

Introduction: What is Strategy as Practice?

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Strategy as Practice as a research approach

In recent years, Strategy as Practice has emerged as a distinctive approach for studying strategic management, organizational decision-making and managerial work (Whittington 1996; Johnson *et al.* 2003; Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007). It focuses on the micro-level social activities, processes and practices that characterize organizational strategy and strategizing. This provides not only an organizational perspective into strategy but also a strategic angle for examining the process of organizing, and thereby serves as a useful research programme and social movement for connecting contemporary strategic management research with practice-oriented organizational studies.

Strategy as Practice can be regarded as an alternative to the mainstream strategy research via its attempt to shift attention away from merely a focus on the effects of strategies on performance alone to a more comprehensive, in-depth analysis of what actually takes place in strategic planning, strategy implementation and other activities that deal with strategy. In other words, Strategy as Practice research is interested in the ‘black box’ of strategy work that once led the research agenda in strategic management research (Mintzberg 1973; Mintzberg and Waters 1985; Pettigrew 1973), but has thereafter been replaced by other issues, not least because of the increasing dominance of the micro-economic approach and a methodological preoccupation with statistical analysis. Because of its micro-level focus, studies following the Strategy as Practice agenda tend to draw on theories and apply methods that differ from the common practices of strategy scholars. In this way, Strategy as Practice research can contribute to the evolution of

strategic management as a discipline and body of knowledge with new theories and methodological choices.

It would, however, be a mistake not to link Strategy as Practice research to the broader ‘practice turn’ in contemporary social sciences. In fact, ‘practice’ has emerged as a key concept for understanding central questions about how agency and structure, and individual action and institutions are linked in social systems, cultures and organizations (Bourdieu 1990; Foucault 1977; Giddens 1984; de Certeau 1984; Sztompka 1991; Schatzki 2002). This practice turn is visible in many areas of the social sciences today, including organizational research (Brown and Duguid 1991; Orlikowski 2000; Nicolini *et al.* 2003). It is about time that we utilized this paradigm to enrich our understanding of organizational strategizing.

‘Practice’ is a very special concept in that it allows researchers to engage in a direct dialogue with practitioners. Studying practices enables one to examine issues that are directly relevant to those who are dealing with strategy, either as strategists engaged in strategic planning or other activities linked with strategy, or as those who have to cope with the strategies and their implications. By so doing, studies under this broad umbrella promise to accomplish something which is rare in contemporary management and organization research: to advance our theoretical understanding in a way that has practical relevance for managers and other organizational members.

Like any emergent research approach, Strategy as Practice can either develop into a clearly defined but narrow theoretico-methodological perspective, or it can grow into an open and versatile research programme that is constantly stretching its boundaries. A key motivation behind this handbook is to

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actively pursue the latter alternative. By spelling out and elaborating various alternative perspectives on Strategy as Practice, we wish to contribute to the expansion and further development of this research approach. Although there stands a risk of eclecticism and ambiguity, we believe that the benefits of theoretical and methodological innovation and continued discussion outweigh such concerns. Our view of Strategy as Practice emphasizes the usefulness of studying ‘practical reason’ – the starting point in Dewey’s (1938), Bourdieu’s (1990) or Tuomela’s (2005) analyses of social practice, for example. According to this view, we must focus on the actual practices that constitute strategy and strategizing while at the same time reflecting on our own positions, perspectives and practices as researchers. This includes a need to draw from, apply and develop various theoretical ideas and empirical methods.

This handbook represents a unique collection of ontological, epistemological, theoretical and methodological perspectives on Strategy as Practice, as written by leading scholars in the field. When compiling this volume, we as editors had three specific goals in mind. First, as explained above, we wished to open up and not limit the ways in which people think about and conduct Strategy as Practice research. This is shown in the multiplicity of approaches presented in the different chapters, complementary to each other in various ways. In this endeavour, we emphasize the need to study both concrete instances of organizational strategizing and broader issues, such as the institutionalization of strategy as a body of knowledge and praxis. Second, we were determined to promote critical thinking. This is important to make sure that Strategy as Practice research does not dissolve into a restricted study of top management, but includes analysis of how others contribute to strategizing and how they at times may resist strategies and their implications (McCabe forthcoming). Moreover, reflection on strategy as a body of knowledge (Knights and Morgan 1991) and praxis (Whittington 2006) that has all kinds of power implications must continue. Third, unlike many handbooks, we emphasize the future. Thus, the chapters included in this book not only provide overviews of what has already been done in

this field but also spell out theoretical or methodological ideas for the future.

