

# Love it or hate it, PowerPoint shapes strategy-making, says new paper

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It's a staple presentation tool in most businesses. It's been banned as a productivity killer. It's even been recently criticized by a U.S. military General as "dangerous" for over- simplifying sophisticated problems of warfare.

Say what you like about [PowerPoint](#), the computer software that presents business cases like a slide show, but one researcher at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management says that such critiques ignore the ways the technology is used to shape idea generation and build corporate strategies.

"It's easy to say that PowerPoint is taking over and that's terrible ... but what I observed is that the day-to-day use of PowerPoint is much more complex," says Sarah Kaplan, a Rotman professor of [strategic management](#) who studies strategy making in uncertain environments.

An eight-month examination of strategy making at a telecommunications company showed Prof. Kaplan that PowerPoint was more than just an omnipresent tool. It allowed for greater collaboration because more people had access to PowerPoint documents, it affected the parameters of the discussion (depending on what information was included, or excluded from the PowerPoint slides) and even shaped the influence individuals had in the strategy-building process (those with less facility using the technology lost status, those who possessed the "deck" of PowerPoint slides had greater power). By studying the daily use of PowerPoint in strategy making, it was possible to see how meanings

were negotiated through PowerPoint use, as a means for both collaborative efforts to generate ideas and cartographic efforts to divide up territories and pursue individual or group interests.

"This is not the first strategy-making technology. Before PowerPoint, there were 35mm slides and viewgraphs," Prof. Kaplan points out. But because PowerPoint is easily available to anyone with access to a computer, it "has radically changed who can participate. It has the potential to democratize strategy-making."

**More information:** The complete study is available at:  
[papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm ... ?abstract\\_id=1569762](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1569762)

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