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A methodological framework for capturing practitioners
knowledge.

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Sciences sociales & humaines

SERIE RECHERCHE

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ABSTRACT

A Methodological Framework for Capturing Practitioners' Knowledge

This paper aims to contribute to developing the methodological apparatus for S-as-P research. It presents and illustrates a methodological framework offering guidelines for conceiving research projects aimed to capture practitioners' experience on research questions based on practical concerns. Research in this framework relies on deep interactions between researchers and practitioners. If highly interactive research methods cannot be legitimated in positivism because they impede researchers' objectivity and neutrality, they can be legitimated in constructivism. But then generalization is a crucial issue.

This paper offers a way to define generalization in constructivist epistemological paradigms. Ways to enact this methodological framework are illustrated with examples drawn from an ongoing research project carried out in the S-as-P perspective.

The discussion highlights the differing roles of practitioners and researchers in research conducted in this framework and its capability to be enacted as a mutually enriching process for research and practice.

Keywords: Strategy-as-Practice, methodology, radical constructivism, generic knowledge, epistemic work

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A Methodological Framework for Capturing Practitioners' Knowledge

“The true is precisely what is made.”

[“*Verum esse ipsum factum.*”]

Vico G., 1710, *De Antiquissima* [English transl., 1988, *Ancient Wisdom.*]

“The Strategy as Practice approach aims in some sense both to capture practitioners' practical knowledge and if possible, to enrich it.” (Langley, 2007: 212)

When researchers want to launch a research project with this aim, they are confronted with two challenges. First, they lack methodological guidelines to help them design a research project whose research findings would be partly based on capturing practitioners' practical experience and could also be considered as a valuable academic contribution.

The second challenge is epistemological. Doing research which attempts to capture practitioners' practical knowledge supposes enacting deep interactions between researchers and practitioners. Such interactions may lead to changes in the researchers and/or the interviewed practitioners' initial perceptions of the issue and the practices under study. They may also lead to modify the research design during the unfolding of research. Thus researchers' objectivity and neutrality cannot be secured, which means that usually such interactive research cannot be legitimated in positivist epistemological paradigms. They can instead be legitimated in constructivist epistemological paradigms – provided that they satisfy a number of criteria such as ethical behavior, rigor and transparency – but in these paradigms, generalization is a crucial issue. Actually, this issue concurs with the epistemological challenge of relating and comparing findings from different studies in the S-as-P perspective.

This paper aims to contribute to filling the methodological gap evoked at the outset, by setting forth a methodological framework for developing knowledge about and for practice. It specifies the epistemological paradigm in which a research carried out along the lines of such a methodological framework can be epistemologically legitimated. It also offers a notion of generalization in this epistemological paradigm. The ways that the guidelines provided by this methodological framework can be used are illustrated on examples drawn from an ongoing research project – thereafter called “the research project” – carried out in the S-as-P perspective.

The paper is structured in three parts followed by a discussion. The first one provides an overview of “the research project” and how it originated. The second part describes an

epistemological framework, namely the Radical Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm (Glaserfeld, 1984, 2001, 2005; Riegler 2001), in which methodological frameworks for interactive research can be epistemologically legitimated. It also discusses the issues of generalization and legitimization in this epistemological paradigm and offers a way for overcoming the issue of defining generalization in this paradigm. The methodological framework is presented in the third part. It offers guidelines for designing research projects attempting to capture practitioners' experience related to a research question based on a practical concern. This framework has been conceptualized in relation with feedback obtained from various research projects that have been carried out along the lines of this framework. Its main processes are illustrated on examples drawn from "the research project". The final discussion highlights the differing roles of practitioners and researchers in research projects based on this methodological framework. It also argues that such research projects can be mutually enriching for research and practice. Finally, it pinpoints the importance of interacting, not only between researchers and practitioners, but also among researchers themselves, in research projects which involve intense fieldwork (Balogun et al., 2003; Van de Van et Johnson, 2006; Tenkasi et al., 2007).

1. Studying Brokers' Strategizing in the S-as-P Perspective

The research that will be used to illustrate the methodological approach presented in this article originated from problems as they were perceived by practitioners, in our case equity brokers, from the evolution of their financial intermediation activities in the French Euronext Stock Market. This ongoing research aims to contribute to social studies of finance research agenda (Adler & Adler, 1984; Abolafia, 1996; Knorr-Cetina & Prada, 2005) and to Strategy-as-Practice agenda research (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson & al., 2007). It intends to show how practitioners are also engaged in the creation process for their own professions and their institutional positions.

After a long period of stability, the French stock exchange environment and its associated practices have, for over two decades now, co-evolved very quickly, due to transformations linked to deregulation, globalization and IT. The former *agents de change* became brokerage companies (with some disruptions resulting from this transformation) and a fertile ground for systematized practices.

This work should provide a way to understand the brokerage profession's emerging rules in the empirical field of financial markets. It intends to integrate practitioners'

knowledge and experience in the construction of academic knowledge (Balogun et al., 2003; Xxx¹, 2007).

1.1 At the Origin of the Research Project: a Reflective Practitioner's Questioning

The practice viewpoint has been at the heart of this research project since its origin. Indeed, one of the co-authors has been a broker for 12 years on Euronext. However, by the year 2000, he/she started having the indistinct sentiment that brokerage activities were undergoing a crisis. Not so much in terms of financial results than in terms of organizing and strategizing. This feeling came to be backed up by several observations.

- Since the new millennium an increasing number of broker associations have been formed in Paris in order to rethink the profession's functions,
- During the same period there has been an important number of restructurings and M&A,
- Most of the stock market companies have established internal committees to elaborate new business models.

These observations incited us to ponder why the profession was suffering from such a feeling of discomfort and to pose certain questions such as: Is there a traditional organizational model for the brokerage profession that is currently being outdated? Are we witnessing a crisis? Are we in a crucial moment of change in the brokerage profession's active strategy?

In 2004, this co-author left financial markets activities with the goal of becoming a scholar and became a "young" researcher as a PhD candidate. He/she was really convinced that an academic career would allow him/her to move from being a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) with practical knowledge towards being a researcher developing academic knowledge. He/she was interested by the methodological questions relative to the capture of practitioner knowledge but at the same time, having a direct access to the field of study, he/she wanted to avoid close proximity to the phenomenon and its linked risks. Following Johnson & al. (2007), he/she became an "insider" researcher, close to the strategy making process, and his/her PhD adviser became the "outsider" researcher. The questions above constituted a first, general formulation of the research question.

¹ To preserve anonymity, all references to the authors will be expressed as Xxx in the submitted version of this communication.

