

Introduction: what is strategy as practice?

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Strategy as practice as a research approach

Since early 2000 strategy as practice (SAP) has emerged as a distinctive approach for studying strategic management, strategic decision-making, strategizing, strategy-making and strategy work (Whittington 1996; Johnson, Melin and Whittington 2003; Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl 2007). In recent years SAP research has confirmed its vitality and fulfilled its promise by being more lively than ever (Golsorkhi *et al.* 2010; Vaara and Whittington 2012; Balogun *et al.* 2014; Seidl and Whittington 2014). This second edition of the handbook confirms the strong enthusiasm for the generation of new ideas about the way practitioners are doing their strategy work. Strategy-as-practice research focuses on the micro-level social activities, processes and practices that characterize organizational strategy and strategizing. This provides not only an organizational perspective into strategic decision-making 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 a 'mere' focus on the effects of strategies on performance alone to a more comprehensive, in-depth analysis of what actually takes place in strategy formulation, planning and implementation and other activities that deal with the thinking and doing of strategy. In other words, SAP 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(Mintzberg 1973; Mintzberg and Waters 1985; Pettigrew 1973), but has thereafter been replaced by other issues, not least because of the increasing dominance of the micro-economic approach and a methodological preoccupation with statistical analysis.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, SAP research can contribute to the evolution of strategic management as a discipline and body of knowledge with new theories and methodological choices.

It would be a mistake, however, 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, Gherardi and Yanow 2003; Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Nicolini 2012). It is about time that we utilized this paradigm to enrich our understanding of organizational strategy.

'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

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to accomplish something that 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 grow into an open and versatile research programme that is constantly stretching its boundaries. A key motivation behind this handbook, reinforced in this second edition, is to 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 exists 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) and Bourdieu’s (1990) analyses of social practice. 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 as well as work on substantive topic areas on strategy as practice, as written by leading scholars in the field. When compiling the handbook, we as editors had three specific goals in mind. First, as explained above, we wished to open up more extensively than in the first edition the multiple ways in which academics from other perspectives think about and conduct SAP research. This is shown in the multiplicity of approaches presented in our five parts, which are 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 (Seidl and Whittington 2014). 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. 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 then introduce the contributions of this handbook, starting with ontological and epistemological questions and proceeding to the various alternative theories. Then several methodological choices are laid out, before introducing some substantive topic areas of strategy as practice that have been developed to date.

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 beyond the scope of this introduction, however (see, for example, Turner 1994; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and von Savigny 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 1953 [1951]; Foucault 1977; Dreyfus 1991; Tuomela 2005), sociologists (Giddens 1984; de Certeau 1984; Bourdieu 1990), anthropologists (Ortner 2006), activity theorists (Vygotsky 1978; Engeström, Miettinen and Punamäki 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 that a practice approach brings to areas such as 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 and multiplicity of variations in the notion of practice make 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. In other words, 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 works 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 may all 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 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, Raisinghani and Théoret 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, Townley and Cooper 1998) can be seen as its intellectual roots. Despite its many important predecessors, however, it has only been from the mid-2000s 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: 212). Since the publication of the seminal *Journal of Management Studies* special issue on 'micro strategy and strategizing' (Johnson, Melin and Whittington 2003), which defined the SAP research agenda for the first time, we have seen more than 100 journal articles in leading journals, eight special issues, several foundational books, at least two comprehensive review papers and numerous book chapters, not to speak of the wealth of conference papers presented every year since then. In the following we provide a short overview of this research stream (see Appendix). We focus first on the contributions that have aimed at developing the strategy-as-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*. These include 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 that of Whittington (1996), who positions strategy as practice with reference to the policy, planning and process approaches as the major perspectives on strategy. Given the affinities of the SAP 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; Floyd *et al.* 2011). 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, Melin and Whittington 2003; Johnson *et al.* 2007) and dynamic capabilities in particular (Regnér 2008).

Strategy-as-practice research has included publications that have *developed the research agenda and offered explicit frameworks*. This includes the seminal paper by Johnson, Melin and Whittington (2003), in which the SAP approach – at that time labelled the 'activity-based view of strategy' – was introduced for the first time. The approach is

characterized as concern 'for the close understanding of the myriad, micro activities that make up strategy and strategizing in practice' (Johnson, Melin and Whittington 2003: 3). This characterization was refined by Whittington (2006), who emphasizes 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 proposes an overarching framework of 'practitioners' (that is, those who do the actual work of making, shaping and executing strategy), 'praxis' (the concrete, situated doing of strategy) and 'practices' (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, Balogun and Seidl (2007), who argue that, because of 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) propose 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 literature review and research agenda on the basis of this framework is provided by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009). More recently, Vaara and Whittington (2012) offer an extensive literature review on SAP research, attesting its vitality and contributions regarding the tools and methods of strategy-making (practices), how strategy work takes place (praxis) and the role and identity of the actors involved (practitioners).

