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Twenty years of strategy as practice scholarship in top journals: a systematic review

Authors: Luis J. Serrano, PhD student Management of Projects. The University of Manchester
Paul W. Chan, Lecturer Management of Projects. The University of Manchester
Paul Blackwell, Lecturer Management of Projects. The University of Manchester

Contact address: Oxford Rd, Manchester M13 9PL

e-mail: luis.serranotamayo@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Paul.Chan@manchester.ac.uk
Paul.Blackwell@manchester.ac.uk

Twenty years of strategy as practice scholarship in top journals: a systematic review

This paper has intended to compile the most relevant research on strategy as practice during twenty years of scholarship. A systematic review protocol allowed consulting and filtering the most relevant literature in academic databases, focused on the most influential journals. In 90 filtered papers and 54 additional documents, this review shows the current methods used in strategy as practice research and its major contributions to organisational studies. The discussion revealed that research on strategy as practice has been focused at the managerial levels, opening space for inclusion of grassroots levels of organisations in future research.

Keywords: strategy as practice, systematic review, strategy work, micro to macro practices, sociomateriality

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Introduction

Twenty years have passed since the introduction of 'strategy as practice' as a novel approach to strategy studies. A growing concern on the practice focus of strategy from thousands of academics and practitioners around the world have contributed to understand why strategy is about people; how people who strategize do their work and what they can afford to do it.

Origins of strategy as practice

Only after World War II and based on the corporate organisations development in the first half of the twentieth century, strategy became part of the managerial world (Chandler, 1961). Then, headquarters, planning, leadership and strategy, among others, became common words in organisations (Newman, 1971). The focus of corporate strategy became how to get a competitive advantage, i.e. the outcomes such as strategic plans, financial projections or similar documents, any case tangible things thought by top managers highly educated to reach a competitive position into a dynamic market (Porter, 1980).

Mintzberg (1987) amplified the meanings of strategy in organisations considering it from five complementary views: strategy as plan, from an initial point to one desired; strategy as pattern, a consistent behaviour about how the things are done; strategy as position, the niche into the market; strategy as ploy, the manoeuvre to defeat a competitor; and strategy as perspective, focused on the core of the business. Among that conceptual framework, strategy as plan has been the deepest studied due to its close relation with strategic planning.

Almost ten years later, Whittington (1996) introduced a new view: strategy as practice. Although this practice-based approach of strategy could have been seen only as a complementary view of Mintzberg's framework, this approach has two distinctive elements. Firstly, he presents the strategy as an interaction of people, something that people do instead of something that organisations have, bringing back the relevance of the human being in the context of strategy (Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2002). Secondly, he proposed the inclusion of lower levels inside organisations as well as consultants outside them. Onwards, strategy would not be something conceived only from the standpoint of the elites, but a social activity between actors at different levels inside and outside organisations.

Essential elements of strategy as practice framework

Traditionally, strategy as practice has had a three-part framework composed by practitioners, practices and praxis, i.e., the workers, the tools and the work on strategy. This framework was introduced by Whittington (2002) and deeper explained in 2006 by the same author.

Practitioners are in the first layer; their work is the essence of strategy as practice. They are the actors which perform the activities of making, shaping and executing strategy (Whittington, 2006); oriented by the search of the knowledge that works (Moisander & Stenfors, 2009). Brown and Thompson (2013) conceive strategy as practice as a 'movement to humanize management and organisational research' concentrated on people. In fact, a central assumption of strategy as practice suggests that ordinary activity of practitioners can make the difference (Whittington, 2014).

Practices are shown as a second layer, parallel and above the layer of practitioners. Whittington (2002) defines practices as the accepted way to do the things on strategy work, providing a sense of what is useful and practical because have been tested in the past. Chia (2004) argues that practices are ingrained in human beings. He describes practices using the word 'habitus', as an unconscious incorporation of social tradition and norms into human conduct; and 'dwelling' as the transmission of practices in a natural course alongside to us. Jarzabkowski (2006) describes practices as a source of resources through which practitioners perform strategy: behavioural, cognitive, procedural, discursive and physical.

The third element of the framework is praxis, the strategy work, showing the connections between practices and practitioners (Whittington, 2002). Here is relevant to make clarity about the meaning of 'the strategy work'. Typically the work on strategy is composed by episodes, such as board sessions, management retreats, consulting processes, team conferences, presentations, and project discussions, among others (Hendry and Seidl, 2003). However, not only formal activities make part of strategy work, other informal conversations at the offices or extra office are routines that contribute to the organisational strategy as well (Whittington, 2006; Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Organisational praxis connects the layers of practitioners and practices. Some arrows go upward, from practitioners to practices, meaning that practices emerge from the praxis exercise. Reciprocally, downward arrows, from practices to practitioners, represent the potential weight for each practice.

Strategy as practice in top journals

Research on strategy as practice has been published in leading journals in Europe and United States (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2010, Vaara and Whittington, 2012; Ericson, 2014; Lounsbury and Beckman, 2015). Although the major disciplines of impact has been organisational studies and sociology, strategy as practice has made contributions in multiple fields such as construction, education, communication, psychology and information systems (Kaplan, 2008; Cooren et al., 2011; Hansen, 2011; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Sage et al., 2012). Moreover, strategy as practice has been one of the largest tracks in leading academic conferences as the European Group for Organisational Studies and has a formalized an activity group at the Academy of Management (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008). The website of strategy as practice, www.s-as-p.org, involves a global community with more than 3,000 members in over 150 countries. This sum of contributions from academics and practitioners has contributed to several publications in international leading journals.

This paper extracts some of the major contributions of strategy as practice in 20 years of scholarship. The following section presents the systematic review protocol implemented to define the relevance and quality criteria established for the journals and papers selection. The results show the most relevant areas of organisational knowledge and the prominent journals in strategy as practice scholarship. The review relates the quantitative and qualitative methods used to study strategy as practice and its key contributions. The discussion and conclusions explore some open questions and potential horizons for future research.

