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Strategy-as-practice: A Review and Future Directions for the Field[1]

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Abstract

This review maps and critically evaluates the rapidly growing body of research in the strategy-as-practice field. Following an introduction on the emergence and foundations of strategy-as-practice, the review is structured in three main parts, based on the terminology, issues and research agendas outlined in the field. First, the paper examines the concepts of practitioners and praxis. A typology of nine possible domains for strategy-as-practice research is developed, based on the way that different studies conceptualize the strategy practitioner and the level of strategy praxis that they aim to explain. Second, the paper reviews the concept of practices, which has been adopted widely but inconsistently within the strategy-as-practice literature. While there is no dominant view on practices, the review maps the various concepts of practices that inform the strategy-as-practice field and outlines avenues for future research. The final section attends to the call for strategy-as-practice research to develop and substantiate outcomes that may better explain or inform strategy praxis. Five categories of outcomes are found within existing empirical studies and an agenda for building upon this evidence is advanced. The paper concludes with a summation of the current state of the field and some recommendations on how to take strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) research forward.

Keywords: strategy-as-practice, practices, social practice theory, praxis, strategizing

Strategy-as-practice: A Review and Future Directions for the Field

Strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) as a research topic is concerned with the doing of strategy; who does it, what they do, how they do it, what they use and what implications this has for shaping strategy. The growth of s-as-p into a field of research arises in part from an increasing dissatisfaction with conventional strategy research. While *people* do strategy, strategy theory is populated by multivariate analyses of firm or industry-level effects upon firm performance. There is a curious absence of human actors and their actions in most strategy theories, even those that purport to examine the internal dynamics of the firm, such as the resource-based view (Johnson *et al.* 2003; 2007). Those studies that do incorporate individuals focus primarily on top managers, as if only one elite group could act strategically. Even these findings frequently are reduced to a set of demographics such as age, tenure and functional background, which can be examined for statistical regularities in relation to some aspect of firm performance. There appears to be little room in mainstream strategy research for living beings whose emotions, motivations and actions shape strategy. This marginalization of the actor has been attributed to the dominant micro-economic foundations of mainstream strategy research (Johnson *et al.* 2003). Increasingly, therefore, strategy research has been influenced by wider concerns to humanize management and organization research by bringing the individual back in (Weick 1979; Whittington *et al.* 2002). The developing field of s-as-p research has taken this concern seriously, bringing human actors and their actions and interactions to the centre stage of strategy research.

S-as-p is not the first research agenda to attempt to break through the economics-based dominance over strategy research. Rather, it may be seen as the culmination of broader constructivist shifts in strategic management research (Mir and Watson 2000), to which a practice perspective can contribute. S-as-p has thus been proposed as a means of furthering the study of social complexity and causal ambiguity in the resource-based view, unpacking the dynamism in dynamic capabilities theory (Ambrosini *et al.* 2007; Jarzabkowski 2005; Johnson *et al.* 2003; 2007; Regnér 2008), and explaining the practice that constitutes strategy process (Johnson *et al.* 2003). In particular, there is some debate about the extent to which s-as-p is distinct from traditional strategy process research (Chia and Mackay 2007). While Carter *et al.* (2008) claim that the term practice is used interchangeably for process and Langley (2007a) views s-as-p as a category of process; others suggest that s-as-p differs from traditional process research in its view of agency, its focus on the production and reproduction

of strategic action, rather than seeking to explain strategic change and firm performance, and its perspective on strategy at multiple levels of action and interaction rather than at the level of the firm (Jarzabkowski 2005; 2008; Johnson *et al.* 2003; *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2007). Above all, s-as-p provides insights beyond studying organizational processes and embeds strategizing activities in the wider practices of societies (Whittington 2006b; 2007). Further discussion of how the s-as-p perspective extends other fields of strategy research is beyond the scope of this paper, which reviews the growing body of s-as-p literature, but may be explored through the papers cited here.

The s-as-p field has seen rapid growth. For example, there are now regular s-as-p conference tracks, workshops and symposia at leading European and North American conferences, five special issues, additional papers in many credible refereed journals, and a website of over 2700 members[i]. In addition, there have been three foundation books which have begun establishing a common terminology, research agendas, research methods and a body of empirical work to advance the field (Golsorkhi 2006; Jarzabkowski 2005; Johnson *et al.* 2007). Given this increase in activity and in publications, it is an apposite time critically to review existing literature within the s-as-p field and outline future directions within the field.

S-as-p: Praxis, Practitioners and Practices

From an s-as-p perspective, strategy has been defined '*as a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategizing comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity*' (Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007, 7-8). The s-as-p field has defined its broad research parameters as studying: practitioners (those people who do the work of strategy); practices (the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done); and praxis (the flow of activity in which strategy is accomplished) (Jarzabkowski 2005; *et al.* 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2006a). We adopt these three interrelated concepts, practitioners, practices and praxis as an entrée into the s-as-p literature, seeking to understand how existing studies have used these concepts and also to inform their future development.

This review paper also addresses two issues which have been consistently iterated in the s-as-p agenda; the links between micro and macro phenomena and the importance of developing outcomes. The issue of links between micro and macro has arisen because the s-as-p research

agenda largely has been concerned with studying practitioners, practices and praxis as micro-phenomena. However, as many authors note, this focus on the micro tends to obscure the embedded nature of strategy-making and the way that localised interactions both shape and are shaped by the wider context (Carter *et al.* 2008; Chia 2004; Contu and Willmott 2003). Thus, increasingly, the s-as-p agenda attempts to make connections between the micro phenomena studied in practice-based research and more macro phenomena (e.g. Balogun *et al.* 2007; Denis et al, 2007; Jarzabkowski 2004; 2005; Johnson *et al.* 2003; 2007; Whittington 2003; 2006a). Second, there has been an increasing emphasis on the need for s-as-p research to move beyond rich descriptions of phenomena to substantiating outcomes from s-as-p research. Strategic management research is concerned with performance outcomes. While the s-as-p field need not emulate this approach, if it is to speak to more traditional strategic management research and also to inform practice, it needs to establish what outcomes are applicable to s-as-p research (Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2007).

As this literature review is intended to cover the s-as-p field[ii], we included only published or in press papers and book chapters[iii], both theoretical and empirical, which explicitly identified themselves with the s-as-p perspective, including through their citation of one or more of five studies (Hendry 2000; Johnson *et al.* 2003; Jarzabkowski 2004; Whittington 1996; 2003), which have been identified as foundations within the field at this stage in its development because they establish research agendas and theoretical orientations (see Carter *et al.* 2008; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2006a)[iv]. This does not mean that other published works are not complementary to the s-as-p agenda but rather reflects the parameters of our review. Where appropriate, we also point to other studies that illuminate specific strategy praxis phenomena or might inform the s-as-p agenda. By selecting only for published or in press work, we also had to neglect studies and papers-in-progress which have been designed to address some of the gaps in the field we will note in this review. As these studies are published they will contribute to the development of the field.