1.2 The Progressive Construction of the Research Question

The field seemed particularly ripe for constructing an interesting research question. Brokerage companies hold a unique position in the capitalist system. Thanks to the increasing visibility of the workings of the currently operating financial systems it is interesting to focus on this subject from a strategic point of view and to pose certain questions. Brokerage companies find themselves at the interface between financial markets and where the real economy is formed. It is here that, for Rouleau (1997), “the links between the organization and the outside world are realized. Among other things, it is where micro-acts of translation are performed (...) and are crystallized in the positions taken by intermediaries in order to create the needed bridges between the company and the outside world and more precisely, with the market.” Brokers and organizations act as translators and intermediaries (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987). This kind of construct, like the pluralist ones studied by Denis et al. (2007), seems to be unique in terms of its strategy development. There is a clear goal for the brokers: to make money for themselves by making money for their clients via the communication of information. They must have a high level of expertise and autonomy and yet be part of the strongly regulated and confining financial system. One cannot exist without the other. Our research question has thus been constructed around the following centers of interest:

First, to study the field of finance through the prism of strategy in order to comprehend the evolutions and changes which have occurred in the field’s activities and organization. To be more precise, to study the field of finance by focusing on the firms that are located in the very core of the market’s practices: brokerage firms. To approach the field using the perspective of strategic management implies studying every organization of financial intermediation in the French stock exchange, juggling between economics and sociology while balancing between holistic and individualistic methodology. Such a task would entice, to paraphrase Rouleau & Mounoud (1998), “reconciling the way we envisage the forming of strategy by taking into consideration both the point of view of the firm’s strategy and the point of view of the actors’ strategy” and then adding to that the institutional weight of the market.

Second, in order to study the “doing of strategy” as “strategizing” (Johnson & al., 2007) for brokerage on financial markets, we have to understand micro-phenomena in their social context, while, at the same, they are co-constructed with macro-phenomena and institutions. So, this study needs “to combine an intimate insight into micro-level activities

with a continuous regard for the wider institutional context that informs and empowers such activities” (Whittington, 2004).

Third, if we consider strategy from a practitioner’s point of view, we also have to consider those who initiate practices: practitioners themselves. In other words, we need to remember that human beings are at the heart of strategizing (Jarzabkowski, 2004). So it is quite surprising when a researcher looks at them as *objects*: when one needs to understand people, one has to interact with them. This does not have to be limited to observations and discussions, but should also include authentic feedback. We need to build something together. As expressed by Jarzabkowski (2005), “the aim of the practice agenda is to see strategy through the eyes of practitioner”.

To summarize, the project aspires to understand the core of strategizing in the field of financial markets, more specially in brokerage activities, considering them as mutually constituted by structures and human agency (Orlikowski, 2000), taking into account both the macro and the micro phenomena (Giddens, 1984).

1.3 Integrating the Human Beings at the Heart of Strategizing

Strategy-as-Practice provides an interesting framework to study strategizing through the prism of practice and to combine different levels (micro, meso, macro) in order to integrate the complexity in which brokers evolve. The approach allows us to consider new kinds of questions emerging from practitioners that are not yet included in the existing literature. It allows us to capture stability and transformation in brokerage activities; it also allows us to integrate practitioners’ own rule, by avoiding exclusively concentrating on the institutions and organizations of financial markets, and by reintegrating the nature of human agency. This research is grounded in the emerging school (Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Golsorkhi, 2006; Johnson & al., 2007) which perceives strategy as a socially built construct. The definition of strategy we adopt for S-as-P is “A socially situated activity by developing an overarching conceptual framework of practitioners, practice and practices” (Whittington, 2006), or a “Socially accomplished activity, constructed through the actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon” (Jarzabkowski, 2005). By using the S-as-P approach, we focus on the heart of strategy in order to understand the nature of how processes are formulated, emphasizing practitioners’ rules in situated actions and activities.

Following Jarzabkowsky's framework (2005), we tried to use her activity-based model in our field, considering strategizing at the interface of Practice (the whole *Praxis*), Practices (tools, artifacts used for doing strategy) and Practitioners (the main strategic actors). Nevertheless, even if the S-as-P approach is relevant, we were confronted with some difficulties in its use: How do we capture doing strategy? Even if we didn't have any difficulty to access this empirical field, challenges were numerous in order to bridge "the depth/breadth/diversity research gap" (Balogun & al., 2003).

Our engagement was to base our research on Jarzabkowski's framework and to take into consideration all three axes (Practice/Practices/Practitioners) whereas usually S-as-P research only cross-examines two axes. In order to accomplish our task we'd have to focus on fewer but particularly important points from each axis. Even with this self-imposed restriction the scale of research became of daunting proportions. We would thus have to enlist experts to help us locate the information relevant for our project. The practitioners themselves seemed to be in the most suitable position to help us. What was left for us was to bestow value to their practical knowledge and experience.

At that point we had to adopt a certain degree of eclecticism in our approach both while mobilizing different theories and while employing different methodologies (Langley, 1999). Since this eclecticism shouldn't mean disorder, we turned to a specific methodological framework which is legitimated in certain epistemological paradigms (Xxx, 2007) in order to develop academic knowledge which could be relevant for practice.

After this overview of our ongoing research project on strategizing in brokerage on the French Stock Exchange – henceforth referred to as "the research project" – we shall present the specific methodological framework in which it is carried out and the various processes which compose this framework. They will be systematically illustrated by examples stemming from "the research project". Before, the next part (§2) is dedicated to presenting the epistemological paradigm in which "the research project" is carried out and in which such a methodological framework can be legitimated.

2. The Knowledge Epistemological Context: the Radical Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm (RECP)

Due to the diversity of the constructivist perspectives which have been developed over the past thirty twenty years (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Glasersfeld's 1984, 2001; Astley, 1985;

Guba and Lincoln 1989, 1998; Cannella and Paetzold, 1994; Van Maanen, 1995; Mir and Watson, 2000 e.t.c.), the first subsection recalls the core assumptions of the RECP. Then the issues of knowledge generalization and validation in the RECP will be successively considered. Since the philosophical presuppositions of the so-called interpretive methods (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006) are similar to those of radical constructivism, the advances of interpretive methods on both issues will be drawn upon in the sections to follow.

2.1 The Core Founding Assumptions of the Constructivist Epistemological Paradigms

Among the various constructivist perspectives, only two theories of knowledge have made their founding assumptions explicit: Guba and Lincoln's (1989, 1998) *Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm* and Glasersfeld's (1984, 2001, 2005, 2008) *Radical Constructivism*, which was further conceptualized by Le Moigne (1995, 2008) under the label *Radical Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm*.

To avoid introducing additional labels which would add up to the difficulty to find one's way in the constructivist maze, these labels, as they have been attributed by their respective authors, will be kept in this paper. This, despite their lengthy phrasing and their use of the term paradigm in a sense which may be slightly weaker than Kuhn's (1970) definition.

