groupthink (Burt and Wright, 2006), or dominant logics (Cunha & Chia, 2007), making managers see the same commonly expected future

(Beckert, 2013). At the same time, the strategic moves of the Tsukiji fish market came as a surprise to the very same actors even though it is one of the key players in the Japanese market. This finding resonates with the warnings of Neugarten (2006) that over-focusing may lead to tunnel vision that prevents managers from seeing the interests of other actors in the wider network context.

4.3. To what extent does visioning inform networking?

To answer this third research question, we now compare the managers' strategic intentions at T1 and the strategic outcomes reported at T2, analysing "planned outcomes" and "outcomes not anticipated" to examine the extent to which the managers initial perceptions about the future are realised and enacted in retrospect. Our overall results suggest that a range of outcomes have materialised in the way the managers at T1 initially planned, but some outcomes at T2 have appeared different to the initial intentions. For instance, at T1 the informants described several strategic moves to becoming more integrated with their counterparts, even to the extent of joint ventures or ownerships. For Supreme Seafood Norway, this has involved setting up four factories in Japan. Here they perform a range of operations, enabling them to work closely with the retailers to produce joint in-store promotions. However, the T1 informant did not anticipate the actual scale and extent of this operation: *"In the new factory we now do the main processing of salmon fillets, skipping stages in the distribution previously used. We have also changed our sales strategy and have radically expanded our sales and marketing staff."* The extent of this operation was not anticipated in 2007. At the same time, Supreme Seafood's move towards further integration with the importer level in Japan has led to Shoitachi stopping buying salmon from Supreme Seafood, as Supreme Seafood Japan now has become a direct competitor. Neither of these developments were anticipated at T1.

As for Nordic Salmon and Bluewater Trading, the outcomes reported at T2 suggest that their strategic paths have taken a different course compared to their initial anticipations. Contrary to the intentions reported at T1, Nordic Salmon does not own its operations in Japan – on the contrary, it has invested heavily in developing extensive cooperation with their two importers of which Bluewater Trading has become particularly close. Bluewater Trading on their part has terminated relationships with its previous Norwegian salmon suppliers and is now buying solely from Nordic Salmon. The close relationship with Bluewater Trading has provided Nordic Salmon with access to Bluewater's extensive retail network. As a result, Nordic Salmon now enjoys the same kind of close cooperation with Japanese retailers as Supreme Seafood Norway does. An example of such close cooperation is the development of salmon brands by both Norwegian exporters specifically for the Japanese market. This was not anticipated at T1: *"We have created a private label for the Japanese market from one of our production sites in Northern Norway. This is a much more sophisticated business model than last time we spoke. We have been able to do this because of our continued good relationship with our Japanese customer"* (Nordic Salmon informant).

These reported results suggest that the managers' strategic activities are indeed informed by their visioning, as several of the network developments are taking place along the paths that the managers initially envisaged. However, our analysis illustrates that there are incidents and developments taking place in the network that the managers have not foreseen, but have still acted upon. This exemplifies that strategizing is as much about responding to the actions of others as envisaging one's own. It also means that strategizing implies continuous interpreting and reinterpreting the network environment. Managers follow their visioning, but constant changes in this visioning are needed as the network creates its own constraints. This finding confirms the earlier results on the nature of network picturing as a recursive process, thus extending the idea to the entire sphere of visioning (Abrahamsen et al., 2016). In line with the basic assumptions of business network theory, our results further demonstrate that managers' strategizing is constrained by the unanticipated actions of other connected actors (Ford &

Håkansson, 2006; Håkansson et al., 2009). The existing network structure limits the strategic options available for a company (Huemer, 2012), and the prospective network is thus both an outcome of and an input to managers' strategizing activities.

Another observation is that even within the same business field, where the actors perceive the future of the business in a relatively similar manner, they make fundamentally different strategic choices. For instance, Supreme Salmon chose an integration strategy whereas Nordic Salmon and Bluewater Trading adopted a partnering strategy. One explanation for this may be that managers' current strategic choices are rooted in choices in the past, which condition their strategic intentions related to the future, as proposed by research on path dependence in technology-intensive fields (Araujo & Harrison, 2002; Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2002; Dobusch & Schüßler, 2012). This may also serve as a good example of the "stickiness" of initially formed expectations and mental models (Konlechner et al., 2018), such as a business model (Penttilä et al., 2020). This suggests that even when faced with a similar envisioned future, managers will make different strategic choices reflecting their prospective network, i.e. they choose different strategizing paths based on different plausible accounts of the past, present and future (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013).