Method

The systematic review protocol

The landmark of systematic review as a method in recent academic research comes from the study of Antman et al. (1992), in which shows how relying on single studies led to ineffective

treatments of heart attacks. Thenceforth systematic reviews have been applied into multiple disciplines (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). A systematic review is a critical appraisal and analysis using an explicit and accountable method (Gough et al., 2013). The most relevant consideration to undertake this method is the reduction of the bias (Kitchenham, 2013).

Shamseer et al. (2015) highlight benefits to undertake systematic reviews such as the researcher can anticipate potential problems, it allows the reviewers to verify the chosen method, it prevents discretionary decisions about inclusion or exclusion of information and it improves collaboration between colleagues in the area. Therefore, to grasp the essential elements of strategy as practice, all the literature analysed have complied with the following protocol, based on the work of Boland et al. (2013) and Gough et al. (2013).

The protocol begins with the question to address: What are the essential elements and key contributions from strategy as practice during these 20 years of scholarship? To answer that query, the following objectives have driven the review: to develop a comprehensive understanding of 'strategy as practice', to identify the particular language and terminology, to recognize the key authors, to identify the essential contributions and to describe the current debates. The following guiding questions associated to the objectives were: What is 'strategy-as-practice', and how is this similar and/or different to the study of corporate strategy? What are the various definitions of 'strategy-as-practice', and from what disciplines do these definitions stem from? What are the research questions that form the basis of inquiries into 'strategy-as-practice', and what discernible patterns can one detect when examining the questions vis-à-vis different disciplines? What methods are used in inquiries into 'strategy-as-practice', and what is the unit of analysis in previous studies? What are the findings in past scholarship on 'strategy-as-practice'? And what discernible patterns and trends can be gleaned from these findings? What are some of the questions that remain unanswered, which can be gleaned from calls for further research? These questions and other emerged from the review has been analysing in the present paper.

Gough et al. (2013) describe the term 'reference list checking' as a tool to implement in a search strategy that scan the titles and citations into a list of literature considered with potential to be included. Consequently, the term "strategy as practice" and "strategy-as-practice" was checked on 15th January, 2016 using the academic databases available at The University of Manchester.

The results were as follows: Google Scholar: 4,210, Web of Science: 164 and Scopus: 65. Through the website Google Scholar, the most relevant academic databases on the topic were consulted: EBSCO, JSTOR, ProQuest, Science Direct, SpringerLink and The Academy of Management. Additionally, information from the 'Strategy as Practice International Network' and sources such as books and other papers recommended by academic and peers totalized 4,454 results; 4,439 through the database searching and 15 additional from complementary bibliography.

Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria were based on relevance and quality (Boland et al., 2014). Relevance is considered as the level of connection and closeness between the document and the topic, and quality is the standard or specific characteristic that every document needs to meet (Gough et al., 2013).

Regarding relevance, the criterion to include a paper into the systematic review was the inclusion of the concept “strategy as practice” or “strategy-as-practice” into the title, keywords or abstract. Multiple documents only mention strategy as practice in the references or as a tangential issue, connecting the concept with other areas, but deviating from the review objectives and guiding questions. However, those documents discarded in this review could be considered to include later on, because they bring new insights to expand the horizons of strategy as practice.

In terms of quality, the criterion established was checking only peer-reviewed papers in top journals; the standard of a top journal was double: the numbers of stars given by the Association of Business Schools (ABS) and the quartile qualification given by the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR). Although it could sound contradictory to undertake a systematic review only into international leading journals, the intention of this paper is to highlight how strategy as practice has become a relevant area of strategy thought through the publications on the most influential journals.

ABS qualifies the journals with stars from 1 to 4, being the best qualified those with 4 stars and 1 the lowest rated. The results were filtered to only 3 and 4 stars journals into the Academic Journal Guide 2015, the report generated by ABS.

SJR, which covers the biggest spectrum of journals in multiple areas of knowledge, shows the journals scores of the last 15 years classified into four quartiles. The first quartile, Q1, includes the top ranked and the fourth quartile, Q4, the lowest ranked (Hole, 2015). The results were filtered to journals into the Q1 and Q2 quartiles in the last five years with Q1 score in at least three of these five years.

The process to filter the results, according the criteria established, is based on the ‘Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analysis’ (PRISMA) diagram (Panic et al., 2013). PRISMA is ‘an evidence-based minimum set of items that should be used to report systematic reviews and meta-analyses’ (Moher, 2009). PRISMA diagram consists of a verification list which filters the results found in four stages into a flow diagram. First is identification that summarizes all documents available; second, screening, which discards the citations and repeated documents; third, eligibility, applying the criteria of relevance and quality. Finally, included, which synthesizes the documents filtered into the systematic review. Figure 1 represents the PRISMA diagram used to filter the journals and papers about strategy as practice.

In the stage of eligibility, the Boolean operator was different between journals and papers. The relevance criterion used for the quality of journals was ‘OR’, which means that a journal could match any of the two quality criteria established (ABS or Scimago). On the other hand, the Boolean operator for the paper was ‘AND’, i.e. the paper had to fulfil the criteria of relevance ‘AND’ quality.

Gough et al. (2013) classify systematic reviews in argumentative or configurative. This review is classified as configurative due to the different studies being organised and synthesized from a majority of qualitative data to produce a conceptualization of the subject matter. The selected literature appraisal obeys an inductive method because this review asks to open questions answered with the interpretation of qualitative data in order to understand the main concepts of strategy as practice.