----- Insert Table 1 about here -----

Inspired from Guba and Lincoln (1998), Table 1 is arranged in three rows which, according to these authors, reflect epistemology's three basic questions, namely:

- 1) The ontological question which asks: "*What is there that can be known?*"
- 2) The epistemological question which asks: "*What is the relationship of the knower to the known (or the knowable)?*"
- 3) The methodological question which asks: "*What are the ways of elaborating knowledge?*"

This table reveals major differences in the foundational assumptions of the two Constructivist Epistemological Paradigms. The two Constructivist Epistemological Paradigms strictly agree on only one founding assumption, the one which posits the unfeasibility to separate the inquirer and the phenomenon under inquiry. This founding assumption implies that humans cannot know a world beyond their own experience of it. This implies an unfeasibility to separate ontology and epistemology in Constructivist Paradigms (Guba and

Lincoln 1998), which is reflected by the dashed line separating the ontological and epistemological levels in Table 1. This also makes both verification and falsification appear never conclusive. This is the reason why Radical Constructivists do not make any founding assumptions on the nature of what Guba and Lincoln call reality.

2.2 Generalization in the RCEP: Building Generic Knowledge

Knowledge generated in the contextualist perspective is usually local situated knowledge (Garfinkel 1967, Pettigrew 1987, Scherer and Steinmann 1999). It is considered contextually dependent and subjectively constructed (Gergen 1994; Mohrman et al. 2001), with an emphasis on the uniqueness of the phenomenon studied. Hence generalization is usually not considered as a relevant question. Even though the RCEP considers that context plays a decisive role in knowledge elaboration, since as recalled on Table 1, the knowledge elaborated is considered context and goal-dependent, we consider generalization as an important issue in the RCEP, similarly to other interpretative researchers.

2.2.1 Generalization in Interpretive Research and in Grounded Theory Methods

In interpretive research, a number of studies deal with the issue of generalization. The traditional positivist criterion of external validity has been interpreted in terms of transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). For these authors, the responsibility to transfer research findings from a study carried out in one setting to another rests with the person who seeks to perform this transfer. Consequently, researchers must provide “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973) which enable others to assess the legitimacy of transferring findings from a particular research study to another setting.

Bendix (1978) and Geertz (1983) approached generalization in interpretive research from another standpoint: by conceptualizing problems with some degree of abstraction, they construct frameworks in which developments in different human societies are presented and compared as alternative responses to common problems. This suggests an approach to generalization which can be extremely valuable in the RCEP: the construction of formal grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Even though these authors’ positions were imbued with positivism (Charmaz 2003), the processes they describe for generating grounded theories are typically construction processes rather than unveiling processes. They are based on the creation of categories and on continually adapting the theory generated to the data gathered, and the data collection to the theory being generated. Hence knowledge construction is carried out as a recursive process,

i.e. as a self-fueling process whose outputs not only feedback as input into the process but also influence the process itself, as in what is called in lay language vicious, or virtuous, circles. Glaser and Strauss even acknowledge that there is no guarantee that two researchers working with the same data will achieve the same results. Such a view of the research process is hardly defensible in a Positivist Epistemological Paradigm, while, as will be argued below, it appears legitimate in the Radical Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm as long as researchers comply with the fundamental requirements of ethic behavior, rigor and transparency (Le Moigne 1995).

For Glaser and Strauss, theory in sociology must be useful in theoretical advance in sociology, and usable in practical applications. It should be able to provide practitioners with some understanding and control of situations. "Theory that can meet these requirements must fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use. By 'fit' we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by 'work' we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study." (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 3)

This normative view of sociological theory is not far away of research's aim in the RCEP. Its core notions are not "truth" and "laws" as in positivist and critical realist paradigms, but "fit" and "work", two keywords in the RCEP.

In their theorizing of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss distinguish two basic kinds of middle-range theory: substantive and formal. For them, a substantive theory is developed for a substantive, or empirical, area of sociological inquiry, such as patient care or race relations. A formal theory is developed for a formal, or conceptual, area of sociological inquiry, such as stigma, deviant behavior, socialization, reward systems. Both types of theories can be considered as middle-range, i.e. falling between the "minor working hypotheses" of everyday life and the "all-inclusive grand theories."

These authors dedicate one chapter to a discussion of how to go from substantive to formal theory. They advocate that this generalization be accomplished through the systematic study of multiple comparison groups and substantive theories. This approach provides a means for developing knowledge with a certain level of conceptual generality by drawing on local situated knowledge, which is particularly valuable in the RCEP.

2.2.2 The Notion of Generic Knowledge

Glaser and Strauss' use of the phrase "formal theory" to designate the upward extension in conceptual generality of a substantive grounded theory is unfortunate though, because this

phrase has the connotation of a theory built by logical deduction from a priori assumptions and, most often, expressed in the mathematical formalism. This corresponds less to what these authors were advocating than the notion of “generic knowledge” in the sense Prus (1987) used the phrase “generic social processes” to equate dynamic features of association that transcend the content or substantive features of group life. A particular negotiation, for example, can be envisioned as an instance of a generic process, while the items being bargained for denote the content mediated through this social form.

The notion of generic knowledge extends the notion of generic proposition developed by the pragmatist philosopher Dewey (1938). Generic knowledge expresses knowledge about kinds of things and processes rather than about particular instances— episodes or events—or about statistical regularities. In the mid-90’s, this notion was taken up by researchers from various cognitive sciences (Carlson and Pelletier 1995) who engaged in investigating pending epistemic questions this notion raises such as: how do we acquire knowledge about a certain kind of thing or process if we have a limited number of examples, or have only experienced a single instance of the thing or process in question?

For instance, Prasada (2000) underscored that generic knowledge involves knowledge of properties that are considered essential for being a particular kind of thing. At the same time, generic knowledge is not rendered invalid by the existence of what seem to be counter-examples. For example, the fact that there exist some dogs that have only three legs does not render the statement that dogs are four-legged animals false. Besides, when a certain kind of thing has certain properties, it is considered to be by virtue of being that thing, not by virtue of any hidden underlying mechanism. The notion of generic knowledge is consistent with the RECP. All this, combined with Bendix (1978) and Geertz’ (1983) approach evoked above suggests defining generalization in the RECP as a process of upward extension in conceptual generality of substantive or local knowledge, and using the phrase *generic knowledge* to designate the generalized knowledge obtained through this process.

The construction of generic knowledge can be accomplished through de-contextualization of local substantive knowledge *via* the systematic study of multiple comparison groups and substantive theories. Usually this implies iterations and back and forth connections of the information gathered, local knowledge developed, knowledge available in literature, conjectures made by the researcher, and going back to the field in order to collect further information and to academic literature to clarify emerging notions. This process is fairly similar to that described by Pawson and Tilley (1997) for uncovering “underlying generative mechanisms”. Such a rule is defined as a chunk of general knowledge linking an intervention

or artifact with a desired outcome in a certain application-domain (Van Aken 2004), where general is precisely taken to mean generic.