5. Strategizing in networks – A conceptual model

Our study suggests that visioning, as conscious contemplation about potential futures, is a natural and integral part of network strategizing. Visioning forms an important driver for managers' interaction and networking as they continuously evaluate how their network might evolve and what options this opens up for strategizing. Based on their visioning, managers take action in relation to other actors in the network, seeking the materialization of their strategic intentions. Integrating these results with extant knowledge of network strategizing and the ideas from the foresight literature, we propose a conceptual model which links visioning as a specific type of sensemaking to network strategizing, and describes strategizing as a recurrent cycle of visioning, networking and reflecting. This circular process is conditioned by managers' cognitive limitations and network constraints as illustrated in Fig. 3.

Visioning is a cognitive process where the manager takes an explorative, relatively short-term view of future changes related to the surrounding network and emerging strategic opportunities and forms strategic intentions accordingly. We propose that managers' visioning revolves around two key concerns – what do we expect to see? and what do we aim to do? – and label these as managers' prospective networks and managers' strategic intentions in the model (see Fig. 3). Managers' prospective network refers to the future development of the network, the direction and speed of change of the business network structure, i.e. the actors, activities and resources it entails, and the role and position of connected actors. Managers construct a prospective network based on network insights gained through business interaction (Henneberg et al., 2010; Mouzas et al., 2008), and they form strategic intentions based on this prospective network and the options they see in the present network context (Abrahamsen et al., 2016; Mouzas et al., 2008). Forming of strategic intentions involves evaluating the strategic options available, identifying network positioning paths, and assessing the type of interaction required with connected actors. Taken together these two processes (describing prospective networks and forming strategic intentions) construct the process of visioning, giving direction for networking.

Networking refers to interacting with strategic intent, what the managers ultimately do based on their visioning (cf. Laari-Salmela et al., 2015). In our study networking became visible in two different ways. First, in the actors' proactive interaction, where the focal actors decided to integrate their operations and create partnerships, initiate and terminate relationships, or strengthen and weaken ties to connected parties, and second, in reactive interaction, where they needed to respond to the action of other actors, and to unanticipated events and change. These activities reflect the key aspects of the strategizing concept identified by Harrison and Prenkert (2009): changing network roles and positions, influencing and mobilizing other actors, and adapting to other actors' activities in business interaction.

Reflecting means evaluating and interpreting the present network environment and the networking activities undertaken in retrospect. We have labelled the key concerns here the managers' perceived network and strategic outcomes. When reflecting, managers evaluate their network conditions, comparing what they envisaged earlier (the
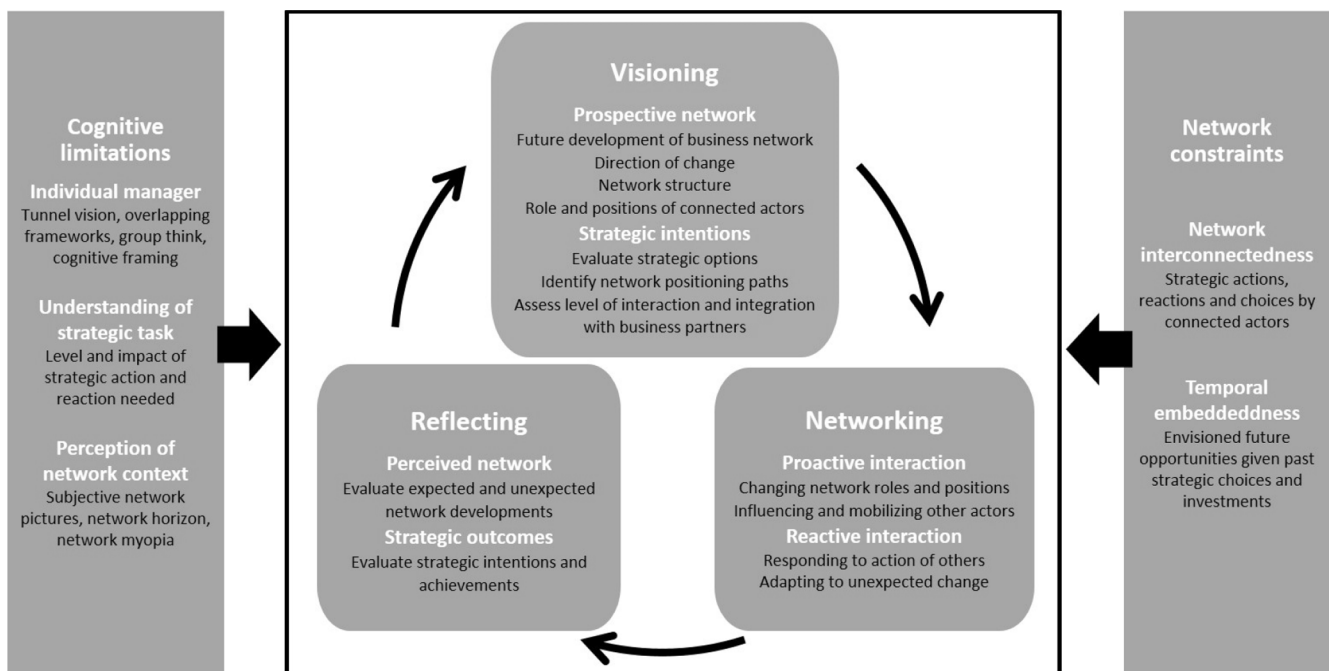
Fig. 3. Strategizing in business networks – a conceptual model.

prospective network) to their present network conditions (the perceived network), and pondering the effects of expected and unexpected change. Similarly, managers reflect on what their company has achieved by comparing their aims (strategic intentions) with achieved results (strategic outcomes).

