

INTRODUCTION

Strategy as Practice: A New Perspective

Key points

- Strategy as practice in relation to other fields of strategy research
- Broad themes of the strategy as practice research agenda
- The activity-based view
- Guide to reading this book

Strategy is not just something a firm has – a position. It is also something that a firm and its multiple actors do. The problem of doing strategy, how it is done, who does it and what they use to do it, is important for both practitioners and strategy theorists. On the one hand, managers at all levels of the firm want better answers to these questions so that they might become more skilled practitioners of strategy. On the other hand, academics face the perplexing problem of a gap between their theories of what strategy is and its actual practice. This is because much strategy research has remained remote from the study of that myriad of activities and practices involved in doing strategy. This book explains a new research perspective, strategy as practice, which addresses the problem of doing strategy research that is closer to strategy practice.

As strategy as practice is a new perspective, this book both sets out some theoretical foundations for the field and provides a body of empirical work, which can contribute to its empirical and theoretical development. Broadly, the book addresses the question: How do the strategizing practices of managers shape strategy as an organizational activity? This introductory chapter serves four purposes:

- locates strategy as practice in the broader field of strategic management;
- introduces the broad aims of the strategy as practice research agenda;
- explains the activity-based view of strategy as practice used in this book; and
- provides readers with a guide to the features of this book.

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STRATEGY AS PRACTICE IN RELATION TO OTHER FIELDS OF STRATEGY RESEARCH

Strategy as practice is part of a broader practice turn in contemporary social theory and the management sciences over the past 20 years.¹ It has been imported into such diverse management fields as technology, knowledge management, organizational learning and accounting.² More recently, the practice turn has entered the strategy field, recommending that we focus on the actual work of strategists and strategizing.³ This practice turn in strategy may be attributed to two main influences, in strategic management specifically and the management sciences more generally.

First, there is an increasing frustration with the normative models of science that dominate strategic management research. Much strategy theory is generated from large-scale studies in the micro-economics tradition, which reduce the complexities of doing strategy to a few causally related variables. Such studies focus on firm and industry levels of analysis, with scant attention to human action. With their implicit assumptions of rational choice, they reduce actors to, at best, simplistic figures represented by a few demographic variables that may be questionably linked to firm performance. The dominance of economic assumptions in strategic management research is a straitjacket that has made strategy theory increasingly remote and out of touch with the complexities of strategy in practice (Bettis, 1991; Ghoshal and Moran, 1996; Lowendahl and Revang, 1998; Prahalad and Hamel, 1994). Indeed, despite some 40 years of strategic management research, we still lack a valid theory of how strategies are created (Hamel, 2001).

Second, building upon Weick's (1979) influential suggestion that we make better use of verbs and gerunds, such as organize and organizing, instead of static and reified concepts such as organization, the broader field of management research has been seeking more 'humanized' theories that bring actors and action back into the research frame (Whittington, 2002). The growing shift from static, parsimonious and generalized forms of theorizing to dynamic and complex explanations that reflect action (Langley, 1999; Mohr, 1982; Weick, 1979) may be partially attributable to an 'after modern' or 'post-industrial' phase in the management sciences. Organizations in a knowledge-based, post-industrial society are increasingly individualistic, fragmented, localized, pluralistic and contested, as opposed to standardized and collective entities (Cummings, 2002; Lowendahl and Revang, 2004; Whittington, 2004). These changing conditions, in which organization may not be considered a coherent whole, pose challenges to practitioners and researchers. Meaningful relationships between theory and practice will be better assisted by dynamic, locally-contextualized theories that can reflect the complexities of practice in an after modern world (Pettigrew, 2001).

The strategy as practice research agenda is situated in the context of these after modern developments in the management sciences and a growing disenchantment with the theoretical contributions, empirical conduct and practical relevance of much strategic management research. Practice research

aims to understand the messy realities of doing strategy as lived experience;⁴ to go inside the world of strategy practitioners as they struggle with competing priorities, multiple stakeholders and excessive but incomplete information in an attempt to shape some coherent ‘thing’ that may be perceived as a strategy by markets, financial institutions and consumers. Strategy as practice is thus concerned with the detailed aspects of strategizing; how strategists think, talk, reflect, act, interact, emote, embellish and politicize, what tools and technologies they use, and the implications of different forms of strategizing for strategy as an organizational activity. Strategy as practice as an agenda thus marks a clear departure from the positivist economic assumptions underpinning much strategy research.

STRATEGY AS PRACTICE AND OTHER AVENUES OF STRATEGY RESEARCH

Strategy as practice is, of course, not the first research agenda to attempt to break through the economics-based dominance over strategy research. Rather, it may be seen as the culmination of broader shifts in strategic management, to which a practice perspective can contribute. Strategy as practice is distinct from, but responds to, challenges and issues raised in strategy process, resource-based view and dynamic capabilities research. These avenues of research and their distinctions and complementarities with strategy as practice are now briefly discussed.

Strategy process

Initially, and perhaps most dominantly, there is the legacy of the strategy process school of research, which made significant departures from content-based theories of strategy by introducing a dynamic view of strategy as a process in which the role of the managerial actor is problematized. While process research made important steps forward in humanizing strategy research and generating more dynamic theories, from a practice perspective it does not go far enough in two ways. First, while process problematizes the role of top managers, it does not carry this through into studying what various managerial actors do. Second, process research is primarily concerned with explanations at the firm level of analysis, necessarily sacrificing more fine-grained analyses of activity construction (Johnson et al., 2003). The contributions of the process school and the ways that a practice perspective builds upon and furthers its agenda are now briefly outlined.

The process school is not a consistent body of theory in itself, comprising various strands, which will be briefly summarized here as the Bower-Burgelman (B-B), action, and change process veins of research. Beginning with Bower’s (1970) influential study of the way that the resource allocation process shapes strategy, the B-B vein of process research counteracted rational choice theories of strategy-making. Building on Bower’s model, Burgelman’s (1983, 1991, 1996) studies developed a theory of strategy as an evolutionary process

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involving multiple managerial actors from the corporate, middle and operational level of the firm. Analysis of the different roles played by these managers has led to an important problematizing of top managers' involvement in strategy creation. Top managers' influence over the way others perform strategy lies in their control over the structural context but, paradoxically, once they embed strategy in an administrative structure, such as resource allocation, they find it hard to alter or shape that strategy. Administrative structures thus contextually bind the strategic actions of top managers, leading to inertia and performance down-turn. By contrast, lower-level managers play the main role in providing initiative and impetus to change strategy. The B-B vein of process theory thus instated multiple levels of managers into the strategy making process, exposed the weakness of rational choice notions and initiated a dynamic theory of strategy as a multi-level process evolving over time.

However, the agency and influence by which different levels of managers shape the evolution of strategy is rather less addressed; that is, how different managers act and interact remains hollow, leaving a somewhat sterile picture of what people actually do (Johnson et al., 2003; Noda and Bower, 1996; Pettigrew, 1992). This branch of strategy process research thus remains very much at the firm level of explanation, rather than the action and activity level, negating fine-grained analysis of the everyday actions and interactions involved in the formation of strategy. This problem is to some extent shaped by a cautious approach to situated concepts of context, since the B-B vein of research remains at the more observable contextual levels of structure and strategy. The omission of situated context is deliberate: 'The problem with situational context, however, is precisely that it is unique to the situation; one can't generalize about it' (Bower, 1970: 71). Hence, Bower sets up a 'separate category', structural context, to isolate and omit the messy situated aspects of context that are of a 'personal and historical nature' and this omission continues to colour the B-B school of research (Noda and Bower, 1996). However, from a practice perspective strategic and structural context cannot be abstracted from situation, as it is the situation that makes both strategy and structures relevant to action. Practice theory aims to understand strategy as a situated activity. Strategy as practice thus extends the B-B theory of process in two important ways, managerial agency and situated activity, in order to better understand how different level actors interact to shape strategy (see, for example, Regnér, 2003).

The action school is largely the province of Mintzberg (1990), whose definition of strategy as 'a pattern in a stream of actions' is pertinent to practice. This definition arises from the concept of strategy as emergent action, as opposed to intended strategy. This school of thought further problematizes the role of the top manager, since top manager intentionality or choice is subject to the intentions arising from other actors and events within the firm. 'To assume that the intentions of the leadership are the intentions of the organization may not be justified, since others can act contrary to these intentions' (Mintzberg and McHugh, 1985: 162). This draws out a theme that is core to a practice perspective; the potential disparity between top managers and other actors. Strategy is not an output of the organization as a coherent, collective

whole. However, the action school then focuses upon grass roots strategies that emerge from the organization in a bottom-up fashion. While this shows the emergent nature of activity and provides an effective counterpoint to rational choice assumptions, it negates the actions of top managers in strategy-making. The action school is more concerned with the messy emergence of strategy at the grass roots level than with the complex relationship between intention, and emergence or its implications for top managers (Hendry, 2000). Strategy may indeed be a matter of emergence rather than managerial intention, but its overall outcomes in terms of strategy content and firm performance are a managerial responsibility. Strategy as practice acknowledges this, addressing the thorny problem of top managers' involvement in shaping strategy in the face of emergence.

