

**Micro-foundations of Strategic Learning:
Strategizing as Practising**

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Abstract

As strategy research has been exploring the dynamic, social and situated nature of the strategy process, so has the role of learning increasingly been recognised as a central feature of strategizing practice. This paper contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of strategizing practice by focusing on the strategic role of learning to integrate the multiple micro and macro forces affecting strategizing practice. In particular the analysis draws attention to the performative nature of practices which underpins their fluid and temporal character. By introducing the notion of *practising*, to capture this characteristic the focus is less on the reproduction and institutionalisation of practices and more on their multiple forms of representation as these are performed in action and interaction with others in the social context. The analysis of practising strategizing leads to a new conceptualisation of strategic learning as a context of strategizing *practise* and also positions strategic learning as a strategizing practice itself. It is argued that strategic learning is integral to strategizing practice due to its capacity to connect.

Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed a turn in strategy research towards a greater emphasis on the processual nature of the phenomenon (Pettigrew, 1992; Langley, 1999; Khanna et al. 2000). The concern with capturing the dynamic nature of strategy formulation and implementation has prompted a greater attention towards the micro-foundations of strategizing with a particular focus on the social and situated nature of the phenomenon (Chakravarthy & Doz, 1992; Hendry, 2000; Levy et al., 2003). This is best reflected in the upsurge of 'strategy-as-practice' as a new perspective for thinking about and researching strategic issues. This new perspective focuses on micro-processes such as strategic activities, episodes and other forms of strategic routines (Johnson et al. 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2004). A practice focus is also consistent with (and extends) recent contributions which have stressed that routines (intended as repeated application of a specific practice) can be a source of change and adaptation (Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Pentland, 2003). All these developments have also significantly affected the language we use to describe the strategy process and it is now more common to refer to 'strategizing' (Whittington, 2003a) as a way of illustrating the dynamic nature of the process and practice of performing strategy.

These trends can also be seen in the context of a wider effort in strategy research to pay more attention to the subtle and often invisible resources that can account for the competitive advantage of organisations (Barney, 1991). Among such resources, knowledge and learning are emerging as key contributors to competitive advantage and those promoting a 'knowledge-based view' of the firm (Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1992) have drawn attention to the role of learning and knowledge in capability development and absorptive capacity (Zollo & Winter, 2002; Zahra & George, 2002). Several contributions (Burgelman, 1988; Szulanski and Amin, 2001) have already recognised the role of learning as a central feature of the strategy process and have posed critical questions about the ways in which managers become strategists and learn to strategise (Liedtke, 1998; Whittington, 2001).

It is in the context of these debates in strategy research that the idea of strategic learning (Sanchez & Heene, 1997; Kuwada, 1998; Pietersen, 2003) is also beginning to receive attention. Current perspectives on strategic learning focus mainly on the process of strategic capability acquisition and modification as a means of designing effective organizational strategic behaviours. Moreover, definitions of strategic learning tend to adopt a limited view of learning

embracing predominantly a cognitivistic perspective thus, neglecting recent developments in Organizational Learning research which seek to more fully engage with the social complexity of learning (see Antonacopoulou, 2005a; Elkjaer, 2004).

There is therefore, a need to enhance our understanding of the nature of strategic learning both in the context of its strategic role in supporting organisational renewal and competitiveness, as well as, in relation to other micro-processes which define learning as a practice within organisations. This paper responds directly to this need and examines the relationship between learning and strategizing practice.

The analysis in this paper, will argue that strategic learning can be conceptualised as a *strategizing practise* where tensions between strategic and operational issues across different levels and perspectives in the organization are exposed such that they can be re-connected in ways that their interdependencies can be strengthened. For the purposes of this analysis strategic learning is defined as a cause, consequence and context of strategizing practice because *practising* is one of the central elements.

A trivial but important distinction between *practice* and *practise* is made here. Whilst *practice* and *practicing* refer to the institutionalization of activities and routines, *practise* and *practising* focus on the holistic and emergent nature of practice (Antonacopoulou, 2005a).