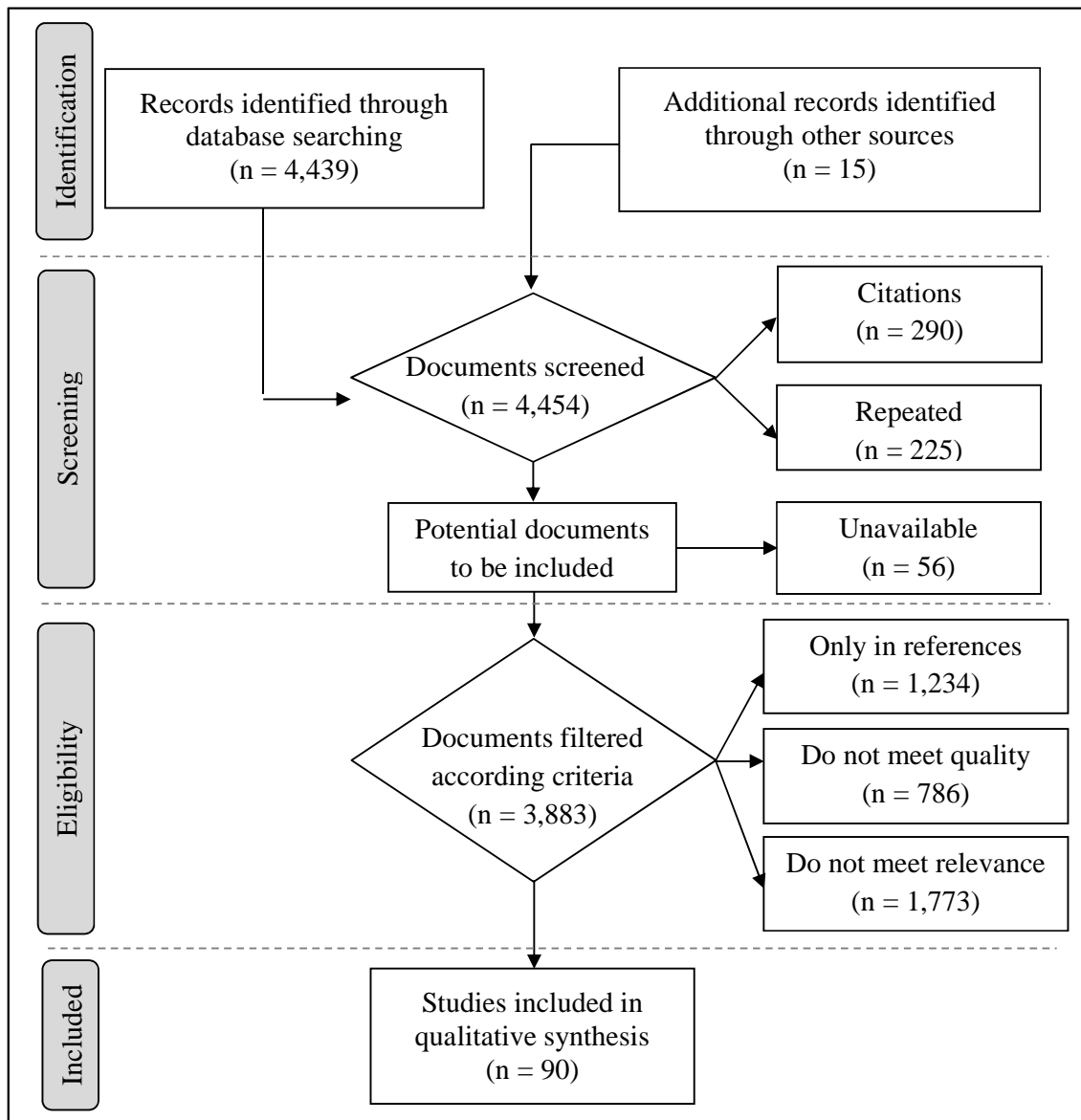


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram of ‘strategy as practice’ according the criteria determined

Results

The papers that met the relevance and quality criteria were organised into their correspondent journal and their related subject area according to their core area in Table 1. At the beginning of the systematic review, in order to identify only the current topics, a time criterion was included. The intention was to check only the last five years of strategy as practice in order to be focused exclusively in the current debates. However, recent documents always refer to previous documents, which are critical to understand the origins, fundamentals and contributions of strategy as practice.

The revision included most of the papers in international leading journals of the last 20 years, counting from the first paper: ‘Strategy as Practice’ (Whittington, 1996).

Table 1. Relation of papers selected for the systematic review by journal and subject area

Area of knowledge	ABS★	Scimago Journal Rank Quartiles					Quantity
Journal name	2015	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Accounting							2
Management Accounting Research	3	Q2	Q1	Q1	Q2	Q1	2
Business History and Economic History							2
Business History	4	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	2
Entrepreneurship and small business management							1
International Small Business Journal	3	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
General Management, Ethics and Social Responsibility							29
Journal of Management	4	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
British Journal of Management	4	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	8
Journal of Management Studies	4	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	9
The Academy of Management Annals			Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
Journal of Management Inquiry	3	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	3
Business & Society	3	Q1	Q2	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
European Management Review	3	Q2	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	3
International Journal of Management Reviews	3	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
Journal of Business Research	3	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
Management Decision	2	Q2	Q2	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
Information Management							4
Journal of Strategic Information Systems	3	Q1	Q1	Q2	Q1	Q1	4
International Business and Area Studies							1
Management International Review	3	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
Organisation Management							32
Organization Science	4	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	6
Human relations	4	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	5
Organization Studies	4	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	19
Organization	3	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	2
Public sector and health care							1
Administration and Society	2	Q1	Q1	Q2	Q1	Q2	1
Sector Studies							6
Building Research and Information	2	Q2	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
Journal of Cleaner Production		Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	1
Social Science Research		Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	4
Strategy							12
Strategic Management Journal	4	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	3
Long Range Planning	3	Q2	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	2
Strategic Organization	2	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	7
Total of studies							90

Some exceptions to the quality criteria were included. For example, the paper from Whittington (2002) in which he describes the framework of practitioners, practices and praxis is in the journal 'Academy of Management Proceedings', did not meet the quality criteria, but it was added. In the same way, other relevant papers were added to the systematic review in spite of they do not meet the quality criteria.

In addition, some handbooks, chapters of books, conference papers, working papers and doctoral thesis were included as complementary bibliography of the systematic review, in order to develop a deeper knowledge of the subject. These additional documents were 54, summing up a total of 144 references.

Review

Once selected the correspondent literature, the next process to reach the objectives and attend the guiding questions defined in the methodology was the systematic analysis of the papers and documents included. In doing so, the questions to solve in each paper were: What questions did the scholars ask? What are the key concepts studied? How did the scholars do their study? What did the scholars find novel? What are the emerging themes? A spreadsheet summarized the results and served as a basis to combine the different approaches to strategy as practice into a connected whole.

Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 are focused on the traditional dimensions of strategy as practice scholarship: practitioners, practices and praxis respectively. These tables describe the questions that emerged from the systematic review, giving a sense of strategy as practice concepts, debates and contributions to organisational studies, as well as the methods used by the different authors in the field.

Strategy as practice has shown the prevalence of qualitative methods over quantitative to grasp the daily practices in the strategy work. Qualitative methods such as observation, interviews, critical discourse analysis, ethnographic studies and documentary analysis have been combined with quantitative methods such as statistical analysis. Observation is a non-avoidable method in strategy as practice research. This method grasps, in a non-prepared field, the daily practices and routines that shape the common doing of strategy work. Interviews is also a highly used method in strategy as practice research, which allows the direct dialogue between academics and practitioners, helping to identify critical information that constitute the daily practice of strategy. Interviews lead to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Although some academics say that CDA is not a method but a field, in strategy as practice has been used as a method which considers strategy as a style of talk, which shows the relations of power and resistance between practitioners and those excluded from strategy work. Beyond the discourse, the nonverbal language and emotions in the strategy discourse are analysed through ethnomethodology. In addition, documentary analysis evaluates the common outcomes of strategy work. Coding is transversal to all methods; it organises information in a network of nodes that facilitates the interpretation of data acquired.

Quantitative methods such as statistical analysis, although is more used in corporate strategy where the statistical analysis of the sector performance is used to have a competitive position into the market, this method could response to strategy theory through the inference of common trends (Johnson et al., 2003; Ambrosini et al., 2007). In fact, if strategy as practice studies the daily work routines, the repetition of these routines create patterns where statistical tools can provide new insights to the strategy work.

Table 2. Review of strategy as practice. Dimension: Practitioners

Questions	Methods	Findings
Who or What is a strategist?	<p>Literature review in four leading American journals in the field of management assessing the influence of technology in organisations, e.g. Orlikowski and Scott, 2008.</p> <p>Longitudinal real-time study of a British firm, e.g. Sminia and De Rond, 2012.</p> <p>Literature review in the journal Organization Studies showing the relations between strategy practice and wider phenomena, e.g. Seidl and Whittington, 2014.</p>	<p>Everyday increasing interaction with technology has expanded the relation between humans and non-humans. Systems are being used to make strategic decisions.</p> <p>The reflective practitioner, typically manager, combines his/her perceptions, reflections and experience in the strategy work.</p> <p>Someone in a network who uses his/her subjective and reflexive powers to perform practices of strategy work into a local context influenced by wider societal structures.</p>
Where do strategists make their decisions?	<p>Observation of periodic formal meetings and documentary analysis of annual reports, strategic plans, academic databases and audit documents e.g. Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002.</p> <p>8 months real-time observation in a construction firm in Netherlands, e.g. Sminia, 2005.</p> <p>Case study approach in reinsurance sector, e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2013.</p>	<p>Strategic decisions happen more frequently in informal and social meetings.</p> <p>Informal discussions. Only 16 from 157 subject codes talked in the conversations were directly related with strategy work.</p> <p>Scenarios and spatial arrangements in the interaction between practitioners and materiality.</p>
What power relations do exist between practitioners in strategy work?	<p>Interview of 158 champions from 12 private and public organisations, e.g. Mantere, 2005.</p> <p>Critical Discourse Analysis of a strategic plan from a city in Finland, e.g. Vaara et al., 2010.</p> <p>Ethnographic case study in the construction sector, e.g. Sage et al., 2012.</p> <p>Case study using critical discourse analysis in a global telecommunication company, e.g. Hardy and Thomas, 2014.</p> <p>Observation of strategic meetings and focus groups in the Wales NHS, e.g. Herepath, 2014.</p>	<p>More inclusive dialogue is always needed between top and middle managers in strategy work</p> <p>Power relations are moderated through the use of language in discourses, conversations and texts.</p> <p>Discourse skills are essential to legitimize and conceal the power relations as a merge of social interests.</p> <p>Power relations in discourses constraint and allow the way the people think, talk and do.</p> <p>Conflicts in the relations of power between top and middle managers.</p>

Questions	Methods	Findings
How middle managers obtain more power and influence in strategy work?	<p>Discursive study of 2 research projects on front line managers, e.g. Rouleau and Balogun, 2011.</p> <p>Experiments from middle managers perspective e.g., Tipmann et al., 2013.</p> <p>Conversational analysis on 7 top management teams, e.g. Liu and Mitlis, 2014.</p> <p>Longitudinal case study in a telecommunications firm, e.g. Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014.</p> <p>Video ethnographic study in financial trading, e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2015.</p>	<p>Attention on symbolic and verbal representations: use the correct terminology and style to get attention and influence.</p> <p>Modifying existing routines according their own knowledge and experience, developing new routines.</p> <p>Sociocultural systems: the use of emotional connections and disconnections promote attitudes and debates.</p> <p>Front line managers use software tools as a representation of their projects to influence in top management.</p> <p>Performing the discourse: getting support for their ideas engaging internal stakeholders as peers, superiors and subordinates and external as consultants, customers, suppliers or authorities, using the correct language and protocol.</p> <p>Setting the scene: is referred to the manager skills using networking in a planned and goal-oriented intention having the right people engaged to improve his/her personal image.</p>
How practitioners choose the practices they will use?	<p>Ethnographic techniques of observation and interviews in the informal economy, e.g. Darbi and Knott, 2016.</p> <p>Ethnographic techniques in an American IT firm, e.g. Kaplan, 2008.</p> <p>Unstructured interviews with different management level members, e.g. Kaplan, 2008.</p> <p>Literature review on institutional theory and strategy as practice, e.g. Frolich et al., 2013.</p> <p>Interviews to the top team management, e.g. Leonard and Higson, 2014.</p>	<p>Managers interpret change from their own perspective and cognitive frames and turn into organisational frame.</p> <p>Undercover what actors did independently or as a group to construct strategic choices.</p> <p>Combining historically dependent conditions, organisational routines and rules and practitioners values and priorities.</p> <p>Managers develop and present the patterns of strategizing according the tools they can afford.</p>
How practitioners should behave?	<p>Literature review on social practices of strategy, e.g. Rasche and Chia, 2009.</p> <p>Literature review on theoretical basis of strategy research, e.g. Vaara and Durand, 2012.</p> <p>Ethnographic methods and documentary analysis in architecture project, e.g. Lalonde et al., 2012.</p> <p>Ethnographic methods into a large multinational apparel firm, e.g. Mueller et al., 2013.</p>	<p>Practitioners shape their identity as strategists performing the strategy work parallel to the management of their credibility.</p> <p>Serious analysis of social issues must be considered in strategic decisions.</p> <p>Consideration of ethics and wisdom from strategy practitioners.</p> <p>Consciousness of power and political influence on strategy.</p>

