Sub-theme 70: Strategy Practices and Performativity: Understanding Strategy as Performative Practice

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Call for Papers

The concept of performativity – derived from Austin's (1962) insight that some statements do not describe an external reality but actually "do things" and perform this reality – has generated many fruitful ideas in philosophy and the social sciences (e.g., Butler, Callon, Barad). These ideas have, in turn, influenced organization scholars in various streams of research (Gond et al., 2015; Guérard et al., 2011, Diedrich et al., 2013), including gender studies (Tyler & Cohen, 2010), critical management studies (Spicer et al., 2009), communication (Cooren, 2004), and information technology (Orlikowski & Scott, 2014). These studies emphasize the generative power of the concept of performativity, and illustrate its potential for organization studies.

In the field of strategy, to date there are only few accounts that utilize the notion of performativity. For instance, Vaara et al. (2010) are interested in the discursive aspect of strategy and investigate the power of strategic plans; Komberger and Clegg (2011) rely on Austin to discuss how the "discourse of strategy" acts performatively in the context of New Public Management; Guérard et al. (2013) invite strategy scholars to adopt a performativity perspective to rethink the concept of performance; Cabantous and Gond (2011) build on Callon (1988, 2007) to explore the performative power of rational choice theory and strategic decision-making. D’Adderio (2008) builds both on Feldman notion of performative routine and Callon’s approach to performativity to better theorise routines (see also D’Adderio & Pollock, 2014); Ottosson & Galis (2013) engage with Callon’s notion of performativity to study how corporate strategy is justified; and Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009) conceptualize business models as a performative device.

Building on and extending this line of inquiry, this sub-theme invites strategy scholars to explore the generative possibilities of the concept of performativity. The sub-theme seeks to widen and deepen the engagement with one or more conceptualization(s) of performativity, such as that of Austin (performativity as doing things with words); Butler (performativity as actors’ constituting the self); Barad (performativity as socio-material mattering); Callon (performativity as bringing theory into being), or the communicative school of communication (Cooren, 2004; cf. Gond et al. [2015] for an overview). By relying on one (or several) conceptualization of performativity, strategy scholars will be able to further the understanding of strategy, its practice and (unintended) effects, as well as focus on new phenomena that have so far been under-studied, such as the materiality and strategy; aesthetics of strategizing; strategizing as mobilizing collective action, etc.

We welcome papers, both empirical and conceptual, that engage with the concept of performativity to study strategy-related phenomena, such the discourse(s) and texts of strategy, the practice of strategy making (both back stage, and front stage), the relationships between strategy and performance, the collective dimension of strategy (i.e., strategizing as distributed activity).

In particular, we welcome work that is inspired by, but not limited to, the following key issues:

- Performativity of strategy discourse, including the constitutive role of models, diagrams, metaphors, charts, etc.
- Performativity and power relations in strategy practice, including their constraining and enabling effects
- Reconsidering the roles of tools and (e)valuation devices (Lamont, 2012; Vatin, 2013) in strategy practice including accounting, financial, and other calculative practices
- Focusing on the non-human agency and its performative effects, including algorithms, technologies, etc.
- Theorizing performative effects of strategizing in the context of distributed collective action, including strategies of social movements, networks, communities etc.
- The performative roles of the academic strategy discourse including the performative effect of strategy theories (e.g., blue ocean strategy; RBV models; Porter's 5 Forces framework, etc.)

References

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