This new conceptualisation of strategic learning highlights that the focus of attention is neither only the practice (as a set of action rules) nor only the routine of learning as a deliberate, conscious and systematic process. Learning is also, a dynamic flow as part of the ongoing socio-political connections embedded in practising attempts as part of the various processes, practices and routines that constitute strategizing. This perspective provides better scope for more fully capturing the strategic role of learning in strategizing practice.

The paper organises the ideas on these issues in three main sections. Firstly, we begin with an overview of the relationship between learning and strategizing from a practice perspective. The second section elaborates on the idea of strategizing as practising and explores in particular the generative dance between strategic routines and operational practices. This perspective provides better scope for combining multiple units and levels of analysis (from macro to micro) in exploring the interconnectivity of endogenous and exogenous forces affecting strategizing

practice. The final section of the paper examines strategic learning as a source of connection between the micro and macro aspects of strategizing practice. The analysis builds on the conceptualisation of strategic learning as a context of strategizing practice and also positions strategic learning as a strategizing practice itself. The paper concludes with some suggestions for future research in strategic learning and research concerned with the micro foundations of organising more generally.

The relationship between strategizing and learning: A practice perspective

The strategic management and organisational learning literatures seem to be developing in parallel a practice based view of strategizing and learning yet, the two communities do not seem to interact sufficiently so that they can inform each other's research. This focus on practice parallels what Schatzki et al (2001) discuss as the practice turn in contemporary theory, a point which has been supported much earlier by De Certeau (1984), Bourdieu (1990) and Turner (1994).

In the strategy literature, the resulting vibrant practice-based thinking (Henry, 2000; Johnson et al. 2003; Whittington, 2003) places the emphasis on the micro dynamics embedded in human action and interaction. Therefore, attention is given to activities of all kinds in the pursuit of what strategists actually do.

An equally vibrant debate is taking place in the organizational learning field (Wenger, 1998; Brown and Duguid, 2000; Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini et al. 2003) where learning as practice embraces not only actions and activities in relation to learning, but also the role of language and other cultural and material artefacts, the nature of social interactions and not least the tacit, situated and almost instinctive responses of actors in the socially networked worlds in which they live. This perspective also emphasises the importance of communities of practitioners as the space where the social dynamics of learning are negotiated, thus reinforcing principles of interconnectedness and interdependence between agency and structure, a point which is central both in structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and in actor network theory (Law, 1999).

Efforts to integrate these streams of research and to provide a more holistic understanding of the nature of practice have resulted in new conceptualisations of practice, which emphasise the fractal and holistic nature of the phenomenon as a continuous flow of multiple adjoining and interlocking practices that form the heart of their evolution (Antonacopoulou, 2005a,

Antonacopoulou et al. 2005). This view of practice, focuses on the ongoing emergence and co-evolution of practice as different aspects of practice interact. The existing literature, provides a number of different aspects of practice by virtue of how practice is defined. Some of the most common interpretations of practice are: practice as *action* (Bourdieu, 1980); practice as *structure* – language, symbols, tools (Turner, 1994); practice as *activity system* (Engeström et al. 1999); practice as *social context* (Lave & Wenger, 1991); practice as *knowing* (Nicolini et al., 2003).

These multiple interpretations of practice reveal the co-existence of a plurality of interlocking practices which co-evolve in dynamic interaction with one another. Therefore, the everyday execution of practice becomes the context of tensions amongst different practices and the groups that embody them. This tension is no better evident than the dualisms that we often create to distinguish strategic intent from operational reality when in essence both co-exist as part of a continuum of ongoing strategizing attempts. However, tensions capture both the socio-political forces as well as, the ‘elasticity’ and fluidity of organizing, as different processes and practices connect to provide new possibilities (Antonacopoulou, 2005a). This view opens the possibility that practices behave fractally and the tensions between them provide the basis of *extension* of a practice.

Therefore, if we understand practice as a self-organising process connecting multiple routines and practices, then the definitions of practice need to become more elastic as well. This also suggests that our focus needs to shift from institutional representations of practices as the end result of a practice, to the flow that underpins the way practices unfold and are constantly re-configured. This is what Antonacopoulou (2005:9) describes as *practising*. By focusing on the emergence of practice – practise – it is possible to map the social network of connections in the way practices are orchestrated, through practising attempts.

