Writing up qualitative data in SAP: Some observations

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Looking in …

SAP as a micro-community advocating for investigating the doing of strategy work – everyday behavior of strategizing.

actively engaging academics
cultivating colleagueship and legitimacy through special issues, conferences, PDW’s, website, and formal networks.

Much of SAP research based on qualitative data

➢ What do we notice by rhetorically analyzing a few texts in this emerging area of research?
Looking a bit more closely…


- Examined how these articles constructed their contribution according to extant framework (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997; 2006; Locke & Golden-Biddle 2007)

- Briefly reviewed empirical articles identified in Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007 to see if obvious examples that populate empty cells
### Framework: Constructing Contribution Opportunities

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Fusing the ART, SCIENCE, and TECHNOLOGY of Business.
Framework for constructing contribution

**Process 1** Constructing intertextual coherence

Placing study in complex of other, related texts that constitute literature referenced; article’s own reconstruction of appropriate literatures

- synthesized coherence – drawing connections between works not typically brought together; consensus
- progressive coherence – drawing on work already linked by shared theoretical perspectives/methods in research areas advanced over time; consensus
- noncoherence – drawing connections between works belonging to common research program but linked by disagreement; dissensus
Process 2  Problematizing the situation

Calls into question the particular intertextual field constructed to locate the work. Signify how much the contribution of present study matters by turning on extant literature to create a ‘gap’

- incompleteness – extant literature is not finished and present study will further specify it; specifying
- inadequacy – extant literature does not sufficiently incorporate different perspectives and views of phenomenon under investigation; illuminating oversights
- incommensurability – extant literature is wrong, having a misguided perspective or having moved in wrong direction; direct advocacy of alternative theses regarded as superior
## Constructing Contribution Opportunities in SAP

### Problematizing the Situation

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<td>Samra-Fredericks, 2003</td>
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A study of micro strategy may be located within the growing body of research upon ‘practice,’ which focuses upon how people engage in the doing of ‘real work’ (Cook & Brown, 1999: 387). Practice scholars examine the way that actors interact with the social and physical features of context in the everyday activities that constitute practice. The practice concept has recently penetrated the strategy literature as practice, recommending that we take strategists and their work seriously (Whittington, 2002). Strategy as practice endeavors to explain how managerial actors perform the work of strategy, both through their social interactions … (Hendry, 2000; Whittington, 1996, 2002). There is an important distinction between practice and practices … Practices may be seen as the infrastructure through which micro strategy and strategizing occurs, generating an ongoing stream of strategic activity that is practice… A conceptual framework of activity theory is developed and used to explain the three key contributions of activity theory to a study of strategy as practice.
Much of strategy process research includes descriptions of *rather broad and aggregate strategy categories* (e.g. cultural, cognitive…), but there are some specifications in terms of strategy process (Hart, 1992; Johnson, 1987) and interpretation modes (Daft and Weick, 1984), routines in decision processes (Mintzberg et al, 1976) and micro-politics in political process descriptions (Pettigrew 1985). Single aspects of strategy processes have also been described and analyzed, for example, tactics in strategy implementation (Nutt, 1987), heuristics in fast strategic decision making (Eisenhardt 1989a), programmed conflict approaches (Schweiger et al 1989) and strategic issue selling by middle managers (Dutton & Ashford 1993). *However, not much systematic research* has focused on the actual activities and actors involved in the creation and development of completely new strategies… *While building* on strategy process research…*this study in comparison* focuses on the micro-level and a deeper and closer understanding of strategy activities (Johnson & Huff, 1998) and their contextual origins (Brown & Duguid, 1991, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Pettigrew & Whipp, 1991; Webb & Pettigrew, 1999)…
Predominance of progressive incompleteness and progressiveness inadequacy contribution constructions in this sample

- Useful for emergent research area, especially one based on analytic base of examining what managers do (other perspectives inadequate; elaborating own theoretic bases).

- Wonder what other constructions might be useful to grow area, address two challenges identified in Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl 2007.
Some ponderings from looking in

Noncoherence or incommensurability

- What if sharper distinctions were made between SAP and traditional strategy work? Is this even desirable? Useful?
  - Incommensurate gap (wrong, misguided) to better illuminate SAP findings and show how they move field in more promising direction
  - Noncoherence literature (both studying strategy, but linked in disagreement about how it should proceed)

Synthesized coherence

- What theoretical partners would help advance SAP? Either as imports to develop SAP or as exports to develop other areas of work?
  - Import: Use of identity, institutional theories to show what strategy research has missed, been misguided in not taking SAP perspective,
  - Export: Use SAP to create macro-micro links in institutional theory.