The change process school focuses upon firm-level change as an outcome of action in context (for example, Johnson, 1987; Pettigrew, 1985; Van de Ven and Poole, 1990). Pettigrew (1973, 1985, 1987, 1990) is perhaps the primary exponent of this method, highlighting the political and cultural aspects of context and how these are implicated in strategic action. The managerial actor is clearly instated within the strategy process as a political entity with interest and intent. However, we also see the constraining and enabling nature of contextual features, such as culture, upon managerial action. This school thus develops contextual explanations that further problematize rational choice theories and invite us to focus upon strategy as situated managerial action.

To this extent, the change process school of strategy is most closely associated with strategy as practice. However, this school's absorbing focus is upon the sequence of events involved in change (Van de Ven, 1992). This school thus deals with the firm as the level of analysis and the sequence of events within a change as the unit of analysis. By contrast, a practice perspective is concerned with activity as the level of analysis and the actions and interactions that comprise activity as the unit of analysis. This analytical distinction enables a more fine-grained understanding of those detailed actions and practices that constitute a strategy process (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Johnson et al., 2003) without the presupposition of change.

Undoubtedly strategy involves change. However, it also involves a good deal of maintenance and reproduction. Such reproduction is not insignificant, since stabilizing strategy is also important to an organization (Chia, 1999; Hendry and Seidl, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2004a). Strategy as practice shifts the analytic focus to how strategy is constructed rather than how firms change, in order to understand the myriad of interactions through which strategy unfolds over time, each of which contains the scope and potential for either stability or change (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Strategy as practice thus privileges the construction of strategic stability alongside strategic change (Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004).

These distinctions between strategy process and strategy as practice in terms of managerial agency, situated action, activity rather than firm-level analysis, and the construction of strategic stability are, to be sure, subtle and fine-grained; a matter of nuance, foregrounding, and focus more than a hard

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delineation (Johnson et al., 2003). Indeed, a clear intellectual debt is owed to the process field, particularly the latter change scholars. Nonetheless, the distinctions are important for developing a theory of practice, as the following chapters will demonstrate. Furthermore, they appear also to be of concern to contemporary process scholars. That is, strategy process seems to be at something of a crossroads, where it is concerned with these problems in the strategy process field. For example, Chakravarthy and White (2002) note that process research needs to attain better theoretical and practical relevance by explaining how strategies are formed and implemented, not only how they are changed. Similarly, Garud and Van de Ven (2002) note the problems of linear analyses of change events and suggest that research must focus upon the emergence, development and obsolescence of change processes. To do so, I maintain that research needs to take a practice perspective on strategy as a socially accomplished, situated activity arising from the actions and interactions of multiple level actors.

Resource-based and dynamic capability theories

Another avenue of strategy research that has developed increasing presence over the last 15 years is the resource-based view (RBV) and its more dynamic 'cousin' dynamic capability theory (Barney, 1991; Helfat, 2000; Lengnick-Hall and Wolff, 1999; Teece et al., 1997). While based primarily in an economic paradigm (Conner, 1991), these theoretical developments in the strategy field aim to address and counteract the typical industry levels of analysis in much strategy research by focusing upon competitive advantage as it arises from heterogeneous firm-level resources and capabilities. From this perspective, competitive advantage might arise not only from tangible assets, but also socially complex assets, such as culture, knowledge, capabilities embodied in specific actors, and the learning routines of an organization. It thus addresses some of the concerns of the practice field by attempting to reinstate actors and unique or situated action into strategy research.

However, this research agenda tends to fall short of its ambitions to explain how heterogeneity within firms is associated with differences in firm performance, resorting to positivistic methods that are too coarse to access deep understandings of how firms differ and, indeed, what difference that makes (Rouse and Daellenbach, 1999). As a result, in the RBV at least, unique features that might well make a difference, such as the situated nature of managerial action, are left within the 'black box', failing to address the very problem that RBV raises (Priem and Butler, 2001). Dynamic capabilities represent something of a development on the RBV, being in the same broad family of theory, but aiming to go beyond the criticisms of RBV as excessively static and commodified (Scarborough, 1998; Spender, 1996). Rather than conceiving of resources as something a firm has that gives it unique advantage, dynamic capabilities are concerned with the learning processes that a firm does. This is a distinctive contribution from a practice perspective, since it acknowledges more dynamic forms of theorizing. However, despite considerable research, dynamic capabilities still fail to deliver a coherent account of strategy-making:

how capabilities are developed and modified over time and what difference that makes to the strategy of the firm (Cockburn et al., 2000). This may be because capability-building theory has also fallen prey to the dominant positivistic traditions in strategy research and so lacks sufficient fine-grained analysis to furnish a more dynamic theory of dynamic capabilities (Regnér, 2005).

A practice focus can address these short comings in RBV and dynamic capability theory by providing a more micro focus on those activities and actions from which socially complex resources are constituted (Johnson et al., 2003). Most importantly, because it is concerned with situated theories of action, a practice perspective can shed light on the way capabilities emerge, are developed, modified and changed over time, furthering our understanding of the essence of dynamic capabilities. Indeed, early work in the practice vein is beginning to identify the micro-foundations of dynamic capabilities that are fundamental to the competitive advantage of firms such as Alessi (see Salvato, 2003). Strategy as practice research can only add to the RBV and dynamic capability research agenda, helping scholars in these areas to utilize practice methodologies and theoretical concepts to further their ambitions of explaining how and why firms differ and what difference that makes to competitive advantage.

INTRODUCING THE STRATEGY AS PRACTICE RESEARCH AGENDA

The strategy as practice research agenda is concerned with strategy as a situated, socially accomplished activity constructed through the actions and interactions of multiple actors. Broadly, this research agenda has three focal points, each of which provides a different angle from which to examine strategy as practice:

- practice;
- practitioners; and
- practices (Whittington, 2002).

PRACTICE

A focus on practice explicitly aims to take us beyond the false dichotomies that characterize much of the strategic management field (Clegg et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2003; Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004). The strategy literature is populated with polarized categories such as content/process, intended/emergent, thinking/acting, formulation/implementation and foresight/uncertainty. Many of these divides are academic conveniences, based in theoretical traditions that have little relevance in practice. In practice research, the 'practice' under investigation is strategy as a flow of organizational activity that incorporates content and process, intent and emergence, thinking and acting and so

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on, as reciprocal, intertwined and frequently indistinguishable parts of a whole when they are observed at close range. For example, the content of a firm's strategy is shaped by its process, which feeds back into the content in ongoing mutual construction. Indeed, earlier process theorists have alerted us to the relationship between process and content (Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991) and the false division of formulation and implementation, proposing that strategy is a process of 'formation' (Mintzberg, 1978). A practice perspective goes beyond studying the relationship between such concepts to addressing them as mutually constitutive. It aims to get inside the flow of strategy as a practice in order to understand how dichotomies such as process and content, emergence and intent, and thinking and acting elide in the ongoing shaping of the practice. This, of course, represents something of a challenge, since the academic language that we have for conceptualizing and analyzing strategy is characterized by these dichotomies (Chia, 2004). Nonetheless, a practice agenda attempts to take strategy research beyond some of these inadequacies in the academic construction of strategy by examining strategy as a practice.

PRACTITIONERS

The next focal point of the strategy as practice agenda is practitioners; it aims to reinstate the actor in strategy research. Much of the frustration with the positivist traditions in strategy research is because they marginalize the actor (Lowendahl and Revang, 1998; 2004). They ignore the fact that people do strategy. Strategy as a practice arises from the interactions between people, lots of people – top managers, middle managers, employees, consultants, accountants, investors, regulators, consumers. While all these people might not be designated formally as 'strategists', their actions and interactions contribute to the strategy of an organization (Mantere, 2005). Therefore, a practice agenda addresses the issue of multiple actors as skilled and knowledgeable practitioners of strategy, examining how their skill is constituted in doing different aspects of the work of strategy (Whittington, 2003). Practitioners are seen as social individuals, interacting with the social circumstances involved in doing strategy. The focus is thus upon how practitioners act, what work they do, with whom they interact, and what practical reasoning they apply in their own localized experience of strategy (Chia, 2004; Ezzammel and Willmott, 2004). The aim of the practice agenda is to see strategy through the eyes of the practitioner.

PRACTICES

Strategy as practice is also concerned with practices: those tools and artefacts that people use in doing strategy work (Jarzabkowski, 2004a; Whittington, 2002, 2003). These practices take many forms, and their use and influence in the practice of strategy is still poorly understood. They might be broadly categorized in three ways. First, there are the 'rational' administrative practices

that typically serve the purpose of organizing and coordinating strategy, such as planning mechanisms, budgets, forecasts, control systems, performance indicators and targets. Strategy as a practice is littered with such rational practices. However, following Bower and Burgelman's process research on the way administrative practices shape strategy and Mintzberg's (1990; 1994) exposure of the false rationality implied in strategic planning and design, we know the purpose of these practices is not necessarily rational. Therefore, they have, with some exceptions (for example, Grant, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2003), largely disappeared off the research agenda. However, for managers, rational practices continue to be relevant (Hendry, 2000). Regardless of how rational they are in use, they are part of the everyday work of doing strategy. Practice research, thus, remains interested in and addresses these practices as mediating mechanisms by which skilled actors interact in pursuit of their own strategic ends.

Second, there are those 'discursive' practices that provide linguistic, cognitive and symbolic resources for interacting about strategy. This is a broad umbrella to cover a range of practices, of which two main types of interrelated practices stand out: the discourse of strategy and the strategy tools and techniques that provide an everyday language for this discourse (Barry and Elmes, 1997; Hardy et al., 2000; Jarzabkowski, 2004a, b). Increasingly, research shows that strategy is mediated by the language that strategists use, with this language in part created by the academic concepts, tools and techniques that populate strategy classes, textbooks and popular media. While the use of such practices to inform strategy making is still largely under-explored, the limited body of empirical research shows that they have consequential effects for the practice of strategy (for example, Hodgkinson and Wright, 2002).