Therefore, practice conceptualized as a dynamic social process that emerges over time and across space entails at its core practising attempts, which seek to accommodate endogenous and exogenous forces, brought about by ecological, economic, social and political dynamics. This dynamic view of practice is useful in re-conceptualising ‘strategy-as-practice’ (Jarzabkowski, 2004) and ‘learning-as-practice’ (Nicolini et al., 2003) and exploring the relationship between learning and strategizing as a continuous flow of *practising*. Placed in the context of the current view of strategizing, greater attention to the practising attempts of strategic routines in relation to operational practices provides scope for understanding the role of learning,

given the upsurge of dynamic capability development which assumes that learning can be deliberate. This is discussed further in the next section.

Strategizing as practising

A hot topic in current strategic management debates is the issue of capability development. The emphasis on capability results from recent developments in theorizing how organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage over the medium to long term. In particular, the dynamic capability (Teece et al. 1997) and strategic learning (Kuwada, 1998) approaches, both drawing sustenance from the resource-based view of the firm, present the impression that organizational success is intimately linked to the capabilities developed and deployed.

The dynamic capabilities concept is developed on the assumption that “competences can provide competitive advantage and generate rents only if they are based on a collection of routines, skills, and complementary assets that are difficult to imitate” (Teece et al, 1997: 524), and are hence, distinctive. Recent developments (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Zollo & Winter, 2002) suggest that although idiosyncratic to a firm, dynamic capabilities may exhibit commonalities across firms, allowing ‘best practice’ recommendations to be developed and dynamic capability to be learned. This argument has subsequently been developed by Zollo and Winter (2002) through the notion of deliberate learning where organizations strategically decide to intervene in operational routines and associated capability development. To demonstrate their argument Zollo and Winter present experience accumulation, knowledge articulation and knowledge codification as key learning mechanisms. These three mechanisms are described as having direct effects on the evolution of operating routines and an indirect effect via the creation of dynamic capabilities. How these mechanisms are operationalized, is not discussed by Zollo and Winter.

Reflecting on the current attempts to capture learning processes that can support strategic action both dynamic capabilities and strategic learning view capability development through a functionalist lens where both capability and competence are assumed to be easily achieved (Alvesson, 2004). Through such functionalist positioning it could be argued that organizations are presented as attempting to secure/impose a hegemonic bloc, a historically specific alignment of economic, political and ideological forces that coordinates major social groups into a dominant alliance (Levy et al 2003: 101). Following Levy et al. (2003) it could be argued that attempts to secure a relatively stable hegemonic bloc may require material payoffs, political compromises,

and the projection of moral and intellectual leadership. However, this line of inquiry is conspicuous by its absence.

This analysis highlights one of the most important limitations of our conceptualisation of macro-level perspectives. We tend to refer to macro-level predominantly with a focus on path dependency and rent appropriation (Blyler and Coff, 2003). In doing so we limit the possibilities for enhancing absorptive capacity through learning from both exogenous and endogenous sources through existing internal processes of sharing information as well as the existing capability and experience (Van den Bosch et al, 2003). Zahra and George (2002) recognise exogenous and endogenous learning as antecedents to absorptive capacity. Whilst they do recognise the temporal aspects of capability development and point to the need for research which examines the role of managers in the development of absorptive capacity and the potential of the organisation to absorb learning from internal and external sources, they do not fully account for the socio-political dynamics of knowledge. Easterby-Smith et al. (2005) based on recent empirical evidence in three organisations show that politics influence the ability of a firm to learn from external sources which also depends on the extent to which the new knowledge is seen as complementary to the existing knowledge of the firm. Similarly, internal learning takes place through experience over time where the ability to absorb new ideas depends on memory of the successes and failures of past experiments and innovations.

Consequently this paper argues that our current conceptualisations of both dynamic capability and strategic learning pay scant regard to the situatedness of learning to develop capability. Situatedness does not only sensitise us to the particularities of context that shape praxis, practitioners and their practices (Wenger, 1998; Brown & Duguid, 2000). It also highlights that socio-political forces are central to participative learning (Coopey, 1995; Antonacopoulou, 2001). Equally situated is the practice of strategizing. The interaction between strategic intent and the actual operationalization of strategy is a key feature of the *dynamic* underpinning capability development. In performing a practice or in developing capability we cannot casually assume that all participants in a practice will share the same objectives, nor can we assume that they have the same level of knowledge and expertise. Equally we cannot assume that they will have the same level of position nor by implication power to own the practice and its transformation. This however, does not mean that they will also lack the power to learn.

