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## ■ Patrick Regnér 2011

Book review: Golsorkhi D., Rouleau L., Seidl D., & Vaara E. (Eds.) 2010

*Cambridge Handbook of Strategy As Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Florence Allard-Poesi 2011

Book review: Baum J. A. C. & Lampel J. (Eds.) 2010

*The Globalization of Strategy Research*, Advances in Strategic Management, vol. 27, Bingley: Emerald.

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## INTRODUCTION

The short-term pressures involved in doing business and ever more intensive competition has both reduced the strategic agenda to waiting for the next day and the strategic activity to an extensive mime contest in which competitors can only be copied. Similarly, the loss of any predictive ability (Wiltbank *et al.*, 2006) which characterizes our so-called postmodern era and the crumbling of most of the institutional benchmarks and templates have both had a major impact during an extensive examination of strategy as a vector for organized collective action. Thereby, strategy may consist in finding a “permanence” in the “ephemeral state” (Bauman, 2007). Thus, the research community in strategic management is in search of appropriate figures and frameworks through which to apprehend contemporary strategies, perhaps to file amongst the “just-in-time strategies” (Weick, 1987).

If we view strategy as a tangle of micro-socially embedded practices, we could only subscribe to a necessary updating of a discipline which is currently being partly stripped of the elements of anticipation, deliberate intention and predetermined action upon which it was previously based (Chia and Holt, 2009). The section which follows offers very accurate reviews of two books, each of which adopts its own approach to updating the research on strategy as practice. The Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara (Eds), 2010) presents a comprehensive and contrasted overview of this new field. Contrasted in that it reserves judgement as to whether the philosophical foundations of the SaP theoretical mosaic are sufficiently cohesive for SaP to be classed as a paradigm. For instance, the degree of emphasis on the deliberate intention of agents varies according to the approach adopted by each author; some authors may completely ignore this conjecture. The 27th volume of the Advances in Strategic Management series, entitled The Globalisation of Strategy Research (Baum & Lampel (Eds), 2010) is not entirely dedicated to strategy as practice but is part of the emerging order of a new strategy field. It questions the meaning of the period (are we to move into a time of “permanent pluralism” or is this a “prelude to a new synthesis”?) and the birth of alternative approach to strategy to highlight, in the words of Florence Allard-Poesi, the emerging pivotal role of a European strategic discourse.

The reviews, by Florence Allard-Poesi and Patrick Regnér, are not only an accurate outlook on two key books for understanding the current state of the strategy field; they also offer stimulating opportunities to reflect on the future of the discipline.

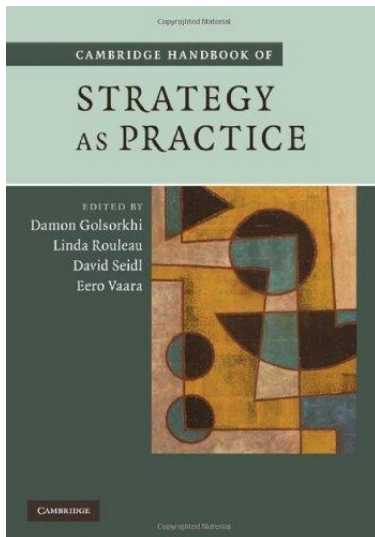
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# Book review

Hardback  
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Golsorkhi D., Rouleau L., Seidl D., & Vaara E. (Eds.)  
2010  
*Cambridge Handbook of Strategy As Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



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The time was ripe for a handbook on strategy-as-practice. During the last decade, scholars working within this approach have been tremendously successful in presenting a novel view of strategy. United by their dissatisfaction with the state of strategic management research and an understanding of strategy as something that people in various parts of organizations do, these scholars have started to examine strategy in new and exciting ways. The publication of this volume is a welcome event since it not only summarizes what has been achieved so far in strategy-as-practice but also presents questions and avenues to be explored in the future.

The editors offer an expansive and thorough volume that enables the reader to grasp diverse aspects of the strategy-as-practice approach: its epistemological considerations, its theoretical roots, methodological concerns and possible areas for future research. While the editors do not define a specific contribution on the part of the handbook and its aim is neither synthesis nor integration of strategy-as-practice, this work presents a unique collection of perspectives on the field and encourages an open and critical research program.

The volume is divided into four distinctive parts, each of which is carefully introduced by a valuable overview. Part I of the volume addresses epistemological and ontological questions. The six papers collected here serve as an excellent introduction to the volume and to strategy-as-practice research in general. Orlikowski presents three modes of practice research - as phenomenon, perspective and philosophy, which show how strategy-as-practice research can vary significantly in terms of how it adopts a practice approach. Division into these modes is useful as a guide when evaluating strategy-as-practice studies since they differ along a range stretching from those which see practice as a mere phenomenon to those which analyze it as a complete and fundamental shift in ontology.. While Orlikowski takes technology studies as her point of departure and