Finally, there are those practices that create opportunities for and organize the interaction between practitioners in doing strategy, such as meetings, workshops and away days. While these are clearly consequential for the practice of strategy, there has been little empirical investigation into the way they influence and mediate that practice (Hendry and Seidl, 2003; Schwartz, 2004). Such practices are referred to as 'episodes' that serve as micro variation and selection mechanisms, provoking change or reinforcing stability in strategy. Individually any single episode may be more or less consequential, but as typical occurrences within the organization they have powerful effects in the stabilizing and change of organizational activity.

In studying these three types of practices – administrative, discursive and episodic practices – the practice research agenda is not focused specifically on practices per se. Rather, it is interested in practices-in-use, practices as mediators of the interaction between practitioners in shaping the practice of strategy (Orlikowski, 1992, 2000). Practices are referred to as mediators because consequential actions and interactions in shaping strategy are frequently indirect. They are mediated through a range of the above practices such as meetings, conversations, budget mechanisms and PowerPoint presentations. For example, the strategy director of a telecommunications company discusses the uses of the value chain, a typical strategy framework, in the following way:

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It's linear and really what we are dealing with isn't like that. It's more of, more of a square or something, many more connections to take account of and not linear like that. But value chain's handy. People recognize that. You know, you put up the five or six boxes in an arrow and it makes sense . . . It's a communication thing. It lets you communicate.⁵

In this statement, it is not the value chain per se that is of interest, but how it has been used to communicate with others about strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2004b). This is the focus of practice research: to study practices-in-use as mediators of action, examining their consequences for the strategy, the actors who use them, and the interactions that are conducted.

The strategy as practice research agenda is broad ranging, drawing together a multitude of issues under the broad themes of practice, practitioners and practices. As a new field, it is still ill-defined and open in its language, concepts and terminology. This represents something of a challenge for its empirical study, not least methodologically (Balogun et al., 2003). This book contributes to the research agenda by developing a set of theoretically and empirically robust concepts and a methodological framework that also provide a basis for further study in the field.

THE ACTIVITY-BASED VIEW OF STRATEGY AS PRACTICE

The strategy as practice research agenda is still largely theoretical. The empirical focus and the choice of analytic units for operationalizing practice remain open. This book builds on early developments in the field by locating within an activity-based view. The activity-based view is specifically concerned with the empirical study of 'practice' as a flow of activity (Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington et al., 2004). It therefore focuses upon the practice of strategy through this activity, as opposed to through practitioners, or practices. With reference to Figure I.1, this is not a clear demarcation so much as an entry point into the study of interrelated phenomena, as the study of activity will, inevitably, bring in practitioners and their practices. The activity-based view addresses 'the detailed processes and practices which constitute the day-to-day activities of organizational life and which relate to strategic outcomes' (Johnson et al., 2003: 3).

In order to further the empirical study of strategy as an organizational activity, there are two key issues to address:

- What is activity?
- How should we study it?

In some senses these are deep philosophical questions that are well beyond the scope of this book. They are also important questions in the social theory of practice. Indeed, one aim of this book is to examine some of the practice-based theoretical underpinnings to these questions. However, let us first examine how they are addressed in the activity-based view of strategy as practice.

Figure I.1: Activity as the focus of this book⁶

WHAT IS ACTIVITY?

A broad definition of activity is: 'Activities . . . are the day to day stuff of management. It is what managers do and what they manage. It is also what organizational actors engage in more widely' (Johnson et al., 2003: 15). An activity-based view is thus concerned with strategy as a broad organizational activity. It is both something that managers do and also a phenomenon involving a wide distribution of organizational actors. Here the activity-based view engages with the agenda to understand strategy as a practice involving a large number of people at all levels of the organization. However, if activity involves everyone, what makes it strategic? For example, is all activity strategic? This is difficult to define. Consider Exhibit I.1, the story of Fred, a track supervisor on the London Tube. While Fred's actions are consequential for the strategy of the Tube, is his activity the activity that strategy as practice scholars should be studying?

To some extent, an analysis of strategy can be conducted at any level of the organization, including the 'Fred's' whose work contributes to strategy. In particular, if we wish to go beyond false dichotomies, such as strategic and operational, then denying Fred's work because it is operational is also false. However, it also seems that some common sense needs to be applied to a definition of what type of activity we wish to study as strategically important. The activity-based view suggests that such activity will relate to strategic outcomes (Johnson et al., 2003). This leads to the second question posed.

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Exhibit I.1: Doing strategy? Greasing the rail head on the London Tube⁷

Fred and the London Tube

Once upon a time there was a track supervisor on the London Tube called 'Fred'. Fred worked the Victoria Line. Over the years, he noticed an increase in rail wear on his section of the line and increased the rail lubrication to compensate. Rail lubrication is grease applied to the inside edge of the rail head, which helps the wheels pass without binding against the rails (that squealing noise you sometimes hear).

When Fred retired, the new supervisor, who knew nothing about the problem and who was alarmed at the grease consumption levels, reset all the rail greasers to the standard levels. The wear on the train wheel flanges suddenly went up to the extent that the depot technician responsible for checking wheel condition was forced to cancel 13 trains for the evening rush hour. The London Tube was in chaos! It took six months of investigation to 'track down' the problem. Eventually, it was discovered that Fred's operational activity of maintaining the rails on his section of track had been vital to the Tube's strategy of running a timely and efficient commuter service.

- Was Fred a strategist? Hardly!
- Was Fred's activity strategic? It would be hard to justify that definition.
- Was Fred's contribution important to the strategy of the London Tube? Undoubtedly!

HOW SHOULD WE STUDY STRATEGY AS ACTIVITY?

In order to study strategy as an activity that relates to strategic outcomes, some notion of intentionality is implied. While Fred's tale is an anecdote and we should not make too much of it, it is doubtful that Fred's intentions were focused on strategic outcomes at the organizational level. 'Intentionality' means that this activity is intended to have an outcome that will be consequential for the organization as a whole – its profitability or survival. This is not implying that intentions will be met. Simply that if we wish to study something in real time that is consequential and that is expected to have strategic outcomes, we will enter the field a priori to knowing those outcomes. Therefore it is helpful to allow the research participants to help us define what activity is strategic and why. This can be done at a number of levels, since many actors do participate in shaping the strategy of an organization (Balogun and Johnson, 2004;

Mantere, 2005; Rouleau, 2005). However, an activity-based view draws attention to top managers.

It does not presuppose the primacy of managerial agency but rather encourages the exploration of the centrality of management within the complexity of the processes that go to make up and influence organizations. An activity-based view of strategy allows for, but does not commit to, managerial agency. (Johnson et al., 2003: 15)

In framing what activity is strategic, it seems appropriate to let the managers who are at the centre of that activity define both the activity and the hoped for strategic outcomes that orient it. This provides an empirical entry point, a particular flow of activity to examine as strategic. From this starting point it is possible to examine who contributes to the activity, how it is constructed, what dynamics of influence shape the activity, and with what consequences. This book adopts this approach, allowing top managers to define, prior to the start of data collection, what activity is strategic. However, keeping in mind the widespread organizational engagement in activity, this research problematizes managerial agency. On the one hand they may define those activities that are intended to have strategic outcomes but, on the other hand, they cannot ensure that those outcomes will be realized through strategy as an organizational activity. In addressing these questions and issues, this book will contribute to the empirical interpretation of the activity-based view, and so to its theoretical development.

AIMS OF THIS BOOK

Taking into account the issues raised by both the broader strategy as practice agenda and the more specific challenges raised by the activity-based view of strategy as practice, this book has three aims:

- to explain how strategizing, what managers do, shapes strategy as an organizational activity;
- to contribute to the empirical interpretation and the theoretical development of an activity-based view; and
- to generate a set of themes, definitions and concepts that can further the development of the strategy as practice field.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Reading a book is a big undertaking in our busy lives! This overview is designed to help readers select the most relevant chapters for their purposes. Additionally, the book has particular features that will enable readers to negotiate their way through material that might at times be quite new or complex. The overall book is in three parts.

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STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE BOOK

Part I deals with the theoretical and analytical foundations of the book. Chapter 1 sets out the social theory of practice themes that underpin the concept of strategy as an activity. Chapter 2 undertakes a review of the relevant strategy literature, developing three research questions that guide the empirical study. This chapter also identifies the unit of analysis, strategizing and the level of analysis, strategy as an activity, providing definitions for these terms that orient the remainder of the book.

Part II is the empirical heart of the book. It is based on a study of strategy as practice in three UK universities over a seven-year period. Chapter 3 introduces the cases and explains the particular features of universities that make them critical contexts for strategy research. Chapters 4 to 6 address the three research questions. They present the core themes and concepts derived from the empirical study, drawing upon the data for illustrative extracts, exhibits and practical examples of the issues under discussion. Chapter 4 explains two types of strategizing, procedural and interactive strategizing, and the influences they have in shaping strategy. Chapter 5 builds on these concepts by developing a typology of four strategizing types that each shape phases of strategy in different ways. Chapter 6 deals with the complex problem of multiple strategies, examining the implications of pursuing several potentially contradictory strategies at the same time.