Our model suggests that to succeed in strategizing, managers need to continuously evaluate and interpret changes in their networks. This continuous scanning forms a new basis for visioning and for consequent strategizing activities. As key agents acting on behalf of their company, managers make interpretations of the current situation, envision network changes and take an active part in forming and implementing the strategy through business interaction and networking. Besides the anticipation of the company's own activities, strategizing involves a fair share of responding to other actors' activities and adapting to unexpected events and change.

Further, in our model we propose that two categories of factors condition the strategizing process: managers' cognitive limitations and the constraints imposed by the network. Cognitive limitations relate especially to individual managers as human beings, to their understanding of the strategic task and perception of the network context. Our results indicate that overlapping cognitive frameworks with close business actors may lead to groupthink, thereby influencing the interpretation of the network and the options available. Similarly, managers' subjective interpretations of the strategic task, the level of strategic action or reaction it requires, and the type of impact such action creates, are likely to affect company's networking. Ultimately, managers' mental models of the network, such as their subjective network pictures and restricted network horizons will have an impact on their strategizing, defining how "far" they are able to see.

For the constraints imposed by the surrounding business network, two dimensions are particularly important: the interconnectedness of the network structure, and its temporal embeddedness (Halinen & Törnroos, 1998; Ritter, 2000). Our results show that company's actual strategizing is to a large extent conditioned by the strategic actions and reactions of other connected actors. Additionally, the study shows that past strategic actions cast a shadow on the present, limiting the options that the company has going forward. Strategizing is thus temporally embedded in past developments, earlier strategic choices and investments in the network. Networking with strategic intent is bound to emerge within the limits of the prevailing network conditions, but as shown in our study, also under the guidance of the envisioned future conditions and opportunities it provides.

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical implications

In this paper we have examined what visioning entails in the context of network strategizing, what the cognitive limitations of visioning are, and to what extent managers' visioning informs their subsequent interaction and networking. Our paper contributes to the business network strategizing literature in several ways. First, we elaborate on the concept of visioning, investigating it as part of business network strategizing. By drawing on the organizational foresight literature, we define visioning conceptually and explore it empirically. Our results show that visioning is a process that helps managers to openly contemplate the future, i.e. to envisage potential changes in the network structure, detect probable trends, and choose courses of action. Defining visioning as a key concept of business network strategizing, we add a new prospective approach to business network studies (cf. Harrison & Prenkert, 2009; Low & Johnston, 2009). Our empirical results and the subsequent elaboration of the concept are especially relevant for understanding how networks will develop. Visioning offers a much needed concept to investigate foresighting and expectation building in business interaction (Andersen et al., 2017; Möller & Halinen, 1999; Naudé & Sutton-Brady, 2019) and in attempting to understand managers'

strategic thinking and action as part of network development.

Secondly, our study adds to current empirical knowledge of the nature and limitations of visioning and its influence on strategic action. Although the managers in our study were relatively good at identifying the future trends and structure of their industry, the speed of change and intensity of interaction was more difficult to foresee. Managers' ability to envision how the trend of structural change will impact their own interactions and other actors' reactions was limited. Our results also show that in an established distribution network, managers' visions may easily converge. This restricts their consideration of other potential futures and creates a tunnel vision that narrows down the perceived network horizon. The danger here is that, in working towards creating a common vision, an unwelcome side-effect may be to place limit on the individual's visioning.

Our findings further contribute to our understanding of the guiding role of visioning. The network in general was developing along the paths initially envisaged, but the managers in the network also needed to act upon a range of events and developments that were not foreseen. This suggests that the network creates its own constraints, limiting both the cognitive process of visioning (what managers can see) and the strategizing as an activity (what their companies can do). We argue that despite these constraining aspects, visioning forms an important driver for managers' interaction and networking.

Thirdly, we combine the results and existing knowledge into a conceptual model of business network strategizing. The model connects visioning to the concept of strategizing and to its other key processes: networking and interacting with a strategic intent and reflecting on the past at the present moment. The model further depicts how the key strategizing processes of visioning, networking and reflecting are conditioned by managers' cognitive limitations and network constraints.