Generic knowledge can take on the form of frameworks of consistent generic propositions. It can also be expressed as technological rules and “knowledge artifacts” (Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2006), namely frameworks, generic models, and tools, such as Mintzberg’s organizational configurations, Porter’s five forces and generic strategy models and portfolio matrices.

2.3 Generic Knowledge: Legitimization Rather than Validation

In a scientific context, the term *validation* has the strong connotation of knowledge having survived all the hypothesis testing performed so far. Therefore, along with Cannella and Paetzold (1993), Le Moigne (1995), or Weick (1999), we prefer to use the word *legitimization* to refer to the process by which some value is assigned to knowledge.

2.3.1 The Relentless Equilibration of Epistemic Work and Empirical Work

For Piaget (1967), the legitimization work relies on a process of *rigorous epistemological critique* carried out by researchers themselves. In fact, what Piaget puts under the name of epistemological critique is captured by what is now called reflexivity (Weick 1999; Tsoukas 2005; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). To keep Piaget’s explicit reference to epistemological concerns, the phrase *epistemic work* will be used rather than the less precise term reflexivity. This has both drawbacks and advantages.

Its main drawback is that this notion of epistemic work is different from the way Cook and Brown (1999) use this phrase. For these authors, epistemic work comes from human action itself. Hence it may be largely implicit while, here, it is deliberate, reflexive work: digging into both the implicit assumptions made and the deep meaning of the notions that are used; tracking what seems self-evident; questioning the mutual relevance and consistency of the numerous decisions the researcher makes along the entire research process, from the specification of the research design to the communication of the results to scholars and practitioners.

Its main advantage is to emphasize that legitimization in the Radical Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm rests on two legs, namely epistemic work and empirical work, which need to be recursively adapted to fit each other throughout the research project.

2.3.2 The Three Main Drivers of Epistemic Work

Epistemic work has three main drivers whose relative weights vary with the phases of the research process.

The first one focuses on knowledge treated as something people possess. This facet of epistemic work consists of reviewing the accumulated knowledge on the topic considered, and understanding the relationships among the various notions and theories involved. It is predominant during the initial literature survey and during the construction of generic knowledge. In fact, no matter what the underlying epistemological paradigm is, researchers carry out (more or less implicitly) this type of epistemic work.

The second driver bears on attempting to connect the knowledge used or constructed with the empirical material gathered. One particularly important aspect is to render explicit the theoretical lenses through which the organizational situations are studied. It has a very strong weight during fieldwork and during the construction of generic knowledge.

The third driver concerns knowledge communication. It bears on designing knowledge communication in order to adapt it to the meaning systems and contexts of each specific audience (Tenkasi et al. 2007), whether scholars or practitioners' audiences. The goal is to capture the audience's attention, keep their interest, and facilitate the appropriation of the knowledge. So far, knowledge dissemination into practice is essentially made through MBA courses, textbooks, consultants and the popular business media (Jarzabkowski and Wilson 2006). Researchers have not shown much interest in talking directly to practitioners in the diffusion of knowledge developed in research projects. A number of scholars, particularly from the Strategy as Practice perspective (Johnson et al. 2007), start considering that the question of how to disseminate this knowledge in ways that directly talk to and with practitioners as an issue which should be discussed more and experimented on.

Despite the epistemic work carried out on knowledge communication, one can never be sure of the way the audience will interpret the message (DiMaggio 1995), nor of the way knowledge will actually be put to use.

2.3.3 Knowledge Legitimization: Goal-Directed and Context-Dependent

The legitimization offered by the researcher depends on the overall goal of the research project, as well as on the contexts in which it has been developed. These include the information obtained in the field, and the experience, culture, and reflective nature of the members of the organization with whom the researcher interacted. It also depends on the

contexts (social, industrial, cultural, economic, managerial, and so on) of the organizations chosen as fields of study.

To be able to judge the scope of legitimacy it can bestow to the knowledge developed in a particular research project, an academic community obviously needs to know more than the sole knowledge elaborated. It needs information on the theorizing process and the context in which it has been developed: what precisely has been extracted from the references (Weick 1995), what reasoning was employed, what evidence was relied upon, as well as any information which will enable the community to appraise the perceived intrinsic quality and mutual fit of the epistemic and empirical work carried out throughout the research project, from research design until the communication of the research findings.

Researchers need to provide a report detailing the following information: the main assumptions of the epistemological paradigm within which the research was carried out; an account of both the epistemic and the empirical work performed, showing how they were mutually adapted during the research project; the inferences made to articulate that knowledge, for instance the coding performed, the conceptual categories built, the relations established among categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967); an argumentation of the consistency of these inferences with the assumptions of the underlying epistemological paradigm; as well as any information concerning the empirical work for documenting the main criteria set forth in the literature on interpretive research (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006), namely *thick description, reflexivity, triangulation, trustworthiness, audit, negative case analysis*, and even *member check* when going back is possible.

3. Methodological Framework for Constructing Generic Knowledge by Capturing Practitioners' Experience

Most articles and textbooks² concerning qualitative research in social sciences depict the research process as comprising of a number of successive phases or steps which are iterative and tightly linked to data (Eisenhardt 1989; Langley 1999; Balogun et al. 2003; Johnson & al 2007). The number of phases may vary from four to eight, according to the level of detail chosen in defining the phases. The basic phases include: research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting (Yin 1994). Each phase corresponds to specific activities (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). These activities are: 1) making explicit the epistemological paradigm in which

² See, for instance, (Eisenhardt 1989, Huberman & Miles 1994, Denzin & Lincoln 2003).

the research will take place 2) conceiving of the research design 3) collecting empirical materials 4) interpreting empirical materials and 5) publishing the findings.

Instead of representing our methodological framework in terms of a chronological sequence of *phases* or *steps*, we have conceptualized it from the standpoint of the *processes* that it involves. We distinguish five main processes which, as shown in Figure 1, will usually be carried out interactively, namely:

- Conception of the research design
- Construction of local knowledge
- Construction of generic knowledge
- Communication of generic knowledge, and
- Activation of generic knowledge

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

The process of conceiving the research design always begins first. Then, it encompasses all the other four processes, in the sense that it shapes the other processes and remains active during the entire research project. In other words, the research design may evolve throughout the research project in relation to the actual unfolding of the other processes. The process of conceiving the research does not appear on Figure 1, because picturing the research design's capability to continually evolve would have considerably restrained Figure 1's readability.