The rest of this introduction is organized as follows. First, there is a brief overview of the practice turn in social science, followed by a review of strategy-as-practice research. We will then introduce the contributions of this handbook, starting with ontological and epistemological questions and proceeding to the various alternative theories. Finally, several methodological choices are laid out, along with exemplary studies of Strategy as Practice.

The practice turn in social sciences

The purpose of this section is to highlight central ideas in the so-called practice turn in social sciences. A comprehensive review of the various perspectives is, however, beyond the scope of this introduction (see e.g. Schatzki *et al.* 2001; Reckwitz 2002). To begin with, it is important to note that representatives of several schools of thought have contributed to our understanding of the central role of practices in social reality. These include philosophers (Wittgenstein 1951; Foucault 1977; Dreyfus 1991; Tuomela 2005), sociologists (Giddens 1984; de Certeau 1984), anthropologists (Bourdieu 1990; Ortner 2006), activity theorists (Vygotsky 1978; Engeström *et al.* 1999), discourse analysts (Fairclough 2003), feminist scholars (Martin 2003) and many others.

Although there is no single motive behind this collective interest, three things should be emphasized. First, a focus on practice provides an opportunity to examine the micro-level of social activity and its construction in a real social context or field. Thus, a practice approach allows one to move from general and abstract reflection on social activity to an increasingly targeted analysis of social reality. This is not to say that all practice-oriented research would have to engage in ethnographic, discourse or conversation analysis, or activity theory, or any other type of micro-level empirical study. On the contrary, a key part of the practice literature has been very theoretical in nature. Nevertheless, the advantage a practice approach brings to areas like strategy

lies predominantly in its ability to elucidate the micro-level foundations of social activity in a particular setting – in either theoretical or empirical studies. Furthermore, the flexibility in the notion of practice makes it possible to analyse activities from multiple angles. Activity can be studied as more or less intentional action, cognition, embodied material practice, discourse or text – and the list does not stop here.

Second, the practice approach breaks with methodological individualism by emphasizing that activities need to be understood as enabled or constrained by the prevailing practices in the field in question. Thus, a practice approach to strategy should not merely focus on the behaviours or actions of managers but seek to examine how these behaviours or actions are linked with prevailing practices. A fundamental insight in practice theories is that individual behaviours or actions – however they are defined – are always related to the ways in which social actors are supposed to think or feel or communicate in and through language in a given situation. Moreover, most practice theories emphasize the latent connection to material aspects of social reality. That is, specific behaviours or actions are closely linked with or mediated by material resources.

Third, the notion of practice allows one to deal with one of the most fundamental issues in contemporary social analysis: how social action is linked with structure and agency. Although views on the linkage of practice and activity differ, most scholars emphasize the potential of the concept of practice to explain why and how social action sometimes follows and reproduces routines, rules and norms and sometimes doesn't. For example, Giddens' (1984), Foucault's (1980) and Bourdieu's (1990) seminal work all focus on 'practice' as a key theoretical concept when dealing with social activity. For Giddens (1984), structuration is the key issue; practices are reproduced and at times transformed in social action, thus reifying social structures. For Foucault (1977, 1980), the point is that we are all constrained and enabled by discursive practices that include all kinds of social practices in addition to pure discourse. And for Bourdieu (1990, 1994), practices constitute an essential part of all human activity; they are part of a grammar of dispositions

(inculcated in *habitus*) that defines what can and will be done in social fields.

This all may give the impression that a meta-theory of social practice exists that could be applied to areas such as strategy research. The fact remains, however, that a closer look at the various perspectives referred to above reveals fundamental epistemological, theoretical and methodological differences. This multiplicity of perspectives does not, however, have to be seen as an impediment to the development of practice-based approaches, but a richness that can help us to better understand various aspects of social activities and practices in contexts such as strategy-as-practice.