The paper is in three parts. First, we examine the concepts of practitioners and praxis, developing a typology based on the way that different studies conceptualize the strategy practitioner and the level of strategy praxis that they aim to explain. This typology provides an overview of the diverse field and also highlights those areas in which there is still little research. The second section reviews the concept of practices, which has been adopted widely

within the s-as-p literature. The paper maps the diverse ways that practices have been conceptualized in different studies as a means of guiding future work within the field. Third, the paper addresses the challenge for s-as-p research to develop a stronger focus on outcomes. Five types of outcomes are found within the current literature – personal, group, strategizing process, organizational and institutional outcomes. The paper concludes with a summation of the current state of the field and some recommendations for taking s-as-p research further.

Practitioners and Praxis

This section explains how existing papers conceptualize or empirically study the relationship between practitioners and strategy praxis. S-as-p research examines strategy as something that *people* do, indicating an important focus on strategy practitioners. However, the literature indicates very broad definitions of who might be considered a strategy practitioner;

> *Strategy's practitioners are defined widely, to include both those directly involved in making strategy – most prominently managers and consultants - and those with indirect influence – the policy-makers, the media, the gurus and the business schools who shape legitimate praxis and practices.* (Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008: 101-102).

Furthermore, empirical studies indicated that strategy practitioner might refer not only to individual practitioners but also to groups of practitioners, indicating the need for a meaningful categorization of the different types of practitioners in order to map the field. We examined empirical and theoretical papers looking for a way to classify their approach to practitioners. Within existing papers we found two main ontological dimensions for identifying practitioners, in terms of what unit of analysis the authors regard as a strategy practitioner and the location of that strategy practitioner in relation to organizational boundaries; i) whether the practitioner is an individual or an aggregate actor, and ii) whether the practitioner is inside the organization or outside the organization. First, studies distinguish between individual and aggregate actors. Some identify strategy practitioners as individuals, examining data for what an individual did and attributing specific activities to that individual; that is, studying John the CEO or Sally the Finance Director, as an individual actor, who might act as an individual in interaction with other actors. Other studies identify practitioners as an aggregate actor, a class of actor, such as 'top management', 'middle management', 'engineering' and so forth. These studies examine data, even where it is collected from individuals, to explain what an aggregate actor, such as engineers did, and attributing specific

activities to an aggregate actor, such as top managers. Thus ontological identification of whether an individual or an aggregate actor constitutes the strategy practitioner, has associated epistemological considerations about how those practitioners might be studied and methodological implications for collecting and working with data (see Balogun *et al.* 2003); does data represent the activity of an aggregate actor or an individual actor.

Second, studies indicated ontological considerations about strategy practitioners in relation to organizational boundaries. A practitioner could be internal, meaning having an allocated hierarchy, line or staff role within the organization's structural and governance arrangements, such as MD, middle manager, CEO or project manager. Alternately, a practitioner could be external, meaning categories of actor that might influence the strategy of a focal organization but did not have an allocated hierarchy, line or staff role within that organization's structural and governance arrangements. External actors include consultants, gurus and institutional actors, such as chamber of industry and commerce, regulators, trade unions, media or other interest groups (such as environmentalists) (see Whittington *et al.* 2003; 2006a). While such actors are also inside their own organizations, the literature conceptualizes them as actors outside a focal organization, whose actions and interactions have an impact upon that organization's strategy. Hence, they are seen as strategy practitioners, albeit external ones. Even consultants, while they might be hired to undertake a task within an organization, are conceptualized in the s-as-p literature as external actors, who come from outside the organizational boundary (see, for example, Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007; Whittington *et al.* 2003). The s-as-p literature thus makes a distinction between internal and external actors. Furthermore, external actors were always conceptualized as an aggregate actor; analysts, regulators, consultants, rather than Emma, the analyst, or Sam the consultant, whose specific analyst/consultant activities may be attributed to her/him and her/his role in an organization's strategy. This may be an evolutionary stage in the field's development, which typically identifies external actors in positioning papers as a relevant class of strategy practitioners that have been under-researched (see for example Palmer and O'Kane 2005; Whittington *et al.* 2003). As this paper reviews the existing literature, we use the categories in that literature; internal individuals; internal aggregate practitioners; and external aggregate actors[v].

Praxis refers to the stream of activity in which strategy is accomplished over time. As there are different nuances in the way that the term praxis is used, our explanation of praxis is located in within a recent editorial paper by Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2007). Drawing upon

Reckwitz (2002) and Sztompka (1991), the authors define praxis as a stream of activity that interconnects the micro actions of individuals and groups with the wider institutions in which those actions are located and to which they contribute. They propose that this definition is helpful in linking the macro and the micro in s-as-p research because; '*it indicates that praxis is both an embedded concept that may be operationalized at different levels from the institutional to the micro, and also dynamic, shifting fluidly through the interactions between levels*' (ibid: 9). This definition is underpinned by Sztompka's (1991) proposition that '*Praxis is where operation and action meet, a dialectic synthesis of what is going on in a society and what people are doing*' (*ibid*: 96), indicating that praxis may occur on more than one level. In this explanation, 'levels' of praxis interconnect, although one might be more to the foreground and one to the background in any given analysis; examining what people are doing foregrounds micro-level praxis, whereas focusing upon what is going on in society foregrounds macro-level praxis. Drawing upon this definition, we distinguished three levels within the literature. Micro refers to those studies that explore and attempt to explain strategy praxis at levels of the individual or group's experience of a specific episode, such as a decision, meeting or workshop. That is, studies which seek to explain some specific phenomena which are relatively proximal to the actors constructing it and hence might be considered part of their micro interactions (e.g. Samra-Fredericks 2003). Meso refers to studies that explore and attempt to explain strategy praxis at the organizational or sub-organizational level, such as a change program, or a strategy process, or a pattern of strategic actions (e.g. Balogun and Johnson 2005). Macro refers to studies that explore and attempt to explain strategy praxis at the institutional level, which is most typically associated with explaining patterns of action within a specific industry (e.g. Lounsbury and Crumley 2007).