Table 3. Review of strategy as practice. Dimension: Practices

Questions	Methods	Findings
What is strategy as practice?	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice, e.g. Whittington, 2002	The interaction between work, workers and tools of strategy.
	Conceptual framework on the micro practices of strategizing, e.g. Chia, 2004	The consequence of mastery skills applied in everyday activities.
	Conceptual framework extension of strategy as practice, e.g. Whittington, 2006	The study of praxis inside, but practices and practitioners outside.
	Case study in a utility firm, e.g. Balogun et al., 2007.	The actions, interactions and negotiations of actors and the situated practices.
	Longitudinal real-time study of a British firm, e.g. Sminia and De Rond, 2012.	A routinized form of organisational and individuals' behaviour to do the strategy work.
	Conceptual framework of discursive forms in strategy as practice e.g. Balogun et al., 2014.	The social interaction in the strategy work and the environment around it.
	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice, e.g. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015.	The use and misuse of strategy tools by multiple actors to perform strategy work.
What do we mean by strategy practices?	Observation and ethnography, e.g. Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002.	Meetings, talks, form-fillings and the micro-climate at the local level have been studied in strategic action.
	Conceptual framework on the micro practices of strategizing, e.g. Chia, 2004.	Practices cannot be formally thought, only can be learnt from example a day-to-day practice.
	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2007.	Patterns of behaviour that emerge from a repeatedly and habituated trend rather than a purposeful intention.
	Longitudinal study of three UK Universities, e.g. Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008.	Socially defined way to act and micro mechanisms to implement strategic change.
	Longitudinal real-time study of a British firm, e.g. Sminia and De Rond, 2012.	The tools that practitioners can afford to do strategy work.
	Literature review showing the relation between strategy practice and wider phenomena, e.g. Seidl and Whittington, 2014.	Behaviour routines, traditions, norms, procedures, regulations of larger economic and social structures.
	Video ethnographic study in financial trading, e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2015.	Emotions, body language and materiality.

Questions	Methods	Findings
What are the daily practices that materialize strategy?	Ethnographic study in a manufacturing firm, e.g. Samra-Fredericks, 2003.	Expressions, metaphoric language and terms of everyday conversations in decision making.
	Conceptual framework of management practices-in-use, e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2004.	Micro-technologies, infrastructure and daily conversations of discourses and meetings.
	Conceptual paper comparing strategy practice and strategy process, e.g. Whittington, 2007.	Strategy away days, use of analytic tools such as SWOT.
	Literature review on social practices of strategy, e.g. Rasche and Chia, 2009.	Consistent pattern of activities performed that unconsciously reflect a strategic orientation such as walking, shaking hands, use of language, style of writing, rituals of presentation, tools of persuasion used, objects used and preconceptions of the world.
	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice and narrative, e.g. Fenton and Langley, 2011.	Use of personal, generic and situational narratives. Production of concrete texts.
	Statistical analysis of humour events in thousands of meetings e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2011.	Foretelling of mundane practice as smiling in meetings is useful on negotiation (the advisable moment to do it).
How is strategy as practice similar and/or different to corporate strategy?	Analysis of interviews as secondary data with CEOs and chairmen e.g. Hendry, 2012.	Daily talking, i.e. unstructured and spontaneous conversations between co-workers at different levels.
	Longitudinal case study in a telecommunications firm, e.g. Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014.	Presentations show what the social entity has been, is or can be, creating emergent strategic plans or patterns.
	Case study about the role of materiality in the process of strategic change into a French bank, e.g. Arnaud et al., 2016.	Production of material texts, the time scheduling and the physical and social spaces arrangement.
	Conceptual framework of strategy from multiple perspectives, e.g. Johnson et al., 2008.	Corporate strategy is a general term to group different views of strategy. Strategy as practice is the sociological approach to understand the activities practiced by managers.
	Ethnography and observations unveil the intrinsically nature of strategy making, e.g. Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009.	Corporate strategy and strategy as practice deal with the ability for decision making.
Longitudinal case study in a telecommunications firm, e.g. Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014.	Corporate strategy is related with product decisions while strategy as practice with practitioners' activities.	
Conceptual framework of strategy as practice, e.g. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015.	Corporate strategy is focused on the outcomes and strategy as practice on practitioners' daily routines.	