These five processes will be presented individually in the following sections. They will be illustrated by examples stemming from “the research project” (presented in §1)

3.1. Conception of the Research Design

It should be underscored that at the outset of any research project, before starting to reflect on the research design, the epistemological paradigm in which the research will be carried out needs to be specified – in our case the RCEP.

The research design then comprises three main facets which are interrelated: 1) defining the general topic and clarifying the main research question that will be studied, 2) specifying the major theoretical references likely to be used 3) defining a strategy of inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2003), which consists of the research method contemplated, the type of setting within which the empirical work will be carried out, and the tactics for collecting information.

Indeed, on the one hand, “*What* we know and *how* we know are recursively linked. ...The kinds of research questions asked, the objects selected for study, and the criteria for

evaluating knowledge claims are all intimately connected with the underlying assumptions of what is valid knowledge and how it may be obtained.” (Tsoukas 2005: 6, 309)

On the other hand, “The virtues of techniques and methods cannot be determined and categorized in the abstract, because their precise nature and significance is [sic] shaped within the context of the assumptions on which the social scientist acts. Qualitative research stands for an approach rather than a particular set of techniques, and its appropriateness – like that of quantitative research – is contingent on the nature of the phenomena to be studied.” (Morgan and Smircich 1980: 499)

Since they are recursively linked, the three topics involved in specifying the research design have to be handled jointly. The mutual consistency of the choices made in this specification needs to be justified. The identification of the three facets of research design obviously calls for epistemic work to be performed on the central research question in reference to the literature survey.

Once the major theoretical references and the organization³ for fieldwork have been identified defining the modes of knowing that will do justice to the phenomenon under study (Burrell and Morgan 1979) calls for further epistemic work. This work is based on answering the following questions: Which particular methods of investigation (tools or techniques) are to be chosen, why, and how should they be implemented? Which practices are to be observed⁴, how, and why? Which practitioners are to be interviewed, in which order, how⁵, on the basis of which interview guidelines, and why? Which organizational documents should researchers try to obtain (such as minutes, meeting reports), and why?

Exhibit 1: Synopsis of the research design of the project presented in part 1

☞ **Epistemological paradigm:** The Radical Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm.

☞ **Central Research Question:** Developing a way to understand strategizing in the field of

³ For writing purposes, we speak of an organization and field of study in the singular, as if there were only one organization involved.

⁴ By “observations to be made”, we mean observing what people actually do (Cook and Brown 1999), and listening to what they tell each other (Samra-Fredericks 2003).

⁵ Will the interviews be semi-directive interviews, elicitation interviews (Vermersch 1999), leading to narratives of practices, narratives of experience, etc.?

financial markets.

More precisely, brokerage organizations are integrated in an institutionalized, powerful financial system, and at the same time operated by autonomous actors. The goal is to understand how strategizing is developed in this environment, with practitioners' rules.

☞ **Major theoretical references:**

- Framework : Strategy-as-Practice (Whittington, 1996 ; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007)
- Literature on brokerage: Biglaiser, 1993 ; Biglaiser & Friedman, 1994 ; Spulber, 1999 ; Adler & Adler, 1984; Baker, 1984 ; Abolafia, 1996; Knorr-Cetina & Preda, 2005)
- Research methodology (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994 ; Charmaz, 2006; Smith, 1994, xxx, 2007)
- Pragmatic sociology (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991) ; the neo-institutional approach (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Fligstein, 2001; Scott 2008 ; Suddaby & Lawrence; 2005); sensegiving (Weick, 1979)
- ...

☞ **Strategy of Inquiry:** Obtain as much information as possible from multiple and diverse sources, regarding how brokerage activities have actually been operating in past years, how and why they have evolved.

☞ **Organizations for field study:** brokers, brokerage companies, institutional clients, institutions (Euronext) and regulators (AMF) in the French financial equity market.

3.2. *Construction of Local Knowledge*

The primary aim of the progressive gathering and processing of information, which are carried out jointly, is to build local knowledge. In this expression the term “local” (Geertz 1983) stresses the *situated* character of the knowledge built at this stage. Indeed, local knowledge's legitimization relies on the fact that it has been elaborated at some point in time on the basis of observations, organizational documents, and practitioners' knowledge and experience as narrated in interviews. Hence, local knowledge depends on the particular practitioners interviewed, their particular background and location in the organization being considered, which itself operates in a particular context, and so forth.

Exhibit 2: Example of local knowledge in the research project

- ☞ In the last 20 years, the French stock exchange's environment and its practice and practices have evolved very rapidly in a co-evolution process.
- ☞ New ways to “make markets” (Abolafia, 1996) have developed. These transformations are aided by mathematically inspired theoretical models, IT developments, deregulation and globalization.

Consequences

Inside the French financial markets, the former *Agents de Change* are transformed into *Brokers* whose increasingly systematized practices are generating a diffuse feeling of crisis and more or less accepted changes on practice.

The practitioners' answer

Numerous layers of « doing strategy » have accumulated over time and nowadays coexist together. This variety of practices that coexist permits a refined adaptation of (financial) intermediation according to the clients' needs and the financial markets' environment. These varying practices are the result of individual will and often turn out to be quite effective in reaching the desired outcome: making money for the different actors, organizations and institutions.

The epistemic work associated with knowledge construction bears on studying theoretical references relative to notions encountered in fieldwork, and the specification of the empirical work performed, and to be performed. The latter is based on answering questions such as: How should the interview guidelines be progressively adapted? Are there any practitioners, other than those initially included, whom it would be relevant to interview for triangulation purposes? Does the research question appear to be related to the concerns and experience of the practitioners interviewed? Is the local knowledge being elaborated shared by all of the interviewees? Etc.

Exhibit 3: Identification of a theoretical gap that the research project will contribute to fill

In order to comprehend the various co-existing practices, their justification and the changes in the brokerage profession (see Exhibit 2) we have consulted the existing literature on brokerage. The subject is approached through two main currents:

On the one side

The usefulness of brokerage services as source of intermediation (Hackett, 1992) has been examined by micro-finance (Benston & Smith, 1976). Brokers as financial mediators, help to conclude exchanges on markets (Cosimano, 1996). They are considered as experts in shaping information and in this way, maintain their utility (Biglaiser, 1993; Biglaiser & Friedman, 1994). This corresponds to a macro-level interpretation of this kind of activity where mediation is considered globally helpful in determining prices, adjusting market liquidity, reducing uncertainties and maintaining control (Spulber, 1999).

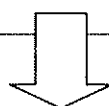
Here, brokerage exists because the financial markets' « laws » require its existence.

However there is no insight on human agency taking place in the black box.