does not evaluate strategy-as-practice research specifically, it is clear that studies within this area can thus far be positioned primarily in the first two modes (practice as phenomenon or perspective). Orlikowski ends with two thoughtful questions about whom the strategy-as-practice research agenda serves and what outcomes it helps to achieve. Next, Chia and Rasche specifically address Orlikowski's third mode (practice as philosophy) in their characterization of a "dwelling worldview" in contrast to the more common "building worldview". They convincingly show how strategy-as-practice research has, with a few exceptions, adopted the latter and has thus declined to embrace the ontology of Orlikowski's third, philosophy mode. In their analysis of the dwelling worldview the authors touch on a fundamental question for strategy-as-practice research and for strategic management research more generally. This question was raised by Mintzberg (1973) almost four decades ago and has still not been answered satisfactorily: to what extent is strategy intentional and based on insight or a "birds-eye view", and to what extent is it planned and rational? Chia and Rasche demonstrate how a tacit form of practical knowledge can be an essential part of strategy making as strategy practitioners are immersed in and intertwined with their surroundings and conduct everyday activities. It could even be argued that this type of knowledge is superior when novel strategic opportunities that create competitive advantage are to be discovered (Regnér, 2003), and thus often more likely to be valuable than knowledge that emerge from strategy formulated in deliberate, planning-focused processes based on widely dispersed strategy tools and techniques used in formal strategy workshops and meetings (Barney, 1986; 1991). However, another fundamental question is of course to what extent strategy research can be made normative and useful for practitioners if this view is adopted. Tsoukas continues the discussion along the same lines as Chia and Rasche, focusing on Orlikowski's third mode. On the basis of Heideggerian phenomenology, he outlines a useful vocabulary and framework for different types of strategy making (in the deliberate and non-deliberate modes). This phenomenological line opens up for diverse types of strategy action and intentionality, including non-deliberate tacit understanding ("practical coping"), explicit awareness ("deliberate coping") and thematic awareness, which involves strategizing based on strategic episodes, planning sessions, away days, etc. ("detached coping"). In the following chapter, Grand, Ruegg-Sturm, and von Arx analyze constructivist epistemologies in relation to strategy-as-practice research and examine the extent to which those epistemologies have had an influence on such research. They present a constructivist research program which emphasizes creation and transformation of strategy concepts and strategizing. Next, Golden-Biddle and Azuma build on earlier research (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997), reviewing extant strategy-as-practice research in two major dimensions (structuring the intertextual field and problematizing the situation). On the basis of their categorization they identify future avenues for exploration that extant strategy-as-practice research has not yet addressed. The primary focus is on incommensurate problematization; that the research would claim that the existing strategy literature is wrong and misguided in a direct challenge to prior work. This is in

contrast to extant strategy-as-practice research, which has in the main proposed refinements and amendments to previous strategy work. In the final chapter in this section, Langley attends to the question of what substantive and general knowledge strategy-as-practice offers. She tackles this question from three different perspectives (adopting a normal science view, a practice theory view and a pragmatic view) and discusses one book to represent each perspective.. In conclusion she finds that strategy-as-practice research is not currently moving in the direction of knowledge development for practitioners through the instrumental use of findings, but that it can be of conceptual value to practice.

Part II of the handbook brings together six papers which focus on how different theoretical ideas from social theory, social psychology, and philosophy can inform strategy-as-practice. First, Whittington addresses a common approach in strategy-as-practice research if not in strategy research in general (Pozzebon, 2004), namely structuration theory. Besides explaining structuration and its advantages in analyzing strategy, Whittington discusses different implications for strategy-as-practice research. Even though structuration theory has been used in strategy-as-practice research, especially in a focus on middle managers' role in strategy making; the author chooses to discuss two empirical studies of technology-in-practice and organizational practices. On the basis of this analysis, he then shows and suggests that strategy-as-practice research can move beyond studies of middle managers and examine other groups' role in strategy making, including consultants and strategy gurus. Finally, Whittington claims that strategy is an institution in itself and deserves research attention as an institutionalized set of rules and resources that has a profound impact on firms and societies. Next, Jarzabkowski analyzes strategy-as-practice research from the perspective of activity theory including its four main concepts of the subject, the collective, object-oriented activity, and mediation. She thoroughly explains activity theory and its variants and shows how it has been successfully applied to core aspects of strategy-as-practice research (e.g. practitioners, practices, and praxis). Gomez turns to Bourdieu in her analysis of strategy-as-practice and notes that his systemic approach to practice has not been used in its entirety, despite its promising nature. In this chapter, some core features of Bourdieu's praxeology are presented, along with an explanation of how the praxeology can be of significant use in strategy-as-practice research. She especially emphasizes how a Bourdieusian perspective makes it possible to move beyond an emphasis on dichotomies in strategy research and leads to a call for more reflexivity among academics and their role in the field of strategy. In the following chapter, Mantere adopts a Wittgensteinian perspective on strategy and explains how that philosopher's work can be of assistance in the analysis of strategy making. In particular, he focuses on the language game concept and employs concrete examples to show how that concept has been successfully applied in strategy-as-practice. He ends with a future strategy-as-practice research agenda based on Wittgenstein's work and emphasizes research on agreement vs. disagreement over language and language family resemblance as promising focuses for future work. Foucault is in focus in the next chapter, by Allard-Poesi,

which offers a constructive critique of the idea of adaptability in strategy-as-practice. She examines three broad sets of practices as analyzed by Foucault, and in each case discusses the implications for strategy-as-practice research. She demonstrates how a Foucauldian perspective can pave the way for new and innovative questions in strategic management generally and in strategy-as-practice specifically, looking, for example, at fundamental questions of power and resistance in relation to strategy practices, which have attracted limited attention so far in strategy-as-practice research. The final chapter in this part, by de La Ville and Mounoud, adopts a narrative approach and builds on the “building” vs. “dwelling” modes of strategy making in an analysis of texts and narratives. The authors present three different forms of strategic narratives (meta-conversations, discourse domination and strategies as narration) and examine narrative production and the process of narration. They summarize their views in a framework including both strategy formation as production and consumption of strategic texts.