As we classified the literature around these two dimensions – practitioners and praxis – we developed a typology of nine domains of s-as-p research, based on the three types of practitioner; internal individual and aggregate practitioners and external aggregate practitioners; and the three levels of praxis; micro, meso and macro. Each of these domains represents a possible area of s-as-p research, some of which have been more heavily populated with empirical research, while others have primarily been framed theoretically but have not, as yet, been the subject of empirical research. This typology, Figure 1, is thus a useful organizing device for understanding those areas of study in which the field is better developed and where gaps remain, particularly in empirical work. These nine domains are now explained, providing examples of the types of research topics and phenomena studied by

drawing upon current studies in the field. It is important to note that while each domain may be seen as a separate area of study, research studies may cover more than one area and, indeed, they have not been treated as mutually exclusive in existing research. As examples will show, studies conceptualize the practitioner in multiple ways or examine more than one level of strategy praxis. Therefore, in order to distinguish conceptual boundaries between domains, an example of a possible research question is provided in each domain.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Domain A: Individual practitioners and micro-praxis

Domain A includes those studies that have examined practitioners as individual actors, focusing upon micro levels of praxis that are largely proximal to the experiences of those actors. Mantere (2005; 2008) studied how individuals interpret their strategy role and which strategy practices enable or disable individuals to go beyond their operational responsibilities in influencing strategic issues. In these studies, Mantere aimed to understand the association between individual's experiences and their personal strategy praxis, in terms of their perceptions of contributing to strategy, even where they might not have a formal strategy role. Other researchers have examined how individual identity is involved in strategy praxis. Beech and Johnson (2005) studied how the strategic appointment of a new CEO shaped the identity and strategy-making dynamics of individuals within the executive team, including the new CEO. This domain may also include studies of micro strategy-making events, as they arise through the interaction between individual practitioners. For example, Samra-Fredericks' (2003; 2005) powerful use of ethnomethodology demonstrated the relationship between senior managers' talk and the praxis of a specific strategic decision, linking the talk-in-interaction between practitioners to the outcome of the decision. Other studies, such as Bourque and Johnson (2008) explain how individuals engage in a strategy workshop through specific rites and rituals that shape their actions within the workshop.

Each of the above studies provides empirical evidence of the association between individuals and micro praxis and also, through the theoretical approaches taken, indicates useful ways of conducting research within this domain, ranging from social theories of agency to cognitive role theory (Mantere 2005; 2008), to identity theory (Beech and Johnson 2005) and ethnomethodology (Samra-Fredericks 2003; 2005). Other studies provide theoretical resources from cognitive psychology to understand individuals and illuminate what '*lies*

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behind the actions of strategists as they engage with particular strategy practices in their praxis' (Hodgkinson and Clark 2007, 251). This domain, focusing as it does upon the micro and the individual, might be considered one of the most pertinent to the s-as-p agenda in terms of uncovering what strategists do. However, as shown in Figure 1, there are still few studies in this area, with many opportunities to further develop our understanding of what practitioners do within their immediate locales as they engage in strategy-making.

A potential, broad question that indicates the nature of research in this domain is: *What are the implications of the way that John, the CEO, and Sally, the CFO, negotiate over a particular strategic target?* This question could use different theoretical lenses applicable to the study of individuals and their praxis, from how John's identity as a CEO differs from Sally's as a CFO, to the cognitive attributes of each actor, to multi-modal analysis of the conversations between the actors, to better understand the skills and activities of each practitioner and how those play out in the praxis of negotiating the strategic target.

Domain B: Individual actors and meso-praxis

Domain B clusters papers that explain individuals' engagement in organizational or sub-organizational praxis. Depending on the focus of study, authors looked at how what individuals do shapes how the organization does strategy (e.g. Rouleau 2005) or shapes their participation in the strategy processes (e.g. Mantere and Vaara, 2008) or shapes what sub-organizational units, such as a business units, do (e.g. Stensaker and Falkenberg 2007). We found two approaches to making the links between individuals and meso-praxis. In the first approach, links are made directly between individual's actions and organizational praxis. Rouleau's (2005) ethnographic study shows how two middle managers in a clothing company successfully launched a new product. These two individuals purposively drew upon different routines and conversations in order successfully to translate the new strategic direction to external actors, such as customers. Maitlis and Lawrence (2003) illustrated an orchestra's failure to develop a strategy, based on the actions of specific individuals, such as the chief executive and other directors. These different actors interpreted the situation and the orchestra's future artistic direction differently, engaging in political behaviour that impeded the assignment of responsibility and accountability and prevented agreement over a strategy. Both of these studies carefully construct the links between individual actors, their actions and interactions, and organizational-level outcomes.

A second approach to constructing links between individuals and meso praxis is taken by those studies that adopt a dual position on practitioners as both individuals and aggregate actors, placing these studies in both Domain B and E of Figure 1. Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) examined how individuals in three different business units respond to a corporate change and how five different individual approaches were linked to the differences in praxis within the different business units. Such an approach somewhat blurs the boundaries of individual and aggregate actors by trying to understand how individual responses may be aggregated into business unit responses. However, it also provides a means of explaining meso-level praxis by establishing how individual actions and interactions shape and are shaped by aggregate practitioner actions, which in turn shape and are shaped by organizational praxis. This method may be helpful for establishing an association between what practitioners do and what organizations do, particularly in large or complex organizations, where direct relationships between actors and organizational activities are hard to substantiate.

In this domain, similar theoretical lenses to Domain A may be used in terms of identity, cognition, discourse analysis and other methods for analyzing how individuals act and interact with each other in shaping organizational or sub-organizational strategy praxis. A potential, broad question that indicates the nature of research in this domain is: *What are the implications of the interactions between the six members of the project team for implementing the new strategic direction?* The unit of analysis is the interaction between project team members as individuals, while the level of analysis is implementation of the strategic direction, which is a meso-level phenomena. Here, praxis draws on that interconnection between what people are doing, their interactions, and what is going on in their context, in terms of an organizational strategic direction.

Domain C: Individual practitioners and macro-praxis
Domain C examines the relationship between individuals and macro-praxis, where macro refers to institutions, markets or industries. Specifically, we looked for studies that explained institutional, market or industry praxis from the perspective of individual's actions and interactions. Vaara *et al.* (2004) provide a unique account to explain how alliances became a legitimate strategy within the airline industry over a twenty-year period. The authors drew upon organizational members from multiple airline companies, whose position ranged from the CEO to front line staff, analyzing how their discourses legitimated alliances as a dominant

form of competition in the airline industry. However, this has been the single study within s-as-p that drew upon individual actors to explain praxis at the institutional level. Given the expressed aim within s-as-p research to make stronger links between micro analysis and macro phenomena (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2004; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2006a), this domain appears a fertile context for further study. Links between individual actions and interactions and the praxis occurring at macro levels may be difficult to establish empirically. However, theoretical resources are offered in recent developments that more actively incorporate agency and action into institutional theory (e.g. Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Oliver 2001) and in practice theories that elaborate the reciprocity between agency and structure (e.g. Bourdieu 1990; Giddens 1984). Other empirical possibilities include taking the dual position adopted by some authors in Domain B, linking the actions of individuals to aggregate actions and then to a more macro-level of praxis.

A potential, broad question that indicates the nature of research in this domain is: *How do the actors within the regulatory office interpret and respond to the cues they receive from various industry players in order to construct a regulatory shift in the market?* The unit of analysis is the individuals within the regulatory office, with, depending on the theoretical lens taken, their identity as regulators, their interpretative responses, discourses and information-processing capacity as a means of understanding and interacting with the marketplace. The level of analysis to be explained is at the macro-level of a shift in the marketplace, indicating the praxis involved in linking what individuals are doing to what is going on in a marketplace (see Sztompka 1991, 96).