Part III draws the book together. Chapter 7 presents the components of a strategizing framework that has been developed from the empirical material. It shows how this framework addresses the main aim of the book, to explain how strategizing – what managers do – shapes strategy as an activity. Chapter 8 revisits the themes that have arisen throughout the book, showing how this book has met its two broader aims: first, to contribute to the empirical interpretation and theoretical development of an activity-based view; and second, to provide a set of core concepts, themes and definitions that contribute to the wider strategy as practice agenda.

SPECIAL FEATURES

To enhance readability, the following features are incorporated into the book.

- 1 Each chapter may be read as a stand-alone chapter, although the empirical chapters have a logical progression and do cross-reference Exhibits.
- 2 Every chapter begins with a summary box of the key points in the chapter.
- 3 The main points in each section of each chapter are pulled together into Quick Reference Guides. Through these Quick Reference Guides readers can access the main points of a piece of text, refresh their memory on a topic already covered, and scan a chapter for particular items of interest.

- 4 Each chapter concludes with the key points to take forward. These points emphasize the main contributions the chapter has made to our understanding and explains how they lead into the following chapters.

WHAT TO READ: CHAPTERS FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

This book has three audiences:

- researchers in the area of strategy and organization;
- students taking courses on strategy as practice, related areas such as strategy implementation and strategy in action, and the wider field of strategic management generally; and
- reflexive practitioners, particularly those working in contexts with similar issues to universities, such as professional service firms and public sector and not-for-profit organizations.

These audiences have different interests and purposes in reading such a book. While the book comprises a whole argument, chapters that might have more relevance for each of these audiences can be identified:

- Strategy and organization scholars will be primarily interested in the theoretical contributions of the book and are thus best directed to read Chapters 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8. These chapters set out the theoretical framework and argue for the contributions of the empirical data, with Chapter 6 providing a glimpse into the evidence upon which the argument is built.
- Students will find that Chapter 2 provides them with an overview of the strategy literature that is relevant to understanding strategy as practice concepts, while Chapters 4, 5 and 6 bring these concepts to life with empirical explanations, which might best be tied into a theoretical understanding by reading Chapter 7.
- Reflexive practitioners, on the other hand, are keen to know what lessons they can gain from this book that will add to their own practice. Here I suggest Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 as the most pertinent chapters for setting out the issues of strategy as practice and its key practical contributions. Chapter 2 sets out the concepts for the research study. The empirical chapters then ground these concepts in comparisons of actual practice.

For all readers, this book is a research monograph that has a dual purpose: to introduce the field of strategy as practice as a new perspective and to develop an argument based on empirical data that contributes a body of evidence to this new field.

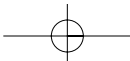
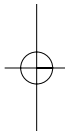
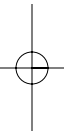
16 STRATEGY AS PRACTICE

NOTES

- 1 Evidence of the practice turn in contemporary social theory may be found in Ortner, 1984; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001; Turner, 1994.
- 2 See the following authors for examples of the practice turn in management: technology (Ciborra and Lanzara, 1990; Orlikowski, 1992, 2000), knowing in action (Blackler, 1993, 1995; Boland and Tenkasi, 1995; Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi, 2000), communities of practice (Brown and Duguid, 1991, 2001; Wenger, 1998), accounting in practice (Hopwood and Miller, 1994).
- 3 See the following for evidence of the practice turn in strategy: Chia, 2004; Hendry, 2000; Hendry and Seidl, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2004a; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002; Johnson et al., 2003; McKiernan and Carter, 2004; Whittington, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2004; Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004. Additionally the website www.strategy-as-practice.org has some 1000 members in its community.
- 4 The fascination with lived experience indicates the ethnomethodological roots of the practice turn, which stands in stark contrast to positivist science (see, for example, Garfinkel, 1967).
- 5 This extract is from a series of interviews I have conducted with strategy directors about their strategizing practices.
- 6 I am grateful to Richard Whittington for his suggestions on this diagram.
- 7 This example was initially garnered from Biffa Waste Services, who have named their corporate intranet 'Fred's Head' to highlight that everyone's knowledge and actions are important to the overall firm strategy. Greater detail and verification were then gathered from 'Tubep prune' at www.trainweb.org/tubep prune.

PART I: DEFINING AND THEORETICALLY LOCATING AN ACTIVITY-BASED VIEW

The aim of this section is to locate the concepts of an activity-based view of strategy as practice in the literature. Chapter 1 deals with the social theory of practice. Four core themes from social theory that apply to the study of activity are developed. These themes provide a sensitizing framework for thinking about the empirically-grounded material in the following chapters. An activity system framework for analysing activity, which will be used in the empirical chapters, is also developed. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the strategy literature that applies to an activity-based view. Key terms, such as strategy and strategizing, are defined and the core analytic concepts are grounded in the relevant strategy literature. This literature review derives the three research questions that guide the empirical study in Part II.



1 CORE SOCIAL THEORY THEMES IN STRATEGY AS PRACTICE

Key points

- Strategy is situated activity
- Becoming: situated activity is always under construction
- Situated activity is distributed
- Managerial agency: practical-evaluative wisdom in dealing with situated, distributed activity that is becoming
- An activity system framework

In a university planning meeting, the top team is discussing the static research and commercial income figures for the 5-year forecasts.* This is an issue that has been perplexing them for some time, particularly the research figures, which have been a problem for a couple of years despite various interventions. They agree that static targets are unacceptable. They must set tough goals. Dave emphasizes: 'It's simply not good enough. We must set TOUGH surplus plans of an increase each year and we MUST achieve those targets which we have not been tough on in the past.'

Tim agrees and suggests a way to action their goals by altering the current monitoring and control procedures for handling income generation: 'We need to have two committees; an academic side to handle and sort out academics and research contracts, and an income side to handle the commercial and administrative side.' The Vice-Chancellor likes the suggestion: 'Be tougher with academics to pull in more research income and get the commercial income up as well.' They quickly coalesce around the new goals for the activity and the procedural means for achieving them. Andy points out that 'It's unlikely to be achieved by democratic means.' Dave agrees: 'It's got to be authorized or recommended from the top . . . You want to keep the surplus increasing, which is realistic to ask for.'

Andy reinforces the tough message about income from research, which they have been grappling with for some years. 'It's not enough for research just to be good in itself. It has to have financial benefits as well.' Joe reminds them that the increasingly competitive environment for research

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funding and for their commercial services means that people are already working very hard to achieve the current figures. Increased financial output is a lot to expect in the current environment. However, he agrees that they need to try.

The team then gets instrumental about who should chair the new committees, the specific commercial and research targets to be agreed with different departments, the incentives and punitive measures that they think might encourage and control the departments, and, based on their personal relationships with individuals, which of them would be best at negotiating the dual targets with each department. Sam raises a point about whether these are contradictory activities: 'Should we clarify these objectives? We want to have maximum research income but also commercial income. It seems we want it all. Maybe these are not compatible objectives?' The Vice-Chancellor silences him quickly: 'We want BOTH.' The dual goals for research agreed, the team goes on with discussing the various practices they have available to construct activity, which they hope will result in increased research and commercial income over the next 5 years.

*While names are disguised to preserve anonymity, this is an extract from a meeting that I observed personally.

This extract, comprising some 20 minutes of a two-hour meeting, captures top managers in a moment of 'strategizing'. In it they are using data, developing goals, articulating targets, appraising the environment, reflecting on past practice, modifying control systems, coping with uncertainty, affirming power structures, considering social relationships with others, and legitimizing action. They do so in a practiced way, arriving at a point of sufficient decision to move on to the next agenda item, secure in the knowledge that they have the necessary practices to progress the 'dual goal' strategy to the next stage. A small strategizing incident in many such incidents.

In this strategizing incident, we can see many of the issues addressed by a practice agenda. The practice turn places the micro practices and processes that constitute the activity of strategizing at the centre of strategy research (Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2004a; Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington, 2002, 2003). Through a myriad of such micro incidents, comprising the ongoing fabric of strategizing, strategists construct parts of a larger flow of strategic activity. They do so with recourse to the situated practices and artefacts that are meaningful within their context, with little concern for the dichotomies that typically characterize strategy research. Polarizations such as content versus process, intended versus emergent, foresight versus uncertainty, and formulation versus implementation dissolve meaninglessly in practice (Clegg et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2003). In one simple 20-minute incident of strategizing, we can see both the content and process of the research strategy, the intent embodied in the 'decision' for dual goals but also that decision's emergence from an ongoing process, the practical iteration between hoped for futures and current uncertainty, and the formulation of strategy in a tightly iterative cycle with its implementation. The outcome of the single incident is a contribution to ongoing activity that will trigger interactions with a range of other actors and actions over time, contributing to the strategy of the organization. In studying

such practical incidents of strategizing at close range, we can begin to understand how strategy is shaped, the implications of the various practices available for shaping it, and some of the consequences of that shaping.

However, before launching into an analysis of the relationship between strategizing and activity, it is important to outline broadly the theoretical basis of the practice turn. In this chapter, four concepts in the social theory of practice that apply to the study of activity are highlighted:

- 1 Strategy is explained as situated activity.
- 2 Situated activity is shown to be in a continuous state of construction.
- 3 Construction of situated activity is distributed amongst multiple participants, which poses particular problems for those whose job is to 'manage' strategy.
- 4 For managers, strategizing involves practical-evaluative agency in the face of situated, distributed activity that is in a continuous state of construction.

