CHAPTER 17

Relating strategy as practice to the resource-based view, capabilities perspectives and the micro-foundations approach

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Introduction

Although strategy-as-practice research has thrived during the last decade, the resource-based view (RBV: Barney 1991; Peteraf 1993; Wernerfelt 1984) and capabilities perspectives (Dosi, Nelson and Winter 2000; Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Winter 2003) have continued to dominate mainstream strategic management research. Recent work has also started to show an increased interest in the micro aspects of strategy, emphasizing micro-foundations as essential in understanding organizational capabilities and resources and their origins (Abell, Felin and Foss 2008; Felin and Foss 2005; Gavetti 2005; Teece 2007). There have been repeated calls for examinations at the intersection between these research directions and SAP research (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan 2010; Johnson *et al*. 2007; Johnson, Melin and Whittington 2003; Regnér 2012; Vaara and Whittington 2012), but surprisingly little of this nature has materialized so far, with a few exceptions (for example, Ambrosini 2003; Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor 2007; Kaplan 2008; Regnér 2003; 2008; Salvato 2003; 2009).

This chapter examines the intersection between strategy as practice and perspectives that have dominated strategy content research during the last couple of decades. Specifically, it examines differences and commonalities, potential relationships and synergies between strategy as practice and the RBV, capabilities perspectives and the micro-foundations approach. It further investigates extant strategy-as-practice research at this intersection and identifies potential future research opportunities. What can possibly be gained from investigating this intersection? There are four points that are of particular importance. First, besides underlining the importance of strategy practices and activities generally for strategic management, it may provide insights into how practices, praxis and practitioners underlie resources and capabilities that maintain competitive advantage. If we accept that there is a relationship between what managers do and strategy content and outcomes, a key issue is determining how practices both enable and impede managers in their strategy praxis concerning resources and capabilities. By linking strategy as practice to resource-based, capabilities and micro-foundations research, it is thus possible to demonstrate the prominence of practices, social contexts and interactions for strategy. This is, of course, in contrast to extant assumptions in these strategy content research areas that often primarily emphasize rational top managers and individuals. The link to the resource-based and capabilities views may thus strengthen the main theoretical traits of the SAP approach and consolidate it.

Second, linking strategy as practice to resource and capabilities views promises to show not only how practices, praxis and practitioners underlie resources and capabilities but also how these, in turn, influence the former. New insights might be gained as the resource and capability embeddedness of strategy actors and activities are taken into consideration. The organizational technologies, competences and/or knowledge that provide for

competitive advantage may shape and form strategizing. Hence, in the same way that strategy practices are embedded in broader institutional contexts, they are embedded in broad organizational technologies and capabilities.

Third, by linking strategy as practice with the RBV and capabilities perspectives and micro-foundations approach, we can advance our understanding of strategy more generally and possibly contribute to a more integrated strategic management view. Indeed, just over ten years ago, when the *Journal of Management Studies*' very first special issue on micro-strategy and strategizing was produced, it highlighted how this new approach could potentially contribute to developing strategic management theory at the intersection with the RBV (Johnson, Melin and Whittington 2003). The explanatory power of examining the relationship between micro-activities and resources was underlined as a primary motive for the approach, with the aim of bridging the artificial divide between strategy content and process. If we continue to pursue this, the end result may be much more profound than providing another angle on the RBV. In fact, by employing a practice lens that links micro descriptions and explications of strategizing and more macro organizational resources and capabilities, it might be possible to shed new light on old truths in strategic management. Inconsistencies in research that lead to the collapse of reigning theories and paradigms are almost always observed by scholars from disciplines other than those traditionally dominating the field (Kuhn 1970). In brief, the strategy-as-practice approach, which is based on social theory and sociology, may be able to develop strategic management theory in more fundamental ways than first anticipated.

Finally, clearly linking strategy practices and activities with strategy content and outcomes may be of benefit to managerial practice, which is a significant aspect that has sometimes been overlooked in strategy as practice (Langley in this volume; Regnér 2011; Splitter and Seidl in this volume).

The gist of this chapter is pragmatic and generative. It is pragmatic in the sense that it does not delve into all epistemological and ontological considerations and discrepancies concerning the various strategic management views and approaches discussed. It is generative in not only reviewing extant research but in trying to highlight possible linkages between the various streams of research and in pointing to potential avenues for future research at their intersection. The examination will make use of the common strategy-as-practice framework including practices, praxis and practitioners (Whittington 2006). *Practices* refer to tools and shared behavioural procedures, including norms and cognitive procedures, that are organizationally specific (they also operate on the institutional level – practices of larger organizational fields). People draw on practices in their *praxis* – that is, what they actually do in relation to strategy, including formulating and implementing strategy. Finally, *practitioners* are people developing, shaping and executing strategy, and they come in many forms, including top, middle and line managers as well as external experts and other actors.

In the next section I first present a very brief overview of the resource-based, capabilities and micro-foundations perspectives. The section following this includes a review of extant empirical strategy-as-practice research at the intersection with these research approaches. The fourth part of the chapter discusses the discrepancies and commonalities between strategy as practice and these perspectives and approaches. In the fifth section research opportunities and potential contributions of SAP research at the intersection with the RBV, capabilities perspectives and micro-foundations approach are examined. Finally, I conclude and discuss how strategy as practice might possibly contribute to a more complete understanding of strategy.

