Strategizing: The Challenges of a Practice Perspective

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From “Activity-Based-View” to “Strategy as Practice”

JMS Special Issue (2003)
• Strategizing as the doing of strategy
• Emphasis on the “micro-actions”

Whittington (2006) and others
• Strategizing as the doing of strategy in the context of the wider field of social practices – micro-macro link
Recurring questions at s-as-p conferences

1. What is strategy?
2. Who are the strategists?
3. What do strategists do?
4. What does the analysis of strategists and their doings explain?
5. How can existing theory inform s-as-p research?
What is strategy?

Definition:

Strategy is (1) a socially accomplished activity, constructed through the actions, interactions and negotiations of (2) multiple actors and (3) the situated practices that they draw upon.
A framework for s-as-p research

Practice
Strategy as situated, socially accomplished flows of activity that are consequential for the direction and survival of the group, organization or industry

Practices
Cognitive, behavioural, procedural, discursive, motivational and physical practices that are combined, coordinated and adapted to construct practice

Practitioners
Actors who shape the construction of practice through who they are, how they act and what resources they draw upon

Strategizing
Who is a strategist?

Against traditional board room demographics:

- Need to study the actual identities, experiences and competences

- Wider scope of strategic actors: all levels of the organization and also external to the organization
What do strategists do?


S-as-p: what do these activities involve and how do they shape strategy
What does an analysis of strategists and their doings explain?

Dependent variable:

• Not only firm performance
• Also micro outcomes, e.g. individual decisions
• Also macro outcomes, e.g. institutionalization of particular practices within an industry
How can existing theory inform an analysis of s-as-p?

• S-as-p is not defined by its theoretical base but by its type of research questions.

• Diversity of theoretical sources:
  – theory of social practices (e.g. Giddens, Bourdieu, deCerteau)
  – Complexity theory
  – Systems theory
  – Discourse theory
  – Sense making theory
  – Etc.
Areas of empirical research in s-as-p so far

- Balogun/Johnson 2004; 2005
- Rouleau 2004; 2005

Practice

- Maitlis/Lawrence 2003
- Mantere 2005
- Samra-Fredricks 2003; 2004
- Schwartz 2004 (AoM best paper)

Practitioners

- Jarzabkowski 2003; 2005
- Regner 2003
- Salvato 2003
- Sminia 2003
- Vaara et al 2004
- Balogun/Jarzabkowski 2005 (w.p.)
- Jarzabkowski/Seidl 2006 (w.p.)
Taking the agenda forward: areas of research

1. Practitioners:
   • particularly the role of actors external to the firm
   • role of strategists’ personal identities and experiences

2. Section C: Practitioners and Practice

3. Section A: Practices and Practitioners

4. Implications of different theoretical approaches