Part III of the volume examines methodological considerations and comprises five chapters, the first of which focuses on methods that can be applied in the study of strategizing in various environments. Huff, Neyer, and Möslin argue that while the predominant use of ethnographic methods in strategy-as-practice has been useful, such techniques have clear limitations, especially in times of structural turmoil and crisis. In particular, the authors emphasize that methods that allow for generalization and more precise conclusions are needed, and present a range of different research practices and methods to this end. Next, Vaara focuses on critical discourse analysis and explains how it can assist in broadening our understanding of the role which discursive practices play within micro-level strategy processes and activities. While studies employing discourse analysis are increasing, this author argues that there is much left to discover in a linguistic analysis of strategy, not least when carrying out critical analysis. Samra-Fredericks's chapter is centered on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. She first provides an outline of these methods and exemplifies them using material from her own studies, and then draws attention to the potential advantages of this approach for strategy-as-practice research, whilst also enumerating the challenges involved. In the following chapter, Johnson, Balogun and Beech argue for an identity approach in research on strategizing and claim that since praxis and identity are so intimately intertwined, there is a need for alternative methodologies and practices that take the “close-with relationship” between researcher and research subjects seriously, in contrast to a “close-to relationship”. This requires close proximity to and engagement with (and from) the practitioner, and therefore demands certain methodological approaches and design principles, which are outlined in the chapter. The final chapter in this section, by Rouleau, examines the study of strategizing through narratives of practice, which is a specific kind of biographical method. The author argues that this approach is advantageous when trying to understand managerial activities in relation to strategy, and on the basis of a previous study she clearly demonstrates how it can be applied. While delineating the promises of this approach for strategy-as-practice research, Rouleau also discusses its potential challenges.

The final section of this volume (Part IV) presents four exemplary empirical works within strategy-as-practice research. In the first study, Johnson, Smith, and Codling investigate how managers influence institutional change, and specifically examine agency in relation to institutional change in the privatization of British Rail. In their longitudinal case study they find that agency in relation to institutional change can be conceptualized as a progression in “cumulative experimentation”, which includes an escalation of actors’ awareness of their capacity to exercise influence by so doing. Macintosh, Maclean and Seidl then aim to investigate the “effectivity paradox” in strategy workshops, whereby the separation of workshops from regular work activities in fact hinders the transfer and implementation of ideas and plans. Drawing on a longitudinal study of ten organizations and 99 workshops, they show that strategy workshops are not only ritualized events, but may also have a significant influence on organizational development. Moreover, they suggest that one-off workshops may be less effective than workshop series, and emphasize that their methodology, which includes active participation from informants, constitutes a novel model of knowledge production in strategy-as-practice. In the following chapter, Laine and Vaara conduct a critical discourse analysis of strategy development in an engineering and consulting company based on a previously published study. Drawing on the critical discourse tradition and viewing the situation through a “discursive struggle” lens, they find that diverse strategy discourses produce different subject positions for diverse actors and show how they resist alternative discourses in discursive struggles. This not only includes struggles concerning strategic directions per se, but also divergence about what activities such strategizing and strategy development are in the first place. The final, exemplary study by Ericson and Melin examines the role of history in strategy-as-practice, and specifically “hermeneutical situatedness”. They use an interpretative method that draws on hermeneutical thinking in their in-depth case study of a single firm and conclude that strategizing in the present must be analyzed in relation to the past and take into account the fact that strategists live in history.

Just as the strategy-in-practice approach has been described as a “broad umbrella” (p.1), so is this handbook a “broad umbrella” under which various perspectives, theories, methodologies, and studies are gathered. The rising interest in “the practice turn” on the part of those working in the social sciences, together with a sense of dissatisfaction with what strategy-process research had achieved in theoretical terms, paved the way for the strategy-as-practice approach. Ten years later, it is still primarily an approach rather than a view of strategy, and it remains surprisingly open to various theoretical and methodological ideas, which this volume exemplifies. We rarely find research areas that do not aim to integrate theory and close in on more narrow and parsimonious explanations and methodologies; while this is an advantage and has kept the area vigorous as discussed in the introduction of the volume, it of course open to criticism. The “broad umbrella” approach could be criticized for simply covering any examination that touches on strategists and strategy practices and thus for not constituting a more coherent and integrated perspective that offers new theory. There is thus an apparent risk that

strategy-as-practice research will not move further than strategy process research in theory development. However, it is much too early to make this judgment, and while there are many promising theoretical developments underway in strategy-as-practice, we must not forget that the strategy-as-practice project is not a colonial one. Rather, it can be seen as an empirical field concerned with strategists regardless of the form in which they may come (inside or outside the organization; at the top, middle or bottom of the organization; as individuals or as a collective; as active participants or passive bystanders, etc.). This, however, does not eliminate the possibility that new, coherent views of strategic management may grow out of the strategy-as-practice approach in the future. Its concern with the microscopic not only heralds an increased understanding of the minutiae of strategy making, but may also say something more fundamental about aggregate outcomes at the group, firm, capability, and institutional levels.

In sum, this handbook is a relatively easy read and is useful not only for scholars engaging in research in strategy-as-practice, but also for those in other strategic management and organizational theory areas who are curious about the practice turn in strategy. As the volume covers many areas, raises a number of fundamental questions which are critical for strategy-as-practice research, and provides solid examples of valuable strategy-as-practice studies, it is not easy to find areas to criticize. Three areas, however, stand out as less discussed and investigated in this volume and in strategy-as-practice research more generally, and these deserve attention. First, given the handbook's focus on "practice", its authors' intention to invite researchers into "a direct dialogue with practitioners" (p.1) and the general emphasis which strategy-as-practice places on practitioners, there are limited suggestions of practical relevance for managers and other organizational members or for how practice researchers should deal with practical advice. Admittedly, this is a handbook directed at researchers and not practitioners, but some ideas of how the strategy-as-practice approach can be of use in practice would nonetheless be valuable. Langley addresses this question and offers some alternatives of how to cope with this, and the exemplary studies of Johnson, Smith, and Codling and Macintosh, Maclean, and Seidl both present some implications for managers, but it is still surprising that strategy-as-practice has so far had a limited focus on the very practitioners whom, as Langley concludes, it claims as its principal concern. Specific normative advice is not necessarily needed (and would indeed go against at least some parts of the approach), but it would be helpful to know more specifically how (and if) the approach could be of value to practitioners. For example, how could a balance be struck between formal and deliberate strategizing (workshops, planning sessions, etc.) and more informal and tacit everyday work? Is it possible to distinguish between "good" and "bad" practice where strategy is concerned? Is it meaningful to do so? Second, it is easy to agree with the editors' opening remark on future research when they emphasize that strategy-as-practice needs to connect with other streams in strategic management research. While some parts of this volume discuss strategy process research, it is quite surprising that more explicit linkages are not made with some mainstream views in organizational