The resource-based view, capabilities perspectives and micro-foundations approach

There have been several calls to link strategy as practice more closely to the 'mainstream' strategy literature (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan 2010). The resource-based and capabilities views have often been at the centre of these calls (Johnson, Melin

and Whittington 2003; Johnson *et al*. 2007; Regnér 2008), and more recently the linkages to the micro-foundations approach have been emphasized (Regnér 2012; Vaara and Whittington 2012). In brief, these calls show that strategy as practice is underutilized in understanding resources, capabilities and their micro-foundations, and vice versa. Figure 17.1 displays an exploded map of strategic management and various parts of the strategy field, which can help explain where research is lacking in this respect. The figure illustrates various parts of the strategy field and their relationships. It differentiates between the micro (activities/praxis) and macro (institutional field practices) levels of strategy, with the middle level (organizational actions) representing the orthodoxy of strategic management discipline, including the separation between 'strategy content' and 'strategy process'. While Johnson *et al*.'s (2007) interest is strategy as practice at the lower level of micro-activities in the figure, they emphasize how the doing of strategy straddles all three levels and both strategy content and processes. So far, however, strategy as practice has mostly covered a lot of ground in the lower right side of the figure – that is, actors' activities and their relationship to organizational strategy processes. Less emphasis has been paid to the lower left corner: actors' activities in relation to strategy content and organizational-level strategies.

The resource-based and capabilities views, which have become central in strategy content research during the last couple of decades, operate at the level of the firm and organization (the middle box on the left in Figure 17.1; the example given by Johnson *et al*. 2007 is 'diversification', but could just as well be 'resource and capability configuration'). The aim of these perspectives is to explain heterogeneity between organizations and how one organization may triumph over others and gain competitive advantage on the basis of its idiosyncratic resources and capabilities (this resource and capability approach to strategy is presented in most textbooks, such as that by Johnson *et al*. 2014). The RBV thus argues that competitive advantage and superior performance by an organization are explained by the distinctiveness of its resources and capabilities (Peteraf 1993; Wernerfelt 1984). To achieve sustained competitive advantage these need to be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and not substitutable (Barney 1991). Imperfect imitability is a central tenet of the RBV (Barney 1986a; 2001), and can be explained by various factors. One primary reason why resources can be costly to imitate may be their specialization, sophistication and/or complexity (Kogut and Zander 1992; Rivkin 2000; Rumelt 1984; Winter 1987). More subtle reasons are unique historical conditions that may put an organization on a path-dependent trajectory that followers cannot later attain (Barney 1991; Dierickx and Cool 1989; Lippman and Rumelt 1982) and causal ambiguity, which implies that the relationship between an organization's resources and capabilities and its sustained competitive advantage is imperfectly understood by the focal organization itself and, above all, by its competitors (Barney 1986a; Lippman and Rumelt 1982; Reed and Defillippi 1990; Rumelt 1984; Szulanski 1996). How to develop the desired resources and capabilities in the short to medium term is thus simply not clear for competitors. Another foundation for imitation impediments is social complexity, which implies that resources and capabilities involve extremely complex social phenomena, including organizational culture, social interrelationships, traditions, trust and reputation, which competitors are unable to systematically imitate and manage (Barney 1991).

The RBV can be described as the 'High Church' version of the resource-based and capabilities views (Levinthal 1995), and has often relied on rational choice and equilibrium assumptions (for example, Barney 1986a; 1991; Peteraf 1993; Wernerfelt 1984). In contrast, the 'Low Church' capabilities version (Dosi, Nelson and Winter 2000; Winter 1988; 2003; Zollo and Winter 2002) relies rather more on evolutionary economics (Nelson and Winter 1982) and behavioural traditions (Cyert and March 1963). Capabilities are defined in terms of high-level routines or a collection of routines (Winter 2003), and the focus of this research is on how organizations develop, maintain and advance their capabilities. This version has less confidence than many RBV scholars and traditional economists in the view that strategic decision-makers