On the other side

Related to economic sociology (Granovetter, 1985; Burt, 1992), interesting developments in the sociology of finance for brokers and brokerage companies (Adler & Adler, 1984; Baker, 1984; Abolafia, 1996; Knorr-Cetina & Preda, 2005), have led to a better understand of this kind of organization and actors. The sociology of finance covers a whole spectrum of approaches and theories which show financial intermediation's high level of complexity.

Here, the ethnographic approach takes practitioners' feelings and practices into account but there is no insight on the practice in its global justification.



**The theoretical gap that the research project will contribute to fill:
No theory permits to bridge macro and micro levels and to link simultaneously the three
dimensions of strategizing (practices, practice, practitioners) in the area of financial
markets.**

3.3. Construction of Generic Knowledge

The construction of generic knowledge is accomplished through a process described in §2.2.2 as conceptualization and de-contextualization of local substantive knowledge *via* the systematic study of multiple comparison groups, possibly taken from other case studies (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2003). Exhibit 4 provides an example of tentative generic knowledge developed in "the research project".

Exhibit 4: Example of tentative generic knowledge regarding the core of strategizing in
brokerage companies

In brokerage activities, legitimacy's matters are at the core of strategizing.

Legitimacy is considered as a justification which changes with time and context (Habermas, 1978).

Legitimacy contributes to sense-making and sense-giving for brokerage companies and their actors which exist only thanks to their reputation and their expertise.

With Jarzabkowski (2006), we consider that the strategy building process in brokerage integrates both the tandem « *interactive strategizing/ interpretative legitimacy* » and the tandem « *procedural strategizing/structural legitimacy* ». The first tandem is built by different interactions which support change in strategy (Suchman, 1987; Weick & Roberts, 1993). The second one is based on existing routines and controls which reinforce strategy already in place (Weber, trad. 1971; Giddens, 1984). The first one has primacy when there is environmental stability, the second one when there are transformations.

The epistemic work associated with this process involves checking whether the chosen conceptual references are well suited to capture the information obtained, and whether other references would not be better adapted. It also consists of clarifying the new notions introduced and of showing how they can be related to existing knowledge. This often calls for a revisiting of some of the literature initially studied, as well as for a further literature survey on notions that have emerged in the conceptualization process. For instance, in order to clarify what we mean by “legitimacy” and to build our conceptual model, we revisited theories to which S-as-P researchers subscribe (Johnson et al., 2007), that correspond to the *practice turn* in social sciences (Schatzki et al., 2001) and pragmatic philosophy in the tradition of Pierce, James and Dewey. The conceptual model we developed on this basis integrates the pragmatic sociology of Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) as well as the neo-institutional approach (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991; Fligstein, 2001; Scott 2001, 2004, 2008; Suddaby and Lawrence, 2005). The congruence between the information gathered on financial markets and the conceptual references considered in the research project comes from the fact that we progressively integrated in our epistemic work all the conceptual references that were used in brokerage.

Epistemic work also bears on legitimating the inferences made to build the meta-model or the generic principles and propositional statements set forth from the various comparison groups.

The legitimization of the constructed knowledge depends on the epistemic work that has been performed in producing it and relating it to pre-existing knowledge, and on its coupling with fieldwork, particularly *via* the local knowledge on which it is based. This legitimization is not absolute, but contingent. Indeed, it depends on a number of circumstances, including the cognitive context in which it has been developed. Namely, the researchers’ culture and the information obtained in the fieldwork, as well as the knowledge, the experience, the culture,

and the reflective nature (Schön 1983) of the organization's members with whom researchers have interacted. The knowledge legitimization also depends on the social, economic, organizational, and managerial contexts of the organization chosen as a field of study.

Generally, in collaborative research, the epistemic work for conceptualizing generic knowledge is essentially done by the researchers involved in the project (see §4.1 for a further discussion of this point). Indeed, practitioners' regular organizational tasks usually do not leave them much time to do this work, even when they may have some interest in doing it. This careful legitimization work usually differentiates the generic knowledge developed in collaborative research from the knowledge developed by practitioners only. This latter is usually based more on empirical experience than on relating it to diverse possible conceptual references through deep epistemic work.

There are two further ways to enhance the legitimization of generic knowledge: its activation in concrete settings and its communication to those scholars and practitioners potentially interested in the knowledge developed.

3.4. Communication of Generic Knowledge

Communicating research findings to academic communities is a well-known requirement of scientific research. In the specific case of knowledge elaborated on the basis of practitioners' experience relative to recurrent managerial concerns not satisfactorily illuminated by theory yet, communication to those practitioners potentially interested in the particular kind of knowledge constructed actually participates in the legitimization of this knowledge *via* its recognition by certain practitioners as potentially useful. Exhibit 5 provides an example of the way some knowledge developed in the research project will be presented to practitioners.

Exhibit 5: Examples of communicating knowledge to and with practitioners

(Xxx, 2009a) offers a written synthesis of the different practices in brokerage with their historical, contextual and theoretical foundations. This publication in a professional financial review is based on knowledge developed in "the research project".

(Xxx, 2009b) will present the core aspects of strategizing for brokerage companies in a conference for the strategic committee of the main institution in charge of organizing the French Stock Exchange. This committee is in charge of developing relationships between financial organizations (banks, brokerage companies, institutional investors) and listed companies.

As seen in §2.3.2, both types of communication – for scholars as well as for practitioners – usually call for further epistemic work on the knowledge to be communicated, and on ways of communicating it. In the case of interactive communication, remarks, questions, or counter-examples from the audience often spawn the need for further epistemic work and generate ideas for additional research projects.

3.5. Activation of Generic Knowledge

Putting the knowledge elaborated in a research project into practical use is both a primary purpose of generic knowledge developed in this framework, and a means to enhance its legitimization *via* putting it to the test of actual experience in authentic settings.

As a consequence of the RECP's core assumption summarized in Table 1, any available knowledge, when put into use, is to be considered as a heuristic guide whose goals are to arouse scholars and practitioners' reflection, to provide them with a broader or deeper understanding of the problem at hand, and/or to stimulate their creative action.

Putting generic knowledge into action requires its re-contextualization and reinterpretation according to the specifics of each setting. Considering the (perceived) rich complexity of practice, re-contextualization cannot be treated as a mechanical process. Thus, instead of speaking of knowledge application, some authors speak of knowledge put to action or knowledge put into use. We prefer to use *knowledge activation* (Tenkasi et al. 2007), the term "activation" being more specific than the terms "use" and "action". Indeed, sometimes knowledge activation does not lead to any other action than the cognitive action of attempting to integrate it into one's thought processes.