Domain D: Aggregate practitioners and micro-praxis
Domain D includes those studies that examined the relationship between practitioners as aggregate actors and micro instances of praxis. Scholars aggregated actors variously by position, such as middle managers (e.g. Sillince and Mueller 2007) or function, such as engineers (e.g. Laine and Vaara 2007). Some authors were interested in explaining how these aggregate actors constructed localized, micro levels of strategy praxis, such as shaping specific decision-making incidents by drawing upon the group's previous experiences in similar situations (Molloy and Whittington 2005) or through the power relations within the group (Whittington *et al.* 2006). There remain, however, relatively few studies of this type, possibly because studies of aggregate actors better lend themselves to explaining meso-level forms of praxis.

Alternately, rather than explaining some specific incident of micro-praxis that was external to the aggregate actors, some studies in this vein aimed to explain how aggregate actors constructed themselves and their own identities and positions within the strategy-making process; that is, to examine their own praxis as an aggregate actor within the wider strategy process. Balogun and Johnson (2004; 2005) showed how middle managers, grouped into aggregate actors by divisions, such as engineers, experienced structural change through their own sensemaking behaviors and their changing schemata. Laine and Vaara (2007) studied an engineering and consulting group, examining how three different groups of actors constructed their own position within the organizational strategy through their situated top-management, middle-management or project-engineer discourses. A similar discursive approach was adopted by Sillince and Mueller (2007) to explain the different positions taken by middle and top management about a strategy failure. Each group of aggregate actors constructed their own specific discourses to account for their localized praxis and shift responsibility for the failure. Papers of this type tended to span both Domain D in terms of explaining how aggregate actors constructed their own situated praxis and also Domain E in explaining how that situated praxis contributed to meso-level praxis at the organizational or sub-organizational level.

A potential, broad question that indicates the nature of research in this domain is: *How do the interactions between top managers and middle managers within a strategy workshop, shape the conduct and outcomes of that workshop?* In this question, the praxis of the two groups of aggregate actors, in terms of the ways they construct themselves as participants interacting with the other group in the workshop, is the unit of analysis, which shapes the praxis of the workshop itself, in terms of its conduct and outcomes, as the level of analysis. An example of this type of approach may be found in Thomas *et al.* (2007) analysis of a culture workshop which, while not explicitly an s-as-p paper, does draw upon some of the s-as-p literature to analyze the interactions between different managerial levels as aggregate actors and their implications for two main issues being considered in that workshop.

Domain E: Aggregate practitioners and meso-praxis

In Domain E, some studies examined only one class of aggregate actor, such as middle managers (Balogun and Johnson 2004; 2005) or top managers (Jarzabkowski 2003; 2005). Other studies identified multiple groups of aggregate actor, such as top and middle

management (Hoon 2007; Sminia 2005) or peripheral and corporate actors (e.g. Paroutis and Pettigrew 2007; Regnér 2003), often comparing and contrasting the different types of strategy praxis of each group. Ambrosini *et al.* (2007) compared the service quality of two divisions in a financial service provider, finding that variations were due to differences in their inter-team strategy praxis, which contributed to differences in the firm-level praxis of performing customer service. Others examined the interaction between aggregate actors, for example comparing the formal and informal interactions between middle and senior managers and the way that these interactions enabled middle managers to have their ideas incorporated into the organization's strategy (Hoon 2007). By contrast, Sminia (2005) showed how lack of interaction between senior and business unit managers caused a breakdown in firm-level strategy praxis, as each business unit resorted to their own localized praxis in implementing strategy. While all of the above studies examined the praxis of aggregate actors within the organization, sometimes using these aggregate actors as proxies for the business unit or organization studied, one study looked at the organization itself as an aggregate actor. In a unique research account, Salvato (2003) showed how a set of relatively small but key decisions taken within each firm shaped the successful evolution of two Italian firms. Rather than studying the actors who made the decisions, he studied the decisions taken over time as the praxis of each firm, linking it to these firms' development of design capability.

In Domain E, most studies explored links between the praxis of the aggregate actors they had defined and sub-organizational or organizational-level praxis. Salvato's (2003) study took the most macro approach to defining the practitioner as firm and the praxis as firm-level competitive behavior. However, all studies in this domain were focused upon explaining, at a minimum, sub-organizational praxis in terms of how specific strategy processes were constructed (Jarzabkowski 2005; and Wilson 2002) or organizational praxis in terms of strategic change (Balogun and Johnson 2004; Sminia 2005), or competitive behavior such as service delivery (Ambrosini *et al.* 2007). In a somewhat unusual approach, Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) assumed the aggregate actor as strategy meeting participants and focused upon strategy meeting praxis, as it shapes stability or change in different organizational strategies. A key feature in this domain is the links between what classes of actors do and what organizations or their divisions do. A potential, broad question that indicates the nature of research in this domain is: *How does the praxis of different business units in implementing an organization-wide change program influence their perceptions about the success of that change program?* This question examines the praxis of aggregate actors, such as business

units, and their implications for organizational praxis in terms of a change program, tying this back to the aggregate actors perceptions of the success of organizational-level praxis.

Domain F: Aggregate practitioners and macro-praxis

Domain F examines the relationships between aggregate practitioners within organizations and macro-praxis in terms of institutions, industries or sectors. Relatively little empirical work exists within this domain. Indeed, only Hodgkinson *et al.* (2006) examine the extent to which strategy workshops, as a particular type of practice in which aggregate organizational actors, particularly senior managers, are engaged, have become widely diffused and institutionalized across multiple sectors. However, this study takes a uni-directional approach to the institutional and practitioner relationship, focusing more on the institutionalization of workshops as a practice than upon the way actors within workshops also shape institutional praxis. By contrast, another study on boardroom strategizing, while it does not explicitly identify with the s-as-p perspective, explains how boardroom actors as aggregate practitioners attempt to shape new institutional arrangements at state and national level (Parker 2007). Some conceptual papers also illuminate this domain. Melin and Nordqvist (2007) conceptualize the institutionalization of the family business as a business organization, both through the activities of family businesses as aggregate actors and also through the activities of extra-organizational actors, such as researchers and government policies, placing the study in both Domain F and I.

Palmer and O'Kane (2007) more explicitly frame the interaction between corporate managers in retail transnational companies as aggregate organizational actors and extra-organizational actors, such as securities analysts, in shaping and re-shaping the corporate governance system and, hence, the praxis of retail transnational companies. Their study indicates a potential broad question that can indicates the type of research to be conducted in this domain: *How do executive directors in retail firms take account of and attempt to influence the industry analyses that shape investment in their industry?* In this question, the praxis of an aggregate group of actors, executive directors, is the focal unit of analysis, being examined for its implications upon a more macro-level of analysis, to do with industry analyses and investment.