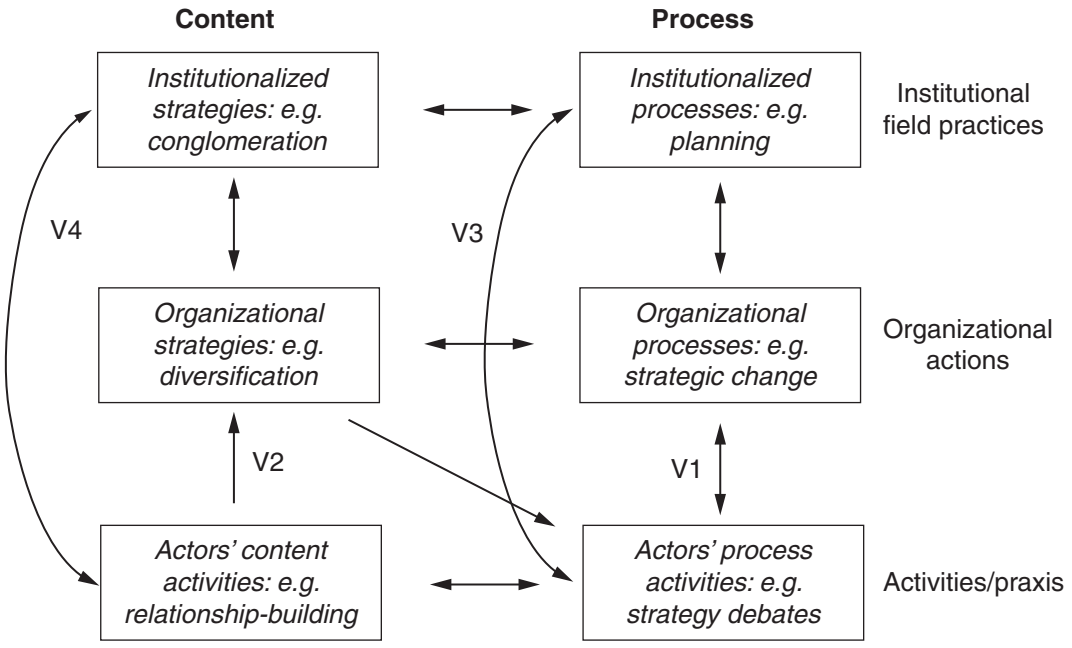

Figure 17.1 An exploded map of strategic management
Source: Johnson *et al*. (2007).

and organizations can smoothly adapt their resources and capabilities to changing environmental conditions (Dosi, Nelson and Winter 2000). Instead, the emphasis is often on initial conditions and the path dependence of resources and capabilities; once an organization is formed on the basis of certain capabilities it is difficult to change and adapt, even if changes in the environment should require this.

The difficulty to adapt is captured in the division of capabilities into *ordinary* and *dynamic* capabilities (Winter 2003). Ordinary capabilities allow organizations to be successful and earn a living now, but they may not be enough to provide for long-term survival and competitive advantage in the future if the environment changes. Dynamic capabilities, in contrast, are capabilities directed at environmental change with a capacity to create, extend or modify capabilities (Helfat *et al*. 2007; Teece 2007; Teece, Pisano and Shuen 1997). These capabilities are of particular interest for strategy as practice, since strategy analysis and planning are examples of dynamic capability – as are product development and innovation, forming and integrating alliances, etc. (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000). Finally, it should be noted that the resource and capabilities views are not without critics, and several scholars have emphasized the risk of tautology in them and their lack of specificity and dynamics (Bromiley and Papenhausen 2003; Kraaijenbrink, Spender and Groen 2010; Priem and Butler 2001). Interestingly, one research path in the resource and capabilities tradition comes rather close to acknowledging the importance of social contexts and interactions between people in strategy, similarly to strategy as practice. Indeed, the very essence of the knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant 1996; Kogut and Zander 1992; 1996; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Spender 1996; Zander and Kogut 1995) is that firms represent social knowledge of coordination and learning. In the following I sometimes refer to the diverse variants of resource and capabilities perspectives as a single approach, since the dividing line between them is far from precise. Likewise, the distinction between resources and capabilities

is not always clear; some treat both as variations of resources (Barney 1991), while others make a distinction within which 'capabilities' refer to an organization's capacity to deploy resources (Amit andSchoemaker 1993; Makadok 2001).

Parts of resource and capabilities research have recently started to open up to possible explanations at the actor level, including potential micro/macro explications. Capability views have thus begun to incorporate more aspects in terms of actors, intentionality and agency (Becker *et al*. 2005; Gavetti, Levinthal and Ocasio 2007; Teece 2007), and some scholars of the RBV have likewise initiated an emphasis on the micro (Alvarez and Barney 2008; Barney 2001). In particular, a micro-foundations approach has emerged as a reaction to what is seen as an exaggerated focus on organizational and collective-level capabilities (Felin and Foss 2005). It is argued that the capabilities construct denies any role of the individual and that strategy is, instead, rooted in individual action and interaction (Abell, Felin and Foss 2008; Foss 2011). The focus is on how individuals and their interactions aggregate to form collective effects and organizational capabilities, resources and routines (Barney and Felin 2013). In a related and emerging stream of research, the focus is on 'behavioural strategy', including cognitive and psychological explanations, with an emphasis on managerial judgements and their limits (Powell, Lovallo and Fox 2011). In the context of Figure 17.1, the micro-foundations approach highlights relationship V2 ('vertical relationship no. 2'), and how individual decisions and activities and individuals in interactions aggregate to form capabilities.

Interestingly, the focus on micro-foundations started out as an approach that primarily emphasized the individual and largely rejected the role of structures, institutions and social context, but its more recent interpretations have initiated some acknowledgement of these factors (Barney and Felin 2013; Felin *et al*. 2012). Some researchers have therefore indicated a departure from the heavy emphasis on the individual and acknowledged that other factors, including processes, structures and social interactions, may be of some significance. There is as yet no coherent view or theory of micro-foundations, however (Barney and Felin 2013); like strategy as practice, it tends to be an approach with an interest in the micro aspects of strategy. It has also been criticized for exaggerated reductionism, specifically because it often excludes social relations and interactions (Hodgson 2012; Hodgson and Knudsen 2011) and fails to consider that capabilities develop over long time periods that often go beyond individual tenures in organizations, and even lifetimes (Winter 2012).