To say that an individual activates some knowledge in a particular situation means that he/she takes that knowledge into consideration in his/her thinking about the situation. Taking some knowledge into consideration means treating it as thought-provoking or as a means to illuminate a problematic situation. It does not mean treating it as a prescriptive rule for obtaining the desired outcome. Knowledge activation can permit the appropriation—embodiment—of this knowledge, i.e. the integration of this knowledge into the individual's prior knowledge. This operation can induce modifications not only of the individual's prior knowledge, but also his/her initial interpretation of the activated knowledge. In other words, when activation occurs, this has an impact on both the individual and the knowledge: neither ones are left intact. "The person who applies theory becomes, in effect, a generator of theory,

and in this instance the theory is clearly seen as process: an ever-developing entity.” (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 242)

Trying to activate some generic knowledge in a setting other than that in which it has been initially developed, calls for further empirical work aimed at understanding the specific circumstances of the new setting. It jointly calls for further epistemic work aimed at clarifying the deeper meaning of the notions involved and investigating the legitimacy of activating this knowledge in that setting given its specific circumstances. Tenkasi et al. (2007) underscore that this re-contextualization benefits from being accomplished jointly by practitioners of the unit concerned by this knowledge activation. Furthermore, re-contextualization often involves reconstructing the corresponding knowledge in relation to the particular setting considered, which often generates new research questions to be studied.

Exhibit 6: Activation of knowledge developed in the research project

After the completion of “the research project”, some of the knowledge developed in this project is to be activated in one of the two brokerage companies where we currently carry out our case study, upon request of this company’s top management. They are asking us to participate in their discussions regarding the conception of a new business model for the company. Our role will be to make sure that the associated strategic reorientation adequately fits the evolution of its internal and external stakeholders’ expectations, as we have identified them in “the research project”.

For us, as researchers, the primary goal of this knowledge activation is to put to use some of the knowledge developed in “the research project” in an authentic setting. A secondary goal is to identify whether practitioners’ concerns regarding the conception of a new business model can give rise to new, valuable research questions on the topic of business model conception.

4. Discussion

The discussion will address three issues. First, it examines the respective roles of practitioners and researchers in this particular methodological framework. Then, it sets forth that a research project carried out along the lines of this framework can be enacted as a mutually enriching process between strategy research and practice. Finally, it underscores the importance of interactions among researchers within the research project’s team.

4.1. The Differing Roles of Practitioners and Researchers in the Framework

We shall successively examine the specific roles of researchers and practitioners during the two processes of local and generic knowledge elaboration. These two processes are highly intertwined: local knowledge elaboration is influenced by practitioners and researchers' previous local and generic knowledge. In addition, during generic knowledge elaboration, it is often useful to go back and to study more deeply certain experiences that had earlier served to build local knowledge.

In our experience, during the elaboration of local knowledge most of the practitioners involved do behave as co-researchers. The questions addressed by researchers to practitioners on their experience and practices push practitioners to build representations of their practices – in the sense the term “representation” has in Table 1 – and then to reflect on these representations in ways they are not generally used to, i.e. do some kind of epistemic work on their representations of their practices and experience.

Local knowledge which is generated out of interactions between practitioners and researchers is typically a co-construction between them. However, these two kinds of professionals do not play the same role in this co-construction. For instance, elements of the local knowledge which are elaborated in a face-to-face interaction between practitioners and researchers are, usually, subsequently shaped and written down by researchers according to their perceptions and understanding of these interactions.

Another example lies in the difference between cognitive postures: researchers address questions to practitioners in a sort of Socratic searching and inquiring dialogue, whereas practitioners usually ask few questions. They mostly narrate their experience relative to specific situations. In addition, while listening to practitioners, researchers strive to make sure that the answers obtained are sufficiently precise and detailed to enable satisfactory ulterior epistemic work on them. This continual questioning about empirical materials which will be needed later to progress on the epistemic front is a concern mainly, but not exclusively, for the researchers⁶.

In this process, both practitioners and researchers do epistemic work, but the kinds of epistemic work they do are different and have different goals. Practitioners' epistemic work

⁶ For instance, one day, at the end of our interview, a Broker asked us whom we had interviewed so far, and whom we were planning to interview next. After we had answered him, he expressed his surprise that we had not planned to interview “so and so”. He considered that without obtaining information from this person, we would miss important information on the functioning of their company. So, we interviewed that person too, who did give us some further insights on practices in this company.

bears mainly on their own experience and aims at giving accurate account of it. While, as described in §2.3.2, researchers' epistemic work has several facets. For instance, it involves clarifying notions used in the organization and relating them to the academic literature, and identifying what to consider as local knowledge among all the ideas which have been expressed in the interviews and the internal documents gathered. It also involves adapting the empirical work to the knowledge progressively generated.

According to our experience, practitioners and researchers' respective roles are even more different during the elaboration of generic knowledge. The conceptualization work described in §2.2.2 and §3.3 corresponds more to the researchers' main professional skills and duties than to those of practitioners. During this process, the collaborative interactions between them take essentially two forms: first, researchers who are going back to practitioners to clarify some points that were not examined in a sufficiently precise manner, or not at all, during the elaboration of local knowledge; second, discussing successive versions of the generic knowledge being elaborated. In our experience, these discussions do enrich both parties (XXX, 2009c).

These differing roles originate mainly from the differences in their prime functions and of the related competence, experience and knowledge which go with these functions: a manager's prime function is to manage, while an academic researcher's prime function is to teach and do academic research. As a result, they have different goals, knowledge, experience, competence and constraints. As a matter of fact, in research projects that we carried out with consultants, some consultants who were behaving as reflective practitioners (Schön 1983) were taking a more active part in the conceptualization of generic knowledge than organization managers usually do, probably because knowledge construction is more directly connected to consultants' prime professional activities.

So, to summarize, this methodological framework promotes interactive research between practitioners and researchers, in which these two kinds of professionals play differing and complementary roles throughout the project. Taking advantage of their differing and complementary roles is precisely what makes their collaboration likely to enrich both parties, as will be seen now.

4.2. A Mutually Cross-Fertilizing Process between Research and Practice

The various processes involved in the methodological framework offer opportunities of mutual enrichment between knowledge elaboration and practice.

This framework relies on the assumption that certain members of an organization can be considered as experts on the research question (Johnson et al 2007). In particular, they may have developed in their practical experience some knowledge corresponding to theoretical gaps. So, certain research projects designed along the guidelines of this framework may lead to the development of generic knowledge partly based on practical knowledge. In other words, this framework offers the possibility to enrich academic knowledge by drawing on practices via the multiple interactions between researchers and practitioners taking place in the various processes described in part 3 above.

Reciprocally, in research projects which we have carried out in the spirit of this methodological framework, we have observed that each of these processes offered opportunities that these research projects lead to enriching certain practices.