As Antonacopoulou (1998; 2000; 2005b) showed through longitudinal studies of managerial learning practices in the banking sector in the UK, managers performing their learning practices frequently adopt an institutional identity in learning, presenting themselves powerless (helpless) when their very attitudes to learning determine what they learn and if they learn what they say they learnt. The political nature of learning therefore, lies in the power of learning to commit one to responsible action by working towards overcoming defensive routines rather than treating them as undiscussable (Argyris, 2004). This point also reflects the power of learning to steer a whole host of emotions and to participate in practices through different degrees of engagement.

Practices therefore, manifest as much actions and activities as they also illustrate behaviours, states of emotion and desire to act based on one's knowing. All these issues form part of the experience and know-how one brings as resources in the process of performing one's practice on an ongoing basis. Thus, knowledge and learning are critical to practice as they create the capacity to connect previous and current experiences in perfecting one's practice. By tapping into both micro activities and the wider context on a macro level in which such activities are performed we can better appreciate the flow that is so central to organizing attempts, such as strategizing practice.

This brings us to the long debated relationship between 'practice' and 'field' that has been at the core of Bordieu's work on practice. In a recent review Warde (2004: 13) provides an interesting account of the orientation and distinction between 'practice' and 'field'. He points specifically that fields by their nature are competitive, strategic and oriented toward external goods. The characteristics of practices on the other hand, are their pluralism, co-operative nature and orientation toward internal goods. In a similar tone, Reckwitz (2002: 249) distinguishes practice from practices ('praktik') where practices refer to praxis – the whole of human action, while practices are routine behaviours which consist of several interconnected elements including bodily and mental activities, artefacts, background knowledge, states of emotion and know-how. Schatski (1996: 89-98) offers yet another distinction between 'dispersed practices' and 'integrative practices'. The former focus on general aspects of social life that require understanding, while the latter focus on more complex practices constitutive of particular domains of social life. More recently, Whittington (2001; 2003b) drawing on Turner (1994: 8) provides further distinctions between praxis, practice, practices and practitioners. Practice refers to activities in relation to the goal seeking drives of the actors who engage in such activities,

whereas practices are the norms governing behaviour and social conduct. Finally, praxis refers to actual events while a practitioner is the performer of a practice.

All these distinctions seek to position practice both on a micro and macro level. In other words, practice operates both in relation to endogenous (what McIntyre 1985:195 calls 'internal goods') and exogenous forces (what may be described as external goods). These forces are in positive tension, because they provide different dimensions that feed a practice in the way it is represented when performed. This would suggest that the same practice has always the potential to be both performed and represented in diverse ways depending on the way different internal and external goods of a practice are connected. Extending the fractal view of practice discussed earlier, different internal and external goods of a practice operate as actants which may be attracted to different actants thus, creating multiple possibilities in the way a practice emerges. These ideas draw from a complexity science perspective which has hitherto proven useful in engaging with the co-existence of seemingly oppositional forces such as order and chaos (see Stacey, 1995; Antonacopoulou & Chiva, 2005).

In the context of our analysis such a perspective provides us an avenue for exploring the diversity of practice in relation to the multiple and competing forces that it entails. At the same time this perspective could help us to explore the interconnectivity of practices by focusing on the elasticity they create when they interlock thus, stretching a practice to different dimensions through the possibilities such interlockings create. Therefore, when we seek to understand the micro and macro aspects of a practice we need to be mindful of the dynamics that the connections between them create that both define the practice and the way it is engaged with in action and interaction with others.

An example illustrating these ideas would be the experience of an opera singer performing an aria. What one finds is that the same aria is performed differently, by the same opera singer at different times subject to the way the very practice of singing is refined. Performing a practice however, is not only a matter of competence and the practising entailed in perfecting one's art. It is also a matter of the moment in which the practice is represented. Practising one's practice, as already pointed out in the earlier section, is central to refining the intricate qualities of a practice. However, despite the dictum 'practice makes perfect', it is also important to acknowledge that practice is always subject to imperfections at the critical moment of its representation in action. This alerts us to the fact that no performance of a practice is ever guaranteed to lead to the

desired outcome. There are always a whole host of forces that have a bearing on the way a practice is embodied and enacted.

