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978-0-521-68156-8 - Strategy as Practice: Research Directions and Resources

Gerry Johnson, Ann Langley, Leif Melin and Richard Whittington

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Strategy as Practice

Strategic management is taught in business schools as a fundamental aspect of management. It has also come to be regarded as a significant area of academic research over the past three decades. However, in that time research in strategy has largely migrated to a concern with strategy as that which organizations have, rather than strategy as that which managers do. In other words, the activity of managing and developing the strategy of organizations by the people concerned with actually doing it has become marginalized. *Strategy as Practice* reverses this trend by analysing what people do in relation to the development of strategy in organizations. In so doing it provides insights into current issues in strategy that require a more micro level of understanding. This pragmatic approach also helps to integrate different aspects of strategy research and provides insights that will help managers work more effectively.

Gerry Johnson is the Sir Roland Smith Professor of Strategic Management at the Lancaster University Management School.

Ann Langley is Professor of Strategic Management and Research Methods at HEC Montréal.

Leif Melin is Professor of Strategy and Organization at Jönköping International Business School, Jönköping University.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Authors' biographies</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii

Part I

1	Introducing the Strategy as Practice perspective	3
	Introduction	3
	The need for Strategy as Practice	7
	Mapping the research domain	15
	Defining concepts: practice and praxis	26
	The structure of the book	27
2	Practical theories	30
	Introduction	30
	Theoretical orientations	31
	Theoretical resources	36
	Strategic planning from four perspectives	47
	Conclusion	49
3	Doing research on doing strategy	52
	Approaching Strategy as Practice: epistemological choices and research strategies	53
	Bounding Strategy as Practice: sampling and research design	57
	Capturing Strategy as Practice: access, data collection and ethics	65
	Understanding Strategy as Practice: analysis and theorizing	72
	Conclusions: doing research on doing strategy	77

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)**vi Contents****Part II Illustrative papers**

	Introduction to the papers	81
4	Technology as an occasion for structuring: evidence from observations of CT scanners and the social order of radiology departments <i>Stephen R. Barley</i>	83
5	Making fast strategic decisions in high-velocity environments <i>Kathleen M. Eisenhardt</i>	101
6	In search of rationality: the purposes behind the use of formal analysis in organizations <i>Ann Langley</i>	121
7	Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation <i>Dennis A. Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi</i>	137
8	Business planning as pedagogy: language and control in a changing institutional field <i>Leslie S. Oakes, Barbara Townley and David J. Cooper</i>	152
9	Strategizing as lived experience and strategists' everyday efforts to shape strategic direction <i>Dalvir Samra-Fredericks</i>	165
10	Organizational restructuring and middle manager sensemaking <i>Julia Balogun and Gerry Johnson</i>	179
11	From metaphor to practice in the crafting of strategy <i>Peter T. Bürgi, Claus D. Jacobs and Johan Roos</i>	197

Part III

12	Reflections <i>Ann Langley, Gerry Johnson, Leif Melin and Richard Whittington</i>	207
	<i>References</i>	222
	<i>Index</i>	240

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68156-8 - Strategy as Practice: Research Directions and Resources

Gerry Johnson, Ann Langley, Leif Melin and Richard Whittington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Figures

1.1	An exploded map of strategic management	18
2.1	Four theoretical resources for Strategy as Practice research	37
3.1	'Triple comparative design' of Barley's (1986) study	64
3.2	Access trade-offs in research on strategy practice	67

Preface

There has always been an interest by some strategy scholars in the activities of managers as they relate to the development of strategy. Henry Mintzberg's work in the 1970s and the case study work of Andrew Pettigrew and some of the authors of this book in the 1980s show this. It is an interest that has continued. For example Andrew Pettigrew and Georg von Krogh co-ordinated EGOS workshops in 1999, 2001 and 2002 on Acting and Thinking Strategically that attracted scholars with a bias towards researching such activities. It was from these EGOS workshops that several strands of research started to converge; these are discussed more fully in chapter 1.