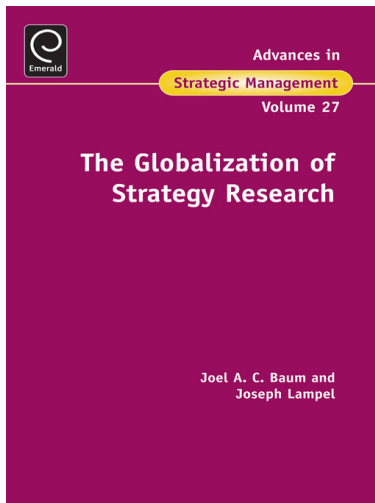
theory and strategic management. For example, current developments in neo-institutional theory emphasizing change (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002) and institutional work (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009) are remarkably close to lines of thinking in strategy-as-practice. Johnson, Smith, and Codling's study in this volume is an interesting effort to incorporate institutional theory more explicitly, but it constitutes a rare exception. Another research area to which there are obvious and close linkages is dynamic capabilities (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Helfat et al., 2007; Teece, Psiano, & Shuen, 1997; Teece 2007; Winter, 2003). While this relationship has been acknowledged and discussed in strategy-as-practice research (Regnér, 2008) there are still surprisingly few strategy-as-practice studies that make a connection to dominant strategy-content views including the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities. Both these research areas touch on related questions as in strategy-as-practice and increasingly so from a micro perspective. This is, however, not a call to accept often narrow economic assumptions; on the contrary, it is a plea to acknowledge the potential for cross-fertilization between sociological and economics-based views. Strategy-as-practice has the potential to challenge some of the assumptions in strategy-content views and thereby contribute to the development of strategic management theory generally, just as strategy-content views can potentially contribute to strategy-as-practice and process research (Helfat et al., 2007; Peteraf, 2005). Finally, a concluding chapter tying the many different issues and questions raised in earlier chapters together would have been welcome. While the editors conclude their introduction section with a number of areas that deserve further research, a more defined direction for research in strategy-as-practice could have been outlined. These are, however, all minor criticisms, and the handbook is probably the most noteworthy, comprehensive, and useful book in the strategy-as-practice area so far. It includes a well-balanced collection of papers, and offers an excellent summary of the achievements made so far in strategy-as-practice, as well as outlining many interesting and promising future research areas and challenges. I believe that it provides a compelling case for continuing an open and critical approach to the examination of strategizing, and that it constitutes a praiseworthy milestone in strategy-as-practice research as the field marks its tenth anniversary.

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## Book review

Baum J. A. C. & Lampel J. (Eds.) 2010  
The Globalization of Strategy Research, Advances  
in Strategic Management, vol. 27, Bingley: Emerald.



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Baum and Lampel address the emergence of research perspectives, alternatives to the current North American field which is considered dominant in strategic management today. As introduction, the editors present a narrative of the emergence of strategic management that defines its contours (objects, appropriate methods) and thus, gives it legitimacy. This narrative, which considers the 1977 Pittsburgh conference as a founding event for the field, contributes to the consecration of North American research, and with it a definition of strategy as a sequential process (formulation, implementation), an object to be studied using the canons of logical empiricism.

Yet, it is this relatively limited definition of strategic management, along with online access to European publications (in particular, Organization Studies, Journal of Management Studies) that gave rise to increasing research debate. As this growing debate is located outside North American borders, the publishers do not hesitate to speak of a “globalization of strategic management research”, despite the essentially European origins of the contributors.<sup>1</sup>

In order to justify the necessity of alternative perspectives, Baum and Lampel underline the variety of strategic discourse employed by the authors united in this work, yet also observe a certain fragmentation in the field of strategic management. This fragmentation would undermine dialogue among researchers, dialogue that this work intends to regenerate.

### CONTRIBUTIONS

In the part one, “Perspectives: strategy as ...”, three concepts of strategy are developed. Using Foucault as a base, Hatchuel, Starkey, Tempest and Le Masson view strategy as a discourse characterized by instrumental rationality as much now, in newer developments, as

1. Among 31 contributors, 24 work in a European institution (including among them, 13 in Great Britain, 4 in France and 3 in Finland) and 7 in a North American institution.

in the old schools. The authors then point out that this domination would be detrimental to both the development of the firm's capacities as they would be directing their efforts on what exists, as well as, for the "subject" lulled by the illusion that he is master of his future and can attain infinite satisfaction for his desire for riches.

Instead of this conservative rationality, the authors suggest seeing strategic management as a process of conception oriented toward innovation (innovative design). This would entail a process in which concepts and knowledge would be mutually questioned and defined. Illustrating their ideas using the development of innovative products at Saint Gobain (i.e. the European leader of automobile glazing), the authors emphasize the co-evolution of the organization itself, as the new concepts and knowledge that are questioned call for the renewal and/or review of organizational forms, boundaries and methods. Thus the authors propose a new concept of strategic management that is imaginative, flexible and more humane.

