Welcome to the
First EGOS Strategy-as-Practice Paper Development Workshop

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Strategy as Practice: Some Questions, Claims and Trends

Paper Development Workshop
EGOS 2011

David Seidl
What is strategy-as-practice?
Starting point: What is Strategy-as-practice?

Traditional conceptualization
strategy as something that a firm has

New understanding
Strategy as a practice, i.e. something that people in an organization do

→ Sounds appealing but what does that really mean? Three different views ...
First view:
“Practice-turn” → Interest in the practical doing

„Bringing work back in“ (Barley/Kunda), „Bringing the human being back in“ (Bettis)

Terminological consequence: organ-izing, strateg-izing etc.

Special Issue on „ Micro Strategy and Strategizing” (JMS 2003):
“We are calling for an emphasis on the detailed processes and practices which constitute the day-to-day activities of organizational life and which relate to strategic outcomes.”

“[W]e wish to attract scholars who have a concern for the close understanding of the myriad, micro activities that make up strategy and strategizing in practice.”

For example:
First view:
Example of research project

Meetings:
day-to-day activities...
First view:
Example of research project: Paths of variation

Potential for the emergence of variation
- Free discussion
  Emergence of variation
- Restricted-free discussion
  Variation unlikely but can emerge
- Restricted discussion
  No variation
- Administrative discussion
  No variation

Potential for the development of variation
- Working Groups
  Variation developed
- Rescheduling
  Variation maintained

Potential for positive/negative selection
- Free discussion
  Variation developed
- „Stage-Managing“
  Positive selection
- Restricted-free discussion
  Development of variation limited
- Voting
  Variation mostly deselected

Effect on variation
- Prevention of variation
- Removal of variation
- Destabilization/Change
- Stabilization

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Second view: „Practice Turn“ → Use of Practice Lens

- Theories of social practice as theoretical framework (e.g. Giddens, Bourdieu, deCerteau)
- Particular interest in recursivity between structure and action

For example


„This article applies [practice theory] as an interpretative framework for explaining managerial strategizing behavior.“ (Jarzabkowski 2008: 621)
Third view:
“Practice Turn” → Ontological primacy of practices

- Social world consists of practice
- Break with methodological individualism
- Ontological primacy of practices instead of actors

For example
Development of the field
Number of publications per year
Number of publications by journal
Number of publications by area

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Special issues and books

Special Issues

- JMS Special Issue 2003
- European Management Review 2004
- Human Relations 2007
- Revue Française de Gestion 2007
- Long Range Planning 2008
- Journal of Management Studies 2012

Books

Source books

- Jarzabkowski, Sage, 2005
- Golsorkhi (Ed.), Vuibert, 2006
- Johnson, Langley, Melin & Whittington (Eds), CUP, 2007
- Chia & Holt, CUP, 2009
- Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, Vaara (Eds), CUP, 2010

Textbooks

- Clegg et al., Sage, 2011
- Paroutis, Heracleous & Angwin, Sage, 2012

Practitioner (not exclusively)

- Heracleous & Jacobs, CUP, 2011
Some new topics/areas in strategy-as-practice research

- Role of power/body/materiality/artefacts
- Role of meetings/strategy workshops
- Inter-organizational strategizing
- Strategy as profession
- Critical approaches to strategy
- ...

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Two central claims
First claim: Linking micro and macro

HR Special Issue (2007) – “Strategy as Practice”

- Strategizing as the doing of strategy in the context of the wider field of social practices – micro-macro link


→ Yet, only very few studies so far do that explicitly…
Second claim: Practical relevance of research

Whittington

“It is hard to believe that rigorous research into what people ‘really do in strategy’ does not have the potential for considerable practical value” (in Johnson et al., 2007, p. 220).

After all: practice theorists (particularly Bourdieu) has emphasized the importance of practical relevance of research

→ Yet, still unclear how this research becomes practically relevant
→ Some studies on this issue, e.g. Langley 2010; Splitter/Seidl 2011
Some recurrent questions
Is S-as-P really new? – Yes and no

No
• Roots of s-as-p in the work of Mintzberg
• Earlier practice research in OB and OT (e.g. Barley 1986)
• ...

Yes
• Linking mico and macro
• Bringing the dispersed research together
• Developing theoretical and methodological approaches further
• Showing the strategic aspect of areas previously not considered part of strategy
• ...

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How does Strategy-as-practice differ from process?

Different views on that:

• S-as-P as micro-process, emphasis on the “doing”
• Emphasis on micro-macro link
• Break with methodological individualism (for some...)
• ...

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What makes a practice “strategic”? 

Three alternative approaches to answering the question:

1. **Definition in terms of actors**: Those practices are strategic that are done by strategists (analogously: science is what scientists do)

2. **Definition in terms of the definitions in the field**: Those practices are strategic that are referred to as “strategic” by the organizational members themselves

3. **Definition in terms of outcome**: Those practices are strategic that affect the development of the organization
What is the dependent variable?

Dependent variable

• Not only firm performance
• Also micro-outcomes, e.g. success of a strategy workshop
• Also macro-outcomes, e.g. institutionalization of particular practices within an industry
Methodological questions

Problem of getting close to practice and practitioners
Call for new methods

Some typical problems:
• Retrospective accounts of the doings rather than the doings themselves
• Cognitions rather than cognitions-in-action
• Tools are taken to stand for the actions
• Being allowed to write it up as s-as-p
• .....

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SAP-IN – Get involved!


This includes:

• up-to-date bibliography (categorized)
• Description of the research agenda
• announcements of events
• discussion forum
• working papers

Let us know if you want to support our strategy-as-practice activities!
Thank you for listening!

We wish you a productive and enjoyable conference.