Overview of Strategy as Practice research

Strategy as Practice research developed from several sources. Classics of strategy process research (Pettigrew 1973; Mintzberg *et al.* 1976; Mintzberg and Waters 1985; Burgelman 1983) and various attempts to broaden and renew strategic management (Eisenhardt 1989; Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Knights and Morgan 1991; Johnson and Huff 1998; Langley 1989; Oakes *et al.* 1998) can be seen as its intellectual roots. However, despite its many important predecessors, it has only been within the last few years that Strategy as Practice has established itself as a clearly defined sub-field in strategy research, bringing together like-minded colleagues whose ideas might otherwise have 'remained marginal and isolated voices in the wilderness' (Johnson *et al.* 2007, p. 212). Since the publication of the seminal *Journal of Management Studies* special issue on 'Micro Strategy and Strategizing' (Johnson *et al.* 2003), which defined the Strategy as Practice research agenda for the first time, we have seen more than fifty journal articles in leading journals, five special issues, four foundational books and numerous book chapters, not to speak of the wealth of conference papers presented every year since. In the following we will provide a short overview of this research stream (see Appendix). We will first focus on the contributions that have aimed at developing the Strategy as

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Practice research agenda and then turn to important themes within this area.

Development of the research agenda

Important efforts have been made to define and develop the Strategy as Practice approach *per se*. This includes analyses that have focused on *the role and characteristics of strategy-as-practice research in relation to other sub-fields of strategy*. The first paper to do so was Whittington (1996), who positioned Strategy as Practice with reference to the policy, planning and process approaches as the major perspectives on strategy. Given the affinities of the Strategy as Practice approach with the process approach it is not surprising that others have elaborated on the similarities and differences between the two (Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2007; Chia and MacKay 2007). In addition, there are several works that show how Strategy as Practice can be understood as a complementary approach to the resource-based view in general (Johnson *et al.* 2003, 2007) and dynamic capabilities in particular (Regnér, 2008).

Strategy as Practice research has included explicit publications that have *developed the research agenda and offered explicit frameworks*. This includes the seminal paper by Johnson *et al.* (2003), in which the Strategy as Practice approach – at that time labeled ‘activity-based view of strategy’ – was introduced for the first time and characterized as concern ‘for the close understanding of the myriad, micro activities that make up strategy and strategizing in practice’ (p. 3). This characterization was refined by Whittington (2006), who emphasized that the strategizing activities needed to be understood in their wider social context: actors are not working in isolation but are drawing upon the regular, socially defined *modus operandi* that arise from the plural social institutions to which they belong. Based on this, Whittington proposed an overarching framework of ‘practitioners’ (i.e. those who do the actual work of making, shaping and executing strategy), ‘praxis’ (i.e. the concrete, situated doing of strategy) and ‘practices’ (i.e. the routinized types of behaviour drawn upon in the concrete doing of strategy) as the three building blocks that make up strategizing.

This framework was further developed by Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2007), who argued that, due to pragmatic reasons, empirical works would do well to focus on the relation between any two of the building blocks while (temporarily) bracketing out the third. In their review of the Strategy as Practice literature of the time, they show how all papers can be placed within this framework, identifying particular gaps from which they develop a research agenda for future work. Johnson *et al.* (2007) proposed another overarching framework which positions different research projects according to the level of analysis (the level of actions, the organizational level and the field level) and according to whether they are concerned with content or process issues. The authors use this framework to examine the strength and distinctiveness of the existing research and propose their own agenda for future work. A more recent literature review and research agenda on the basis of this framework is provided by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009). In addition, there are several other publications that provide introductions to and overviews of Strategy as Practice research (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2004, 2005; Whittington 1996, 2002; Whittington *et al.* 2003).

There are several useful discussions of various *theoretical perspectives* on Strategy as Practice research. Jarzabkowski, for example, explored activity theory (Jarzabkowski 2003, 2005), different theories of social practice (Jarzabkowski 2004) and structuration theory in particular (Jarzabkowski 2008). Dennis *et al.* (2007) compared potential contributions from theories of social practice, convention theory and actor-network theory. In Johnson *et al.* (2007), we find an exploration of situated learning theory, actor-network theory, the Carnegie tradition of the sensemaking and routines perspective, and institutional theory. In addition, Chia and Holt (2006) have explored the potential of the Heideggerian perspective, Campbell-Hunt (2007) complexity theory, Seidl (2007) systemic-discursive theories (such as those by Wittgenstein and Lyotard) and Vaara *et al.* (2004) critical discourse analysis as a fruitful basis for Strategy as Practice research.