Questions	Methods	Findings
Where do we can go to find “good” strategy practices?	Unstructured interviews e.g. Balogun and Johnson, 2005.	Diary practices in a strategy implementation.
	Ethnography and observations unveil the nature of strategy, e.g. Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009. Conceptual framework on narratology ways and strategy e.g. Brown and Thompson, 2013. Semi-structured interviews with key executives e.g. Burgelman, 2015.	Daily routines shape strategy not only an internal, but a wider context connected to multiples levels of societal phenomena. Narrative perspectives such as case studies, storytelling, discourses and metaphors. The great initiatives happen in ‘employees pockets’.
What narrative tools can the strategist afford?	Ethnographic study in a manufacturing firm, e.g. Samra-Fredericks, 2003.	Ethnographic research: subtle elements of intonation, body language and emotions analysis into the strategy discussion.
	Conceptual framework on discursive perspective of strategy as practice, e.g., Seidl, 2007.	Discursive perspective: the way that practitioners engage to the strategy work is circumscribed into the linguistic context.
	Conceptual framework on ethnography based on video, e.g. LeBaron., 2008.	Conversation analysis: study of daily conversations that shape the daily strategy practice.
	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice and narrative, e.g. Fenton and Langley, 2011.	Narrative Analysis: texts study on storytelling, popular strategy literature, biographical interviews and strategic plans.
	Conceptual framework on middle managers in change situation, e.g. Roleau and Balogun, 2011.	Sensegiving: discursive ability to deploy knowledge telling a story in the right way at the right time to gain influence.
	Critical discourse analysis, e.g. Brown and Thompson, 2013.	Narrative and storytelling as communicative key resources to construct strategy as a corporate coherence discourse.
	Conceptual framework of discursive forms in strategy as practice e.g. Balogun et al., 2014.	Metaphor: insights from familiar to unfamiliar contexts during workshops and meetings to create emotions into discussions.
	Literature review showing the relation between strategy practice and wider phenomena, e.g. Seidl and Whittington, 2014.	Critical discourse analysis: uses linguistic elements of texts to promote, resist or negotiate changes in strategy. How discourse links micro and macro practices (local and societal).
Conceptual framework of discursive forms in strategy as practice e.g. Balogun et al., 2014.	Poststructuralist analysis: discourse as a power to promote, support or resist into the strategy discussion.	
Ethnographic study during six months in UNESCO, e.g. Bjerregaard and Nielsen, 2014.	Relevance of particular language for the daily work and career promotion into the institution.	
Conceptual framework of discursive forms in strategy as practice e.g. Balogun et al., 2014.	Rhetoric Analysis: use of persuasive argumentation to promote strategic change, negotiation and decision-making.	

Table 4. Review of strategy as practice. Dimension: Praxis

Questions	Methods	Findings
What is praxis?	Conceptual framework extension of strategy as practice, e.g. Whittington, 2006.	The mixture work an organisation need to do to make and execute its strategy (internal and external, formal and informal, routines and innovations).
	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice and complexity, e.g. Campbell-Hunt, 2007.	The act of choose a particular way to proceed over other available options.
	Ethnography and observations unveil the intrinsically nature of strategy making, e.g. Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009.	The stream of activities that interconnect individual and group work with wider contexts.
	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice and small businesses, e.g. Degraevl, 2012.	The activities that involve strategy work such as meetings, dialogues, calculations, presentations, communications and thinking in formal or informal contexts.
	Longitudinal real-time study of a British firm, e.g. Sminia and De Rond, 2012.	A democratic process that involves not only top managers but champions at different levels of organisations.
How materiality enables or constraint the strategy work (praxis)?	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice and institutional theory, e.g. Smets et al., 2015.	The organisation daily work embedded into a sector and societal contexts.
	Observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, e.g. Rouleau, 2005.	Use of whiteboards, flipcharts, agendas and the disposition of rooms where discussions take place.
	Observation of daily activities of actors at all levels, formal and informal interviews as well as documentary analysis, e.g. Kaplan, 2011.	Use and abuse of Power Point in the dialogue of strategy making. Uses of Power Point as a style of language and part of the organisational culture. Use of power to highlight or hide information according personal interests.
	Case study approach in reinsurance sector, e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2013.	5 situations of strategy work related with specific materials: 1. Physicalizing, photos, e.g. a new project; 2. Locating, maps, e.g. distribution of the operation and partners; 3. Enumerating, data packs, e.g. categorization of portfolios; 4. Analysing, spreadsheets, e.g. flows of investment; 5. Selecting, graphs, e.g. marketing trends and financial results.
	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice and IT systems, e.g. Whittington, 2014.	Practices are not exclusively discursive or symbolic, but include the materials and technology to perform strategy.

Questions	Methods	Findings
What units of analysis have been used in strategy as practice research?	Observation and ethnography, e.g. Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002.	Dominant coalition: top management team.
	Conceptual study on resource based view and institutional theories, e.g. Johnson et al., 2003.	Board meetings and away days to strategy development.
	Conceptual framework extension of strategy as practice, e.g. Whittington, 2006.	Praxis into organisations: instants of strategy work. Practitioners or strategists: who they are, how they act.
	Conceptual framework of strategy as practice e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2007.	Practices: what practices draw upon, how they are draw upon, how use alters over time and application at different levels.
	Semi structured interviews with 17 managers of 15 organisations, e.g. Hendry et al., 2010.	Strategizing practices: board meetings, workshops and instants for planning, decision making, and resource allocation.
	Conceptual framework on communication in strategy as practice, e.g. Cooren et al., 2011.	Communications: communicative events in organisations.
	Ethnographic methods and documentary analysis in architecture project, e.g. Lalonde et al., 2012.	The project meeting, strategic level committee meetings.
	Case study on middle managers practices in four organisations, e.g. Tippmann et al., 2013.	Middle managers: their mechanism for accumulating and circulating knowledge.
	Video ethnographic study in financial trading, e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2015.	Strategic episodes of decision making on resource allocation and preserving resources for future business opportunities.
	How do we can expand the strategy as practice scope?	Critical Discourse Analysis of a strategic plan from a city in Finland, e.g. Vaara et al., 2010.
Conceptual framework of strategy as practice and complexity, e.g. Campbell-Hunt, 2007.		Structuration theory: relation between micro-level practices and society captured by ‘management practices in use’.
Observation of strategic meetings and focus groups in the Wales NHS, e.g. Herepath, 2014.		Critical realism: differentiate macro level structures from micro level activities.
Conceptual framework on narratology ways and strategy e.g. Brown and Thompson, 2013.		Narratology: dealing with equivocality; polyphony; storytelling, production and consumption of strategic narratives.
Literature review of strategy practical knowledge, e.g. Splitter and Seidl, 2011.		Bourdieu perspective: cultural values, norms and traditions, how human beings dwell into their world and surroundings.
Conceptual framework on discursive perspective of strategy as practice, e.g., Seidl, 2007.	Wittgenstein language game concept: strategy as a network or ecology of multiple language games that influence the discourse of strategy.	