Domain G: Extra-organizational aggregate actors and micro-praxis

Domains G to I examine the relationship between extra-organizational practitioners, who were conceptualized as aggregate actors in existing literature, and various levels of praxis. An explicit part of the s-as-p research agenda has been to widen the definition of who is a strategist beyond traditional roles, such as senior managers and, specifically, to include external actors such as consultants, media, gurus and institutional actors, such as business schools and environmentalist groups (Jarzabkowski 2005; *et al.* 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2003; 2006a). While there have been few s-as-p studies that have made these extra-organizational actors an explicit focus of empirical study, some insights may be gained from s-as-p studies that have made peripheral allusion to such actors.

Domain G examines how extra-organizational actors shape micro-level praxis. While conceptually there has been a large debate on how strategy knowledge is shaped by various actors (see Mazza and Alvarez 2000), these interactions have been widely neglected in empirical strategy research so far. Nonetheless, accounts within the s-as-p field captured interactions between organizational members and extra-organizational actors. For example, studies note that consultants participate in and therefore are very likely to influence the praxis of strategy workshops (Hodgkinson *et al.* 2006) and re-organization initiatives (Molloy and Whittington 2005). Furthermore, Sturdy *et al.*'s (2007) study, while not explicitly identifying with the s-as-p agenda, shows the role of consultants during strategizing by examining their interactions with organizational actors during business dinners. These dinners were incidents of micro-praxis during which trust between organizational and extra-organizational actors could be established and important or sensitive information could be exchanged. Other studies examine how external experts may be called upon by organizational actors, such as middle managers, to give presentations that increase the legitimacy of middle managers' claims about strategic initiatives (Hoon 2007). However, the theoretical background and empirical evidence in this domain is limited, particularly given the prevalence of external actors, such as consultants, within quite micro incidents of praxis, such as workshops, meetings and decisions, indicating considerable opportunities for future research.

A relevant question, that indicates the type of work which might be done in this domain is: *How do actions of strategy consultants brought in to run a strategy workshop, shape organizational participants' interpretation and acceptance of the points raised within the workshop?* This question examines how an aggregate extra-organizational actor, 'consultants', impact upon the praxis of a strategy workshop and the other participants within

the workshop. The focus is on the interplay between external actors' praxis and internal actors' praxis, in constructing a strategy workshop as an organizational event.

Domain H: Extra-organizational aggregate actors and meso-praxis

Domain H focuses upon the relationship between extra-organizational actors and strategy praxis at the sub-organizational or organizational level. There are a few studies within the s-as-p field that indicated the role of extra-organizational actors in shaping strategy praxis at the organizational level. For example, Whittington *et al.* (2006) noted that regulatory and governmental pressures impacted upon an organization and shaped its workshop discussions. Jarzabkowski *et al.* (forthcoming) examine the way that specific regulatory demands and regulatory relationships shape the interactions between business units within a listed company over time. Others refer to external consultants and their influence upon strategy implementation and strategic planning in organizations (e.g. Laine and Vaara 2007; Sminia 2005). These studies show both direct and indirect involvement of extra-organizational aggregate actors in the strategy praxis of organizations, but the evidence is incidental and this topic has not yet been a central focus of either theoretical or empirical papers within the s-as-p field. An illustrative question that would bring research in this domain into focus is; *What practices do environmentalist groups draw upon in an attempt to influence the inclusion of environmental considerations within an oil company's strategies?* In this question, the specific focus is upon the praxis of environmentalist groups, as they try to construct influence upon the strategy praxis of a specific organization. The question examines the interplay between what external actors do and the strategic actions of an organization.

Domain I: Extra-organizational aggregate actors and macro-praxis

Domain I examines the association between extra-organizational actors and macro-praxis. There has been growing interest in this domain, with a number of theoretical papers that conceptualize the association between multiple actors and the construction of strategy as a field. Indeed, Whittington (2007) proposes that strategy may be seen as an institutional field '*with a collective identity and a set of connections that goes far beyond particular organizations*' (*ibid*: 1580). Actors within the institutional field include, amongst others, organizations, business schools, the media, the state and financial institutions (Whittington *et al.* 2003; Whittington 2006a). Others adopt a more specific focus upon the interaction between particular types of actors, such as researchers, policy-makers, businesses, and analysts in institutionalizing specific business forms (Melin and Nordqvist 2007) and

governance systems (Palmer and O'Kane 2007). Still others examine the institutionalization of particular types of strategy discourses, such as consulting versus academic discourses (Seidl 2007). These discourses provide institutionalized resources for doing strategy, such as strategy tools (Jarzabkowski 2004; and Wilson 2006), decision-making procedures (Hendry 2000) and workshop procedures (Hodgkinson *et al.* 2006).

These conceptual papers promote the study of how strategy resources become institutionalized and how they are used in strategy praxis (see Jarzabkowski 2004; and Wilson 2006; Seidl 2007; Whittington 2003). Additionally, a single empirical paper draws upon institutional and practice theories to explain the creation of new practices within the money management industry through the interaction over time of a range of professional, industry, trade and media actors (Lounsbury and Crumley 2007). There is thus considerable interest in studying this domain, particularly in terms of understanding particular types of strategy and strategy resources as institutionalized practices, as well as how these practices emerge, evolve and are modified through interaction between multiple actors. An illustrative question that indicates the type of research which might illuminate this domain is; *Do banks' formal borrowing requirements shape the strategic plans and planning procedures of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and, if so, in what ways?* This question examines the interaction between specific institutionalized practices associated with the borrowing requirements of external actors, banks, and the macro praxis of SMEs, in which strategic plans and planning procedures might illustrate specific characteristics that increase their legitimacy as borrowers with those banks.

Future directions in the practitioners/ praxis typology

As Figure 1 illustrates, the s-as-p field empirically has been dominated by studies in Domains A, B, D and E. In particular studies examine Domain E, aggregate actors engaged in meso-praxis, indicating that s-as-p researchers continue to be interested in how groups of actors shape and are shaped by sub-organizational and organizational level activity. Such work is quite consistent with the earlier strategy process traditions of research, to which s-as-p research owes an intellectual debt (Jarzabkowski 2005; Langley 2007b) and may indicate that heritage, as well as adding fuel to debates about the extent to which s-as-p research has established itself as a distinct field of research.

It is unsurprising that practice studies have been most concerned with studying the bottom left hand corner of our typology, which focuses upon the individual or the aggregate organizational actor engaged in micro- or meso-praxis. Indeed, we might expect more work in Domain A, looking at what individual practitioners do and how that doing shapes micro-praxis, such as specific decisions, meetings and events. However, the lack of attention to extra-organizational actors, particularly in Domains G and H is a matter of concern. If s-as-p research is to better engage with how strategy practitioners shape strategy praxis, it needs to engage more explicitly with practitioners outside the firm. Here authors might draw upon a range of relevant literature on the role of strategy gurus (Clark and Greatbatch 2002), consultants (Clark 1995; Sturdy *et al.* 2006), and business media (Clark and Greatbatch 2002; Mazza and Alvarez 2000) among others to help inform and develop empirical studies that will specifically examine these domains of our typology. As understanding grows about the role and contribution of external actors to organizational strategy, so also, the research agenda might examine these external actors as individuals, not only as aggregate classes of actor.

