

Call for Papers

**Special Issue of *California Management Review*:
Inclusive and Transparent Strategy-Making**

Guest Editors:

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Historically, strategy-making was defined by hierarchy, confidentiality, and limited stakeholder engagement, with strategic ideation and decisions confined to senior executives and boardrooms (Whittington et al., 2019). More recently, however, shifts in how organizations are structured and governed have challenged these conventions, prompting a move toward more collaborative forms of organizing, which have reshaped managerial practices and sparked growing scholarly interest (e.g., Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Malhotra & Majchrzak, 2014; Berrone et al., 2017; Splitter et al., 2023a). These developments have changed strategy work too, giving rise to open strategy (Seidl et al., 2019) – characterized by broader stakeholder involvement in the formulation and implementation of strategy and greater transparency in communicating strategic intentions (Whittington et al., 2011; Hautz et al., 2017; Seidl & Werle, 2018; Langenmayr et al., 2024; Splitter et al., 2024). This trend reflects wider societal expectations for accountability and inclusivity (Whittington & Yakis-Douglas, 2020; Suddaby & Panwar, 2022) and has been enabled by technologies and techniques that support real-time, large-scale engagement (Stieger et al., 2012; Malhotra et al., 2017; Plotnikova et al., 2021; Morton & Iglesias Ruiz, 2024).

Existing literature highlights promising implications of opening up strategy-making across contexts, from small start-ups and large multinationals to public sector organizations and non-profits. Inclusion can boost engagement, overcome cognitive limitations, foster ideas, and democratize decision-making (Dobusch et al., 2019; Golding et al., 2024; Vaara & Rantakari, 2024). Transparency can help organizations manage impressions and align with stakeholder expectations (Whittington et al., 2016; Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017). These approaches can also enhance adaptability by improving how organizations detect and respond to change (Doz & Kosonen, 2008; Morton, 2023). Inclusion and transparency in strategy-making intersects with other domains too including corporate political activity, influencing how organizations manage political positions and institutional pressures (Barron & Coulombel, 2024). Digital tools – including AI, analytics, and social media – can further amplify these dynamics by enabling nuanced stakeholder analysis, real-time responsiveness, and increasingly sophisticated forms of communication and interaction (Baptista et al., 2017; Morton et al., 2022; Ortner et al., 2024).

Despite these benefits, inclusive and transparent strategy-making also poses significant challenges. These include safeguarding confidentiality, managing divergent stakeholder interests and tensions, addressing rising expectations for involvement, and dealing with the volume and complexity of input (Appleyard & Chesbrough, 2017; Hautz et al., 2017; Stadler et al., 2021; Splitter et al., 2023b). Other risks include performative engagement – where inclusion lacks

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substance – and potential for conflict, attention issues, knowledge gaps, or information overload (Luedicke et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017; Brielmaier & Friesl, 2023; Stoiber et al., 2025).

Ensuring that strategy-making is enhanced rather than undermined remains a critical concern, and understanding these multifaceted implications is essential – not only for advancing theoretical debates but also for offering practical, actionable insights to managers. While extensive work has examined inclusion and transparency in strategy-making, there is little research exploring how these ideas translate into effective tools and guidance for managers. This special issue seeks to bridge this gap by inviting rigorous empirical and conceptual contributions that connect theory with managerial practice. Submissions to this special issue have potential to address a number of areas and questions, including but not limited to:

Communication and transparency

- How do communication and disclosure practices influence perceptions of transparency in strategy-making, and how do they affect stakeholder trust and alignment?
- How do communication strategies shape the effectiveness of transparent strategy-making, and how do they vary across audiences and platforms?
- What organizational narratives and storytelling practices support or hinder open strategy?

Stakeholder engagement and dynamics

- How do different stakeholder groups perceive and experience inclusive strategy processes, and how do these perceptions influence engagement?
- In what ways does the involvement of external stakeholders (e.g., customers, NGOs, investors) differ from internal ones in shaping strategy?
- What are the implications of open strategy for managerial identity, roles, and accountability?
- How do inclusive approaches reshape organizational hierarchies and power dynamics?

Managerial practices and capabilities

- What practices help managers balance open strategy approaches with necessary confidentiality?
- Under what individual, organizational, industrial, or environmental conditions do inclusive strategy-making approaches thrive?
- How can managers navigate the emotional and social tensions of inclusive strategy processes?
- What unintended consequences can emerge from open strategy, and how can they be managed?

Processes, technologies, and outcomes

- How do inclusive and transparent strategy practices evolve over time, and what shapes their durability or reversion?
- How do digital tools (e.g., AI, social media, blockchain, augmented reality) enable or constrain open strategy?
- How does increased participation affect organizational adaptability and learning?
- How do increased inclusion and transparency affect strategic decision-making and effectiveness?
- How can success in open strategy be assessed and measured?
- What can be learned from cases of successful or failed open strategy initiatives?

- How do transparent forms of strategy-making interact with corporate political activity, and what are the implications for managers?

Given the complexities associated with inclusive and transparent strategy-making, we encourage the use of rigorous research designs and methodological approaches that can clearly identify the organizational and managerial implications of these practices.

For managers, such research can inform more effective practices in stakeholder engagement, strategic communication, and balancing openness with confidentiality. For policymakers, it can offer insights into fostering inclusive and transparent organizational governance. For researchers, this special issue provides an opportunity to advance theoretical understanding, develop new concepts, and investigate the multi-level impacts of strategy-making.

Authors should submit a full manuscript no later than November 1, 2025 to the guest editorial team using [CMR's online portal](https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/uc-cmr) <<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/uc-cmr>>

Manuscripts should clearly state:

- (i) the purpose of the study;
- (ii) the particular issue addressed, relating to inclusive and transparent strategy-making;
- (iii) the context in which this issue is examined;
- (iv) the relevance of the study for *both* practitioners and academic scholars.

Based on these submissions, the guest editors will select a subset that is most likely to result in first-rate, high-impact submissions. Authors of papers that are not selected will hear back within 2-4 weeks. Authors of selected submissions will receive an official invitation to submit their paper online through the CMR submission portal to be peer reviewed.

Authors should keep in mind the journal's unique audience and its goal to provide "evidence-based research that inspires, informs, and empowers stewards of modern organizations" by disseminating ideas "that engage scholars, educate students, and contribute to the practice of management." Submissions should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words for the body of the article, and should conform to the journal's other editorial guidelines for CMR "In-Depth" articles provided by <https://cmr.berkeley.edu/resources/submit>

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding the special issue, please contact the guest editorial team at inclusivetransparentstrategy@gmail.com.

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