In the following chapter, Vaara takes up the notion of strategy as discourse in order to emphasize its variety and complexity. It is true that for the most part research using this perspective consider that discourse (i.e., the manner in which language is used orally or as written text) are social practices essential to the reproduction and transformation of organized phenomenon and strategy. However, a closer look at these works allows us to distinguish three facets or levels through which this strategy's discursive dimension is embodied. With Knights and Morgan (1991), strategy can be seen as knowledge, a group of concepts, methods and practices marking conversations and narratives used in the organizations. For Vaara, this knowledge is tied to other bodies of knowledge (military, financial even spiritual) giving way to different strategic conceptions and practices (more or less participative, Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Following that, strategy is built through narratives, narratives that give sense and legitimacy to actions that have been taken or will be taken within the organization. Both the issue and locus of power phenomena, the construction of these narratives are the result of multiple, often contradictory, fragments (what Boje, 2001 calls "ante-narratives"), a necessary step before an official version can emerge; an official version that, in fact, will never really completely overshadow all alternative narratives (see Boje, 1995). These different narratives are developed and reproduced through conversations among the members of the organization, through which some will create their own privileged position (Samra-Fredericks, 2003) or even propose a counter-discourse in order to maintain room to maneuver when faced with strategic discourses considered as hegemonic (Laine & Vaara, 2007).

Through this panorama, Vaara calls for the conception of strategy as a place where multiple discourses are reproduced and transformed, a concept in which all "dominant discourse" only serves to mask this multiplicity and thus is open to debate.

The following chapter exposes the issues and difficulties facing the strategy-as-practice movement. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan first treat the specificities and contributions of this extremely heterogeneous

trend (see Regnér, this volume). Using varied theoretical sources, the researchers inscribed in this movement consider that social phenomenon, of which strategy is a part, takes form and structure in micro-actions, activities and interactions among actors. Interest is focused on the multiple actors who participate in the fabrication of strategy, on activities (workshops, seminars), on the various tools and models that support the strategy and concretize practices and on the results of the strategy itself (Regnér, 2003).

In spite of its potential contribution, the strategy-as-practice movement has not had much exposure in the top American journals. There are two reasons for this: on the one hand, its interpretative anchor confronts the classic reticence of all qualitative and inductive research; on the other hand, the notions of strategizing challenges the classic dichotomy between formulation and implementation and etc, and the recourse to essentially Northern European social theories does little to convince. Given this, the authors suggest several directions: conduct research in American firms, more strongly link the contributions of this research to classic questions in strategy (success, failure of fusions, for example), more rigorously specify and justify the chosen units for analysis.

The second part of the work, titled "Perspectives: strategy and ..." regroup two chapters that dig deeper into the discursive dimension of strategy. Ezzamel and Willmott contrast the Foucauldian concept of discourse (qualified as poststructuralist) and the so-called rational and interpretative perspectives of strategy. While these two perspectives can be aligned to objectively describe strategic processes, the Foucauldian concept breaks with all ambition to reconcile "words and things", representations normally transmitted through scientific discourse and the world. This does not mean however that discourse has no effect. For Foucault (1991) discourse constitutes knowledge in the sense that it is that is governed by rules of enunciation, rules which give form and materiality to "objects" (organization, the environment, for example) and subject positions (who speaks to whom? in what manner?).

Adopting a Foucauldian perspective leads us to question the power of strategic discourse(s), in other words, its performative dimension. Foucauldian research (while not numerous) seeks to problematize the way we look at the objects and subjects constructed by strategic discourse. In what way does discourse construct "strategic" problems, solutions and the subject-strategist himself (Knights & Morgan, 1991)? How do the conveyed rationalities justify certain strategic movements or management control methods (Ezzamel, Willmott & Worthington, 2008)? In other words, how are these discourses related to specific organizational techniques and practices (Rose & Miller, 1992)? Through this questioning, the Foucauldian perspective of strategic discourse appears "complementary" to the rational and interpretative concepts of strategy.

Sillince and Simpson are less interested in strategic discourse as a body of knowledge and more interested in how, through rhetoric, strategy and organizational identity mutually transform and evolve over time. The authors observe that research on these two notions was developed autonomously and led to two theoretical problems:

contradictory conceptions of the stability/instability of organizational identity and its role (facilitator vs. inhibitor) in strategic change, and correlatively, the different visions of an actor's capability to consciously modify this identity.

For the authors, escaping these contradictions implies that strategy and organizational identity are viewed as "meaningful" social practices taking place in conversations among actors. With the rhetorical processes that these conversations activate, the actors are able to reconstruct and reformulate the sense they give to past actions and to imagine new paths; in other words, it activates, in the present, both identity work (linked to the past) and strategic work (linked to the future). Rhetorical processes integrate past and future in that it enables anticipated results to be compared to obtained results, processes that lead us to review the sense given to the past and to envision new actions. Emotions (notably fear) play an essential role in that they bring to the forefront both the past and the future. It is thus through their interactions that the members of the organization work ceaselessly on identity and strategy, integrating that which theory has too often reified and separated.

The third part of the work titled "Perspectives: symbolic resources" considers the capacity of organizations to construct/re-construct the sense of their actions as a source of competitive advantage. Suddaby, Foster and Trank, in a perspective close to that adopted by Sillince and Simpson, argue in favor of a rhetorical concept of history as a source of competitive advantage. While work in strategic management more often sees history as a entrenchment of real facts that constrain or limit the possibilities of action in the organization, historians distinguish these facts that can never be fully captured (i.e., the past) from history itself, as they define history as a temporary consensual interpretation, that is always reconstructed in light of the present.

In this perspective, history can be seen as a highly malleable resource that organizational actors use to generate new interpretations, motivate action and create change. This rhetorical concept of history finds numerous parallels in work on storytelling, memory, forgetting and even organizational identity. However, the authors regret that these contributions have basically neglected the voluntary intervention of organizations in these constructions. The use of historians, the creation of a museum commemorating the enterprise, the development of industrial tourism, all pay witness to what history represents for organizations. By conferring identity and legitimacy to the organization, history constitutes a key strategic resource that the authors invite us to study in more detail.

