INDIVIDUALITY IN STRATEGIZING ACTIVITY AND PRACTICE: FORMULATORS, IMPLEMENTERS, INNOVATORS

Strategy-as-Practice standing working group at EGOS 2009: Passion for Creativity and Innovation

Organizations do not create or realize strategies: people do. People who invest their talent, creativity and energy to service strategic activities. There are also people in organizations who are unable to contribute to strategy work for a variety of reasons—indeed, “creativity” and “innovation” are important social constructions, fuelled by organizational discourses, such as strategy, which construct boundaries around who participates and who doesn’t. In fact, there are many ways of drawing the distinction within an organization between strategists and non-strategists; formulators and implementers; ‘us’ and ‘them’. Understanding people in strategy is one of the key issues in strategy-as-practice research, as “the focus of this approach is on strategy as a social ‘practice’, on how the practitioners of strategy really act and interact.” (Whittington, 1996: 731). Our track addresses how individuals express their creativity within the strategy process, how they advance their interests, what obstructs those interests and how the activities of strategizing and organizing attract or suppress individual creativity and innovation. We invite participants to examine 1) a range of different types of individual within strategy work, and 2) how these individuals express passion, creativity and innovation with strategy work.

Research into strategy-as-practice reinvigorates interest in the individual, lost during the micro-economics revolution in the 1980’s. We ask who strategists are, how they make sense of their worlds, how they learn and how they construct themselves within the work of strategy. In particular, strategy-as-practice excites interest in a wider range of individuals as potential strategic actors, including middle managers, peripheral organizational actors, external actors, such as consultants, analysts, regulators and others. While not all individuals have a formal strategy role, many construct themselves as strategic actors, through their desires to take part and the practices that they draw upon. Some individuals, despite not having a strategy role, become key strategic actors because the work that they do, often on the peripheries, sparks innovation in the organization. Others, often middle managers, play a strategic role through their centrality in the implementation of strategy, but remain unrecognized due to the predominance of a traditional top-down discourse on strategy. Still other individuals have a formal strategy role, which they may use to express passion, exercise personal creativity and innovation and support or suppress those characteristics in others.

We invite papers from a range of theoretical and methodological approaches that address the individual in strategizing activity and practice. Theoretical and, in particular, empirical papers are invited. Authors might consider, but are not restricted to the following themes:

• Who are the strategists? We invite a range of approaches to defining which individuals may be considered strategic actors

• What resources do individuals draw upon to construct themselves as strategic actors and / or to have strategic effects? For example, what discourses or other multi-modal forms of interaction, such as positioning, gesture and movement enable individuals to construct themselves as strategic actors?
• How do individuals build their identities as strategic actors, regardless of their formal roles?
• What roles do individuals assign themselves within strategy work and how does this enable or constrain their ability to contribute to that work?
• How do individuals express passion, desire and emotion in the doing of strategy and with what implications for themselves as strategic actors or for the strategizing activities in which they are engaged?
• What work do strategists do and, in particular, how does strategy work vary across different strategists?
• How do individuals learn to be strategists?
• What factors enable and suppress individuality and dialogue in strategy work and discourse?
• What research methods enable us to better access and understand the individual as a strategic actor?

The suggested topics outlined above give room for a variety of possible contributions to the Sub-theme. As EGOS has acted as an important forum for the development of the Strategy-as-Practice scholarship through the work conducted within the stranding working group, we will also consider papers beyond the scope of the current theme. We do hope, however, that the present agenda would inspire exciting new research on strategy.

Convenor team Description:

Saku Mantere is Acting Professor of Management and Organization, Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration (Hanken), Helsinki, Finland. His research is focused on strategy work in organizational centers and peripheries. He is particularly interested in middle management agency and strategy discourse. His work has been published in journals as Organization Science, Journal of Management Studies, Strategic Organization, Journal of Organizational Change Management, Scandinavian Journal of Management and Business & Society. His forthcoming monograph (with Pekka Aula) Strategic Reputation Management will be published by Routledge in 2008.

Julia Balogun, Professor of Strategic Management, Cass Business School, Ghoshal Fellow, Advanced Institute of Management. Julia’s research interests centre on how strategic activity is initiated and championed at multiple levels within organizations, through a focus on activities such as strategic planning, strategic change and organisational restructuring, increasingly within the context of globalizing organizations. Julia has many publications in leading journals, such as Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Management Studies and Organization Studies, and sits on the editorial boards of Academy of Management Journal and Organization Science. She is a founding member of the Strategizing Activity and Practice SWG at EGOS.

Paula Jarzabkowski is Professor of Strategic Management, Aston Business School and an Advanced Institute of Management Ghoshal Fellow. Paula’s research focuses on the social practices of doing strategy in pluralistic contexts such as regulated firms, professional firms and public sector organizations, which have contradictory and competing strategic demands. She publishes on these topics in leading journals, such as Academy of Management Journal,