Our study is based on the sensemaking perspective, but it makes an important addition by integrating a deliberate forward-looking perspective to it. The sensemaking perspective has been extensively applied in the study of network strategizing (Laari-Salmela et al., 2015), and the related concepts of network pictures (Henneberg et al., 2006; Abrahamsen et al., 2016) and network change (Abrahamsen et al., 2012; Penttilä et al., 2020). In recent years the sensemaking framework has, however, been criticized for its strong emphasis on retrospection and limited view on the future, seeing it through the ideas of enacted reality and future perfect thinking (Weick, 1995; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Tapinos & Pyper, 2018). As foresight researchers rightly suggest, in complex business environments typified by uncertainty and surprise, a more open perspective of the future is necessary (MacKay, 2009; Cunha et al., 2006; Sarpong et al., 2013; Tapinos & Pyper, 2018). The future is manifest in multiple imagined alternatives (Beckert, 2013; Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013) and therefore, instead of retrospective assessment based on learnt cognitive frames that eventually misguide or at least restrict people's comprehension (Holt & Cornelissen, 2014; Penttilä et al., 2020), strategizing should be extended to cover unknown possibilities that the future provides.

Building upon the sensemaking perspective, and its original idea of sensing and acting being inextricably linked to each other (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Weick et al., 2005), our study adds visioning as a necessary step between past-oriented cognition and action. We claim that the cyclical process from visioning, to networking and back to the reflecting of things in retrospect better describes what actually happens in strategizing. Supported by Konlechner et al. (2018), we argue that strategizing concerns the continuous interplay between prospective and retrospective thinking.

6.2. Managerial implications

Anticipation of potential futures is a challenge for managers in constantly changing business networks. Our findings suggest that to rise above this challenge, managers should invest in their visioning skills and

create forward-looking abilities to break free from their established cognitive frames that potentially limit their view on the future and impede their sensing and acting on lucrative business opportunities.

This entails managers critically examining their own perceptions of the broader network within which they operate. It is important to be cognisant of the high level of interconnectedness as well as temporal dependencies that typically exist within networks, in which some possible actions might be enabled, but others are constrained, and where actions often lead to unforeseen path dependency and unexpected outcomes. Managers should be aware of the risk of creating a shared tunnel vision with their closest partners, which involves the danger of myopia. To enhance sensitivity towards potential futures, managers should instead extend their visioning process beyond their closest business partners so that they can identify the key contingencies and anticipate the major events affecting their business.

Foresight studies offer a number of techniques and procedures that can be integrated into the contextual wayfinding and make use of strategic conversations or reflexivity with respect to everyday business practices (Sarpong et al., 2013; Sarpong & Maclean, 2016). Strategic conversations where selected foresight technologies are used to tease out potential pathways into the future would be most helpful in raising awareness of alternatives and for making informed strategic choices. In the network context, visioning may be enhanced by engaging in networked foresight that entails a purposeful effort to make sense of the future trends and events together with other network partners (cf. Heger & Boman, 2015; Andersen et al., 2017). The risk of excessive groupthink has to be noted, however, while exercising visioning in tightly knitted business networks.

In order to maximise the benefits of the time and effort spent on visioning, managers should be thinking through what their prospective network could be, and in particular to identify the direction of the desired change and what this implies for actual networking. Our results suggest that managers should look closely into the everyday interaction and the investments of time and resources that strategizing towards the selected future target requires.

Besides a proactive orientation towards the future, the study also suggests that managers spend more time and effort on reflecting the past and the present developments and to evaluate the pros and cons of any expected and unexpected developments in their network. To simply react to other actor's actions or proactively seek the desired future, managers should pay more attention to the anticipation of future change (pre-active thinking). As it is impossible to fully disentangle oneself from established cognitive frames and to be fully prepared to potential futures, it is necessary to assess how the recent developments have actually affected the strategic position of the company and where the new developments might eventually lead the firm with its closest partners.

6.3. Limitations and avenues for future research

The study suffers from some limitations. First, we asked questions concerning managers' probable future, not their preferred future. This may have influenced their reasoning and responses. The preferred future goes together with a vision as an ideal future state of a company (MacKay, 2009), whereas our questions of probable future fit better with the continuous process of visioning and the impact of network conditions created through strategic choices in the past. Additionally, it is ultimately a matter of definition as to what is considered short term in future contemplations. The temporal distance to the future is likely to affect the informants' accounts, i.e. what they are able to envision. We asked questions concerning what their network will look like in five years' time, not for instance within 20 years, as common in foresight studies (Cunha et al. 2006). Instead of long-term social and

environmental trends, major events or potential conflicts, managers foresaw structural developments in their closest business network. What they could see now, after the COVID-19 crisis and major trade-political episodes that have recently created volatility in the business environment, would be an interesting topic for future research to address. Our informants were key people in the industry, but the number of informants from each company was limited. Additional responses from managers representing other organizational levels, and from other actors in the network, may have broadened the quality of information and given more substance to our claims.