There are several useful discussions of various *theoretical perspectives* on strategy-as-practice

research. Jarzabkowski, for example, explores activity theory (Jarzabkowski 2003; 2005), different theories of social practice (Jarzabkowski 2004) and structuration theory in particular (Jarzabkowski 2008). Denis, Langley and Rouleau (2007) compare potential contributions from theories of social practice, convention theory and actor-network theory. Johnson *et al.* (2007) provide 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, Lyotard and Luhmann), Fenton and Langley (2011) and Brown and Thompson (2013) the narrative perspective, Ezzamel and Willmott (2010) poststructuralist analysis and Vaara (2010) critical discourse analysis as fruitful bases for SAP research. Following Hendry and Seidl (2003), Katzberg (2013) has drawn on Luhmann's system theory for theorizing the interconnectedness between different organizational arenas. Balogun *et al.* (2014) have, in turn, elaborated on the role of discourse as the central foci of SAP research, and Guérard, Langley and Seidl (2013) have explored the potential of different performativity perspectives, such as those of Austin, Butler, Lyotard and Callon. In a recent article, Seidl and Whittington (2014) provide an overview of different theoretical perspectives in terms of the ways in which they allow the linking of local strategizing activity to larger social phenomena.

Closely related, there also are a few *methodological reflections on strategy as practice*, though explicit contributions have been rare. The paper of Balogun, Huff and Johnson (2003) was the first to address this issue and to suggest particular methodological approaches. The paper summarizes the particular methodological challenges of SAP 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' (Balogun, Huff and Johnson

2003: 198). This issue is also taken up by 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 in a section of their paper that propagates ethnographic approaches as most suitable for strategy-as-practice research. Venkateswaran and Prabhu (2010) argue for process and clinical studies for advancing our knowledge of the practice of strategy-making. For a broad range of novel ways of interacting with informants, collecting data, involving collaborators and so on, the chapter written by Huff, Neyer and Moslein (2010) in the *Handbook's* first edition remains an important methodological piece to consult.

Others have *criticized the predominant definitions and approaches to SAP research*, however. In particular, Chia and his colleagues have provided alternative perspectives on the analysis of strategy (Chia and MacKay 2007; Rasche and Chia 2009; Chia and Holt 2009). Rather than building on the proposed frameworks, they criticize current research for its lack of distinctiveness, and call for a more focused approach that breaks away from the methodological individualism that still dominates strategy-as-practice work. In addition, Clegg, Carter and Kornberger (Clegg, Carter and Kornberger 2004; Carter, Clegg and Kornberger 2008; 2010; Carter 2013) have critiqued the conceptual and methodological bases of much of the research in this area. In a nutshell, they argue 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 second edition, with several implicit and explicit chapters around these issues (including a chapter by Clegg and Kornberger on strategy as practice and power, and another by Blom and Alvesson on strategy as practice and critical approaches). In a more optimistic tone, Rouleau (2013) provides a reflexive view of the knowledge production project underlying the development of this research perspective. She considers that this perspective is now at the crossroads, and invites researchers to discuss how in a more advanced stage of institutionalization

and development this new knowledge project will be able to cultivate its inherent diversity while consolidating its agenda.

Central themes in strategy-as-practice research

Strategy-as-practice research has examined various important themes, including strategy work in different settings, formal strategic practices, sense-making in strategizing, materiality and tools in strategy work, discursive practices of strategy, roles and identities in strategizing and power in strategy.

The thrust of existing research has focused on *ways in which strategy work is conducted in specific organizational settings*. In fact, most studies in this area have concentrated on organizational processes, activities and practices in particular contexts. In addition to studying business organizations, such as venture capital firms (King 2008), financial services organizations (Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor 2007), airlines (Vaara, Kleymann and Seristö 2004), clothing companies (Rouleau 2005) or multi-business firms (Paroutis and Pettigrew 2007; Jarzabkowski and Balogun 2009), scholars have examined strategizing in orchestras (Maitlis and Lawrence 2003), artistic organizations (Daigle and Rouleau 2010), hospitals (Denis *et al.* 2011), cities (Kornberger and Clegg 2011; Pälli, Vaara and Sorsa 2009) and universities (Jarzabkowski 2003; 2004; 2005; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). These analyses have also revealed general patterns of strategizing; for example, Regnér (2003) shows 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. Hydle (forthcoming) draws attention to the way that strategy work is organized both temporally and spatially.