Strategy-as-practice research at the intersection with contemporary strategy content research streams

Strategy-as-practice research has only recently started to address the window of opportunity at the intersection with the RBV, organizational capabilities perspectives and micro-foundations approach. Despite the surge in SAP research during the last decade, surprisingly few articles explicitly examine organizational capabilities or resources. Nevertheless, Table 17.1 summarizes six representative articles at this intersection. This empirical work has an explicit focus on how certain practices and/or praxis and/or practitioners underpin resources, capabilities and technologies. The articles were chosen for illustrative purposes, and there may be other articles of relevance. For example, there are several studies on strategy as practice that at least partly relate to organizational capabilities, but, even though these seemingly play an important role, they are rarely made explicit.

The studies in Table 17.1 examine a variety of issues related to capabilities, resources and technologies, but they share four common themes: a focus on strategy praxis and outcomes, multiple practitioners and practices, similar methodological approaches and a reliance on a diversity of theories. First, they all share a focus on strategy *praxis* or *activities* and their relationship to strategy and organizational *outcomes* (Table 17.1, columns 2 and 3). The outcomes in the articles refer to competitive advantage (Ambrosini 2003), renewed (Salvato 2003; 2009) or novel capabilities (Regnér 2003), successful or less successful service outcomes (Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor

2007), and technology investment decisions (Kaplan 2008). The studies investigate praxis or activities that underlie competitive-advantage-generating resources and capabilities (Ambrosini 2003; Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor 2007), activities that underlie dynamic capabilities, and activities that otherwise contribute to capability renewal (Kaplan 2008; Regnér 2003; Salvato 2003; 2009). Ambrosini (2003) and Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor (2007) most clearly establish a relationship between specific activities and strategy outcomes, including competitive advantage. Their studies examine various forms of praxis (tacit managerial activities, coordination activities, etc.) and demonstrate how the activities underlie resources and generate certain strategy outcomes and competitive advantage. Interestingly, some of the studies that examine strategizing show that activities that influence capability development do not necessarily involve traditional and formal strategy activities such as analyzing, planning, etc. Instead, a rather diverse set of activities are described as relevant to capability development. For example, Salvato (2003; 2009) examined how different types of day-to-day activities and experimentation at lower organizational levels, together with top management activities, contribute to capability renewal and change. Likewise, Regnér (2003) highlights how peripheral inductive strategy activities, including experimental and trial and error activities, contribute to the creation of new strategies and capabilities while central deductive activities rather promote extant capabilities.

The varieties of praxis or activities in the studies suggest a second common theme, including distributed strategy-making and *multiple practitioners*, drawing on a *varied set of practices* (Table 17.1, columns 2 and 3). For example, Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor (2007), in their fine-grained analysis of what underpins resources, examined numerous practitioners at several organizational levels and observed clear differences between both practices and related outcomes in the two divisions they investigated. Notably, practices that are not always considered 'strategic' in the traditional sense (strategic analysis, planning, etc.) may still have significant consequences for strategy outcomes. For example, Salvato (2003; 2009) highlights the importance of design practices and I emphasize (Regnér 2003) the significance of innovation practices. These latter findings thus support other strategy-as-practice studies that consider strategy as something immanent in purposive action that draws on broader tendencies and predispositions, rather than strategy as individual (top management) purposeful action only (Chia and Holt 2006; Chia and Rasche, in this volume). Sensemaking and cognitive frames have figured prominently in several studies on strategy as practice (Balogun and Johnson 2004; Rouleau 2005), and Kaplan's (2008) study, summarized in Table 17.1, demonstrates the importance of framing practices in technology investment decisions. The study explicates how diverse actors engage in political framing contests to legitimize their own cognitive frames. Consequently, it shows the significance of how technologies and capabilities are situated in cognitive frames, and thus are in the eyes of the beholder.

A third important commonality of the studies is the use of similar *methodological approaches* (Table 17.1, column 4). They all include ethnographic and observational methods combined with interviews and archival data, and most of them use a comparative case study design. Based on these methods, the scholars meticulously worked back from the various strategy outcomes (resources, capabilities, strategies, decisions, etc.) and traced relevant actors and the minutiae of their activities. These intimate, in-depth and fine-grained investigations were therefore focused on how particulars of strategy activities and actors' actual work underlie strategy outcomes. Some of the studies also examined interactions between actors (Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor 2007; Kaplan 2008) and cognitive structures (Ambrosini 2003; Kaplan 2008; Regnér 2003). Most of them also include examinations of a broad set of actors at several organizational levels (and, in some cases, external actors), in contrast to the focus on top management and individuals in mainstream strategy research. In brief, the focus on situated actors, their specific micro-activities, their interactions and their sensemaking, and thus an emphasis on a relational totality of strategy, is in sharp contrast to the emphasis

Table 17.1 Research at the intersection between strategy-as-practice and resource-based capabilities and micro-foundations research