As these four concepts are discussed, their application to an activity-based view of strategy as practice is developed, leading to an activity system framework that guides the empirical study.

STRATEGY IS SITUATED ACTIVITY

'Situated' is a key practice term that populates the literature with little or no definition, as if its essential meaning is understood. However, 'situatedness' is a deeply embedded concept that has multiple layers of meaning, many of which have been sacrificed to the superficial context of interpersonal interactions (Contu and Willmott, 2003). Situated refers to the way that activity both shapes and is shaped by the society within which it occurs. Since all activity is situated activity, actors cannot be considered separately from the context or situation in which they act. Suchman, one of the primary proponents of situated activity, defines the relational nature of actor and situation:

First, cognitive phenomena have an essential relationship to a publicly available, collaboratively organized world of artifacts and actions, and secondly, that the significance of artifacts and actions, and the methods by which their significance is conveyed, have an essential relationship to their particular concrete circumstances. (1987: 50)

This definition of situatedness captures the fundamental character of practice; individual cognition that both constructs and is constructed by a shared world on an ongoing basis. It also highlights two important aspects of situatedness; that situation provides an interpretative context and that this context imbues artefacts and actions with meaning. First, situation provides an interpretative context for action (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991). That is, any particular action derives meaning, 'significance', from the situation in which it is enacted: 'In so far as actions are always situated in particular social

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and physical circumstances, the situation is crucial to action's interpretation' (Suchman, 1987: 178). The interpretative nature of situation comprises two important elements, social embeddedness and history.

Let us think about these terms in relation to the above extract, top managers in a university considering how to increase income from research and commercial revenue streams. The situation that lends meaning to these goal-directed activities is deeply embedded. Economically and politically, the need to pursue two concurrent but potentially contradictory goals of research income and commercial income is situated in a 20-year historical trend in OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries of declining state-funding and increased market-based competition in the public sector generally and the higher education sector specifically. This situation provides a set of contextual conditions that generate urgency about strategy for team members. The economic and political situation means that all of their activities must provide revenue within the context of increasing competition for resources. This realization extends to their more localized situation, which is the University's success in generating revenue from various activities. Historically the University has good research rankings, but it has struggled to raise the percentage of revenue from research for three years, despite attention and various modest interventions by the top team. This situated nature of research activity lends particular weight to their decision to 'get tough' on research income. The embedded and historical nature of the situation is inextricably involved in the way the top team wishes to shape research activity strategically.

The embedded nature of situation is explained by broader social phenomena, such as social institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1984). The reason that many organizations appear similar, particularly from the outside, is due to their situatedness in social, political and economic contexts that provide broadly similar concepts of what an organization is. However, situatedness also serves to explain the localized nature of activity in which institutional codes of conduct are not uniform. Local situatedness explains why, from the inside, organizations look so different. For example, all three cases in this book have similar concerns about managing the tensions between research and commercial activity, because of the economic and political climate in which they are located. To this extent, situatedness is a broad institutional concept responsible for common forms of social practice in different localities. However, internally the universities pursue similar streams of activity in quite different ways, with different outcomes due to both the different historical connotations of those activities and also the practices available to enact them within their local context. Practice must, therefore, take into account both the broad social situation that provides institutionally embedded codes of conduct and the micro interpretations of that situation in constructing activity within an organization (Jarzabkowski, 2004a). This embedded construction of situated activity is termed 'praxis'. Praxis is a chain of social events 'where operation and action meet, a dialectic synthesis of what is going on in a society and what people are doing' (Sztompka, 1991: 96). Praxis comprises the

interaction between macro and micro contexts in which activity is constructed (Whittington, 2002). Macro or wider societal contexts constitute a current of social movement, 'what is going on in a society' (Sztompka, 1991: 96). Micro contexts comprise any given group engaged in their own local construction of practice, 'what people are doing' (1991: 96). Strategy is a situated activity that is located within this praxis; constructed by actors in interplay with broader social, economic and political institutions.

A second consideration arising from Suchman's definition is 'the significance of artefacts and actions', which refers to the situated practices available for action. For example, organizations have a multitude of artefacts, such as planning procedures, resource allocation mechanisms, committees, logos, acronyms, presentations and templates, which have particular significance in that organization. These artefacts have technical purposes, such as allocating and organizing resources, and also social purposes, such as legitimizing activity and signifying power relationships within the organization (Bechky, 2003). Artefacts are thus inherently associated with actions and actors. For example, in his attempts to increase control over revenue from a commercial initiative owned by a department, a senior university manager, in an interview, explained to me the use of committees, auditors and audit statements:

I had a go on my own and was unable to do it . . . So my next strategy was to use the Resource Committee which has more legitimacy in financial matters than I do but even then we had to use auditors . . . to actually prove that there was a case. They've got the internal audit to suggest that there is a lack of standardization . . . doesn't fit normal good practice in terms of control systems and there's also a lack of effectiveness.

This extract shows power relationships in the use of artefacts and professional roles in order to ascribe legitimacy to an act of resource authorization between top managers and a department, with the broader objective of shaping the commercial income strategy. This is not solely a feature of potentially politicized artefacts, such as audit statements. Other studies have found that even seemingly apolitical and acontextual artefacts, such as whiteboards and Post-it notes, are important social, political and technical mediators of activity in organizations because of the social interactions involved in their use (Blackler et al., 2000; Eden and Ackerman, 1998). The artefacts are not meaningful in isolation but in the way they are used to lend meaning to a situation. Artefacts are thus situated social and technical tools that are inherently entwined with the activity of doing strategy in a particular context. This will hardly be surprising to practitioners, since the skilled use of existing organizational practices as resources for collaborating with, co-opting or coercing others is one way in which they display their competence as strategists; because they know the done thing, they are able to get things done (Whittington, 1996).

Finally, Suchman's definition of the 'essential relationship' of activity and artefacts 'to their particular concrete circumstances' alerts us to a key ontological issue in strategy as practice. The term 'practice' suggests that strategy arises out of daily experiences that assume reality for the people participating

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in them. That is, 'in practice' is commonly understood as 'in reality', indicating that we need to get inside the lived experience of practitioners as they are doing strategy, understanding the multitude of actions and practices that constitute their 'reality' in doing strategy. The practice turn's obsession with getting inside 'lived experience', 'reality' or 'concrete circumstances' does not indicate an objective reality that we could understand if only we could study it in sufficiently micro-detail. Rather, the practice turn perceives reality as situated activity over time: that activity comprising reality for the people participating in it as it moves over time in context. It is thus largely constructivist in nature, despite its diverse epistemological foci and underpinnings.¹ This ontological perspective is adopted in this book, referring to strategy as socially constructed activity.

An activity-based view conceptualizes strategy as situated activity. The key points of situated activity are drawn together in the Quick Reference Guide at the end of this section. Situated activity arises from the interaction between people and the embedded, historical layers of context, from which they derive codes of conduct and which they imbue with localized meaning. In the construction of strategic activity, people resort to and fashion artefacts that will enable them to draw upon, convey and modify this meaning. Situated activity does not, therefore, assume an objective, stable state with a durable set of meanings, but is an ongoing process that remains under construction. An activity-based view of strategy is concerned with the dynamic and mutable construction of activity, in which 'Mutual intelligibility is achieved on each occasion of interaction with reference to situation particulars rather than being discharged once and for all by a stable body of shared meanings' (Suchman, 1987: 50–51).

Quick Reference Guide 1.1: Key points in situated activity

- Situated activity arises from the interaction between embedded layers of context from institutional to localized level.
- Situated activity is constructed by actors, with recourse to those situated artefacts that lend meaning to activity.
- Situated activity is socially constructed. It constitutes reality for those actors involved in constructing it.

BECOMING: STRATEGIC ACTIVITY IS CONTINUOUSLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Suchman's quote highlights the point that strategy as a situated activity is always under construction. If 'mutual intelligibility is achieved on each occasion of interaction', then strategy is never a reified state but is continuously

constructed through activity. This continuous construction is known as 'becoming'. Becoming encompasses three important themes about activity – inertial, stabilizing and changing activity – that are at the heart of practice-based theorizing.

Strategy is typically a teleological activity, meaning that it is future oriented. Hence it is imbued with terms such as vision, mission, goals, objectives, directions; all words that conjure a future anticipated state. To this extent, strategic activity is goal-directed activity. However, this does not naively assume that goals are achieved. Rather, strategizing oscillates, as evidenced in the opening extract to this chapter, between some desired future and current activity, in which current activity helps to create the future, while anticipations of the future shape current activity (Sztompka, 1991). Oscillation between these states involves an ongoing feedback process of becoming in which 'the heavy hand of the past is present in the future' (Pettigrew, 1990). Unfortunately, much strategy research has engaged with this process in a dichotomous way, giving primacy to either the future or privileging the heavy hand of the past. In the former, the future is a projective state involving change, while reliance on the past equates with inertia in current activity. Inertial patterns of activity arise from the problem of recursiveness.