There also are a few *methodological reflections on Strategy as Practice*, although explicit contributions have been rare. Balogun *et al.* (2003) is

the first paper to address this issue and to suggest particular methodological approaches. The paper summarizes the particular methodological challenges of Strategy as Practice research as follows: ‘The growing need of researchers to be close to the phenomena of study, to concentrate on context and detail, and simultaneously to be broad in their scope of study, attending to many parts of the organization, clearly creates conflicts’ (p. 198). This issue is also taken up in a separate chapter in Johnson *et al.* (2007), providing illustrations of various methodological choices and their respective advantages and disadvantages. Rasche and Chia (2009) also deal with methodological challenges briefly in a separate section of their paper, which propagates ethnographic approaches as most suitable for Strategy as Practice research.

However, others have *criticized the predominant definitions and approaches to Strategy as Practice research*. In particular, Robert Chia and his colleagues have provided alternative perspectives on the analysis of strategy (Chia and MacKay 2007; Rasche and Chia 2007). Rather than building on the proposed frameworks, they criticize current research for its lack of distinctiveness and call for a more focused approach which breaks away from the methodological individualism that still dominates Strategy as Practice work. In addition, Clegg, Carter and Kornberger (Clegg *et al.* 2004; Carter *et al.* 2008) have critiqued the conceptual and methodological bases of much of the research in this area. In a nutshell, they have argued for more theoretically advanced and critically oriented studies to explore fundamental issues of identity and power. This critique served as a key motivator for the expansion and development of the Strategy as Practice research agenda in this handbook.

Central themes in Strategy as Practice research

Strategy as Practice research has examined various important themes, including strategizing methods in different settings, formal strategic practices, sensemaking in strategizing, discursive practices of strategy, roles and identities in strategizing, tools and techniques of strategy, and power in strategy.

The thrust of existing research has focused on *ways in which strategizing is conducted in specific organizational settings*. In fact, most studies in this area have concentrated on organizational processes, activities and practices in particular contexts. Apart from studying business organizations, such as venture capital firms (King 2008), financial services organizations (Ambrosini *et al.* 2007), airlines (Vaara *et al.* 2004), clothing companies (Rouleau 2005) or multi-business firms (Paroutis and Pettigrew 2007), scholars have also examined strategizing in orchestras (Maitlis and Lawrence 2003), cinemas (Rouleau *et al.* 2007), hospitals (Von Arx 2008) and universities (Jarzabkowski 2003, 2004, 2005; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). These analyses have also revealed general patterns of strategizing; for example, Regnér (2003) showed that there are significant differences in the way that people in the centre of a firm strategize compared to those who work on the periphery.

Researchers have also focused special attention on *formal strategic practices*. Studies have examined the strategic roles of strategy workshops (Hendry and Seidl 2003; Hodgkinson *et al.* 2006; Bourque and Johnson 2008; Whittington *et al.* 2006), strategy meetings (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008), committees (Hoon 2007), formal teams (Paroutis and Pettigrew 2007) and various formal administrative routines (Jarzabkowski 2003, 2005; Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2002). Nevertheless, it has been argued that these formal practices receive far less attention than they should. For this reason, Whittington and Caillaet (2008) have dedicated an entire special issue of Long Range Planning to the exploration of new avenues for research on strategic planning.

A significant part of Strategy as Practice research to date has been devoted to the study of *sensemaking in strategizing*. In contrast to earlier works on cognitive aspects, Strategy as Practice scholars have been interested in the social dimensions of sensemaking. Accordingly, researchers have focused on the socially negotiated nature of sensemaking (Balogun and Johnson 2004, 2005), the political contests around the framing of strategic issues (Kaplan 2008), the interaction between individual-level and organizational-level sensemaking (Stensaker and Falkenberg 2007) and the influence

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of the wider societal context on sensemaking activities at the organizational interface (Rouleau 2005). The interest in sensemaking aspects is somewhat related to a further, nascent area of contribution: *the role of material artefacts in strategizing*. Heracleous and Jacobs (2008), for example, show how material artefacts are purposefully employed in change interventions in order to stimulate particular sensemaking processes. Whittington *et al.* (2006) discuss physical objects as particular means of communication.