Authors	*Focus*	*Findings*	*Main methods*	*Main theoretical base*
Ambrosini (2003)	Activities underpinning tacit routines and organizational performance	• Tacit activities and routines as determinants of competitive advantage	Case studies: six organizations • Interviews • Causal/cognitive mapping	• RBV • Organizational routines • Psychology
Regnér (2003)	Strategy activities and cognitive structures in the centre versus periphery	• Establishing a link between activities and capabilities: inductive activities in the periphery supporting new capabilities and deductive activities in the centre supporting extant capabilities	Comparative case studies: four multinational corporations • Interviews • Observation • Documents	• Practice theory • Capability and dynamic capability view
Salvato (2003)	Activities, routines and resources in strategic initiatives	• Dynamic capabilities as based on the repeated combination of stable core micro-strategies involving routines, activities and resources, which generate new strategic initiatives	Comparative case studies: two multinational corporations • Interviews • Observation • Documents	• Capability and dynamic capability view • Giddens' structuration theory
Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor (2007)	Inter-team coordination activities	• Establishing a link between practices and service outcomes: specific managerial activities, physical location and interactions as determinants of competitive advantage	Comparative case study: two divisions in a large public financial service company • Interviews • Observation • Documents	• Practice theory • RBV
Kaplan (2008)	Technology strategy initiatives and cognitive frame differences	• Various actors engaging in political framing practices and contests to make their strategy views and technologies resonate and gain active support	Case study: two projects in an R&D group within a multi-divisional corporation • Ethnography/ Observation • Interviews • Documents	• Practice theory • Goffman's frame theory • Social movement theory
Salvato (2009)	Day-to-day activities in capability development	• Mindful ordinary activities and local experimentation as central to organizational renewal and new capabilities	Case study: tracking product innovation processes in a multinational corporation • Interviews • Observation • Archival documents	• Capability and dynamic capability view • Organizational routines

on aggregate strategies, capabilities, resources, etc. in traditional research.

A final common theme among the studies is their reliance on *several and diverse theories* (Table 17.1, column 5). Naturally, general practice theories, including structuration theory, play an important role in these studies, but they also rely on a whole set of other theoretical traditions. Resource-based and capabilities-based views, of course, play principal roles. Ambrosini (2003) and Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor (2007) take the RBV as their point of departure

when examining the activities underlying resources that provide competitive advantage. Salvato (2003; 2009) draws on the capabilities and dynamic capabilities views, as does Regnér (2003). Ambrosini (2003) and Salvato (2003; 2009) also build on organizational routine theories and studies that emphasize routine change (Feldman 2000; Feldman and Pentland 2003; see also Feldman in this volume). Interestingly, Ambrosini (2003) also employs various theories from psychology. This has so far been unusual in the SAP approach, given its sociological base, even though sensemaking and cognitive structures, which have figured in several studies (for example, Kaplan 2008), of course have roots in psychology. Finally, Table 17.1 also shows that Kaplan (2008) uses Goffman's frame theory, which is more familiar to strategy as practice, and she also draws on social movement theory. The latter may be particularly useful when analysing how individuals' activities and interactions aggregate to form capabilities.

Differences and similarities between strategy as practice and the mainstream strategy research streams

While SAP research at the intersection with the RBV, capabilities perspectives and the micro-foundations approach is exciting and shows a lot of promise, the review above also confirms that it has been rather limited to date. One reason may be the clear and distinct differences between strategy as practice and these views and approaches. The dissimilarities between the research streams relate both to epistemological and ontological discrepancies, which are apparent from several chapters in this handbook (see, for example, Chapters 1–4). Most fundamentally, strategy as practice's emphasis on a mutual constitution and relational totality of practices as routinized behaviour interconnected to mental and bodily activities, things, tools and emotions (Reckwitz 2002) differs completely from the Cartesian tradition including dualisms, which the other views and approaches rely on. Although the specifics of the ontological differences are not detailed and reiterated here, it can be observed that the distinctions between strategy as practice and the other research streams include level of analysis, primary interests, root disciplines and outcome focus (see Regnér 2008), as outlined below.

First, strategy as practice emphasizes practices, praxis and practitioners on the level of actors while the RBV and capabilities perspectives centre on organization-level resources, capabilities and routines. Micro-foundations research shares the focus on actors or practitioners with strategy as practice, however, but primarily emphasizes individuals and does not emphasize practices and the shared understandings and interactions they rely on. Second, the key interest of strategy as practice is strategizing as a social practice, building on social theory. The interest of the RBV and capabilities perspectives, in contrast, is strategy as a means to achieve competitive advantage, building on mainstream and evolutionary economics. This points to the third, and perhaps most fundamental, difference between the diverse research streams: concerns with strategy outcome. Strategy-as-practice research has not primarily been concerned with outcome, and when it has the focus has been on the performance of practices, procedures, tools, workshops, discourses, etc. rather than organizational or firm-level performance (Guérard, Langley and Seidl 2013). This is in contrast with the RBV and the capabilities perspectives, which emphasize outcomes, and micro-foundations research, which instead has capabilities as an outcome variable. Other differences between the research streams include methodological approaches and a rather larger focus on non-profit organizations in SAP research.