For instance, as seen in §4.1, interviews aiming to capture practitioners' practical experience lead practitioners to perform mental operations, namely building representations of their practices and reflect on them, which, according to them, is fairly unusual for them. Sometimes the practitioners even arrive at the interview with prepared notes on what they think important to tell us about their work: the various evolutions they had gone through – in the case of “the research project”, some brokers have been working on financial markets for many years; the difficulties they encountered to adapt to stock markets' evolutions and to the new tasks assigned to them; their current practices, what is nice in their activities, what is problematic, etc.

In addition to the epistemic work performed for and during interviewing, finding out later how their views have been integrated in the local and generic knowledge offers practitioners further opportunities to reflect on their corresponding practices and enhance their knowledge. This may even lead some of them to modify – enrich – their practices.

Besides, the main goal of generic knowledge communication in professional meetings is to contribute to enriching the audience's knowledge and – hopefully – their practices. Sometimes post-conference interchanges suggest that some of the knowledge presented has indeed attracted the attention of certain participants. However, it is not possible to know to which extent, and how, these notions will actually contribute to enrich these people's practices. The only way to find out is to visit them thereafter in their organization to study if

their practices have indeed been modified. This takes us to the last process, whose aim is precisely to foster the enrichment of certain practices via knowledge activation.

4.3 The Importance of Interactions among Researchers within the Research Team

After highlighting the potential mutual enrichment stemming from interactions between researchers and practitioners, the importance of interactions among researchers has to be underscored, particularly in this framework.

With Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) and Tenkasi et al. (2007), we consider that collaborative research projects benefit from being carried out by a research team rather than by a sole researcher. Interactions with other researchers play a crucial role, not only to distribute the research workload among several persons but, during fieldwork, they also enable researchers to address more facets of the issue under consideration and in deeper ways, particularly through jointly interviewing practitioners. During epistemic work, interactions also help overcoming certain limits of individual introspection in the surfacing of some the underlying assumptions of research, just as interactions between researchers and practitioners help articulating practitioners' experience and tacit knowledge. In addition, by enabling the crossing and confronting of several interpretations and theoretical entry points, they foster the development of richer pictures of the practices studied.

Sometimes, for diverse reasons such as a doctoral research – which is an individual endeavor – or the reluctance of certain managers to have several researchers wandering around asking questions to their staff, which could be disturbing for them, a researcher may find him/herself as a lone fieldworker. In this case, it is crucial that he/she do interactive epistemic work with fellow researchers from his/her research center or in other settings like research networks.

Like generic knowledge developed in the RCEP, this methodological framework is to be considered as providing heuristic guidelines for a certain kind of research practice. These guidelines are intended to foster reflection, offer insights on how researchers may proceed, and/or stimulate researchers' creative action by showing them plausible ways to achieve their aim of developing knowledge recognized as academically valuable, by attempting to capture practitioners' experience.

Concluding Thoughts

The conceptualization of the methodological framework presented in this paper originated from the aim to offer guidelines for researchers eager to develop knowledge capturing practitioners' experience and practical knowledge. Attempting to capture practitioners' experience requires that researchers and practitioners engage in deep interactions, meaning that researchers accept to change their views on the research question and even on the research design during the unfolding of the research project. Because of that, legitimization of knowledge elaborated in such interactive approaches appears problematic in (post)-positivist epistemologies while it is not problematic in constructivist theories of knowledge—provided that the conditions of ethical behavior, rigor and transparency discussed in §2.2.1 are fulfilled throughout the research project. This capability of legitimating knowledge elaborated in interactive research comes mainly from the constructivist epistemologies' founding assumption recalled in Table 1, which postulates the unfeasibility of separating the inquirer from the inquired into. This assumption leads to various interactionist assumptions shared by constructivist researchers (Mir and Watson 2000).

In constructivist paradigms generalization is a crucial issue, which concurs with the epistemological challenge of relating and comparing findings from different studies in the S-as-P perspective. This paper also offered a way for overcoming this difficulty. Indeed, the notion of generic knowledge was argued to constitute a legitimate way of conceiving of generalization in constructivist epistemological paradigms. It also appears relevant for conceiving generalization in the S-as-P perspective.

Last but not least, research projects carried out along the lines of this framework can give rise to mutually cross-fertilizing process between research and practice, capable of increasing the elaborated knowledge relevance's for both academia and practice. This makes this epistemologically-founded methodological framework capable of being particularly valuable for doing research within the S-as-P perspective.

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Table 1: Core Founding Assumptions of the Two Main Constructivist Epistemological Paradigms

Levels of questioning	Radical Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm (Glaserfeld 2001; Le Moigne 1995, 2008 ; Riegler 2001)	Constructivist Epistemological Paradigm according to Guba and Lincoln (1989, 1998)
<p>Ontological</p> <p><i>What is there that can be known?</i></p> <p><i>What is the nature of reality?</i></p>	<p><i>Phenomenological assumption:</i> Humans cannot know such a thing as an independent, objective world that stands apart from their experience of it. The existence of an objective world populated by mind-independent entities is neither denied nor asserted.</p> <p>Because of the phenomenological assumption, no founding assumption on the nature of reality is made.</p>	<p><i>Relativist ontology assumption:</i> There exist multiple socially constructed realities not governed by any natural laws, causal or otherwise.</p>
<p>Epistemological</p> <p><i>What is the relationship of the knower to the known (or the knowable)?</i></p> <p><i>How can we be sure that we know what we know?</i></p>	<p>The inquirer cannot be separated from the inquired-into.</p> <p>The elaboration of knowledge is portrayed as a process of intentional elaboration of symbolic constructions, called representations, based on experience.</p> <p>The notion of “truth” is meaningless because of the unfeasibility of determining if representations are similar, or not similar, to the world that has induced the experience.</p> <p>To know is not to possess true representations of reality, but to possess ways and means of acting and thinking that allow one to attain the goals one happens to have chosen.</p> <p>The role of knowledge construction shifts from constructing (supposedly) <i>true</i> representations to <i>functionally fitted</i> representations.</p> <p>The knowledge elaborated is context and goal-dependant. It may induce modifications in the prior knowledge that served to build it.</p>	<p>The inquirer cannot be separated from the inquired-into.</p> <p>“Truth” is defined as the best informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is consensus.</p> <p>Theory is viewed as an act of generation, rather than the formalization of an underlying reality.</p>
<p>Methodological</p> <p><i>What are the ways of elaborating knowledge?</i></p>	<p>Any method, including hermeneutical dialectical methods, is eligible.</p> <p>Criteria: ethics, rigor and transparency</p> <p>Replication is not relevant.</p>	<p>Only hermeneutical dialectical methods of inquiry are eligible.</p> <p>Criteria: rigor, transparency and contestability.</p> <p>Replication is not central</p>

Figure 1 - Methodological Framework for Developing Generic Knowledge Capturing Practitioners' Knowledge