Recursiveness means the socially accomplished reproduction of sequences of activity and action because the actors involved possess a negotiated sense that one template from their repertoire will address a new situation. [While] recursiveness is always improvised . . . equally, there can be a durability about recursiveness that constrains attempts to transform the sequences. (Clark, 2000: 67)

Such recursiveness is a core theme in many social theories of practice (for example, Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984). It accounts for the stability and long duration of social order that characterizes a social system over time (Lockwood, 1964). However, in strategic management, this recursiveness has largely been associated with inertia and failure. For example, the principles of recursiveness underpin the determinism of strategizing routines, the tendency to competency traps, and the bind of core rigidities (Jarzabkowski, 2004a). Such studies focus on the way past templates lead to present inertias; strategy is a reified state that has 'become' rather than is becoming. Indeed, inertia is a noun not a verb. However, even inertia is a 'socially accomplished' (Clark, 2000: 67) pattern of activity, constructed by actors in interaction with their context. For example, Orlikowski (2000) draws attention to the enactment of inertia as one of the ways that technology is used in practice, showing the reproduction involved in enacting such inertia. Inertia is, therefore, one possible path in the becoming of activity.

Given the problem of recursiveness and its predisposition to inertia, another major direction in strategy research has addressed the problem of how organizations change (see Wilson, 1992). Research that examines strategic change is future oriented, examining how the strategy will become something different. Despite this future orientation, much earlier change research focused on change

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as a reified state, also. An organization undertook strategic change and, having changed, instituted a new stable order (Tushman and Romanelli, 1985). More recent change literature has adopted a becoming perspective, acknowledging that change is not a reified state but a process of *changing*; that is, an ongoing process of becoming that does not involve some ‘future perfect’ state in which the organization has ‘changed’ (Orlikowski, 1996; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Changing is thus a second possible path in the becoming of activity.

Additionally, a practice perspective is interested in the stabilizing of activity. The polarization between inertia and change in strategy research begs the point that attaining stability – *stabilizing* – is also a dynamic, skilled and purposeful activity. Indeed, in a pluralistic world in which activity is fragmented, distributed and pulled by multiple competing demands (Giddens, 1991), we could say that stabilizing activity is problematic (Chia, 2004). Stabilizing does not imply inertia but the ability to construct and reconstruct activity without sliding into inertia or occasioning change. Stabilizing activity is of interest to strategists who are, after all, as concerned with realizing strategy through the exploitation of existing resources, capabilities and actions as they are with changing activity (March, 1991). It therefore behoves us, as strategy as practice scholars, to develop a plausible explanation for stabilizing as a path in the becoming of activity.

If strategy is in a continuous process of becoming, analytic attention is directed towards those practices that are associated with its construction in inertial, stabilizing or changing paths of becoming. Most importantly, in studying the becoming of activity, we acknowledge that a strategist’s work is never ‘done’; strategy is always an unfinished project under construction (Knights and Mueller, 2004).

Quick Reference Guide 1.2: Three paths in the becoming of activity

Activity is always under construction. While it is goal-directed, it never reaches a reified state:

- Activity may follow an inertial pattern by drawing upon the recursive templates of past activity, but this inertia is actively constructed as a state of becoming.
- Activity may follow a changing pattern as an ongoing process of becoming.
- Activity may follow a stabilizing pattern of becoming, constructing and reconstructing activity without sliding into inertia or occasioning change.

DISTRIBUTED AND COLLECTIVE STRATEGIC ACTIVITY

The recent surge of interest in practice theory has been attributed to an ‘after modern’ phase in the management sciences, which emphasizes the individual, fragmented, localized, pluralistic and contested, as opposed to standardized and collective nature of work (Lowendahl and Revang, 2004; Whittington, 2004).² This dispersed and fragmented nature of work highlights the problem of distributed activity.

The concept of ‘distributed’ arises from Hutchins’ (1995) work on the role of distributed cognition in navigation. Complex social activities, such as navigation, require contributions from multiple actors, each of whom has only partial knowledge. Since no single actor can perform all the aspects of navigation, overlap of knowledge between actors is important, with each actor knowing enough about the adjacent activities to construct a responsive and useful contribution to the activity of navigating the ship. Contributions are the input of distributed individual actions into the flow of activity that comprises a social system. Weick and Roberts (1993) exemplify the relationship between distributed contributions and collective activity in their explanation of a flight deck as a complex social system involved in the activity of launching and recovering aircraft. No single actor is able to construct the activity in its entirety. Contributions to activity are distributed amongst a range of actors, very few of whom actually fly the aircraft. The launching and recovery of aircraft is thus an outcome of a stream of activity constructed by multiple, distributed actors, held together by their concept of a shared social system, the criticality of its goals, and their own reasons for contributing to the collective stream of activity.

These concepts have been adopted in organization theory, viewing organizations as distributed activity systems (Blackler et al., 2000; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Spender, 1995).³ Firms are increasingly distributed. The multinational conglomerate is distributed across different time zones, geographic regions and national cultures, as well as being distributed across different products and markets represented in different divisions and business units. While this is an extreme example, most firms may be considered distributed. The problem for firms is that they are not like flight decks, with singular, critical, pre-established goals that can direct the contributions of a range of actors towards a collective activity. Rather, the distributed nature of the firm tends to create ambiguity of strategic purpose and activity, since different groups may have different interests and represent the appropriate goals and activities of the firm differently (Blackler et al., 2000). Distribution is thus a conundrum in terms of constructing collective activity from the multiple actors involved in any particular strategy. The organizations’ challenge generally, and top management’s challenge specifically, is to convince other actors to behave as if there is a shared social system into which they wish to contribute their own actions as part of a larger collective stream of activity.

The coordination of activity within organizations has long been a topic of organization theory (for example, Chandler, 1962; March and Simon, 1958;

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Mintzberg, 1979). Hence there is a significant body of literature on the structural mechanisms of motivation and control, based on transactions that stimulate distributed actors to exchange contributions to the organization in return for perceived rewards (for example, Ferrary, 2002; Williamson, 1996). Other literature examines coordination from a social interdependence perspective, generating collective action through shared purpose, socialization and shared meanings (for example, Barnard, 1938; Daft and Weick, 1984; Ouchi, 1979). However, a practice lens, in keeping with the situated nature of activity, is less concerned with either the structural properties of control mechanisms or the interpretative properties of social interdependence than with their relational character, as they are realized in social practices of acting (Reckwitz, 2002). Fundamentally, practice is concerned with those structural and interpretative practices that render activity 'mutually intelligible' for distributed actors, producing a social structure that is sufficiently cohesive, stable and binding for collective activity to occur (Barnes, 2001; Suchman, 1987). The role of such practices in mediating mutually intelligible activity between actors is at the heart of practice theory (Garfinkel, 1967; Reckwitz, 2002). Strategy as practice, therefore, focuses upon situated activity as the common thread holding actors together, and seeks to understand the shared practices and interactions through which that activity is constructed (Spender, 1995). This is the basic 'premise' of the activity-based view (Johnson et al., 2003).

An issue that has, however, been largely ignored, even by the few practice studies that have begun to analyse the problem of distributed activity (for example, Blackler et al., 2000; Orlikowski, 2002), is its implications for top managers. While distributed means that strategy arises from the efforts of multiple actors, the fact that it is 'strategic' means that it is the responsibility of top managers. Hendry (2000) reminds us that, in our focus upon the micro issues of practice, we must not forget its 'strategyness'. Regardless of the provisional, emergent, divergent and grass-roots nature of distributed activity, top managers are charged with responsibility for 'the competitive appropriation of value by the organization or its stakeholders, in the form of revenue and profit' (Hendry, 2000: 969). The managerial task is thus problematized by the notion of distribution. Top managers must be accountable to the board, the city, shareholders or, in the public sector, the state and the public, for the outcomes of their organization. And yet those outcomes arise from the activities of distributed actors within the firm, with their potentially divergent and competing interests.

A theory of strategy as practice must therefore deal with top managers as intentional actors who aim to pursue goal-directed activity. This does not assume that goals are always attained or imply a rational approach to strategy. Neither does it assume that strategy is top-down more than grassroots or middle-up-down. Rather, it acknowledges 'the centrality of management within the complexity of the processes that go to make up and influence organizations' (Johnson et al., 2003: 15). Top managers are placed at the centre of distributed activity, attempting to shape its collective performance, as in the earlier example of a senior university manager using committees, auditors and audit

documents to shape divergent interests over commercial activity. The point is that top managers do have responsibility for the direction and outcomes of the organization, as indicated by their compensation relative to others in the organization. Indeed, the level of recompense for top managers is so high that it is currently subject to much public and shareholder scrutiny. Since the work of top managers is 'expensive work' (Whittington, 2003), we should better understand what they do to conduct that work. In particular, we should understand how they deal with the relationship between their responsibilities for collective activity and the fact of distributed interests and inputs to that activity.

Quick Reference Guide 1.3: The problem of distributed activity

- Activity is constructed by multiple, distributed actors who contribute individual actions into the wider flow of activity of their organization.
- Distributed actors have potentially divergent interests that make activity contested and prone to fragmentation. This generates problems for collective organizational activity.
- In order to generate collective activity, distributed actors must interact with each other using a variety of structural and interpretative practices. These practices are the focal point for understanding collective activity.
- Strategy as distributed activity is a challenge for top managers, who have responsibility for the collective output from the contributions of distributed actors.