In their stronger forms, the differences between the strategy-as-practice and the other research streams are very distinct, and translations of strategy concepts from one area to the other may be rather difficult (Seidl 2007). For example, in some micro-foundations approach methods, the sole point of departure is the individual, including a primary focus on rational and utility-maximizing agents and how their actions determine macro outcomes (Foss 2011; Felin and Foss 2005; 2011; for a critical evaluation, see Hodgson 2012). This is in sharp contrast to strategy as practice, of course, which starts with historical and extant practices and how they constrain or enable actors, often based on structuration

theory (Giddens 1984; see Whittington, this volume). The divergence is most clear when making comparisons with strategy-as-practice interpretations that fully draw on a practice philosophy in which the solitary focus is on practice as the basic unit, with no independently existing elements and no dichotomy between the micro and macro whatsoever (see Orlikowski, this volume). In these strong forms the research streams might even be considered as incommensurable, with few possibilities of any reconciliation. Despite these conflicting assumptions, however, several comparable interests and characteristics are evident in the diverse research streams' weaker forms. In fact, some recent reviews (Barney and Felin 2013; Vaara and Whittington 2012) even suggest that they have much in common and that there may be synergies between them.

The strategy-as-practice and capabilities perspectives both emphasize practices and routines in continuous processes; the importance of historical and localized contexts; the behavioural traits of organizational members; strategy as situational; and path dependence, with limited change capacities (Regnér 2008). Strategy as practice also overlaps with the knowledge-based view in terms of the emphasis on social interactions, as indicated earlier (Grant 1996; Kogut and Zander 1992; 1996). While the emphasis in the capabilities perspective and the knowledge-based view is on the organizational level, however, and thus a collection of whole routines and collective knowledge, strategy as practice is more concerned with the inner workings of capabilities, routines and knowledge (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville 2011). This takes us to the micro, and an emphasis on the individual level and human agency, which implies a close affinity with the micro-foundations approach. There is a clear resemblance in this respect between these two latter strategy research areas, as observed in both strategy-as-practice (Floyd and Sputtek 2011; Regnér 2012) and micro-foundations research (Barney and Felin 2013), as illustrated by the following quotations:

> SAP's attention to micro-level praxis suggests an obvious affinity as well with the current interest in Micro-Foundations in strategy research... (Vaara and Whittington 2012: 320).

> The strategy-as-practice area shares a broad affinity with the microfoundations program in that it seeks to more carefully delve into the actual micro activities, behaviors, and processes of strategy and organization... (Barney and Felin 2013: 145).

In sum, despite some fundamental differences in assumptions, strategy-as-practice research shares an emphasis on shared routines and practices with the capabilities view; the importance of social interactions with the knowledge-based view; and a focus on the micro, including actors, their interactions and their agency, with the micro-foundations approach.

Research opportunities

Despite important differences in assumptions the discussion above shows that there are several potential overlaps between strategy as practice and the RBV, the capabilities perspectives and the micro-foundations approach. In fact, it has been proposed that strategy as practice is in a unique position to connect the micro with the macro, to bridge structure and agency and to broaden the range of outcomes to encompass resources and capabilities (Vaara and Whittington 2012). This type of research could potentially contribute to capabilities and RBV research at the level of the firm and organization (Figure 17.1, middle left box and arrows). Moreover, it might develop strategy-as-practice research on the content side (Figure 17.1, lower left box and V2) and, hence, contribute to micro-foundations research, including actors and interactions underpinning capabilities. Furthermore, such research could also strengthen extant SAP research (Figure 17.1, primarily lower right box and arrows).

There are two principal research paths at the intersection between strategy as practice and the RBV, capabilities perspectives and micro-foundations approach that offer promising future research opportunities. First, strategy-as-practice research can examine how micro processes and content activities (Figure 17.1, lower right and left boxes) both relate to organization-level strategies, including resource and capability configurations

and allocations (middle left box). Most extant SAP research at the intersection with the RBV and capabilities perspectives belongs to this principal research path. The second principal research path has attracted less attention so far and is based on an incorporation of resources and capabilities (Figure 17.1, middle left box) and micro-foundations (lower left box) into strategy-as-practice approaches, which may change how strategy practices, praxis and practitioners (lower right box and arrows) are examined and interpreted. Both these principal research paths are discussed below.

The first principal research path can be illustrated by a range of relations (or, indeed, 'foundations') of strategy that capabilities perspectives and the micro-foundations approach tend to leave out. Both overlook a fundamental aspect that is at the centre of strategy as practice: seeing strategy as something people do in specific social contexts. Social context and interactions enable and constrain actors' strategy activities in various ways and may have significant consequences for what, and how, capabilities emerge. The arrows surrounding the lower left part of Figure 17.1 all indicate that micro-strategy activities are not isolated but depend on various social contexts and interactions. Regardless of whether our interests lie in the characteristics of capabilities or their micro origins, we need to consider the social context of strategizing and relations between people. Hence, there are interactional consequences of actors in a social context; individuals may strategize differently depending on the setting, which can influence strategy outcomes, organizational capabilities and – in the end – competitive advantage. Organization-level resource and capability configurations may thus be contingent on particular activities aimed at forming them (Figure 17.1, lower left box and V2), but also more indirectly on strategy praxis (Figure 17.1, lower right box and lower double arrow).