The study was conducted in a specific type of context, namely in an established distribution network that proved to be changing slowly. We suggest further prospective research to be conducted in industries where the pace of change and level of uncertainty are clearly higher than that studied here. Further, among Norwegian and Japanese managers there may be different cultural understandings of time. Even though the managers operate in the same industry, and potentially share the same industrial logic, their perceptions of future time may differ. The method used was not appropriate to address this issue. Further studies with a specific emphasis on different time conceptions are needed.

As a further consideration of the limitations of this study, we used data from only two points in time, which implied that we were not able to follow the visioning or the strategizing activities in real time. We could only rely on our informants' prospections and recollections. To complement the provided view, researchers should in the future follow managers' visioning more intensively and collaborate more closely with the companies to achieve more substantial insights into their cognitive processes and the guiding role of visioning over time. The study also examines sensemaking as an individual level cognitive activity. In the future, further knowledge is needed on visioning as a social, collective, and inter-subjective achievement in an organization and in the networks (cf. Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012).

Besides business networks, our results are likely to be relevant for visioning and strategizing in other complex and systemic business contexts such as ecosystems and business fields (Möller et al., 2020; Penttilä et al., 2020). We hope that researchers find the proposed qualitative and temporally comparative methodology useful for further studies of visioning and strategizing. We believe that our approach to examining the future at a relatively short term and in an open manner brings a valuable addition to the existing scarce research on foresight in networks and inspires further empirical research of strategizing in different business contexts. Particularly, we hope that our proposed conceptual model will act as a guide for future research and attract more in-depth investigations and verification.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Morten H. Abrahamsen: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Aino Halinen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Peter Naudé:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.
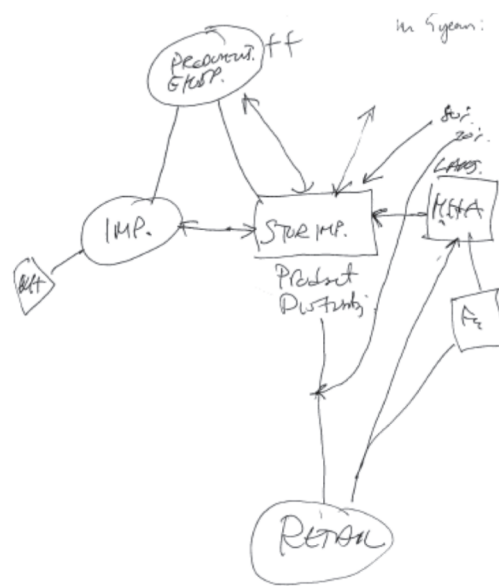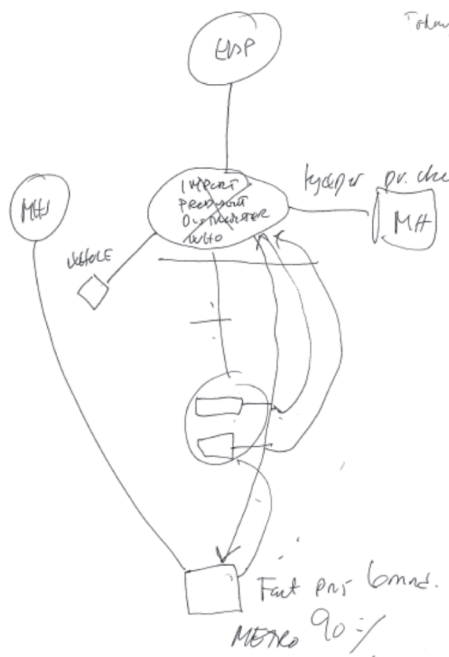
Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Network pictures
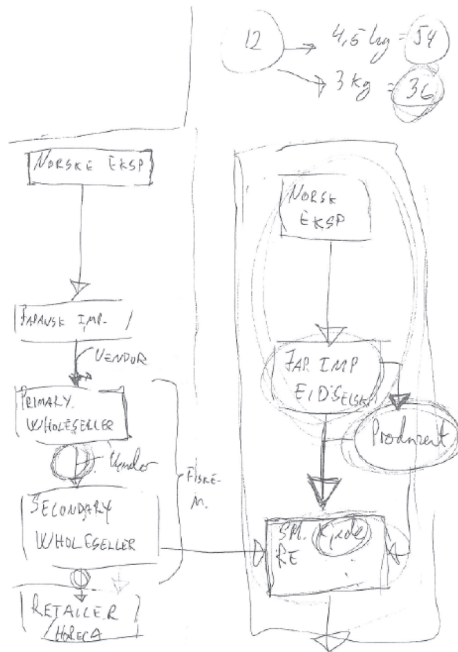
Network picture by Nordic Salmon informant at T1 depicting initial network (left) and prospective network (right)

Network picture by Supreme Seafood Norway informant at T1 depicting initial network (left) and prospective network (right)

References

Aaboen, L., Dubois, A., & Lind, F. (2012). Capturing processes in longitudinal multiple case studies. *Industrial Marketing Management, 41*, 235–246.