Studies on the *discursive aspects of strategy* have become increasingly popular in recent years. A seminal paper by Knights and Morgan (1991) examines the historical emergence of strategic management discourse, its assumptions and implications on management. Hendry (2000) provides another influential account of strategy as an essentially discursive practice. In addition, the seminal narrative analysis of Barry and Elmes (1997) elaborates on the role of strategic storytelling. Based on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, Samra-Fredericks (2003, 2004, 2005) has examined the rhetorical micro-processes of strategizing and the ways in which conversations impact strategy. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, Vaara and his colleagues have examined how discursive practices make up strategy (Vaara *et al.* 2004), how strategy discourse is appropriated and resisted (Laine and Vaara 2007) and how discourses may impede or promote participation in strategic decision-making (Mantere and Vaara 2008). Phillips *et al.* (2008) have followed suit to provide an integrative model of the role of discourse in strategic decision-making. Sminia (2005) examines strategy as layered discussions, where strategic reflections often take place indirectly and implicitly within discussions on other matters. Coming from a somewhat different perspective, Seidl (2007) points to the differences between different types of strategy discourses and the problematic relations between them.

Researchers have also examined the *role and identity of managers and other organizational members engaged in strategy and strategizing*. Accordingly, a great deal of research has been devoted to the strategic role of middle managers (Rouleau 2005; Mantere 2005, 2008; Sillince and

Mueller 2007; Balogun and Johnson 2004, 2005). Other groups of actors that have received specific attention are consultants (Nordqvist and Melin 2008; Schwarz 2004) and regulators (Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2009). In addition, scholars have pointed out the need for research into the strategic roles of strategy teachers and strategy gurus (Hendry 2000; Whittington *et al.* 2003). Others have focused on the identity of strategists. Knights and Morgan (1991) described how the emergence of strategic management in the middle of the twentieth century turned the passive administrators at the top of companies into proactive strategists. Strategy accordingly is described as a set of practices ‘which transform managers and employees alike into subjects who secure their sense of purpose and reality by formulating, evaluating and conducting strategy’ (p. 252). In another study, Lounsbury and Crumley (2007) provide a conceptualization of agency that accounts for the way in which practitioners are constrained by wider societal belief systems, providing meaning to their activities and prescribing them specific roles that delimit the scope for performativity. Beech and Johnson (2005) in turn showed the recursive relation between a strategist’s identity and his strategizing activities during a larger change project. Furthermore, Rouleau (2003) has examined the impact of gender on strategizing practice.

Several publications in Strategy as Practice have lately been exploring the *way in which specific tools and techniques are utilized in strategizing activity*. Some authors have studied the ways in which tools and techniques change according to context (Seidl 2007; Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2006). Others have examined strategy tools as potential boundary objects that can span across different organizational contexts (Spee and Jarzabkowski 2009). Moreover, there have been calls to analyse the ways in which strategizing work has changed through the use of technologies like PowerPoint, mobile phones and the like (e.g. Molloy and Whittington 2005).

Ever since the beginning of Strategy as Practice research, scholars have also been interested in *issues of power*. Knights and Morgan (1991) set out on an analysis of the ‘disciplinary force’ of strategy as a particular institutional practice. Studies drawing on critical discourse analyses have also focused on

the ways in which strategy discourse can be used to legitimate or resist specific ideas and to promote or protect one's own power position (Laine and Vaara 2007; Mantere and Vaara 2008). This has been followed by studies by Ezzamel and Willmott (2008) and McCabe (forthcoming) who examined the power differentials and inequalities in the strategizing processes occurring in a global retailer and manufacturing company and a UK building society, respectively, focusing attention on various modes of resistance. However, as noted above, critical analyses of Strategy as Practice have called for more studies of power in strategy and strategizing (Clegg *et al.* 2004).