Dalpia, Rindova and Ravasi ask for further study of symbolic and cultural dimensions. For these authors, research on strategic management masks the question of the transformation of an enterprise's resources and capabilities into value for the costumers and the role of perceptions and meanings that clients associate with a product or service. The organization, with its cultural capital, on the one hand, and its symbolic capital, on the other, is likely to influence these meanings as well as its capacity to "realize" value. Cultural capital and symbolic capital are defined and distinguished from more common notions of intellectual,

social and reputational capital. Cultural capital includes an ensemble of cultural resources (knowledge of artistic movements and sociocultural tendencies, in particular) as well as the capacity to exploit them which allows the enterprise to develop original products endowed with new meanings ("fun" products from the furniture manufacturer Alessi, for instance). Symbolic capital is defined as the association of valued sociocultural meanings (status or identity-enhancing) to the product by external stakeholders (Harley-Davidson, as an example). The relationships among the different forms of capital are then described. Relying essentially on examples of European firms within creative industries, the authors point out that strategy develops within a specific sociocultural context to which the enterprise actively contributes through the products or services it offers.

The fourth part of this work called "Application" regroups two empirical studies. The first contribution explores tactics of strategic discourse consumption by managers in three large enterprises. Using de Certeau as inspiration, Suominen and Mantere envision strategy as a body of knowledge consisting of different registers that managers reproduce and use (consume), adapting them to their interests. Through individual interviews, observation and documentary studies, the authors identified five registers or macro-discourses describing strategy and strategic work for managers. These different registers were all present in the three organizations studied, leading the authors to consider that, through their discourse, managers reproduce conceptions and metaphors that are in effect in society.

A deeper analysis of discourse by which managers recount their experiences and practices brings to light three usage tactics of these registers: an "instrumental" tactic in which the manager uses strategic discourse to defend his unit or even mobilize his team; a "playful" tactic in which they mock the discourse and actions taken by management and they seek to create a margin of liberty; an "intimate" tactic where managers use strategic discourse to question and give sense to their existence. For the authors, this study shows that the mechanisms of subjection and equally, subversion are at work in strategic discourses in organizations.

In the following article, Munir, Ansair and Cregg build a critical evaluation of strategies destined for the poorest countries and used by certain multinationals. These so-called "Bottom of the Pyramid" strategies (BoP) are often presented as a means to generate profit and eradicate poverty; however the possibility of simultaneously achieving both has yet to be shown, as is the problem in Corporate Social Responsibility and social entrepreneurship activities. The authors return to the different versions of BoP strategies, exposing successes and failures. In the first versions these strategies rely on the size of the market that is represented by populations whose revenues are less than \$2 a day and propose low-cost products or services. This first version is the object of numerous critiques that say it proposes superfluous products and it overestimates the size of the potential market. From that, a second version proposes not to deliver products or services to consumers but to turn them into producers. In spite of this change of perspective, the second version is

confronted with other difficulties as it assumes a level of mutual trust that, in practice, is difficult to attain between multinationals and third world populations. Close examination of the successes and failures of the “BoP” strategies underline the difficulty in identifying their social benefits. The authors suggest placing these strategies in a context of a global value chain. Envisioning their potential benefits by considering the group of actors intervening from conception to distribution of the product or service would possibly allow the identification of the power relationships between the multinationals and the consumer/producers of these poor countries and would underline the role that the state plays in the regulation of this relationship. The potential social benefits of these strategies could be distinguished in function of the type and degree of firms, state and population involvement.

The fifth part of the work, “Genealogies”, regroups three historical perspectives in the field of strategy. Djelic and Durand propose a contextual and genealogical analysis of the mechanisms of selection. Harkening back to Weber, they emphasize that other forms of selection can be identified along with a Darwinian version: strategic selection that is essentially defined by the power that certain actors have (large national groups, specifically) to influence the selection mechanism themselves (government policy, for example) and institutional selection, where insertion in a socio-economic network and the ability of actions to conform to the cultural and social norms in place, constitute the key criteria. One or the other of these mechanisms will predominate at a given time or place in function of the underlying cultural frameworks installed (which the authors call the “embedded rationalities”), predominance giving way to specific competitive configurations and performance levels. The authors illustrate this by comparing the “rationalities” in place in the United States and in France. This analysis calls for a contextual and historical reading of the value of the resources that the enterprise possesses, the success and failures of different entrepreneurial forms, the mechanisms at work in the ecology of populations and the process by which “embedded rationalities” are transformed.

The following chapter goes back to the origins of the notion of competitive advantage and, more broadly, to the affiliations and foundations of the modern versions embodied by Penrose, Schumpeter and Porter. Powell, Rahman and Starbuck point out that the notion of competitive advantage is owed to certain economists who opposed the mathematical models that were wide-spread in the 19th century. The English economist Hobson introduced this notion in 1904, emphasizing that entrepreneurs seek to preserve an advantage because the earnings from competitive advantage exceed those that may be achieved by instituting change. By their behaviors, entrepreneurs can reduce competition so that the markets only rarely resemble the pure and perfect competitive situations or the monopolies that economists study. Hobson, who saw in competitive advantage a source of social inequality, will eventually fall into oblivion, but his hypotheses are largely shared within the field of strategic management. The authors then researched the major influences on Penrose, Schumpeter and Porter through their thesis directors (and, in turn, their thesis directors) and the authors

cited in their work. This investigation principally showed the stamp of the Austrian school on our three “pillars”. Carl Menger, founder of this school, directed Wieser, who would be the future director of Hayek and Böhm-Bawerck, who was the director of Schumpeter and Mises. This latter connects Penrose and Porter in that Mises will direct the doctoral work of their directors. The authors also point out that in spite of the influence of German historians on certain American researchers from Harvard, as well as, the contributions of Chicago and Cambridge in the study of monopolistic competition, it is the Austrian roots in strategic management that should be retained.