The second principal research path implies that strategy as practice may benefit from incorporating fundamental aspects of the RBV, capabilities perspectives and micro-foundations approach into examinations of strategy practices, praxis and practitioners. Often the basic characteristics of resources and capabilities (Figure 17.1, middle left box) are ignored when strategy practices are examined. These may be important, however, as practices and praxis are embedded in certain resources and capabilities (such as technologies, competences and knowledge) and may be contingent on these (diagonal arrow in the lower part of Figure 17.1). More generally, it is essential to determine the ways in which strategy practices indeed are *strategic* at all, by explaining how strategy procedures, workshops, tools, etc. directly relate to and/or aim at developing or changing resources or capabilities (and/or competitive positions) – something that SAP research sometimes tends to leave out. This suggests broadening the range of outcomes to also incorporate organization-level performance. Finally, the institutionalization of the resource and capabilities perspectives and techniques per se in academia and in practice is also of interest to strategy-as-practice research.

On the basis of both principal research paths above, it is possible to identify several promising future research avenues at the intersection between strategy as practice and the RBV, capabilities perspectives and micro-foundations approach. I will limit my discussion to five main themes and opportunities, however. The first two themes concentrate on the first principal research path: how micro-process and content activities relate to organization-level resources and capabilities. The final three themes focus on the second principal research path: how practices, praxis and practitioners are embedded in resources and capabilities, and how these can be incorporated into extant strategy-as-practice research.

Micro-process and content activities and resources and capabilities

First, there are numerous interesting research opportunities in the examination of micro-processes and content activities and their association with organization-level outcomes, including resources, capabilities, decisions, etc. In fact, this has been described as 'an open window of opportunity' (Vaara and Whittington 2012: 321) for strategy-as-practice scholars interested in how the micro

relates to organization-level resources and capabilities. Specifically, and in relation to micro-foundations, it offers an opportunity to reach beyond the individual-centric focus in this research to also include the role of social contexts and interactions as underlying capabilities and resources (Regnér 2014). A fundamental question here is how practices, practitioners and praxis contribute to and shape capability creation, acquisition and combination. This can be investigated by working backwards from the resultant capabilities, decisions, etc. and then identifying the particular practices, practitioners and praxis involved; alternatively, one can examine how the resources, capabilities, decisions, etc. evolve in real time by examining the former. Both these approaches have been used in the studies mentioned in Table 17.1. Future studies can, for example, explore how particular strategy practices embedded in certain social contexts relate to specific strategy outcomes (capabilities, resources, decisions, knowledge, etc.). This may provide an understanding of how social contexts shape behaviour, outcomes and performance. One can examine how various practitioners and their interactions in diverse sections of an organization or in different organizations influence strategy outcomes. This could possibly also include scrutiny of the fine-grained specifics of the processes and mechanisms involved in these interactions; for example, how various forms of discourses, negotiations and politicking relate to certain organization-level outcomes.

A second area within the first principal research path above that offers promising research opportunities relates to what was most new in the RBV (Barney 2001): inimitability. While physical and technological imitation difficulties are of importance, including resource and capability specializations, as well as sophistication and/or complexity (Kogut and Zander 1992; Rivkin 2000; Winter 1987), other barriers to imitation are even more important (Barney 1991). These include causal ambiguity (Lippman and Rumelt 1982), unique historical conditions and social complexity (Barney 1991). They have seldom been untangled, but strategy-as-practice research holds out the possibility of sorting out the details of these processes and mechanisms. Although extant research in behavioural strategy and micro-foundations has started to look into psychological explanations in this respect (Gavetti 2005; 2012; Hodgkinson and Healey 2011), organizational contexts and social interactions also need to be taken into consideration (Winter 2011). Clearly, strategy practices and practitioners, and the norms and culture entangled with them, contribute to the social complexity of resources and capabilities and may thus afford inimitability (Regnér 2010), which is also recognized in the RBV (Barney 1986b). For example, strategy-as-practice research can disentangle the interactions and tacitness that contribute to inimitability and competitive advantage (for example, Ambrosini 2003; Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor 2007). Strategy practices may also include norms that are socially complex and thus difficult to understand and follow for competitors outside a specific organizational or institutional context, and they may therefore contribute to inimitability (Jonsson and Regnér 2009). SAP research could potentially also move beyond these observations of institutional and normative barriers to imitation and unpack their fine-grained details. For example, it could discern exactly how the practices and shared norms are entangled and why they confer inimitability. Finally, a careful examination of the micro-practices and foundations underlying strategy could perhaps separate out how capabilities become idiosyncratic, valuable and inimitable as they are transposed when organizations apply generalized strategy practices in different ways (see Vaara and Whittington 2012).

Resources and capabilities and practices, praxis and practitioners

The second principal research path discussed above offers three other interesting research opportunities. Hence, a third research opportunity includes an examination of the extent to which, and how, strategy practices and praxis are embedded in certain resources and capability frames and interpretations, with possible consequences for the qualities of the former. Strategists are thus not only entwined in and carriers of particular strategy practices, they are also embedded in socio-material

resource and capability practices, including certain assumptions, standards, tools, norms, activities, etc. This opens up interesting research opportunities as to how the use and understanding of strategy procedures, tools, techniques, etc. may be dependent on particular cognitive frames tied to specific resources and capabilities (see Eggers and Kaplan 2009; 2013). Yet another possible research area when examining frames and sensemaking is to examine closely how they could contribute, as part of social practices or capabilities, to various biases in strategic decision-making (see Vaara and Whittington 2012). This would offer an alternative to the primary focus on individual cognitive biases in extant micro-foundations and strategy behaviour work.