Ontological and epistemological questions

The Strategy as Practice approach was born from a break with the traditional notion of strategy as a property of organizations. Instead, strategy was to be understood as an activity or practice: strategy is not something that firms *have*, but something that people *do* (Johnson *et al.* 2003; Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007). If taken seriously, this reconceptualization implies a fundamental ontological shift in several respects. First, the world of strategy is no longer taken to be something stable that can be observed, but constitutes a reality in flux. Second, strategy is no longer regarded as 'located' on the organizational level; instead, it is spread out across many levels from the level of individual actions to the institutional level. Third, the world of strategy constitutes a genuinely social reality created and re-created in the interactions between various actors inside and outside the organization. Accordingly, there are several fundamental epistemological consequences for both researchers and practitioners. So far, however, Strategy as Practice scholars have focused relatively little attention on epistemological questions. In this sense, the chapters in Part I of this handbook pave the way for a better understanding of these fundamental issues.

Wanda Orlikowski in her chapter distinguishes three different types of practice research in organization studies in general and Strategy as Practice research in particular. These three types of research

result from fundamentally different understandings of 'practice' among the respective researchers. The first type treats practice merely as *phenomenon*: researchers study what happens 'in actual practice' as opposed to what is merely derived theoretically. The second type emphasizes practice as a theoretical *perspective*: apart from attending to actual practice, researchers draw on practice-centred theory in their studies. Incorporating the assumptions of the other two types, the third mode highlights the notion of practice as a particular *philosophy* (ontology): researchers conceive of practice as constitutive of all social reality; i.e. actors and agency are treated as a product of their practices. This mode of engagement with practice is the most extreme form, rarely found in existing publications. Orlikowski discusses the general challenges of the three different practice views and the implications for research practice.

The next two chapters elaborate on Orlikowski's third mode of practice engagement. Drawing on Heidegger, Robert Chia and Andreas Rasche characterize this mode as a 'dwelling worldview', in contrast to what they refer to as a 'building worldview'. The latter is the dominant view inherent in traditional strategy research, accounting for a large percentage of existing Strategy as Practice work. This view is characterized by two basic assumptions: (1) individuals are treated as discretely bounded entities; and (2) there is a clear split between the mental and physical realm; cognition and mental representation of the world necessarily precede any meaningful action. Accordingly, strategic action is explained through recourse to the intention of actors. In contrast, the dwelling worldview does not assume that the identities and characteristics of persons pre-exist social interactions and social practices. Social practices are given primacy over individual agency and intention. Thus, strategic actions are explained not on the basis of individual intentions but as the product of particular, historically situated practices. Chia and Rasche discuss the epistemological consequences of these two worldviews. They argue that the research findings depend greatly on the chosen worldview.

In the following chapter, Haridimos Tsoukas develops the argument of Chia and Rasche further. In line with earlier works by Chia (Chia and

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Holt 2006; Chia and MacKay 2007), he argues that Strategy as Practice researchers need to follow Orlikowski's third mode of practice engagement. Only this would allow them to go beyond the process approach in strategy. He supports the call for a clear break with methodological individualism in favour of a view that gives primacy to practice. Yet he warns about pushing research too much in the opposite direction, where strategy is treated as emergent by definition. Instead, we need to reconcile – from a practice-based approach – the possibility of both non-deliberate and deliberate types of action in strategy. Drawing on Heidegger's philosophy, he develops a framework that distinguishes between three different types of actions according to the involved form and degree of intentionality: (1) 'practical coping' (based on tacit understandings), which constitutes non-deliberate action; (2) 'deliberate coping' (based on explicit awareness); and (3) 'detached coping' (based on thematic awareness), which is the most deliberate form of action. These three forms of action are then linked to three forms of strategy making.

Simon Grand, Johannes Rüegg-Stürm and Widar von Arx argue in their chapter that serious practice research needs to be accompanied by constructivist epistemologies. They show that while there are many variants of constructivism, they all share four central concerns: (1) they challenge the predominance of unquestioned dichotomies in the social sciences, like micro vs. macro or situated activities vs. collective practices; (2) agency is treated as distributed and related in specific ways in different contexts; (3) reality is treated not as given but constructed; and (4) therefore, the status of knowledge needs to be explicitly studied. After introducing and comparing the three most central constructivist perspectives, Grand and his co-authors discuss the implications of the four central assumptions of Strategy as Practice research, useful for the study of strategizing practices, the understanding of strategy and the conduct of strategy research. Above all, they emphasize that the very notion of strategy and strategizing practice contains nothing that can be taken as given, but is instead the result of continuous (re)construction by the activities of the practitioners and researchers involved.