For example an opera singer may be practising her vocal techniques and may be in full command of the intricacies of the specific piece of music she will be delivering during her performance. In delivering an aria she would be both using her knowledge and skills as much as she would be relying on her internal goods – mentally, emotionally, physically - in providing this particular aria her own special touch. She may have other things on her mind, she may have a bad throat, she may be tired or be in a bad mood. All these factors could influence the outcome of her delivery. The success of the performance would also be largely affected by her interaction with the audience. As is commonly known, the success of a performance is in the applause! The external goods of her practice are not only the audience but also the conductor and the orchestra who are in constant co-ordination with her, her colleagues on or off stage, the journalists and music critics that will be assessing and reporting on her performance drawing on their own experience and views of the performance and the established standards and rules that would distinguish a good from a bad performance.

This example seeks to demonstrate that the internal goods of a practice such as emotions would be in constant interaction with external goods like the mood of the audience in defining how a practice is delivered and received. This places the performer and the audience in a mutual context of co-creation.

Therefore, the tensions between micro and macro forces in practices are critical in the way a practice is formed and the way it unfolds over time and across multiple contexts. These tensions therefore, can extend the elasticity of a practice to bend, adapt and at the same time be transformed in the way endogenous and exogenous dynamics interact to define and redefine the practice. In other words, tensions become the basis for *ex-tensions* of current reality. These ongoing permutations of practice remind us that no practice is ever the same. The same performer can perform the same practice very differently at different times and across space. Moreover, different performers in the same context can perform the same practice very differently. These variations in practice and their delivery may be explained by the learning dynamics embedded in practice. Learning is not only an activity; it is also a flow, a flexible, ever-changing structure that connects actors, systems and artefacts together. This view of learning in

relation to practise could prove useful in helping us appreciate further the heterogeneity of practice when enacted.

Practising attempts are not only reflective of the fluidity of a practice as we discussed in the previous section. They may also account for the flow of learning that underpins practising attempts. Therefore, if we are to fully tap into the emerging, fluid nature of practices we need to focus on the way practices are practised.

Placed in the context of strategizing practice we need to find ways of examining the interactions between strategic intent and operational routines to identify the process of strategy reformulation in the process of strategy implementation. As Whittington (2001) points out with reference to his notion of 'learning to strategize', from a practice perspective, provides greater scope for asserting the interdependence of the micro and macro level strategizing. Whilst micro-strategizing on the one hand, points to activities of actions within organizations, macro-strategizing on the other hand, points to wider practices and strategies. Connecting micro and macro levels would aim to embrace social space and its transformations in its full complexity. This point suggests that instead of punctuating strategy into phases to more fully engage with the complexity of strategizing we need to be mindful not only of strategizing practice but the practising of strategizing.

This very process of trying things out could help us encounter more closely the social and political tensions when competing forces may stand in the way of translating intent into reality. At the same time such a analysis would also help us come closer to the multiplicity of alternatives that form part of strategizing as it is enacted. Alternative courses of action are explored in community and the practising attempts by actors performing such a practice derive meaning in the course of action and interaction. This point has also the potential to better place strategy as an integral part of working life, therefore, strategizing can be afforded as a practice that is performed in multiple contexts and by multiple players, not only top managers.

With that view in mind, we can focus more on the practising of strategizing which would enable us to tap into the ways in which actors learn to perform strategizing as a process and a practice. By focusing on the learning practices of strategic actors we can also come closer to the way connections are made between micro and macro aspects of strategizing practice. This too would

be a critical foundation for better capturing the nature of strategic learning and the strategic role learning can play in organisations. This point is discussed in the final section of the paper.

Strategic Learning as connecting

In the previous section we focused on the strategic role of learning in its capacity to support capability development not as a deliberate process but as an integral aspect of the way a practice is performed. By facilitating the learning across levels and perspectives, through practising attempts, the strategic role of learning becomes critical in providing the seamless flow of action that practices tend to reflect. By revealing the underlying tensions within and across practices, in its strategic role learning explores the interdependencies of interlocking practices and can create new possibilities by motivating new connections. In the context of strategizing practice the strategic role of learning is reflective in its ability to connect resources such that multiple alternatives can be explored in the course of strategizing attempts.