Researchers have also focused special attention on *formal strategic practices*. Studies have examined strategy workshops (Hendry and Seidl 2003; Hodgkinson *et al.* 2006; Bourque and Johnson 2008; Whittington *et al.* 2006; MacIntosh, Maclean and Seidl 2010; Healey *et al.* forthcoming), strategy meetings (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008; Spee and Jarzabkowski 2011; Wodak, Kwon

and Clarke 2011; Asmuß and Oshima 2012; Liu and Maitlis 2014; Kwon, Clarke and Wodak 2014), committees (Hoon 2007), formal teams (Paroutis and Pettigrew 2007; Hendry, Kiel and Nicholson 2010) and various formal administrative routines (Jarzabkowski 2003; 2005; Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2002). These formal practices play a key role in strategy formation, and, for this reason, Whittington and Cailluet (2008) have dedicated an entire special issue of *Long Range Planning* to the exploration of new avenues for research into 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, SAP scholars have been interested in the social dimensions of sense-making. Accordingly, researchers have focused on the socially negotiated nature of sensemaking (Balogun and Johnson 2004; 2005; Rouleau and Balogun 2011), the political contests around the framing of strategic issues (Kaplan 2008), the temporal dimension of sensemaking (Kaplan and Orlikowski 2013), the interaction between individual-level and organizational-level sense-making (Stensaker and Falkenberg 2007), the influence of the wider societal context on sense-making activities at the organizational interface (Rouleau 2005; Teulier and Rouleau 2013), the political aspects (Mueller *et al.* 2013) and the role of emotions in sensemaking (Liu and Maitlis 2014). The role of emotions in particular is a topic that deserves more attention in future research.

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, and its assumptions and implications for management. Hendry (2000) provides another influential account of strategy as an essentially discursive practice. Based on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, Samra-Fredericks (2003; 2004; 2005) has focused on the rhetorical micro-processes of strategizing and the ways in which conversations impact strategy, and thereafter strategy conversations have been examined from other perspectives too (Whittle *et al.* 2014; Wodak, Kwon and Clarke

2011). Coming from a somewhat different perspective, Seidl (2007) points to the differences between different types of strategy discourses and the problematic relations between them. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, Vaara and his colleagues have examined how discursive practices make up strategy (Vaara, Kleymann and Seristö 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, Sewell and Jaynes (2008) have followed suit to provide an integrative model of the role of discourse in strategic decision-making, and Hardy and Thomas (2014) provide an illuminative analysis of how strategy discourses construct objects and subjects. Drawing on seminal work on strategy and narratives (Barry and Elmes 1997), strategy-as-practice researchers have focused on the role of narratives and storytelling in strategy work (Fenton and Langley 2011; Brown and Thompson 2013; Vaara and Reff Pedersen 2013). Strategic plans have also received special attention in recent years (Cornut, Giroux and Langley 2012; Spee and Jarzabkowski 2011; Vaara, Sorsa and Pälli 2010). The discursive perspective of strategy as practice has been one of the most fast-growing perspectives since 2010, including a special issue in the *Journal of Management Studies* (Balogun *et al.* 2014).

Research around the role of *materiality and tools* in strategizing is a growing area of contribution. In the wake of this research stream, Heraclous and Jacobs (2008), show how material artefacts are purposefully employed in change interventions in order to stimulate particular sense-making processes. Whittington *et al.* (2006) discuss physical objects as particular means of communication. 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). Kaplan's (2011) analysis of PowerPoint has elucidated the specific ways in which material objects influence strategy processes. Wright, Paroutis and Blettner (2013) study how, when and to what effect strategy tools are

used in strategy work. Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets (2013), as well as Werle and Seidl (forthcoming), focus on how knowledge is inscribed in visual artefacts and the way these shape unfolding strategy processes. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) provide a framework for understanding the reciprocal relationship between the agency of actors and the selection, application and outcomes of tools. Moreover, there have been calls to analyse the ways in which strategizing work has changed through the use of technologies such as mobile phones and the like (see, for example, Molloy and Whittington 2005).

