A practical perspective on the Strategy-as-Practice perspective

Theory
Practice-based theories +

Methods
Qualitative approaches

Empirical phenomenon
• *Doing strategy*
Why a practice-based perspective to strategy?

Brings strategy back down to earth

- Recaptures its human/social element
- Appreciates and tries to learn from the routines and repertoires of skilled strategy practitioners wherever they practice
- Yet sensitive to how abstract ideas, tools, and discourses about strategy are appropriated, mobilized, constituted and reinvented
- An approach that is eminently « practical » (while grounded in theory)
Examples of studying strategy as a practical activity

Samra-Fredericks (JMS, 2003):
- Using conversation analysis on meetings to identify the discursive strategies of more influential strategists

Balogun and Johnson (AMJ, 2005)
- Using managers’ diaries to trace how middle managers collectively make sense of change in their practice

Rouleau (JMS, 2005)
- Using ethnographic observations to show how a strategy is effectively enacted through everyday routines and conversations of managers talking with clients etc.
More empirical topics from subtheme #5 (2007 examples)

- The roles of meetings in strategy making
- The strategic use of email
- Creating an organization by enacting routines
- How people become strategists
- Meanings managers give to the word strategy
- Practices of justification of a failed strategy
- Conversations among managers on strategy
Some innovative methods for capturing Strategy-as-Practice

- Collect « practice narratives » of strategists at regular intervals over long periods of time
- Videos, photographs - e.g., film meetings and ask for informants’ interpretations – Stronz (2005)
- Trace strategy document versions and what happens between them (paper or electronic)
- Become an apprentice strategist and note down experiences, learnings and feelings
Some practical challenges of research on Strategy-as-Practice

- Units of analysis
  - Limits of focusing only on activity labelled « strategic » → one might miss the practices that really constitute strategy
  - But then, what is not strategic?

- Access and its price
  - Sensitivity of « strategic » issues/discussions
  - Ethical + practical issues of involvement/ neutrality

- Stickiness and contextuality of practical knowledge

- Usual suspects
  - Contribution, legitimacy, credibility, generalizability
Conclusion: Strategy-as-Practice

- An exciting empirical research domain enriched by theoretical resources from social practice and other organizational theories
- A domain demanding innovative methodologies to capture complex multilevel phenomena
- An approach that brings academic theorizing closer to practical knowledge