STRATEGIZING: MANAGERIAL AGENCY AS PRACTICAL-EVALUATIVE WISDOM

In order to explore the challenges of constructing a collective strategic response in the context of situated, distributed and becoming activity, top managers are placed at the centre of this study. Top managers are not framed as all-powerful actors, fearless leaders or corporate heroes, but as skilled, knowledgeable and intentional agents (Giddens, 1984). Agency means to have choices and to be able to effect some action towards those choices, albeit that their outcome may have unintended consequences. Framing top managers as agents acknowledges the power relationships and resources through which they shape activity, whilst also acknowledging the reciprocity through which that activity shapes their ability to be agents. From a practice perspective this reciprocity is an active concept: 'Accounts of order and agreement that refer to practice presume not passive actors but active members, members who reconstitute the system

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of shared practices by drawing upon it as a set of resources in the course of living their lives' (Barnes, 2001: 17–18). In this section, managerial agency is explained as practical-evaluative agency. Exhibit 1.1 provides an example of practical-evaluative agency, as a strategy director reflects on the diversification process at RetailCo, a leading UK retailer. 'Strategizing' is then defined as practical-evaluative agency: the managerial agency involved in shaping and being shaped by situated and distributed activity in a process of becoming. Conceiving of strategizing as practical-evaluative agency provides a conceptual bridge between dichotomies such as strategic thinking and acting, and strategy formulation and implementation (Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004).

Exhibit 1.1: Diversification at RetailCo*

Practical-evaluative agency in a retail company

In this example, the Strategy Director explains the practical-evaluative agency involved in the diversification strategy formation at RetailCo, a leading UK retailer.

There are a few routine tasks, the most obvious of which is an annual planning process. And everything else is not routine and does require different types of analysis. Depending on what it is. Now there are some old favorites, but essentially you have got to sit down and think for each particular problem, 'What would be the most helpful way to tackle it?'

So we have said we want to be an international business. The thought process there in some ways is not very difficult. There is a limit to how much you can grow in the UK. If you want to be a growth business, where is it going to come from? Doesn't take a great deal of financial analysis to work that one out. But then in terms of 'OK, fantastic, international business', well that could be anywhere, couldn't it then? It wouldn't initially actually be financial criteria that would drive your first set of, sort of 'screens' for which countries do I go to. It's only as you get more and more specific about what you are looking at, does the financial analysis become relevant. And then you start to put numbers around them.

For most things we try to build a profit and loss (P&L). So whether that is understanding an acquisition target, or deciding to move into a new business area, we would essentially be trying to learn enough to say what are the different lines of its P&L. And then from there do a discounted cash flow (DCF) to value it.

If we are looking at entering a new product or services area, then we use reasonably typical market research. We then also look at what we already know analytically about this. On new geographic markets, you are still trying to understand how many people live in towns of over a hundred thousand and what's the demographic structure, and then how's the economy growing . . . I mean we don't sort of consciously sit there saying 'Right, why don't we look at this?' If that seems like an appropriate thing, then we might. But there's no standard 'Here's an idea, now let's subject it to the following process.'

CORE SOCIAL THEORY THEMES 31

And it's that way round because, um, if you try and get too detailed about the numbers when you don't really know very much about something, you might kill things too early, and you also, yeah, you kill things too early because you don't really realize that actually, if you stretched the margin by just another two percentage points, actually that can make all the difference.

*This is an extract from a series of interviews I conducted with strategy directors about their strategizing practices. It is anonymized for the purposes of confidentiality.

There are three dimensions of agency that inform a view of strategists as active participants in the creation of situated activity: iterative, projective and practical-evaluative dimensions (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). These three dimensions help us to understand issues in shaping inertial, stabilizing and changing paths in the becoming of activity. The iterative dimension deals with actors' skilled reproduction of previous templates for acting without conscious thought; in effect the recursiveness noted above, which tends to emphasize the way that managerial agency is shaped by existing patterns of acting. This dimension of agency has been dealt with in practice theories such as structuration (Giddens, 1979, 1984) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) and privileges practical consciousness – displaying skilled agency through the doing of activity. It may not be thought of as agency, but more as actors mindlessly reconstructing the past, trapped by the routines of their context and the history of their own actions (Whittington, 1988). Iterative agency is thus associated with the value-laden connotations of inertia discussed above. Iteration is, however, far from mindless. It is an active form of social construction, involving intent, skill and knowledge in the selective recognition and implementation of ongoing activity. Strategists do indeed have known moves for product positioning, market entry, increasing capacity, divesting non-profitable businesses, or allocating resources. These moves are important heuristics that enable skilled strategists to do the work of strategy (Eisenhardt and Sull, 2001; Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992). The selection and use of these routine moves may thus be seen as part of the process of stabilizing activity, as much as predisposing an inertial path.

The projective dimension is the one most commonly thought of as agency. This dimension involves the strategist as an agent imposing individual will on a projected future. The strategist as projective agent is a common concept in strategy: an actor with foresight who drives, drags or coaxes the company towards a better, brighter, leaner and more profitable future. For example, there is the cult of the charismatic leader, such as Jack Welch, who appears to have single-handedly masterminded success at GE. Entrepreneurial personalities, such as Richard Branson and Philip Green, continue to fascinate, with their strategies of bold moves, continuous growth and the seizing of opportunities (Mintzberg et al., 1998). The pervasiveness of projective agency as 'strategy' helps to sell management books that recount the tales of corporate heroes, leading their companies through transformation and

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turnaround. Neither should we be too dismissive of projective agency. As strategy is goal-oriented activity, projective agency is an important aspect of shaping those goals. Projected futures create momentum in current activity. Indeed, the ability to develop a future vision of the company is one important resource that top managers may use to build collective support for changing activity (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003). Nonetheless, it is only one form of agency and not necessarily the most 'strategic', since strategy involves getting things done as well as going places.

The final dimension of agency, and the one with which strategy as practice is most concerned, is the practical-evaluative dimension. Practical-evaluative agency is located within an Aristotelian perspective on practical wisdom. Practical wisdom involves localized exercise of judgment: the ability to 'get things done' within the particular contingencies and demands of the here and now (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Tsoukas and Cummings, 1997). This perspective on agency links both the iterative and projective forms, since the enacting of either type of agency involves the exercise of real-time judgments, taken 'in the face of considerable ambiguity, uncertainty, and conflict [where] means and ends sometimes contradict each other, and unintended consequences require changes in strategy and direction' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 994).

When strategists project the future, they cannot know its outcome. Rather, to move towards those projections, it is necessary to draw on existing resources, which are likely to be those associated with iterative agency. For example, in Exhibit 1.1, the strategy director at RetailCo clarifies both the projective dimension 'We have said we want to be an international business' and also the iterative dimension, using typical strategy tools, such as P&L, DCF and market analysis, to analyse those projections. However, she emphasizes the oscillation between projected futures and iterative practices because of the uncertainty of the future and the recognition that these tools are only resources to be drawn upon in thinking and acting: 'If you try and get too detailed about the numbers when you don't really know very much about something, you might kill things too early' (see Exhibit 1.1). Practical evaluative agency is thus a way that managers bridge the gap between strategic thinking and acting and strategy formulation and implementation in practice. In both the introductory extract to this chapter and also Exhibit 1.1, we see that strategists actively bridge this gap between the doing of strategy and its future realization, formulating strategy as they implement, thinking as they act, and constructing and modifying strategy in the process. Practical-evaluative agency involves the skill and knowledge of the strategist in reconciling existing knowledge of the market and firm with its aspirations practically, through the performance of activity that involves multiple analyses, negotiations, truces, agreements, investments and commitments (Hendry, 2000). As Child (1997: 67) notes, strategic choice 'is mediated by a *consciously-sought adaptation to and manipulation* of existing internal structures and environmental conditions'. Such choice describes the essence of practical-evaluative agency, the ability of managers to consciously adapt, use and manipulate those resources that are to hand.

Of course, no discussion of agency is complete without a mention of power.

Agency is, after all, the exercise of power, in that 'to be an agent is to be able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others' (Giddens, 1984: 14). Power, as understood through a practice lens, is well encompassed by the notion of practical-evaluative agency. Typically, two interrelated types of power are posited: agent power and system power (Clegg, 1989). System power involves those structurally-based powers arising from existing social systems, such as routines, norms, roles and rules. Agents draw upon these existing structures to invest their actions with power. While all actors have access to the structurally-based powers of their system, asymmetries of information and access to resources give some actors greater ability to influence action in accordance with their own intentions. Actors, such as the top managers in the introductory extract, have power because of their hierarchical position, their access to the resources of power, such as committees and resource allocation mechanisms, and their ability to define for others what constitutes legitimate activity (Hardy, 1996; Whittington, 1992).

The point of legitimacy indicates that social systems also have power, developing continuity and influence that constrains or enables actors and favours the actions of some over others (Bourdieu, 1990). Therefore, power by an actor must 'be connected to issues of legitimacy, of the social organization of, and control over, resources' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 37). Dominant actors derive power by drawing upon and reproducing the existing power resources in ways that consolidate the system and their power within it. In consolidating the system, they retain power over the prevalent meanings in a society (Lukes, 1974). Frameworks of meaning which favour a dominant social group are embedded within social systems to the extent that views that conflict with the routinized or habitually accepted power structures do not arise. Others act within these frameworks, even where the meanings constituted are not in their best interests, because they implicitly accept the social order of doing things. However, it is not appropriate to take an overly-deterministic view of either system power or to assume that power is primarily the property of one group of actors. Power is accessible by multiple actors (Pettigrew, 1973). Indeed, in the fragmented 'after modern' world which has fuelled the turn towards practice-based theorizing in strategy, the individuality of the actor is asserted, rather than compliance with a dominant framework of meanings (Lowendahl and Revang, 1998, 2004). For example, in the university context in this study, professional employees wield considerable power. Different actors' use of power may contest dominant frameworks of meaning, leading to change in the power structures as much as their reinforcement.