Acknowledging the strategic role of learning we also appreciate the fluid nature of learning, which is central to the social complexity that it reflects and in which it is embedded. Dominant views in learning theory however, tend to neglect this important aspect and instead present learning as an acquisitional process based on the accumulation of experience, knowledge and skills over time. A large body of the current literature both in Organisational Learning and Workplace Learning discuss learning with reference to the *experiential* issues (Kolb, 1984; Argote, 1999), the *behavioural* aspects (Cyert and March, 1963), the *cognitive* issues (Duncan and Weiss, 1979), the *socio-cultural* dimensions (Cook and Yanow, 1993), the *reflective and emotional dimensions* (Schon, 1983; Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001) and more recently the *practice-based* view (Nicolini et al., 2003).

However, even studies, which claim to take a processual approach to the study of learning within organisations they have not examined the nature of learning as a flow. The social complexity of learning is only now beginning to be engaged with and some of the early insights that are emerging from such analyses (see Fenwick, 2003; Antonacopoulou & Chiva, 2005; Antonacopoulou, 2005a, 2005b) are starting to highlight some of the neglected dimensions of learning in the context of work organisations.

Among the neglected aspects Antonacopoulou (2005a: 5-7) identifies four dimensions that to-date have not been fully discussed: "Inter-connectivity, diversity, self-organisation/emergence

and politics". Whilst inter-connectivity highlights the relational nature of learning, diversity embraces heterogeneity and possibility, whilst self-organization highlights the inherent nature of social systems to renew themselves. Finally, the political dynamics of learning highlight the inequalities of power and control and the power of learning to make a difference through responsible action. A common theme that runs through these additional dimensions of learning is *surprise*. In other words, contrary to the view of learning as intentional and deliberate, these dimensions of learning leave room for the unexpected. This lies at the core of appreciating that learning is not only a practice but it is also a practise, a flow, a multiplicity, a space (Antonacopoulou, 2002).

Therefore, the strategic role of learning creates connections and possibilities in practise. Connections between practices form the core of *learning-in-practise* (Antonacopoulou, 2005a: 8-9), the co-evolution of practice and the unfolding learning through the repeated enactments which configure multiple arenas for negotiation of order. The on-going experimentation and exploitation of multiple possibilities as part of the strategic role of learning, also positions learning as a strategizing practise.

From this perspective strategic learning can be conceptualised as a strategizing practise where local learning practices are reflexively engaged with, maximizing their capacity to provide internal goods in the form of new capabilities. At the same time in these strategizing attempts the approach of strategic learning practice is exposed to a wider set of principles more globally as part of the field of action and variety of interactions across communities of practitioners.

Strategic learning can therefore, be seen as a *cause for strategizing practice*, as a *consequence of strategizing practise* and itself a *strategizing practice*. Over and above the strategic role of learning in the context of strategizing practice, strategic learning as a strategizing practice provides scope for self-organisation in ways that can renew practice through the connections of internal and external goods. Consequently, strategic learning highlights that the focus of attention is neither only the practice (as a set of action rules) nor only the routine of learning in a deliberate, conscious and systematic process. It is also, a dynamic outcome of the ongoing socio-political connections embedded in practising attempts as part of the various macro and micro processes that constitute strategizing.

Therefore, a greater understanding of this interaction between strategic routines (geared towards a macro perspective in response to external pressures) and operational practices (geared towards a micro perspective in response to internal integration) of strategizing may be afforded by concentrating on the actual strategic learning practices of organizational and extra-organizational groups and individuals.

This approach could provide a more informed understanding of strategic learning practice by focusing on the learning aspects, as well as, the socio-political dynamics that underpin capability development, itself a strategizing practice. Consequently, it is suggested, that the implicit and explicit negotiations among the differing perspectives serve to create an array of balancing acts between strategic intent and operational realities. Fundamentally, balancing acts are reflective of learning practise where the strategizing process of human agents takes shape in the context of social structures which frequently define the boundaries of learning (i.e. knowing – tacitly and explicitly how to respond to competing priorities – see Antonacopoulou, 2001). Strategic learning practices, provide an important lens for understanding the dynamics of the interaction between human intend and social structures as the two reinforce and recreate each other (Latour, 1987).

