The track at EGOS this year was heavily over-subscribed, with 55 abstracts submitted. We selected 27 papers for presentation (the maximum we could accommodate), 23 of which were presented at the conference.

Much of the discussion was around the themes identified at last year’s EGOS conference:

1. Relation of papers to the strategy-as-practice research agenda
2. Links to outcomes – and which
3. Units of analysis
4. Theoretical base of papers and how this fits with strategy-as-practice
5. Generalizability and validity
6. Stance towards strategy (ideology)

Whilst the debate continued around all of these issues, we also identified three other themes of interest:

1. Micro versus macro.
   We are agreed that macro / micro is not a useful distinction. We could work with three levels micro (individual / activity), meso (organisational) and institutional / broader society (macro) - but it is possible that distinguishing between “levels” in this way is not appropriate. However, we do need some way of distinguishing between the differing foci of our study and the different units of analysis, or layers of influence, these studies are trying to connect.

2. Agency / structure.
   In many of our papers we are still struggling to find a way to pay adequate attention to both agency and structure.

3. The role of grand theory / description
   There were many discussions about the role of “grand theory”, such as structuration theory, or Actor Network Theory, in our research. In general it was agreed that we can learn much from rich description in which findings are derived inductively, as opposed to narrative and description structured through a particular theoretical perspective. Yet if we are to make significant contributions from our research, and develop publishable papers, we need to be able to move beyond such rich description to build on the work and findings of others. This requires us to use our inductive analysis of strategising activities to make connections to existing research, often through the application of particular theoretical lenses. This move from rich description to contribution is the difficult step for most qualitative researchers. It was suggested that maybe we should be more concerned with “mid-range” theory – we should endeavour to draw together different bodies of theory to account for our
findings. Grand theory may simply provide us with sensitising frameworks for our research.

In addition, we regularly returned to the theme 4 - outcomes. We discussed at length the necessity of linking our studies to some kind of outcome. Richard suggested distinguishing in this respect three levels of outcomes: outcomes on the micro-level (success/failure of the ‘strategist’), outcome on the meso level of the organisation (e.g. competitive advantage), outcomes on the macro level/institutional level (outcomes for society). Some participants (e.g. Robert Chia, Eero Vaara) questioned whether we really do need to focus on outcomes at all. Ann Langley argued that if we do process studies, the strategy process itself could be considered an outcome.

The first paper of the conference (Whittington, Johnson and Melin) introduced an additional framework to help us consider where we should focus our attention in our research. It should be noted that this framework was not offered as a definitive framework for how we think about strategy as practice – and indeed, since one of the purposes of the framework is to alert us to the trap of doing research that fits only in the south-east box of this map, we should recognise that to offer a definitive framework at this stage could lead us to “box up” or constrain our thinking at a too early stage. Furthermore, this framework doesn’t take into account the many different theoretical perspectives we use – and some of these perspectives would not separate out the different levels of activities, organizational and institutional as in this map.

Figure 1: An Exploded Map of Strategic Management: Some Links, a Trap, a Choice and a Confusion

However, this map was useful during the track as we identified that as a group we had already avoided the trap of focussing on the “Actor’s process / episode” box, with
many of us making linkages between different components and conducting research across levels.