Although the importance of micro practices study (Rouleau, 2005; Jarzabkowski, 2009; Werle and Sedil, 2012) and how they have added value to people interaction and sociomateriality involved (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Whittington, 2014), researchers coincide in the risk of isolation and the need of expand the scope of strategy as practice (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007), connecting the field to wider contexts, disciplines and cultures (Seidl and Whittington, 2014; Lounsbury and Beckam, 2015).

The relevance of the elements that have helped humans shaping strategy has been highly remarked by several authors, which considers three types of materiality: traditional elements such as flipcharts, desks, etc.; software, from Power Point presentations and Excel graphs to state of the art software to build highly sophisticated statistical analysis or prospective; and spaces like meeting rooms, workplaces, etc. (Balogun et al., 2014, Whittington, 2015, Arnaud et al., 2016). Sociomateriality has studied this relation between strategists with the elements and spaces they use to do the strategy work.

New framework?

Broader scenarios for strategy as practice need updated frameworks. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) propose an update to the scheme of practitioners, practices and praxis (Whittington, 2006). The practitioners are called the agency of actors, involving a wider spectrum of participants at multiple levels in organisations. The practices are called the affordances of tools, covering the concepts, models, methods, best practices and so on included in the strategy literature. In fact, strategy practices are something malleable and adaptable (Sminia and De Rond, 2012). In the middle, the praxis is divided in three stages: selection, application and outcomes. In addition a group of arrows interconnect the different elements of the framework. In selection, tools give to the actors a clear vision and simplicity. Reciprocally actors select tools depending on their familiarity, position and expertise. In the application stage the tools provide to actors a common language, social interaction and potential improvisations. Actors use tools to get attention, make sense of strategic issues and legitimate their particular positions. Finally, at the outcomes stage, tools are useful to actors if they are routinely used and adopted in organisations. In the same way, actors will use tools if the outcomes allow a project to move forward, help to client satisfaction, show competence of the practitioner and cooperate in solving differences.

Discussion and Conclusions

Twenty years of scholarship in strategy as practice have contributed to have a bigger picture of daily routines that shape the strategy work in organisations. Vaara and Whittington (2012) note ‘Strategy as practice studies have therefore extended mainstream strategies research by bringing to light practices that have largely passed unnoticed, and discovering in them effects that previously were hardly imagined’.

The focus on international leading journals has shown the seriousness of practice approach, which has been complemented by a wider bibliography from conference papers, doctoral theses, books and working papers. The journal Organization Studies had the largest number of contributions (19) into the filtered papers, showing the impact of strategy as practice into the organisational life. Other prominent journals with a significant numbers of papers on strategy as practice were Journal of Management Studies (9), British Journal of Management (8), Strategic Organization (7) and Organization Science (6); this last journal is based on United States, showing the influence outside Europe.

The description of qualitative and quantitative methods show a prevalence of the firsts in the strategy as practice field, but without discarding the opportunities of mixed methods in future research. In fact, the review suggests that only using a melting of methods as different approaches is possible to understand the daily practices of strategy work. Nevertheless, the review shows an increasing interest in ethnography, observation and unstructured interviews to grasp these subtle elements, hard to size, but relevant to understand the practicalities of the strategy work at the different levels of organisations.

Strategy as practice research has been mainly focused on the micro practices and routines that managers perform during their daily work. The review suggests that practices need to be studied at different levels, from the small groups into organisations, the firm level, the industry sector or the national characteristics. At every level not only the affordable tools, but the traditions, norms and values schemes shape the organisation strategy.

Potential horizons

Inclusive management in strategy work

Strategy as practice, although its sincere interest in study the strategy work at all levels of social entities, its research has been focused on managers at different levels (CEOs, boards, senior executives, top manager, senior directors and middle managers) (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Sminia, 2005). Scarce research has been undertaken looking the lower levels of the organisational pyramid, the ‘standpoint of the underdog’, who, by the way, are the first points of contact in many organisations (McCabe, 2010). Is it time to do research about them?

This inclusion approach has two origins. First, strategy as practice has been shunting to open strategy, based on the scholarship on open innovation, which suggest that openness could extend more in the field of strategy (Chesbrough and Appleyard, 2007). Open strategy has two dimensions: transparency, referred to the communication of strategy once formulated; and inclusion, related with the range of people involved in the strategy work. Second, a growing trend to reveal which traditionally has been hidden information. Social networks and Wikileaks are only examples of growing movements that, for better or worse, are influencing a trend towards an open strategy; in addition, an increasing numbers of external stakeholders, shareholders and investment groups in organisations open the strategy discussion beyond the headquarters of organisations (Whittington et al., 2011).

Some successful cases of inclusive and open strategy are inviting other firms to democratize the strategy work. ‘IBM strategy jam’ has involved over 300,000 employees worldwide in strategy and innovation, increasing the businesses portfolio (Palmisano, 2004). Parallel, LEGO Mindstorm project included narrative stories as a way to integrate people in strategy (Campbell-Hunt, 2007). It seems to be that an inclusive approach of strategy as practice could be good for businesses through the involvement of people from lower levels to discuss, develop, assess and shape strategy.

Inclusive management may have several benefits for organisations. Markets are diverse and multicultural, so a diverse staff can fulfil more customer needs and create new business opportunities (Thomas, 2004). When individuals and company development coincide, workers tend to be more committed. Inclusion promotes high quality relations, synergy, job

satisfaction, wellbeing, career plans and job performance (Mor Barak, 2015). However, discrimination and exclusion in organisations persist; inclusion seems to happen more like a legal mandate than a good business for companies and people (Shore et al., 2011). Therefore the challenges of inclusion in strategy work are still scarcely explored.

Beyond the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in organisations, particularly in strategy work, many questions emerge about this possible inclusive perspective: What practices performed in their daily routines by the lower levels can contribute to strategy work? How the value of the daily contact of lower levels with internal and external problems can contribute to strategize?