Aaboen, L., Dubois, A., & Lind, F. (2013). Strategizing as networking for new ventures. *Industrial Marketing Management, 42*, 1033–1041.

Abrahamsen, M. H., Henneberg, S. C., Huemer, L., & Naudé, P. (2016). Network picturing: An action research study of strategizing in business networks. *Industrial Marketing Management, 59*, 107–119.

Abrahamsen, M. H., Henneberg, S. C., & Naudé, P. (2012). Sensemaking in business networks: Introducing dottograms to analyse network changes. *Industrial Marketing Management, 41*, 1035–1046.

Abrahamsen, M. H., & Håkansson, H. (2016). Market policy and destructive network effects. *IMP Journal, 10*, 195–220.

Andersen, P., Holmen, E., & Pedersen, A.-C. (2017). Que sera, sera? Conceptualizing business network foresighting. *IMP Journal, 12*, 56–74.

Araujo, L., & Easton, G. (1996). Strategy: Where is the pattern? *Organization, 3*, 361–383.

Araujo, L., & Harrison, D. (2002). Path dependence, agency and technological evolution. *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management, 14*, 5–19.

Baraldi, E., Brennan, R., Harrison, D., Tunisini, A., & Zolkiewski, J. (2007). Strategic thinking and the IMP approach: A comparative analysis. *Industrial Marketing Management, 36*, 879–894.

Beckert, J. (2013). Imagined futures: Fictional expectations in the economy. *Theory and Society, 42*, 219–240.

Bestor, T. C. (2004). *Tsukiji: The fish market at the center of the world.* Los Angeles, Ca: University of California Press.

Bruun, H., Hukkinen, J., & Eklund, E. (2002). Scenarios for coping with contingency: The case of aquaculture in the Finnish Archipelago Sea. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change, 69*, 107–127.

Burt, G., Mackay, D. J., & Perchard, A. (2015). Managerial hyperopia: A potential unintended consequence of foresight in a top management team? *Technological Forecasting & Social Change, 101*, 134–146.

Burt, G., & Wright, G. (2006). "Seeing" for organizational foresight. *Futures, 38*, 887–893.

Corsaro, D., Ramos, C., Henneberg, S. C., & Naudé, P. (2011). Actor network pictures and networking activities in business networks: An experimental study. *Industrial Marketing Management, 40*(6), 919–932.

Cummings, S., & Daellenbach, U. (2009). A guide to the future of strategy? The history of long range planning. *Long Range Planning, 42*, 234–263.

Cunha, M. P. E., & Chia, R. (2007). Using teams to avoid peripheral blindness. *Long Range Planning, 40*, 559–573.

Cunha, M. P. E., Palma, P., & Guimarães da Costa, N. (2006). Fear of foresight: Knowledge and ignorance in organizational foresight. *Futures, 38*, 942–955.

Cunha, M. P. E., Clegg, S. R., & Kamoche, K. (2012). Improvisation as "real time foresight". *Futures, 44*, 265–272.

Czakon, W., & Kawa, A. (2018). An empirical study of network perception. *Industrial Marketing Management, 73*, 116–124.

Dubois, A., & Gadde, L.-E. (2014). "Systematic combining": A decade later. *Journal of Business Research, 67*, 1277–1284.

Dobusch, L., & Schüßler, E. (2013). Theorizing path dependence: A review of positive feedback mechanisms in technology markets, regional clusters, and organizations. *Industrial and Corporate Change, 22*, 617–647.

Ford, D., & Håkansson, H. (2006). IMP–some things achieved: Much more to do. *European Journal of Marketing, 40*, 248–258.

Ford, D., & Mouzas, S. (2008). Is there any hope? The idea of strategy in business networks. *Australasian Marketing Journal, 16*(1), 64–78.

Gadde, L.-E., Huemer, L., & Håkansson, H. (2003). Strategizing in industrial networks. *Industrial Marketing Management, 32*, 357–364.

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2012). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods, 16*, 15–31.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Godet, M., & Roubelat, F. (1996). Creating the future: The use and misuse of scenarios. *Long Range Planning, 29*, 164–171.

Håkansson, H., & Ford, D. (2002). How should companies interact in business networks? *Journal of Business Research, 55*, 133–139.

Håkansson, H., & Waluszewski, A. (2002). Path dependence: Restricting or facilitating technical development? *Journal of Business Research, 55*, 561–570.

Håkansson, H. Ford, D, Gadde, L.E., Snehota, I. & Waluszewski, A. (2009). 'Business in networks'. Chichester: John Wiley.