In the following chapter, Ortmann and Seidl highlight the specifics of German research in strategic management. Unlike North American research, German research principally targets the relationship of the organization with its environment. To do this, they take inspiration from the works of Habermas, Luhman, the Austrian School and to a lesser degree, Giddens and Derrida. Beyond this diversity of inspirations, the research conducted in Germany sees strategic management as an organizing/organized process, a conception that both relies on, and develops, a vision of society. The thinking is anchored in a few general principals, from which the modalities of functioning and propositions for action are deduced and that, for the most part, uncovers paradoxes. Linked to a university system that values essentially theoretical and general knowledge in management, Ortmann and Seidl regret that these particularities are apt to dissolve as German universities adopt the evaluation criteria used by large international institutions.

The final part of this work regroups two methodological contributions. Understanding the accreditation agencies and public policy requirements for research impact, Antonacopoulou and Balogun placed this issue in the “rigor/relevance” research debate. They call for engaged (Van de Ven, 2007) or relational (Bartunek, 2007) research, however the incidences and potential contributions of collaborative research has not been fully explored. The impact of collaborative research should not be uniquely seen in terms of its results; the learning that occurs for the practitioners and researchers must also be taken into account. Collaborative research is a process of coproduction that assumes not only the establishment of mutual trust but also a questioning of the research practices themselves. This transformation calls for a modification of recruitment policies, training, remuneration of researchers and, ultimately, their identity.

In the last chapter, Samra-Fredericks brings to light a different form of reflection. Beginning with a quote from Evans-Pritchard where it is said that what one takes from a field of research depends on what is put into it, the author suggests that we think about the incidences of “I” on the process and results of research. She views the “I” on two levels. First of all, the “I” is a member of an epistemic and theoretical community, which by adopting or differentiating oneself from the norms of its community (post-positivist paradigm in strategic management research) participates, or not, in field reproduction. While the constructivist perspective leads us to question the current concepts and classifications that affect our way of reading reality, they remain silent about this “I” whose choices

reflect its belonging to a particular social and epistemic community. Following Johnson and Duberley (2003), Samra-Fredericks thus steers us to exert epistemic reflexivity in order to contextualize our choices and the results obtained. Secondly, the “I” and its view of the world are also formed by personal history. Through four biographical extracts, the author illustrates how certain elements of one’s history can shape choices and references in terms of research. She thus calls for this double reflexivity in order to reveal the hand of the researcher in his productions, uncovering both the fragility of obtained results and the responsibility of the researcher in their production.

## **THE POWER OF A “EUROPEAN” STRATEGIC DISCOURSE**

Baum and Lampel principally accentuate the diversity of perspectives proposed by the contributions assembled here, leaving us to think that European opposition to the North American school of thought expresses a form of anomie. In counterpoint to this perspective, we wish to present here what, in our opinion, appears to link these works. What strikes us immediately is the insistence of the different contributors on the centrality of strategic discourse and its performative dimension. Whether it is seen as a body of knowledge or “savoir” (Hatchuel et al.; Vaara; Suominen & Mantere; Ezzamel & Willmott), a narrative on what will be or has been the organization (Vaara; Suddaby et al.), or the set of rhetorical processes at work during conversations and interactions among the members of the organization (Samra-Fredericks; Sillince & Simpson), strategic discourse has power effects: it shapes our way of reading reality, a reading that is reproduced and legitimized when put into use; it defines “subject positions”, attributing differentiated rights to speaking subjects and, from that, social identities (Ezzamel & Willmott; Vaara). As the vehicle for sociocultural meanings which may bring value to the client (Dalpiaz et al.), as an expression of organizational identity, continuity, and coherence in action (Suddaby et al.), strategic discourse can be the source of competitive advantage.

This performative dimension of strategic discourse is not limited to enterprises but also affects the academic world itself. It is the power of discourse that Powell et al. reveal when they highlight the fact that we owe strategic management’s key concepts and hypotheses to several heterodox economists of the 19th century (Europeans moreover) and it is in some way this power of concept and classification that Samra-Fredericks warns against when she calls for epistemic reflexivity.

Although a number of the contributions share a vision of strategic discourse as a mechanism of reproduction and even subjection, some underline the fact that this power does not take away all possibility of discourse transformation or even innovation: that it is the result of simple subversion when managers divert the organization’s current strategic discourse to serve their own interests; a reconstruction of the past (Suddaby et al.) and/or the future through conversations that activate rhetorical work (Sillince & Simpson); or even the innovations

that concepts and knowledge generate (Hatchel *et al.*).

It is Foucault's sense of the power of discourse that is in question here: a "productive" power that forms, deforms and transforms. Certainly all contributors are not renouncing the idea of a subject's intentionality. Powell *et al.* and Suominen and Mantere emphasize the plasticity of strategic discourse, a discourse that directors and managers work on, or use, in function of their objectives or interests. It is important, however, to separate the multiple and varied manifestations of these discourses from the rules of enunciation that are without a doubt more stable and more restricted than the manifestations which obey them (Foucault, 1991). If certain works (see Vaara) emphasize the possibility for the actors to resist or go against strategic discourses coming from management, Ezzamel and Willmott remind us, that according to Foucault, these particular capacities are limited because discourse hides its rules of formation and so appears "rational" and because it is often linked to daily, insignificant notions and practices. It is perhaps for that reason that Hatchuel *et al.* have chosen the discourse of design and engineering rather than that of strategy to imagine other ways of conceiving the strategic process.