Researchers have also examined the *roles and identities of managers and other organizational members engaged in strategy work*. Accordingly, a great deal of research has been devoted to the strategic role of middle managers (Fauré and Rouleau 2011; Mantere 2005; 2008; Sillince and Mueller 2007; Balogun and Johnson 2004; 2005; Rouleau 2005; Rouleau and Balogun 2011; Thomas, Sargent and Hardy 2011). Other actors who have received specific attention are consultants (Nordqvist and Melin 2008; Schwarz 2004) and regulators (Jarzabkowski, Matthiesen and Van de Ven 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). Furthermore, Rouleau (2003) has examined the impact of gender on strategizing practice. Beech and Johnson (2005) in turn show the recursive relation between a strategist's identity and strategizing activities during a larger change project. 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. Following Knights and Morgan (1991), others have focused on the social construction of the identity and subjectivity of strategists (Dameron and Torset 2014; Dick and Collings 2014; Laine and Vaara 2007). These analyses have been closely connected with discourse and power, as explained below.

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 legitimize 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 (2010), who examine 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. Other studies focus on power as the central issue of strategic processes and practices. Samra-Fredericks (2005), for example, provides a fine-grained study of the everyday interactional constitution of power based on an analysis of the talk within a strategy meeting. Kornberger and Clegg (2011) in their study of the strategy-making process undertaken by the city of Sydney highlight the power effects resulting from the simultaneous representation of facts and values. They argue that strategy is a sociopolitical practice aimed at mobilizing people, marshalling political will and legitimizing decisions. Mueller *et al.* (2013) studied a multinational apparel company, and they highlight how politics constitutes a central interpretive method through which organizational reality is constructed and strategic decisions are made. Based on a case study of global telecommunication company, Hardy and Thomas (2014) in turn show how the power effects of discourses are intensified through particular discursive and material practices, leading to the production of objects and subjects that are clearly aligned with the strategy.

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, Melin and Whittington 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, rather, constitutes a reality in flux (a dynamic and processual perspective). 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 (multi-level perspective). Third, the world of strategy constitutes a genuinely social reality created and recreated in the interactions between various actors inside and outside the organization (open perspective). 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 second edition of the 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 realms; 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-date 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 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. He warns about pushing research too much in the opposite direction, however, 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 four different types of actions according to the involved form and degree of intentionality: (1) 'practical coping' (based on tacit understandings); (2) 'deliberate coping' (based on explicit awareness); (3) 'detached coping' (based on thematic

awareness); and (4) 'theoretical coping' (based on theoretical understanding). These four forms of action are then linked to four forms of strategy-making.

Simon Grand, Widar von Arx and Johannes Rüegg-Stürm 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 question a concept of 'reality' as something that is 'objectively given'; (2) they study the status of knowledge and the processes through which it is constructed; (3) they treat agency in the construction of reality as distributed among heterogeneous actants; and (4) they challenge the predominance of unquestioned dichotomies in the social sciences, such as micro versus macro or situated activities versus collective practices. After introducing and comparing the three most central constructivist perspectives, Grand, von Arx and Rüegg-Stürm 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 Katharina Ditrach, Karen Golden-Biddle, Elana Feldman and Karen Locke continues the same theme by examining how SAP 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 this, such as 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, Dittrich, Golden-Biddle, Feldman and Locke identify opportunities for the construction of contributions yet to be examined by strategy-as-practice researchers.

Ann Langley addresses a central question in strategy-as-practice research: how can we build a cumulative body of knowledge when SAP 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 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.

In the final chapter of Part I, Violetta Splitter and David Seidl address the practical relevance of practice-based research on strategy. They review practice-based studies that have examined the ontological and epistemological conditions for producing strategy research that proves relevant to management practice. Drawing on these works, they argue that researchers inevitably adopt a scholastic point of view, which makes it impossible to capture directly the logic of strategy practice. Strategy-as-practice scholars can increase the practical relevance of their research, however, by developing theories based on practical logic. They outline three approaches to capture the logic of management practice: (1) theorizing through practical rationality, (2) the application of 'participant objectivation' and (3) the consideration of the dissociation process. They argue that, if strategy-as-

practice research builds on these insights, it can prove a particularly fruitful approach for generating knowledge that is of conceptual relevance to strategy practice.

Theoretical resources: social theory

With Lewin's adage that '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. There is no one theory of practice, however, 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 are presented and discussed in Parts II and III of this handbook; while Part II focuses on general social theories, Part III contains organization and management theories. The chapters in these two parts serve to explain how specific approaches are able to elucidate our understanding not only 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