This analysis is intended to helps us to rethink the strategic nature of learning as a process of connecting and the centrality of learning in strategizing practices. Moreover, the dynamics underpinning the way learning is practised in the context of socio-political relations broadens the scope of understanding strategizing not only as the institutionalisation of strategic practices but also as a reflection of their self-organizing nature. This is best captured by the inherent quality of learning to connect.

Conclusions and implications for future research

In this paper a new conceptualisation of strategic learning is being presented as a source of connecting the micro and macro forces of strategizing practice. Strategic learning as an emerging theme in the strategic management debates according to this analysis holds a vital role in helping us understand and engage with the intricacies of fluid organisational practices like strategizing practice. Strategic learning not only reveals more powerfully the strategic role of learning as a key organizational resource for competitiveness. It also reveals the relational nature of learning in the way it exposes socio-political tensions and employs these tensions as a foundation for extending the scope of core business practices like strategizing. The strategic role of learning to connect the strategic intentions and the operational practices does not only provide

new avenues for rethinking strategic reformulation as part of strategy implementation in an ongoing continuum of strategizing. It also broadens strategizing practice beyond the realm of path dependency and a prerogative of top managers into a practice performed in diverse ways by heterogeneous actors across multiple context as an integral part of working life.

The strategic role of learning expands strategizing practice by focusing on the relationships binding multiple actors, multiple practices and multiple performances together in a complex social system that dynamically unfolds in time and across space. Strategizing practice unfolds in a self-organizing process by virtue of practising attempts which are the balancing acts providing continuity in the ongoing stream of discontinuity. Therefore, strategizing as an unfolding practice is in flow when in *practise*. Therefore, central to the flow of strategizing beyond an appreciation of the processual nature of strategy and the need to focus on the micro practice of strategy in the activities and actions of strategic actors, this analysis highlights also the importance of *practising* attempts.

The introduction of practising as distinct from practice (and practicing) is important not only because it clarifies language, but also because it encourages strategy researchers to not only talk about the enactment of strategy but to also engage with its embodiment in the way strategy is performed.

A *practise-centred* perspective articulated in this paper in relation to strategizing and learning, marks a step forward in process research in organisation studies. It reveals the need to challenge our basic epistemological and ontological assumptions in relation to the flow of organizing practices that form organisation. It invites us to look beyond agents and their structures and the way these interact in a working net of activities and actions. It fundamentally invites us to explore the flow of organizing-in-flow. In other words, it introduces us to an epistemology of connectivity and an ontology of embeddedness.

This suggests that in studying organisational processes like strategizing practice, it is not enough that we only focus on micro processes like actions. It is equally critical that we also focus on the micro-foundations of practice in the way internal and external goods of practice co-evolve in practise.

The ongoing permutations of practice in relation to other practices and in relation to the array of internal forces like emotions, behaviours and knowledge, reveal chance and ambiguity as an integral aspect of flow. Flow cannot be controlled, by taking intentional measures (like learning) to define the outcome. For when we seek to control the way practice unfolds, we limit the possibilities for unexpected connections to be made which could re-configure practice. Instead, engaging with practice could provide scope for practise where the strategic role of learning (to connect) is itself acknowledged as a strategizing practice.

These ideas call for greater attention to the way learning as a micro process is understood in relation to strategizing and in the context of work organisations more generally. Instead of treating learning as a commodity to be manipulated at will, learning can be a powerful means of tapping into the social complexity of practices by revealing the intricate connections that form conditions affecting the systemic/fractal nature of practices.

In the context of future strategy research these ideas call for greater attention to avoid dualities between macro and micro perspectives in studying strategizing practices intended to support competitiveness. Competitiveness as we have already acknowledged is not only a matter of identifying a firm's unique resources at a certain point in time and developing capabilities that enhance distinctiveness. Competitiveness, is also about the ongoing reconfiguration of these resources in the way routines and core practices are constantly interconnected placing the firm in competition with itself !.

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