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## Introduction to Strategy-as-Practice



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## Overview



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## Foundations of S-as-P

- From something a firm **has**, to something that a firm and the people in it **do**  
(Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2006)
- Two points of departure:
  - Mainstream strategy and the process turn
  - The broader practice turn in management disciplines

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### Departure 1: Strategy & economics

**Disenchantment: Mainstream strategy has been questioned by economic theory, and so has the logic of the people who do strategy**

"Rules of behaviour prescribed by economic models, however logical, cannot be normative if managers are not capable of implementing them or if the assumptions on which the models are built do not apply"

Miles, 1995: 127

**Firm and industry are insufficient explanations**

Porter's five forces model permits us to analyze the competitive forces impacting the firm, yet empirical research has shown that these industry influences account for only **between 4% and 19% of overall variance in firm profitability**

Mintzberg, Kim, Ghoshal & Lajtha, 2000

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### Departure 1: Strategy process

Humanizing strategy

Strategy as action (Mintzberg, Pettigrew)  
+ Strategic strategy  
+ Plans, content, models

An effective counterpoint, but... where are the people doing strategy with stuff?

Firm, processes, change

How strategy processes, such as resource allocation, shape strategy outcomes (Dowd, Burgelman)

Going inside the process: strategizing, doing, acting

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### Departure 2: The practice turn

- Broader management field has taken practice seriously in:
  - Accounting
  - Technology
  - Marketing
- From this perspective practice is a conceptual lens from which to understand many avenues of research

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### A 'definition'

- "From a strategy-as-practice perspective strategy is conceptualized as a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategizing comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity"  
(Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007: 7-8)
- We are looking at:
  - Activity
  - People
  - Practices

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### Three notions of "practice" (according to Orlikowski)

Practice as...

Empirical phenomenon	Theoretical lens	Social ontology
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### First notion: Practice as empirical phenomenon

Interest in the practical doing of strategy

- 2003 JMS Special Issue on "Micro Strategy and Strategizing"  
*"We are calling for an emphasis on the detailed practices and processes which constitute the day-to-day activities of organizational life and which relate to strategic outcomes."*

Example: Study on the role of meetings in strategizing (Jarzabkowski et al, 2009)

- A closer look at the different practices that can be found in 8-round meetings.
- Examined to what extent were the particular practices consequential for the strategic orientation of the organization
- Certain combinations of practices tended to lead to stabilisation of strategic orientations whereas other combinations tended to lead to the emergence of new strategic orientations

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### Second notion: Practice as theoretical lens

Application of theories of social practice

- Theories of social practice as theoretical framework. (e.g. Giddens, Bourdieu, de Certeau)

**Example: Shaping Strategy as a Structuration Process** (Jarzabkowski, 4M 2008)

- "This article applies structuration theory (i.e. a particular practice theory) as an interpretative framework for explaining managerial strategizing behavior." (Jarzabkowski 2008: 621)
- Identifies different patterns of how top managers influence the 'structure' and 'action' realms
- Evaluates effectiveness of these patterns within different contexts

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### Third notion: Practice as social ontology

Ontological primacy of practices

- Social world consists of practices
- Ontological primacy of practices instead of actors
- A very radical view that breaks with a lot of the assumptions that can be found in traditional strategy research today
- Example:** "a view of practices, which deems events, individuals and doings to be manifest instantiations of practice-complexes; ontological priority is accorded to an **immanent logic of practice** rather than to actors and agents" (Chia/WestRay, 2007)

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### A research framework: The 3 P's of S-as-P

Practitioners	Praxis	Practices
Practitioners are defined widely, to include both those directly involved in making strategy - most prominently managers and consultants - and those with indirect influence - the policy-makers, the media, the gurus and the business schools who shape legitimate praxis and practices	Praxis refers to the sheer labour of strategic: the flow of activities such as meeting, talking, calculating, form-filling and presenting through which strategy gets made	Practices involve the various routines, discourses, concepts and technologies through which this strategy labour is made possible - not just obvious ones such as strategy reviews and off-ides, but also those embedded in academic and consulting tools (Porterian analysis, hypothesis testing, etc.) and in more material technologies and artefacts (PowerPoints, flip charts etc.)
• Much work in the field has also focused on middle managers	• Praxis is hard to define as a clear 'level' of analysis but makes a very useful 'level' of analysis. • It's a very useful concept that helps us define what level of work we are looking at	(Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008: 101-102)