Power may thus be summarized in the following three points:

- Agency is connected to power. Power is the ability to draw upon the resources in the social system to lend meaning to action, which frequently reinforces that social system.
- While power is weighted towards dominant groups within a social system because of asymmetrical access to resources, it is not solely their province.

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- Power is also accessible by other actors within a system. It is thus contested and open to change as well as reinforcement of the social system.

Power in practical-evaluative agency is the ability to draw upon existing resources of power, whilst also effecting change in power structures as part of the evolving and mutable nature of power constellations over time.

To conclude, practical-evaluative agency involves reflexive actors, able to understand their situated actions within the context of past actions and future aspirations and mediate between the two in ways that enable the stabilizing of existing practice as well as its becoming into future practice. To better understand practical-evaluative agency it is necessary to study both the iterative practices that strategists use to engage in activity as well as their intentions in using those practices to shape future activity. This does not mean that agency will result in the intended consequences. Rather, it is likely to generate the type of feedback that stimulates the exercise of further practical judgment. Any act of managerial agency is 'skilled improvised *in situ* coping' (Chia, 2004: 33): a performance at a point in time situated within a stream of such acts. Strategizing may therefore be defined as practical evaluative agency.

Quick Reference Guide 1.4: Strategizing and practical-evaluative agency

- Agency has three dimensions:
 - iterative, which involves selecting from existing templates for action;
 - projective, which involves imposing the strategist's will upon anticipated futures; and
 - practical-evaluative, which involves oscillation between the iterative and projective dimensions in order to 'get things done' within the uncertainties of any given situation.
- Strategizing is practical-evaluative agency: the skilled ability to use, adapt and manipulate those resources that are to hand to engage in shaping the activity of strategy over time.

AN ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING STRATEGIC ACTIVITY

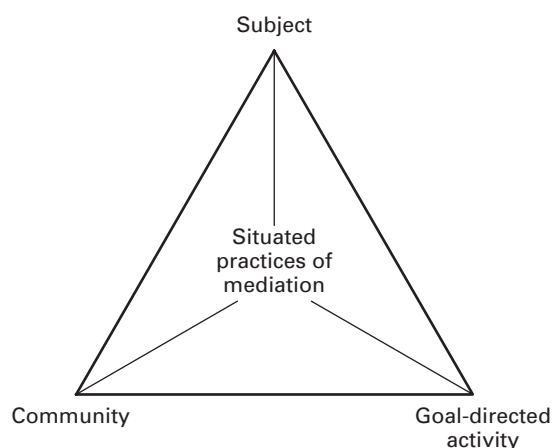
In order to study strategy as situated activity, it is necessary to develop an analytic framework that can place top managers at the centre of the complex interactions involved in strategy as a situated, distributed and becoming activity. In this section, I propose an activity system framework as the basis for

this analysis. This framework is informed by activity theory (Leontiev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978), but it is not a faithful representation of activity theory in its entirety.⁴ Rather, it draws upon activity theory principles of mediated interaction between actors and their social community in the production of shared activity. A brief introduction to the principles that underpin this framework is now provided.⁵

Shared activity is directed towards an outcome (Engeström et al., 2002). It is also distributed and collective, because different actors input their individual actions into the broader activity and outcomes of the activity system. Individual actors thus associate with a community in constructing outcome-oriented activity. Activity is a long-duration concept, a flow of activity over time. It is constructed by the interactions between actors and their community, and also contributes to those interactions. Activity is therefore posited as the essential level of analysis for studying the interactions between actors and their community. The activity level of analysis is helpful in developing an analytic framework because it separates the tightly interwoven interactions between actors and their community, directing attention to the activity that they produce as the level of analysis in which these interactions may be observed⁶ (Blackler, 1993).

An activity system framework also proposes a unit of analysis – the practices of mediation involved in constructing activity. Mediation is a distinctive concept in activity theory that explains how individual actors, the community, and their shared endeavours are integrated in the pursuit of activity. Mediation occurs through structuring practices, such as role, division of labour, tools, and implicit and explicit rules that enable interaction between actors and their community (Engeström, 1993). Mediating practices are an important theme in the social theory of practice. As discussed above, practice theory aims to understand those structural and interpretative practices through which

Figure 1.1: An activity framework for studying strategy as practice



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distributed contributions are rendered mutually intelligible and collective. The activity system framework focuses upon these practices and their role in mediating the dynamics of interaction within the system.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the activity system framework to be used in this study. The organization is conceptualized as an activity system (Spender, 1995). It comprises three main elements of interaction: actors that are the subject of investigation, their community and the goal-directed activity in which they are engaged. Practices of mediation are situated in the context of the activity system and enable shifting dynamics of influence according to the issue at hand and the relative power of the different actors involved. Conceptualizing activity within an activity system enables us to generate an interdependent view, understanding how the actions in one part of the system affect actions in another part, with these interdependencies mediated by the practices. Each of these points in the framework is now briefly explained.

The subject is the individual or group of actors who form the focal point for the analysis. Any group of actors might be positioned as the subject, depending upon whether their contributions to activity are central to the research. Since strategy as practice highlights the practical-evaluative agency of top managers and their centrality in the complex and competing issues involved in constructing activity, top managers are the subject in this book. The actions of top managers are socially situated in relation to the community, comprising those distributed organizational actors with whom they interact in the pursuit of goal-directed activity. However, this community may have divergent goals and interests, emphasizing the distributed nature of activity and the complexity of the managerial task in shaping organizational activity towards common strategic goals. Goal-directed activity is organizational activity that is shaped through the interactions between actors and their community and directed at goals that are consequential for the organization as a whole.

Finally, the interactions between actors, their community and goal-directed activity are mediated by the practices available within the activity system. Such practices are situated, meaning that they reflect both the institutional properties of the wider society in which they are embedded and also the local interpretations of those practices as artefacts for action (Suchman, 1987; Whittington, 2002). Practices of mediation both lend meaning to and are imbued with meaning by the situation in which they are used. They enable interaction between the participants in the activity system and mediate shifting dynamics of influence in the construction of goal-directed activity.

This activity system framework furnishes the analytic requirements of an activity-based view of strategy as practice. It places top managers at the centre of the complex interactions involved in strategy as a situated, distributed and becoming activity. While this brief introduction may seem rudimentary, the framework will be further defined and located within the strategy literature in Chapter 2. It will then be empirically interpreted in Chapters 4 and 5, where it is used as an analytic tool to model the activity system dynamics involved in shaping strategy.

CONCLUSION: POINTS TO TAKE FORWARD

This chapter has developed the four core themes that, broadly, guide this activity-based view of strategy as practice. As these are broad themes of social practice, they are not analytic constructs. Rather, these four themes, which are summarized in their respective Quick Reference Guides, should be taken forward as sensitizing frameworks for thinking about the more empirically-grounded issues raised in the following chapters.

- 1 Strategy is situated activity. This means that it is embedded in context and socially constructed by actors in interaction with the situated features of that context.
- 2 The construction of situated activity is distributed amongst multiple actors with potentially divergent goals and interests. Distributed actions may be more or less aligned, depending upon the degree to which situated practices render them mutually intelligible and enable collective activity.
- 3 Such practices do not constitute a stable body of shared meanings, since activity is in a process of becoming, needing to be continuously constructed and reconstructed.
- 4 The situated, distributed and becoming nature of strategic activity is complex for top managers, who exercise practical-evaluative agency in both shaping and being shaped by that activity.

In practice, these four themes are complexly interwoven and difficult to disentangle analytically. An activity system framework has therefore been developed. This framework is conceptually underpinned by these four themes, but enables them to be operationalized empirically. The analytic uses of this framework will be further grounded in the strategy literature in Chapter 2 and empirically developed in Part II.

NOTES

- 1 For a more thorough discussion of social theories that underpin the practice turn, see Ortner (1984), Reckwitz (2002), and Schatzki et al. (2001), and for a discussion of their application to management theory, see Gherardi (2000), Jarzabkowski (2004a) and Whittington (2002).
- 2 For further discussion of the 'after modern' issues affecting the practice of strategy, see Cummings (2002), Ezzammel and Willmott (2004) and Lowendahl and Revang (1998).
- 3 For further discussion of organizations as distributed activity systems, see Blackler (1993, 1995), Orlikowski (2002), Spender (1996), Spender and Grinyer (1996) and Tsoukas (1996).
- 4 For the origins of activity theory, refer to its founder, Vygotsky (1978), and the development of the theory by his student (Leontiev, 1978). Additionally, Wertsch (1985) and Kozulin (1990) provide helpful interpretations of these works. For recent developments in activity theory, read Engeström (1987, 1993, et al., 1999) and Chaiklin et al. (1999). For application of activity theory in the management field, refer to Blackler (1993) and Blackler et al. (2000).

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- 5 The activity system framework used in this book is a stripped down version of Engeström 's model. My framework is informed by activity theory and theories of situated action and distributed cognition (Nardi, 1996).
- 6 This focus is a distinctive point of activity theory, enabling analysis to go beyond the criticism leveled at many social theories of practice, that they conflate actor and society by associating them so closely that they are not analysable as separate entities (Blackler, 1993). For a more thorough discussion of the empirical problems of such conflation, see Archer (1995), Barley and Tolbert (1997), Barnes (2001) and Blackler et al. (2000).