One workshop was concerned with what strategists actually do – with strategizing. The second examined the gap highlighted by resource-based theorists: the need to understand the activities that underpin the distinctive competences bestowing competitive advantage on organizations. The third looked at the continuing interest in processes of strategy development in organizations. Given that all three of these interests placed an emphasis on the activities of people in organizations, it was decided to find out just how much interest and research was going on in the field by promoting a special issue of the *Journal of Management Studies* and inviting papers on these topics. The initiative actually started with a 'research conversation' on the themes at an EIASM conference in 2001 where over fifty academics representing these three strands met to present their research and arguments. Many of the papers developed from this event found their way into the *Journal of Management Studies* Special Issue (Johnson, Melin and Whittington 2003) and, since then, Strategy as Practice has 'taken off'.

Strategy as Practice has established itself as a significant social movement (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996), able to mobilize many researchers and access important channels. Thus the www.strategy-as-practice.org list has, at the time of writing, approaching a thousand participants and the movement has streams at EGOS, the British Academy of Management and the Strategic Management Society. The first research monograph on Strategy as Practice

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Preface

has been published (Jarzabkowsle 2005) and there are forthcoming special issues of *Human Relations* (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl 2007) and *Long Range Planning* (Cailluet and Whittington 2007). There has also been an increasing number of publications that have taken a practice focus, as well as work that has no explicit affiliation with this emerging perspective but which is nonetheless highly relevant. Much of this is referred to throughout this book. Less tangibly, but just as important, the vibrancy of discussion and debate about strategy practice has begun to attract more and more interest. It is time now to review progress, to identify some challenges and opportunities for the next generation of research, and to offer resources and guides to help this next generation forwards. These are the aims of this book.

Apart from the authors, there have been others who have been especially helpful in bringing together the various strands in the book. In particular we would like to thank and acknowledge the many members of the Strategy as Practice network who have helped, but in particular Julia Balogun, Paula Jarzabkowski and David Seidl, Hugo Guo and Lorna Carlaw, who helped substantially with the preparation of the manuscript, and our publishers at Cambridge University Press who have been so patient with us.

Gerry Johnson, Ann Langley, Leif Melin and Richard Whittington

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His research interests are in the field of strategic management practice, in particular with processes of strategy development and change in organizations. He has published in *Academy of Management Review*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Organization Studies*, *British Journal of Management* and *Human Relations*. He serves on the editorial boards of *Strategic Management Journal* and *Journal of Management Studies*. He is also co-author of Europe's best-selling strategic management text *Exploring Corporate Strategy* (Prentice Hall, 2005).

ANN LANGLEY is Professor of Strategic Management and Research Methods at HEC Montréal. She took her undergraduate and master's degrees in the UK (Oxford and Lancaster respectively) and obtained her PhD at HEC Montréal in 1987 after working for some years as an analyst both in the private sector and in the public sector. From 2003 to 2006, she was Director of MSc and PhD programs at HEC Montréal. She was Professor of Strategy at Université du Québec à Montréal from 1985 to 2000.

Her research deals with innovation, leadership and strategic change in complex pluralistic organizations, with a more specific emphasis on the health care sector. She also has a particular interest in process research methods and has published on this theme in *Academy of Management Review*. Her empirical work has appeared in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Management*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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His current research is focused on Strategy as Practice, with projects on strategic issue management, learning to strategize and the historical evolution and diffusion of strategy as a practice. He has published seven other books, including the seventh edition of *Exploring Corporate Strategy*, *Handbook of Strategy and Management* and *The European Corporation: Strategy, Structure and Social Science*. He is a Senior Editor of *Organization Studies* and is on the editorial boards of *Academy of Management Review*, *Organization Science* and several other journals.

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68156-8 - Strategy as Practice: Research Directions and Resources

Gerry Johnson, Ann Langley, Leif Melin and Richard Whittington

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

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