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978-0-521-86293-6 - 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.

**Richard Whittington** is Professor of Strategic Management at the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford.

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## 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](http://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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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

## Authors' biographies

GERRY JOHNSON is the Sir Roland Smith Professor of Strategic Management at the University of Lancaster Management School. He received a BA in Social and Physical Anthropology from University College London and his PhD from Aston University. He has worked as a marketing executive, as a management consultant and as an academic at Aston University, Manchester Business School, Cranfield School of Management and Strathclyde University Graduate School of Business. He is also a Senior Fellow of the UK Advanced Institute of Management Research.

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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*Studies, Organization Studies, Organization Science* and *Sloan Management Review*. She is currently senior editor for *Organization Studies*.

LEIF MELIN is Professor of Strategy and Organization at Jönköping International Business School (JIBS), Jönköping University. He received his PhD from Linköping University, where he later became a Professor of Strategic Management. He is the founding Director of CeFEO, the Center for Family Enterprise and Ownership at JIBS, and he has also served as Dean and Managing Director of JIBS.

His research interests are in the field of strategizing and organizing in organizations, especially the role of ownership and strategic leadership in strategic change activities, and strategic practices in continuously growing business firms. He has published in international book volumes and journals, including *Strategic Management Journal*, *Journal of Management Studies* and *Family Business Review*. He is currently serving on the editorial board for several international journals, such as *Strategic Organization*, *European Management Review*, *Journal of World Business* and *Long Range Planning*.

RICHARD WHITTINGTON is Professor of Strategic Management at the Said Business School and Millman Fellow, New College, University of Oxford. He was previously at the University of Warwick and has held visiting appointments at HEC Paris, the University of Toulouse and the Harvard Business School.

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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