Of equal concern is the relatively low attention to macro-praxis. While much has been made of intentions to link micro studies with macro-praxis (Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2006a), there is little empirical evidence in Domains C, G and I, albeit considerable conceptual interest in Domain I and the institutionalization of strategy as a social practice and indeed as a profession (Whittington 2007). Resources within institutional theory, particularly neo-institutionalism with its interest in agency and the emergence, diffusion and change of institutional fields (e.g. Barley and Tolbert 1997; Hargraves and Van de Ven 2006; Jepperson 1991; Oliver 1991), might help to inform research in this area. In particular, recent developments actively call for links between practice theory and institutional theory (e.g. Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Lounsbury and Crumley 2007) while some recent empirical studies illustrate how the micro practices of actors shape institutional change (Reay *et al.* 2006). The s-as-p field has now to rise to the challenging research agenda it has set in outlining a range of strategy practitioners and levels of strategy praxis. It may do so by drawing upon wider theoretical resources available in other fields to design appropriate empirical studies that can better inform all the domains of our typology.

Practices

Having outlined the relationship between practitioners and praxis, this section looks at strategy practices, which is an essential element of the s-as-p research agenda (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2003; 2004; *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2003; 2006a). In particular, we identify how practices have been explained within existing studies. In the above mapping of the literature around practitioners and praxis, a number of practices were identified, which we sought to categorize in a meaningful way. This has been a challenging task because so many different concepts of practices are used within the s-as-p field (Chia 2004; Carter *et al.* 2008). This is not surprising, given the various philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of practices (Schatzki 2006). We therefore begin with some definitions of practices within the wider practice literature and examine how these relate to definitions within the s-as-p field.

One of the problems with identifying practices is that they are entangled and interrelated elements of activity. It is thus hard to separate one particular 'practice' from the interwoven fabric of practices. Schatzki (2006) conceptualizes this interrelatedness as a bundle of practices within a spatial and material set of arrangements;

> *... that an organization is a bundle of practices and arrangements thus implies that an organization consists in interrelated practices transpiring amid interconnected material orders. An academic department, for instance, consists in interrelated practices of grading, teaching, advising, research, decision making, and ceremony transpiring amid interconnected offices, classrooms, auditoriums, laboratories, and so on* (Schatzki 2006, 1864)

This definition is important both in developing the concept of practice bundle and in using gerunds to highlight the active and constitutive nature of practices; they are means of doing in which organizing is constituted, rather than static concepts or objects to be employed. However, Schatzki separates out the spatial arrangements and, to some extent, the material elements of practices. By contrast, Orlikowski (2007) advocates incorporation of the material, noting that in many studies of practices, there is an '*absence of any considered treatment or theorizing of the material artifacts, bodies, arrangements, and infrastructures through which practices are performed*' (*ibid*: 1436). Orlikowski thus conceptualizes practices as sociomaterial, in so much as the doing of any activity cannot be separated from the material arrangements in which doing occurs.

Reckwitz (2002) also notes the interrelatedness of practices and their materiality but, in addition, develops the embodied aspect of practices, defining them as

> *routinized types of behavior which consist of several elements, inter-connected to one (an)other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge* (*ibid*: 249)

This definition is important in bringing body, emotion and motivations into practices, which may not be consciously understood by the actor. Such concepts resonate with Chia's (2004, 32) notions of practices as a repository of '*background coping skills*' upon which actors unconsciously draw as part of their everyday 'being' within the world. Practices are thus less something that is employed by an actor and more something that is constitutive of acting within the world.

Drawing together these perspectives, we note that practices are a complex bundle involving social, material and embodied ways of doing, that are interrelated and not always articulated or conscious to the actor involved in doing. The s-as-p field has attempted to translate this complex set of concepts into the practices involved in doing strategy;

> *Practices involve the various routines, discourses, concepts and technologies through which this strategy labour is made possible – not just obvious ones such as strategy reviews and off-sites, but also those embedded in academic and consulting tools (Porterian analysis, hypothesis testing etc.) and in more material technologies and artefacts (PowerPoints, flip-charts etc.).* (Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008, 101)

Furthermore, s-as-p scholars note the embedded and institutionalized nature of practices (Chia and Holt 2007; Hendry 2000; Jarzabkowski 2004; Seidl 2007; Whittington 2006a), which provide shared understandings of how to do strategy; the material practices of PowerPoint's and other technologies, the tacit 'know-how' practices of concepts and discourses, and the habitual modes of doing strategy, such as reviews, meetings and awaydays are all shared and recognized ways of doing strategy. However, despite these definitions and a strongly advocated research agenda into strategy practices, the s-as-p literature, particularly the

empirical literature, reveals no *dominant* view on the concept of practices. In the following, we, therefore, discuss some of the more common approaches to practices within the literature.

Perhaps the most common approach to practices is grounded within the linguistic turn in practice theory (Alvesson and Karreman 2000), looking at the discursive practices of strategy practitioners (e.g. Balogun and Johnson 2004; 2005; Jarzabkowski and Sillince 2007; Laine and Vaara 2007; Rouleau 2005; Samra-Fredericks 2003; 2005; Sillince and Mueller 2007; Vaara *et al.* 2004). The dominance of the discursive approach may be due to the strong theoretical and methodological background that informs discourse studies, providing a body of theory that can be drawn upon to examine strategists' forms of talk as practices.

There is also an emerging approach to studying modes of doing strategy, such as meetings and workshops, as practices, which draws from Luhman's theory of episodes (Hendry and Seidl 2003) and from ritual theory (Bourque and Johnson 2008). Such modes of doing strategy are conceptualized as concentrated episodes in the wider strategy praxis, during which strategy-making takes on particular forms that are part of the practices within the episode. Thus, recent studies examine workshops as episodic strategy practices, examining the typical management practices engaged (e.g. Hodgkinson *et al.* 2006), or the structuring of workshops through ritual practices (Bourque and Johnson 2008). Other studies focus upon meetings as episodic strategy practices, examining how those practices engaged in the initiation, conduct and termination of the meeting shape the outcomes of the meeting and enable that meeting to link to other episodes of strategy-making or to the wider organization (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008).

Still others have taken a more empirical approach, examining the typical practices engaged in doing strategy and analyzing how those practices shape strategy praxis. For example, Regnér (2003) compared the exploratory practices of peripheral actors with the stability-seeking practices of corporate actors, in order to explain how innovations arise and are incorporated into mainstream corporate strategy. Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007) also compare strategy practices, looking at how corporate and business unit practices evolve during a strategic change process. Jarzabkowski (2003; 2005) theorizes the mediating role of taken-for-granted administrative practices for doing strategy, such as resource allocation and monitoring and control. Her studies then empirically analyze how these practices are contextually embedded,

mediating between the interests of top managers and their wider organizational community in ways that are particular to that organization and its members.