The inclusive approach to the strategy work could include not only internal, but new external participants. Traditionally, competitors, new entrants, buyers, suppliers and emergent technologies have been seen as rivals according Porter's five forces. An inclusive approach to the strategy work sees them differently. They can be seen not as rivals but as part of the organisations' chain or like other organisations that share similar interests; and those connections make possible to strategize together.

In external inclusion, strategy as practice has considered the work and practices of consultants since its origins (Whittington, 1996) who have helped companies in their processes of strategy formulation, negotiation and implementation (Hendry et al., 2010). Other external stakeholders such as gurus, regulators or institutions have influenced the strategy practice (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). Beyond those actors, the trend toward an open strategy has included new ones. For example, crowdsourcing has involved external stakeholders and eventually internal employees, in problem-solving (Stieger et al., 2012).

However, scarce research has shown which practices help to involve actors with common interests. Almost every organisation is connected through a supply change with other organisations or has similar objectives with others, but the dialogue between them seems to happen by the personal charisma of the leaders and the strategy is seldom shared. This paper suggests that the inclusive perspective could reveal practices to bring closer strategies from different organisations.

Massification of strategy through affordance of technology

Materiality has been always necessary to complement the idea of strategy as 'abstract issues only in the minds of people' (Mintzberg, 1994). However, this affordance of tools is not necessarily positive. For example, research has shown how the use of Power Point foreshortens evidence, exaggerate linearity, obscure significant details, and affect the strategic thinking (Kaplan, 2011). Nowadays, the massification of elements to do strategy has fostered the 'democratization' of strategy (Stieger et al., 2012). Excel spreadsheets, Power Point presentations, flipcharts and whiteboards, among others, complement desks, chairs, maps, photos, which are common elements at every level of organisations (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013).

The review has shown what elements could be helpful depending on what kind of strategy work are the practitioners performing. However, only scant research is emerging in the study on how the permanent devices we use in daily work such as smartphones, tablets and other almost wearable technological gadgets and their applications play a role in strategy-making. How these materiality enable and constraint the strategy work? How this democratization of

materiality facilitates or restricts the ability to become a strategy practitioner and to be involved in the strategy work? Technology rarely solves social problems, but fosters the openness and inclusion in the strategy work (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011). The mass production of elements and the widely use of mostly the same elements around the world, make that researchers findings will contribute to many sites (Whittington, 2015).

In addition, technologies used in strategy work such as event-based jamming, ongoing collaboration tools, wikis, blogging and social networks enrol multiple participants in strategy, but its effectiveness is unclear. Ethnography and cross-case analysis could reveal some results of this strategy mass participation. The definition of sociomateriality as the indivisible relation between social entities and the material we use at work (Orlikowski and Scott, 2009) is increasingly certain in our relation with technology. As a matter of fact, data stored is doubling every 12 months (Skillicorn and Talia, 2012), typical mobile users check their phone 150 times per day (Chou, 2014), and there are more devices connected to Internet than people in the world (Chen et al., 2015). So, how this massive use of technology in the daily work can help or prejudice the strategy work? What new practices can we afford through the use of technology to involve internal employees or external stakeholders in strategy work?

Dynamics of resistance and power in strategy practices

Strategy as practice has been described in terms of managerial practices of CEOs or other head positions, therefore an inclusive approach confront the traditional way to do strategy in organisations, creating changes and conflicts of power and resistance. How to face top management with such inclusive approach?

Resistance happens in multiple ways, resistance that comes from middle managers to accept or implement top management initiatives (Balogun and Johnson, 2004), resistance from higher levels to include people from lower levels in a traditional top management work (Hendry et al., 2010) or resistance from grassroots levels to elites agendas, among other combinations between typical groups in conflict. How this power of resistance can turn from negative to positive? How decision making and power structures changes due to an inclusive strategy approach? How resistance dynamics can be good for businesses and contribute to reach strategic goals?

The dynamics of power relations between multiple actors due to a strategy inclusive approach suggests different organisational structures. Seidl (2007) suggest the elimination of high and low levels of organisational charts; instead of this, promote a dialogue between a network of actors inside the firms and networks of ecologies (autonomous organisations) outside them. Brauer and Heitmann (2013) describe Intel Corporation as an ecology of strategic initiatives. It seems to be evident the structural changes in organisations due to an inclusive approach, but is not clear how the rearrangements of organisational structures can benefit them.

The dynamics of power relations from an inclusive approach involve the participation of lower levels in decision making. In addition, Jarzabkowski (2003) mentions three key strategic activities, in which the inclusion of lower levels has been scarcely mentioned: resource allocation, monitoring and direction setting. In project management, the above activities are performed by Project Portfolio Management (PPM) and it seems to be interesting to know how this eventual 'positive resistance' can include new considerations in the exercise of PPM. After all, organisational strategy is materialized through a portfolio of

projects. So, how the strategy practices from lower levels help to balance the bottom-up and top-down approaches in the definition of the projects portfolio? What discursive practices from different organisation levels are more effective in resource allocation? Whittington et al. (2011) propose three processes for an inclusive approach in decision making: generating, discussing and evaluating. Future research can show which practices consider a balanced view, which include the vision from top management and the aspirations and needs from lower levels represented in the project portfolio. How evaluation and decision making on strategy and its derived portfolio of projects change due to an inclusive strategy? How to integrate a top down and bottom up visions in strategy to make decisions about a project portfolio?

Final considerations

Strategy has traditionally been a subject associated with political and organisational elites, but this paper has shown that strategy as practice, which seems to turn to a more open and inclusive view, is challenging the typical roles of organisation charts, suggesting an invitation to grassroots levels of organisations to participate more actively into strategy work. Strategy is far away from mysterious documents with secret seals in CEOs drawers or a hidden work of elites with higher education. In fact, is far to be an element as such. So, strategists could be also people from the grassroots levels, even in the absence of research about their participation in the strategy work, which suggests future research.

In the military context strategy has been a matter of how to win wars; in traditional strategic planning view is about how to make more money, responding fastest to dynamic competition and markets; in strategy as practice, strategy tends to be a social activity to achieve results, many times unexpected, through human interaction.

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