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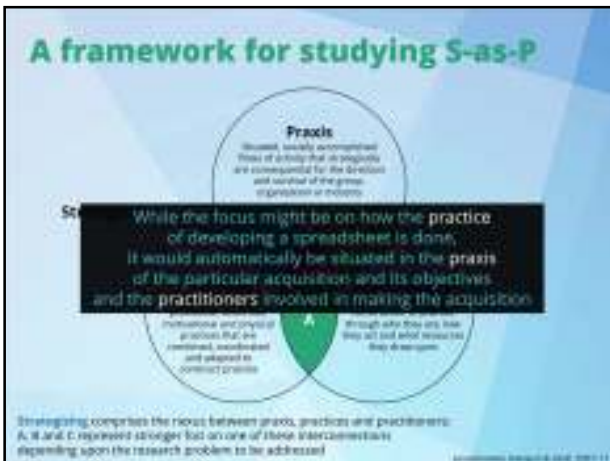
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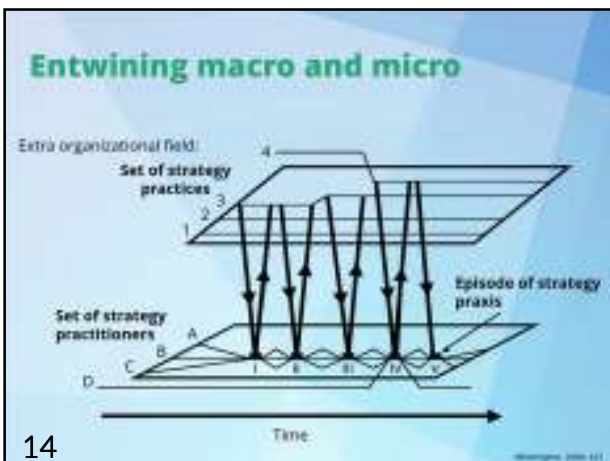
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### Strategy-as-Practice characterized by pluralism of theories

- Strategy-as-Practice defined by common interest rather than common theory
- Particular interest in theories that relate micro and macro aspects
- Choice of theory depending on particular research question

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### Large set of theoretical resources

<b>Structuration Theory</b> <small>(e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2008)</small>	<b>Bourdieuian Practice Theory</b> <small>(e.g. Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2011)</small>	<b>Activity Theory</b> <small>(e.g. Balogun and Balogun, 2008)</small>	<b>Foucaultian Analysis</b> <small>(e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2010)</small>
<b>Critical Discourse Analysis</b> <small>(e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2010)</small>	<b>Sensemaking Theory</b> <small>(e.g. Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2011)</small>	<b>Complexity Theory</b> <small>(e.g. Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2011)</small>	etc.

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### Methodological choices

- Variety of methods used (S-as-P does not automatically imply ethnographic approaches)
- Dilemma of combining depth, breadth and diversity: data that is contextual, longitudinal, collected at and comparable across different sites (Balogun et al. 2003)
  - You typically need "deep" data about the unique characteristics of the particular context of individual strategizing activities – thus, focus on context and detail
  - You need also "broad" data that covers activities across different places simultaneously – hence broad in scope
  - You also need data that reflects the diversity of the social world in which strategizing is taking place

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### Methodological choices

- Variety of methods used (S-as-P does not automatically imply ethnographic approaches)
- Dilemma of combining depth, breadth and diversity: data that is contextual, longitudinal, collected at and comparable across different sites (Balogun et al. 2003)
- Call for new methods – both transfer from other areas and development of new ones

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### Resources: Some foundational texts to get you started

- Special issues
  - JMS (Vol. 40/1, 2003) Special Issue on "Micro strategy and strategizing"
  - Human Relations (Vol. 80/1, 2007) Special Issue on "Strategizing: the challenges of a practice perspective"
- Introductory books
  - Johnson et al. (2007) *Strategy as Practice: Research Directions and Resources*. Cambridge: CUP
  - Golobinski et al. (2010) *Cambridge handbook of Strategy as Practice*. Cambridge: CUP
- Monographs
  - Jarzabkowski (2005) *Strategy as practice: an actively tested view*. London: Sage
- Community site
  - [www.sas-practice.org](http://www.sas-practice.org)

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### Thank you for listening and welcome to the community of strategy-as-practice scholars!

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