There has, however, been little empirical consideration of a number of practices that are proposed in the theorizing of strategy practices. For example, much theoretical work has noted the widespread diffusion of management and education practices, such as the various strategy tools, techniques and concepts typically taught in classrooms and textbooks (Jarzabkowski 2004; and Wilson 2006; Seidl 2007; Whittington 2003; 2006a) but there has been little empirical attention to either the actual diffusion of these practices or of how these practices are engaged in or constitutive of strategy praxis. Other papers conceptualize the embedded cultural and historical practices that shape the practices available for strategists to draw upon and also constitute the possibilities for being a strategist (e.g. Chia and Holt 2007; Chia and Mackay 2007). However, there has been little empirical attention to how such practices comprise resources or their implications for the way that strategists act within their worlds. Indeed, it is through these embedded practices that practitioners and academics may account for strategy as a concept, a form of work (Carter *et al.* 2008) and, potentially, a profession (Whittington 2007) and yet this area remains under-explored. This is, in part, related to the lack of empirical work at the macro-level of Figure 1, where little attention has been paid to the interplay between institutionalized strategy practices and the actions and interactions of strategy practitioners.

Other gaps in the s-as-p literature comprise opportunities to better develop the field. For example, with some exceptions (e.g. Molloy and Whittington 2005), there has been scant attention to material practices. There are few published works on the role of material artifacts and technologies, such as PowerPoint or number systems (e.g. Denis *et al.* 2006) or of the spatial arrangements of practitioners within a meeting or workshop. Similarly, there has been little empirical work on intangible, embodied strategy practices, such as strategy know-how, motivations, emotions and intent, albeit that some studies touch on this topic tangentially (e.g. Mantere 2005; Samra-Fredericks 2003; 2005). Aligned with this lack of attention to embodied practices, we know little of the strategic practices through which individuals construct and advance themselves as strategic actors, although some work on identity (e.g. Beech and Johnson, 2005) offers potential avenues to research this issue. In studying what strategists do, it is important more closely to examine the actual doing; the material artifacts to hand, the physical positioning in strategy episodes, the laughter, frustration, anger, excitement,

anticipation, boredom, repetition and political maneuvering that are brought together as a bundle of strategy practices.

This leads to our final point, which is that few studies have set out empirically to examine practice bundles in a systematic way. While these bundles may be implicit in the way that some studies have grouped a number of practices under their explanation of one phenomena, such as Balogun and Johnson's (2004) social processes of interaction, or teased out the practices within an episode, such as Jarzabkowski and Seidl's (2008) meeting practices, few studies have attempted a rigorous examination of the way practice bundles interact. What practices come together in a bundle during some instances of strategy praxis and how is the content of bundles reorganized, according to different instances of praxis?

In order to explore some of these gaps in the empirical study of practices, it may be necessary to resort to wider theoretical perspectives. For example, other fields of endeavour, such as anthropology (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990; Geertz 1973), ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel 1967) and dramaturgy (e.g. Goffman 1959) offer both theories and methods for studying culturally and historically embedded practices and their situated manifestation in action. Critical methods also offers potential perspectives to analyse strategy, particularly in terms of alternative lenses for understanding the practices through which actors account for themselves as strategists and, more broadly, which constitute strategy itself as a social practice (Alvesson and Deetz 2000; Carter *et al.* 2008; Hendry 2000; Knights and Morgan 1991).

In this section we have outlined various concepts of practices that inform the s-as-p field, as well as examining the s-as-p research agenda to study practices. We have identified how practices have been dealt with empirically in a number of studies, which has largely been as discursive practices or, more recently, episodic practices, albeit that some other empirical studies of practices are evident. We also note that there has been considerable work on theorizing practices that has, as yet, to be brought to life empirically. These different definitions of practices are listed in Table 1, which also brings together the various Domains A-I from Figure 1. Table 1 thus summarizes the various approaches to practitioners, praxis and practices we have found in reviewing the s-as-p literature.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Outcomes

This section turns to the call for s-as-p research to speak to more traditional strategic management research by establishing appropriate outcomes from different forms of strategy praxis (Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2007). In doing so, it is important that s-as-p research does not try to emulate and, hence, fall into the same traps as traditional strategy research; that is to explain firm performance based on large-scale data sets with parsimonious sets of variables that at best can give only a partial explanation of performance (Jarzabkowski 2005; Johnson *et al.* 2007). Rather, as the strength of s-as-p research is in its rich understanding of situated phenomena, so also its criteria for outcomes are better suited to ideographic research which can explain underlying structures and patterns of action (Tsoukas 1989). However, this does not mean that there is no room for examination of the implications of variation in praxis, albeit not using variance methods (Langley 1999). We propose that s-as-p outcomes might be grounded in two types of explanations; the single-case generative mechanisms method and comparative methods that seek to explain variance arising from those mechanisms (Eisenhardt 1989; Langely 2007b; Tsoukas 1989). In the first, studies examine the implications of what particular strategists do for constructing particular streams of activity. This uses a detailed analysis of the generative mechanisms to explain how a particular outcome is constructed. A second explanation of outcomes is through comparative methods, examining how differences in what strategists do explains variations in the way that streams of activity are constructed. The second type of explanation seeks to build upon the first by examining whether a variation in the generative mechanisms is associated with a variation in the outcomes (Langley 2007b).

A second issue in studying outcomes is, who's outcomes? That is, how outcomes are understood might depend upon the unit and level of analysis, as an outcome for an individual in terms of their own advancement might not be the same as an outcome for an organization. The issue of what type of outcomes were being examined, and the level of analysis for those outcomes was not always clearly identified in s-as-p research. Nonetheless, we identified five categories of outcomes, which link to the micro, meso and, to some extent, macro levels of praxis. These five categories, personal, group, strategizing process, organizational and institutional outcomes, are listed according to their sources in Table 1 and are now explained.

Personal/individual outcomes

Studies that analyzed practitioners as individuals, particularly at micro-levels, tended to identify outcomes in terms of the individual's personal experience. Most of these studies illustrate the first type of outcome, linking what strategists to outcomes in terms of their individual praxis. For example, Beech and Johnson's (2005) study shows how a new CEO experienced an identity-based outcome, as he used increasing power to reinforce his authority. This authority made him appear threatening to others in the executive team and, hence, reinforced his own identity perception that his role was to play the 'tough guy'. At the same time, the CEO's introduction into the team, had outcomes for other individuals in the way they assumed and developed their own identities in response to him. Personal outcomes of the second type, in terms of variation in what strategists do, have also been noted. For example, variations in capacity to influence were noted by Samra-Fredericks (2003; 2005), who observed how one actor's talk within strategizing activity was able to give him increased influence over other senior managers. However, only Mantere (2005; 2008), has systematically compared the practices of different individuals, explaining how these differences constrain or enable individuals capacity to influence the strategy process.