The chapter by Karen Golden-Biddle and Jason Azuma continues the same theme by examining how Strategy as Practice articles construct their contribution to the field of organizational studies. Based on earlier work (Locke and Golden-Biddle 1997), they argue that the construction of academic contributions can be examined along two dimensions: (1) the article needs to make connections among extant work, and between extant work and the respective article; this can be accomplished in several different ways, for example by presenting progressive coherence in the literature; and (2) in order to make a contribution the article has to problematize the current state of research. Again, there are different methods for doing that, e.g. by presenting it as incomplete or contradictory. Combining the two dimensions, the authors create a framework of nine generic choices for constructing contributions. By placing the existing Strategy as Practice papers within the framework, Golden-Biddle and Azuma identify opportunities for the construction of contributions yet to be examined by Strategy as Practice researchers.

In the final chapter of Part I, Ann Langley addresses a central question in Strategy as Practice research: How can we build a cumulative body of knowledge when Strategy as Practice interests tend to favour small intensive samples and fine-grained analysis, leading to corresponding limitations in terms of generalizability? Langley addresses this question from three different perspectives on the nature and purpose of science: (1) the 'normal-science view' is based on the ongoing search for more accurate, general and useful causal statements about the relationships between important phenomena; (2) rather than striving for a single truth, the 'practice view' calls for increasingly more insightful interpretations or representations of the social world; and (3) the 'pragmatic view' puts the emphasis on the instrumentality of knowledge. Accordingly, the researcher ought to uncover the knowledge of the practitioners, render it explicit and make it available to others. Langley shows how the different publications in the field of Strategy as Practice invariably fall into one of the three views of science. She concludes by discussing the advantages and disadvantages were Strategy as Practice to adhere to any one of these models of science.

Alternative theoretical perspectives

With Kurt Lewin's adage 'nothing is so practical as a good theory' in mind, it is important to focus attention on the theoretical basis of Strategy as Practice. A 'good' theory allows us to advance knowledge without having to reinvent the wheel. By offering a means to make sense of the very processes, activities and practices that constitute strategy and strategizing, it can also serve practitioners. However, there is no one theory of practice that can provide a basis for all relevant research questions at various levels of analysis, which range from reflections on strategy as a body of knowledge and praxis to studies of the idiosyncrasies of specific strategic and organizational processes in different institutional and cultural contexts. Nor should a unified theory be the objective if we wish to advance the theoretical discussion of practices and their implications. Consequently, Strategy as Practice research can and must be informed by alternative conceptions of practice and strategy. Various approaches have been offered and applied, the most important of which will be presented and discussed in Part II of this handbook. It serves to explain how specific approaches are able to elucidate not only our understanding of concrete strategic decision-making, but also of strategy as a body of knowledge and praxis.

In the first chapter of Part II, Richard Whittington explains how Giddens' (1984) structuration theory can be applied to Strategy as Practice research. Giddens has been a key source of inspiration in seminal pieces of Strategy as Practice, including Whittington's own influential work (Whittington 1992, 2006). In his chapter, Whittington demonstrates how management researchers have already applied structuration theory in Strategy as Practice research. He explains how structuration theory differs from two close alternatives: the practice theoretic approach of Pierre Bourdieu and the Critical Realist approach of Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer. Whittington focuses on the advantages of structuration theory and highlights its usefulness for analysis that deals with the ever-present issues of agency and structure. However, he also points out that there is more to structuration theory than has been realized in previous research. In particular, he

argues that the institution of strategy has received far too little attention, and he concludes by calling for further studies in this area.

In the second chapter, Paula Jarzabkowski focuses on activity theory as a basis for Strategy as Practice research. The roots of activity theory can be traced to Russian social psychology (Vygotsky 1978; Leontiev 1978), but this has lately been developed into a widely used approach to study the interaction between the individual and the collective in the pursuit of activity. Jarzabkowski demonstrates how activity theory allows one to understand strategic actions as part of activity systems that comprise the actor, the social community with which the actor interacts, and the symbolic and material tools that mediate between actors, their community and their pursuit of activity. In particular, she explains how the elements of the activity system are linked with the key concepts of Strategy as Practice research: practitioners, practices and praxis. She also compares activity theory with theories of practice, to highlight the benefits of activity theory. In conclusion, she calls for more in-depth activity theory inspired research in strategic management.