Håkansson, H., & Snehota, I. (1995). *Developing Relationships in Business Networks.* London: Routledge.

Halinen, A., Medlin, C. J., & Törnroos, J.-Å. (2012). Time and process in business network research. *Industrial Marketing Management, 41*, 215–223.

Halinen, A., & Törnroos, J.Å. (1998). The role of embeddedness in the evolution of business networks. *Scandinavian journal of management, 14*, 187–205.

Halinen, A., Törnroos, J.-Å., & Elo, M. (2013). Network process analysis: An event-based approach to study business network dynamics. *Industrial Marketing Management, 42*, 1213–1222.

Harrison, D., Holmen, E., & Pedersen, A.-C. (2010). How companies strategise deliberately in networks using strategic initiatives. *Industrial Marketing Management, 39*, 947–955.

Harrison, D., & Prenkert, F. (2009). Network strategizing trajectories within a planned strategy process. *Industrial Marketing Management, 38*, 662–670.

Heger, T., & Boman, M. (2015). Networked foresight – The case of EIT ICT Labs. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change, 101*, 147–164.

Henneberg, S., Mouzas, S., & Naudé, P. (2006). Network Pictures: Concepts and Representations. *European Journal of Marketing, 40*(3/4), 408–429.

Henneberg, S. C., Naudé, P., & Mouzas, S. (2010). Sense-making and management in business network – Some observations, considerations, and a research agenda. *Industrial Marketing Management, 39*, 355–360.

Hill, R. C., & Levenhagen, M. (1995). Metaphors and mental models: Sensemaking and sensegiving in innovative and entrepreneurial activities. *Journal of Management, 21*, 1057–1074.

Holmen, E., & Pedersen, A.-C. (2003). Strategising through analysing and influencing the network horizon. *Industrial Marketing Management, 32*, 409–418.

Holt, R., & Cornelissen, J. (2014). Sensemaking revisited. *Management Learning, 45*, 525–539.

Huemer, L. (2012). Unchained from the chain: Supply management from a logistics service provider perspective. *Journal of Business Research, 65*, 258–264.

Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J., & Seidl, D. (2007). Strategizing: The challenge of a practice perspective. *Human Relations, 60*, 5–27.

Johanson, J., & Mattsson, L.-G. (1992). Network positions and strategic action – An analytical framework. In G. Easton (Ed.), *Axelsson, B* (pp. 205–217). Industrial Networks. A New View of Reality. London: Routledge.

Johnson, G., Melin, L., & Whittington, R. (2003). Micro strategy and strategizing: Towards an activity-based view. *Journal of Management Studies, 40*, 3–22.

Kaplan, S., & Orlikowski, W. J. (2013). Temporal work in strategy making. *Organization Science, 24*, 965–995.

King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In C. Cassell, & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organisational research* (pp. 256–270). London: Sage.

Konlechner, S., Latzke, M., Güttel, W. H., & Höfferer, E. (2018). Prospective sensemaking, frames and planned change interventions: A comparison of change trajectories in two hospital units. *Human Relations, 7*, 706–732.

Laari-Salmela, S., Mainela, T., & Puhakka, V. (2015). 'Beyond network pictures: Situational strategizing in network context'. *Industrial Marketing Management, 45*, 117–127.

Low, B., & Johnston, W. J. (2009). The evolution of network positions in emerging and converging technologies. *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing, 24*, 431–438.

MacKay, R. B. (2009). Strategic foresight: Counterfactual and prospective sensemaking in enacted environments. In L. A. Costanzo, & R. B. MacKay (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Strategy and Foresight* (pp. 90–112). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

MacKay, R., Masrani, S., & McKiernan, P. (2006). Strategy options and cognitive freezing: The case of the Dundee jute industry in Scotland. *Futures, 38*, 925–941.

Mattsson, L. G., Corsaro, D., & Ramos, C. (2015). Sense-making in business markets – The interplay between cognition, action and outcomes. *Industrial Marketing Management, 48*, 4–11.

Medlin, C. J. (2004). Interaction in business relationships: A time perspective. *Industrial Marketing Management, 33*(3), 185–194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2003.10.008

Medlin, C. J., & Törnroos, J.-Å. (2014). Interest, sensemaking and adaptive processes in emerging business networks – An Australian biofuel case. *Industrial Marketing Management, 43*, 1096–1107.

Mele, C., Pels, J., & Storbacka, K. (2015). 'A holistic market conceptualization'. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 43*, 100–114.

Möller, K. (2010). Sense-making agenda construction in emerging business networks – How to direct radical innovation. *Industrial Marketing Management, 39*, 361–371.

Möller, K., & Halinen, A. (1999). Business relationships and networks: Managerial challenge of network era. *Industrial Marketing Management, 28*, 413–427.

Möller, K., Nenonen, S., & Storbacka, K. (2020). Networks, ecosystems, fields, market systems? Making sense of the business environment. *Industrial Marketing Management, 90*, 380–399.