A fourth important research avenue, also based on the second principal research path discussed above, suggests incorporating fundamental aspects of the RBV and capabilities views and micro-foundations into strategy as practice. It implies an exploitation of the link to organizational and strategy outcomes commonly used in strategy content perspectives. This does not suggest an abandonment of strategy as practice's concerns with other outcomes, but including organization-level outcomes may reveal hitherto uncovered details of strategy practices. First, the degree to which successful organizations and firms simply have more resources for more extensive and elaborate strategy practices, including strategic planning processes, tools, workshops, etc., and vice versa, could be examined. This might shed light on the common assumption that more (and presumably better) strategy practices result in improved strategy outcomes. Another approach in this vein would be to investigate the basic characteristics of strategy practices and their connection to strategy outcome, such as examining how – and possibly why – extensive, deliberate and formalized strategizing does not always materialize into intended strategy outcomes and better performance (for example, improved and inimitable resources and capabilities), which is far from uncommon. In fact, an examination of the minutiae of the strategy practices and their application in praxis that do not produce intended strategy outcomes and improved resources and capabilities could possibly result in more practical advice from SAP research – something that is really needed (Splitter and Seidl, in this volume). Of course, examining the opposite would also be highly interesting – that is, the extent to which more emergent forms of strategizing may be more successful (see Vaara and Whittington 2012). In fact, although it is widely acknowledged that strategy is often recognized only retrospectively (Burgelman 1983; Weick 1995) and can emerge non-deliberately through everyday practical coping (Chia and Holt 2006; Chia and Rasche, in this volume), surprisingly little strategy-as-practice research has accumulated around this (for an exception, see Regnér 2003). In sum, examining how strategy practice and praxis differ between organizations and firms with different success rates may be highly informative.

A final research opportunity at the intersection of strategy as practice and resource and capabilities perspectives within the second principal research path above is a more general examination of why these perspectives and the analytics and tools involved (resource/capability analysis, VRIO framework,[1] etc.) have become dominant in strategic management. Besides relating to institutionalized actions on the organizational level (Figure 17.1, middle boxes), this would take us to the upper boxes of institutional field practices in Figure 17.1 (V3 and V4 arrows). Reviews have emphasized the promise of analysing strategy as an institution in itself (Vaara and Whittington 2012; Whittington, in this volume), and of course the RBV and organizational capabilities perspectives are by now well established and institutionalized not just in academia but in practice. For example, one research opportunity in this vein lies in tracing how the institutionalized mantra of 'Focus on core competences' has changed strategy practices and praxis not only for corporate- and business-level strategy within organizations but also within business school research and education and among consultants. This type of examination

[1] VRIO refers to the criteria for sustained competitive advantage in terms of resources and capabilities: value, rarity, inimitability and support by the organization (Barney 1997).

could, for example, include investigations of changes in planning, analytics, tools, workshops and discourses. The shift in strategy focus also facilitates investigation into exactly how practices and praxis are mutually constitutive and how the role of practitioners may have shifted. In brief, investigating the change from a primary external and industry focus to an internal and resource/capability focus offers ample opportunities to explore how the social and material influence strategy.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a review of extant research and potential research opportunities at the intersection of strategy as practice and resource-based, capabilities and micro-foundations research. It has demonstrated how strategy-as-practice research can be strengthened by pursuing these opportunities and how they potentially can contribute to a more integrative view of strategy. The chapter reviewed six studies that have started to examine the intersection between SAP research and the strategy content research streams. In addition, the differences and similarities between these and strategy as practice were examined. Finally, two principal paths for research at this intersection were discussed: examining how micro-processes and content activities relate to organization-level resources and capabilities; and examining how practices, praxis and practitioners are embedded in resources and capabilities.

Several research opportunities within the two principal research paths were examined. First, by examining practices, praxis and practitioners and illuminating and explicating how they underlie capabilities, strategy-as-practice research can contribute to questions raised in the micro-foundations approach, but with an emphasis on social interactions and contexts. It was further shown how strategy-as-practice research might describe and clarify the social complexities that may provide for inimitability in capabilities and resources, including interactions between people in strategy practices and praxis. Another promising research approach includes examinations of how strategy praxis and practices, and the shared practical understandings on which they rely, may be affected by organizations' extant resource and capability configurations and by activities that are directly aimed at developing resources and capabilities. In other words, the embeddedness of strategy practices and praxis in certain resource and capability configurations may influence them, and so may activities directed at developing resources and capabilities. Strategy-as-practice research can also contribute by investigating the extent to which strategy practices and praxis are contingent on organizational performance and success. Finally, the institutionalization of resource and capability theories, frameworks, tools and analysis is itself ripe for investigation in the strategy-as-practice field.

In brief, this chapter shows that, despite some fundamental discrepancies between strategy as practice and the RBV, capabilities perspectives and micro-foundations research, these research streams are not primarily in competition but are, rather, complementary modes of investigating strategy. Strategy as practice can contribute descriptions and examinations of what underlies capabilities (or, indeed, their 'foundations'), including social contexts and the interactions of strategizing; it may also be further developed by incorporating questions of how strategy practices and praxis may be embedded in certain resource and capability configurations. Research at this intersection may also contribute to a more complete and integrative view of strategy that finally bridges its content, process and practice aspects, which have too long been separated in strategic management research.

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