Marie-Léandre Gomez provides a Bourdieusian perspective on strategy-as-practice. This is a contribution that is very much needed, given the impact of Pierre Bourdieu's work on practice theory in general. Gomez explains how Bourdieu offers a systemic view of practice that highlights the importance of relations between agents and with the field, the capital possessed by these actors, and their habitus. She argues that research on strategy can benefit greatly from Bourdieu's praxeology. In particular, a Bourdieusian perspective allows one to overcome false dichotomies in strategy and strategizing: the micro/macro alternative, the opposition between structure and agency, and the dilemma between rationality and emerging strategy. In addition, the perspective can help us to better understand the various struggles that characterize strategy and the role of academics in these struggles.

Saku Mantere turns his attention to Ludwig Wittgenstein and the potential of the philosopher's ideas for elucidating our understanding of Strategy as Practice. This is an important contribution in

view of the fact that, apart from being one of the most influential philosophers, Wittgenstein's ideas have paved the way for the 'practice turn' in social science. Both Giddens and Bourdieu, for example, have been greatly influenced by Wittgenstein. Mantere focuses on the idea of the 'language game' as a powerful concept to make sense of Strategy as Practice. He argues that language games shed more light on the discursive struggles endemic to the practice of strategy. He also maintains that the notion of 'forms of life', used to characterize the non-linguistic background of social practice, can direct our attention onto a number of important yet often neglected aspects of strategy. Examples from real-life strategy conversations provide concrete illustrations of these ideas.

Florence Allard-Poesi adopts a Foucauldian view on Strategy as Practice. This reflection explains the seminal role of Foucault's work in more critical studies of Strategy as Practice, as well as pointing to new ways in which we can look at strategy as a body of knowledge. From this perspective, strategic management may be seen as a heterogeneous set of discursive and material practices. These discursive and material practices are governed by specific rules that structure what can be read, said and done in and around strategy. They are techniques utilized for controlling from a distance in the modern enterprise, with both enabling and constraining implications for organizations and their members. She argues that strategic management is similar to a monitoring technique in which the strategist is led to reveal one's intentions, say aloud what is hidden and 'objectify' one's subjectivity. This has all kinds of effects on the individuals in question and the way in which people can and will make sense of strategy.

Valérie-Inès de La Ville and Eléonore Mounoud outline a narrative approach to Strategy as Practice. They draw on the work of Paul Ricoeur and Michel de Certeau in order to elucidate the various narrative practices that constitute an inherent part of strategy and strategizing. This involves the production of texts in strategy formulation, but also the consumption of texts in the 'implementation' of strategies. They offer a model that focuses on the writing and reading of texts and narratives as ongoing activities in organizations. This view

allows one to understand the crucial role of strategy texts and ongoing interpretations in strategizing – and thus challenges the conventional view that focuses solely on formal strategies without considering the ways in which they are 'talked into being'.

Methodological issues and exemplary studies

At the inception of the Strategy as Practice movement, scholars (Balogun *et al.* 2003) pointed to its methodological challenges, which require the researcher simultaneously to be close to actual practice while employing a broad range of theoretical and methodological tools. There have been calls for an exploration of methods that allow us to observe and understand the longitudinal and processual dynamics of the practices, routines and actions of the situated actors, to uncover their interdependences and interactions, and also to focus on discourses and their performativity, the disclosure of the 'non-says', of what is implicit or couched in rhetoric. While longitudinal case studies remain the most frequently used research design in Strategy as Practice, there is a notable trend towards applying and developing other methodologies. Some of the most promising approaches are presented and discussed in Part III of this handbook. As will become clear, the call for 'methodologically innovative' approaches does not necessarily mean that one has to develop entirely new methodologies; it suggests, rather, that we look at them through a 'practice lens' and use innovative ways to approach managers and reconstruct their strategizing activities and roles.

Anne Sigismund Huff, Anne-Katrin Neyer and Kathrin Möslein suggest that the strategizing agenda should be expanded to respond better to macro-events such as the economic crisis in late 2008. They put forward an enhanced agenda, followed by an annotated list of relatively novel ways of interacting with informants, collecting data, involving collaborators, analysing information and presenting results. This is a thoughtful and stimulating chapter that will certainly become a must-read so far as the methodological questions related