Möller, K., & Rajala, A. (2007). Rise of strategic nets – New modes of value creation. *Industrial Marketing Management, 36*(7), 895–908.

Möller, K., & Svahn, S. (2003). Managing strategic nets: A capability perspective. *Marketing Theory, 3*, 201–226.

Mouzas, S., Henneberg, S. C., & Naudé, P. (2008). Developing network insight. *Industrial Marketing Management, 37*, 167–180.

Naudé, P., & Sutton-Brady, C. (2019). Relationships and networks as examined in *Industrial Marketing Management. Industrial Marketing Management, 79*, 27–35.

Nayak, A. (2009). Strategic foresight. In L. A. Costanzo, & R. B. MacKay (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Strategy and Foresight* (pp. 66–81). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Neugarten, M. L. (2006). Foresight – Are we looking in the right direction? *Futures, 38*, 894–907.

Öberg, C., Shih, T. T. Y., & Chou, H. H. (2016). Network strategies and effects in an interactive context. *Industrial Marketing Management, 52*, 117–127.

Öberg, C., Henneberg, S., & Mouzas, S. (2007). Changing network pictures: Evidence from mergers and acquisitions. *Industrial Marketing Management, 36*, 926–940.

Penttilä, K., Ravald, A., Dahl, J., & Björk, P. (2020). Managerial sensemaking in a transforming business ecosystem: Conditioning forces, moderating frames, and strategizing options. *Industrial Marketing Management, 91*, 209–222.

Ramos, C., & Ford, I. D. (2011). Network pictures as a research device: Developing a tool to capture actors' perceptions in organizational networks. *Industrial Marketing Management, 40*, 447–464.

Ritter, T. (2000). A framework for analyzing interconnectedness of relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management, 29*, 317–326.

Sandberg, J., & Tsoukas, H. (2015). Making sense of the sensemaking perspective: Its constituents, limitations, and opportunities for further development. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 36*, S6–S32.

Sarpong, D., Maclean, M., & Alexander, E. (2013). Organizing strategic foresight: A contextual practice of 'way finding. *Futures, 53*, 33–41.

Sarpong, D., & Maclean, M. (2016). Cultivating strategic foresight in practise: A relational perspective. *Journal of Business Research, 69*, 2812–2820.

Stigliani, I., & Ravasi, D. (2012). Organizing thoughts and connecting brains: Material practices and the transition from individual to group-level prospective sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal, 55*, 1232–1259.

Tapinos, E., & Pyper, N. (2018). Forward looking analysis: Investigating how individuals 'do' foresight and make sense of the future. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change, 126*, 292–302.

Tatli, A., & Özbilgin, M. (2009). Agency in management of change: Bringing in relationality, situatedness and foresight. In L. A. Costanzo, & R. B. MacKay (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Strategy and Foresight* (pp. 249–259). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Tikkanen, J., & Halinen, A. (2003). Network approach to strategic management. Exploration to the emerging perspective. *Paper presented at the 19th IMP Conference*.

Tsoukas, H., & Shepherd, J. (2004). Coping with the future: Developing organizational foresightfulness. *Futures, 36*, 137–144.

van der Duin, P., Heger, T., & Schlesinger, M. D. (2014). 'Toward networked foresight? Exploring the use of futures research in innovation networks'. *Futures, 59*, 62–78.

van Maanen, J., Sörensen, J., & Mitchell, T. (2007). The interplay between theory and method. *Academy of Management Review, 32*, 1145–1154.

Voros, J. (2003). A generic foresight process framework. *Foresight, 5*, 10–21.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science, 16*, 409–421.

Dr. Morten H. Abrahamsen is Associate Professor in Marketing at the Norwegian Business School (BI). His research interests include buyer-seller relationships in industrial markets, network dynamics, research methodology and managerial sensemaking. He has published his research in journals such as *Industrial Marketing Management* and the *IMP Journal* (now part of the Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing), and in books by *Emerald Publishing*. Morten H. Abrahamsen is the corresponding author and can be contacted at morten.abrahamsen@bi.no.

Dr. Aino Halinen is Professor of Marketing at Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Finland. Her current research focuses on visioning and sustainability in business networks, and paradigms in the B2B marketing research. Her earlier studies have been published in a number of acknowledged journals such as *Journal of Management Studies, Journal of Service Management, Journal of Business Research*, and *Industrial Marketing Management*.

Professor Peter Naudé joined Manchester Business School in 1988 and completed his PhD there in 1992. After retiring from MBS in 2017, he joined Manchester Metropolitan University Business School on a part-time contract. He has been closely involved in the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group for many years, and his research focuses on buyer-seller relationships in industrial markets, having published in a variety of journals such as *Journal of Business Research, European Journal of Marketing* and *Industrial Marketing Management*.