If strategic discourse possesses productive power, it is because it is anchored in material techniques and methods – those that Foucault (1991) calls the group of "extra-discursive" conditions. A number of the contributions gathered for this work brings to light the importance of performativity of discourse, the relationships among strategic discourse and management techniques and the organization's methods for productive activities. Strategic discourse is sometimes seen as one of the conditions for the implementation of techniques or forms of organization. Ezzamel and Willmott highlight how strategic discourse can simultaneously justify the resizing of an enterprise's activities and the implementation of new methods of management control. In parallel, Hatchuel *et al.* show how new concepts are apt to challenge the company's knowledge base and may, in consequence, initiate new methods of cooperation both within and outside of the organization. Finally at the societal level, Djelic and Durand stress the pervasiveness of embedded rationalities (or the episteme of a society) in longevity of specific competitive configurations.

Symmetrically, these management techniques and organizational methods in some way embody the principles and rules of discourse enunciation and with that, provide solidity and stability. Ortmann and Seidl, Antonocopoulou and Balogun point out here the impact of recruitment methods, training and promotion on developed theories and knowledge, in other words, on academic discourse itself.

It is the relationships (consonant, dissonant) between the methods and techniques (in particular what they value, encourage and enable us to "see") and the discourses that allow one among them to acquire the status of "knowledge". In this perspective, Munir *et al.* note that the social benefits of BoP strategies will only happen when the latter are understood within the framework of the power relationships among actors in the Global Value Chains (multinational corporations, third world developing nations, NGO, government).

Through the importance accorded to discourse on the one hand, and their relationships to the material dimensions of organized life on the other, it appears to us that the contributions assembled here lead us to perceive strategic management as a particular form of governmentality: a specific arrangement between a body of knowledge and the organized/organizing techniques and methods that embody, nourish, reinforce, legitimize and contest this knowledge; an arrangement that, by its complexity and uncertain character, distances us from the sovereign conception of strategy that is the base of the field's orthodoxy.

Research conducted in strategic management, even when inspired by interpretivism, tends to reduce the explanation of the strategic process or actions to an intentionality of the actor who would always be capable of manipulating or bending the rules towards his own ends (Allard-Poesi, 2010). Conceiving strategic management as a "complex arrangement" pushes us to consider the hand of the subject-strategist as "formed", to a great degree, by this arrangement and the knowledge that characterizes it, a hand whose influence on words and things is an effect of the words and things themselves (for an idea close to this, see Ezzamel & Willmott).

If the various perspectives presented here differ from North American orthodoxy, it is because not only do these perspectives reject the post-positivist ambitions and hypotheses (Baum & Lampel), but also prefer constructivist hypotheses. Certainly, Ezzamel and Willmott point out, constructivism takes many forms, from simple interpretativism to what they call "strong constructivism" in which the subject himself, his identity and intentions are seen as historically constituted by the body of knowledge that the subject adheres to<sup>2</sup> (see Rose, 1999). However, these constructivisms recognize all socio-historical inscriptions and the uncertain character of strategic management discourse and practices, as well as of the knowledge that we are capable of elaborating on strategy. This recognition calls for the practitioner and researcher himself to have a certain humility vis-à-vis their possible impact on the world.

The different dimensions brought to light through this analysis show, in our opinion, if not the existence of "counter-norms" at least attractors. It is relatively easy to reveal certain lacks in this and we can suggest certain avenues for further research that appear fruitful to pursue.

A number of researchers today recognize in strategic management the status of knowledge, or a body of knowledge, as these discourses share a certain number of rules of enunciation. The archaeology of knowledge, in other words, the uncovering of these rules, remains to be done. The works of Knights and Morgan (1991; 1995), Lilley (2001), Huault and Perret (2009) are precious help towards the achievement of this goal.

While the material dimensions of strategic practices (the role of diagnosis models and tools, meeting organization, for example) have become the objects of growing interest for management researchers

2. We note here that the constructivism evoked by Ezzamel and Willmott is clearly different from the French version in which social construction of reality results, in the final picture, from the objectives and intentions of the actors (be they practitioners or researchers, see Girod-Séville & Perret, 2007).

(in particular those inscribed in the strategy-as-practice approach, see Jarzabkowski & Kaplan), research seeking to identify these aspects and their articulation with strategic discourse remains few – and above all, by researchers in information systems and management control. What is the relationship between discourse and methods of control and information at work both within, and outside of, the organization? To what extent do these methods, that allow us to see the activities of the organization and its environment, affect the perception brought to bear on these activities and, in return, the strategic discourses themselves? In a similar vein, strategic discourse is fed by other discourse and knowledge (for military, see Knights & Morgan, 1991; accounting, see Hoskin, Macve & Stone, 2006; managerial, see Rose, 1999; economics, see Hatchuel et al., sociological, etc.). What are the incidences of these different types of “knowledge” on the field and on its transformation? To what extent is strategic knowledge affecting other management knowledge?

These questions call upon the field of strategic management to open up to, and be fed by, other management knowledge (in human resources, information systems, finance, management control). As a hallmark of European heterodoxy, we must recognize the care that the contributors to this work have taken to anchor their comprehension of strategic management in larger knowledge bases (philosophy and sociology, in particular), which has permitted them some distance with their object. References to work being done in sister disciplines are still rare<sup>3</sup>, and for a field of research supposedly considered “transversal”, this is all the more regrettable.

The call for greater transversality will not, without a doubt, greatly facilitate an Atlantic crossing but, instead, may reinforce this “European identity” that we have chosen to sketch out here.

3. The contributions of Dalpiaz et al. (references in marketing), Ezzamel and Willmott (references in management control) are the exception.

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