Based on his study, Mantere implied additional personal outcomes, such as personal motivations and gains from assuming particular roles, in which '*an individual is motivated to champion strategy because it provides purpose for his/her work*' (Mantere 2005, 172). The personal outcomes of strategy praxis for an individual may be job enrichment, feelings of power and purpose, capacity for influence, and personal advancement. As Whittington (2003) notes, at least part of the s-as-p agenda is to examine what strategists do in order to help them to become better practitioners of strategy. Better understanding of personal outcomes and particularly variations in outcomes, in terms of identity, purpose, power and career potential, will also contribute to developing the competence of strategy practitioners.

Group outcomes
We also identified outcomes at a group level, particularly the first type of outcome, based on tracing associations between what aggregate actors do and their group outcomes. Hoon (2007) showed how middle managers gained approval for their initiatives by insistently engaging in informal conversations with senior managers. Other studies of this type show also how groups of actors may gain outcomes that support their own rather than corporate interests, such as using discourses to resist corporate strategy (Laine and Vaara 2007) or avoid accountability and reframe responsibility for strategic failure (Sillince and Mueller 2007).

A few studies revealed the second type of outcome, indicating variation in doing strategy between different groups, such as variation in the strategizing practices between corporate and business unit or corporate and peripheral actors, which had implications for those actors' capacity to influence the strategy process (e.g. Paroutis and Pettigrew 2007; Regnér 2003). Regnér (2003) illustrated that peripheral actors were able to engage in more exploratory practices, enabling them to envision and nurture potential changes in strategy praxis. By contrast, top managers engaged in more conservative strategy practices that made them dismissive of new ideas, particularly in the early, unproven stages. These variations in group practices were shown to influence the way that firms go about emerging and recognizing (or failing to recognize) innovation, which also affects organizational outcomes. Similarly, Ambrosini *et al.* (2007) examine variation in inter-team coordination activities as a source of variation in organizational outcomes. There have, however, been few studies that have made clear and consistent links between what aggregate actors do and the implications of that doing for those actors, and even less studies of how variation in praxis between aggregate actors is associated with variation in outcomes for those actors.

Strategizing process outcomes
Strategizing process outcomes were based on studies which looked at strategy praxis at the sub-organizational or organizational level. This was the most common form of outcome within the s-as-p literature, albeit mostly of the first type, finding that some aspect of what strategists do explained outcomes in the strategizing process. Studies examined processes for creating a strategy (Maitlis and Lawrence 2003), or strategic initiative (Hoon 2007), or implementing that strategy (e.g. Balogun and Johnson 2004; 2005; Sillince and Mueller 2007; Sminia 2005; Stensaker and Falkenberg 2007). Some of these studies are able to explain how the strategy praxis observed was associated with strategizing process failures, such as an orchestra's failure to produce a strategy (Maitlis and Lawrence 2003), or failure to implement a strategy (e.g. Sillince and Mueller 2007; Sminia 2005). Other studies introduce an element of variation by showed that the consistent or variable implementation of strategic change across an organization is associated with the pace and nature of interpretative change within different groups of actors (e.g. Balogun and Johnson 2004; 2005; Stensaker and Falkenberg 2007). A few other studies systematically have begun to examine variation in praxis or practices and its implications for strategizing process outcomes. For example, Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) examined the implications of variation in meeting practices. They found that

changes in organizational strategy were more likely to be proposed and either adopted or rejected, depending on which of three different paths were followed through sequential meeting practices over time. More recently, Jarzabkowski (forthcoming) compared patterns in managerial strategizing behavior for their relative success or non-success in shaping twelve strategy processes. However, more comparative studies are needed to illustrate the implications of variations in strategy praxis for strategizing process outcomes.

Organizational outcomes

The fourth outcome we identified was at the organizational level. While we hesitate to call these outcomes 'firm performance outcomes' because of the connotations of financial performance, we nonetheless suggest that influence on the strategy praxis of organizations is likely to have an influence on those organization's financial performance. For example, the failure to create a strategy impacted negatively on the funding of orchestras, because of failures to generate coherent artistic performances and to satisfy external stakeholders (Maitlis and Lawrence 2003). Others, however, illustrate how the praxis of individuals or groups can indirectly shape successful firm performance outcomes by improving the delivery of customer service (e.g. Ambrosini *et al.* 2007; Rouleau 2005). Indeed, in the Ambrosini study, variation in the inter-team coordination activities of two different teams was associated with variation in the level of service quality delivery.

Regnér (2003) provides perhaps the most substantive indication of a link between the praxis of different groups of actors and organizational outcomes. By comparing the activities of peripheral and central actors in four organizations over time, Regnér (2003) illustrated how successful innovations at the peripheral level were adopted at the centre, which provided the basis for organizational change. Indeed, one of his cases explains how Ericsson entered the mobile telephony marketplace, which constituted a major and very successful shift in their strategy. Salvato (2003) also makes clear links between the micro-decisions of two Italian firms and their development of unique design capabilities, which became their source of competitive advantage. Thus, s-as-p research, while it may not adopt the same approach to firm performance as traditional, economics-based strategy research, can explain organizational-level outcomes and hence, contribute to our understanding of why and how organizations perform the way they do.

Institutional outcomes

Consistent with the dearth of empirical research at the macro-level in our typology, Figure 1, there is little research on institutional-level outcomes. However, two empirical studies explain the development of particular types of institutional outcome. Vaara *et al.*'s (2004) study explains the rise of alliance activity as the dominant mode of strategy praxis within the airline industry. Similarly, Lounsbury and Crumley's (2007) study explains the institutionalization of active money management as the dominant practice in the U.S. mutual fund industry. As yet, there have been no s-as-p based studies of variation in praxis at the institutional level, although theoretical insights may be gained from studies of variation in institutional diffusion within the field of institutional theory (e.g. Hung and Whittington 1997; Lounsbury 2007).

A key feature of many of the studies discussed above is that that they spanned outcomes across levels. Thus, strategizing outcomes may span personal and group levels, or group, strategizing process and organizational-level outcomes. Samra-Fredericks' (2003; 2005) study explains both some personal outcomes of competence and influence for individuals and also group outcomes in terms of shaping the outcome of a specific decision. Others show how group outcomes, such as deflecting accountability and blame may be associated with strategizing process failures (e.g. Sillince and Mueller 2007). Still other studies link variation in groups, such as inter-team coordination, or peripheral and corporate practices, to variation in organizational outcomes (e.g. Ambrosini *et al.* 2007; Regnér 2003). Thus studies may have multiple outcomes spanning levels of praxis, which should not be seen in isolation but as inter-twined dynamic outcomes that influence each other. Additionally, as many of these studies were not designed to focus upon a specific outcome, multi-level outcomes may be a feature of the richness of s-as-p studies, which are prone to richer description at the sacrifice of parsimony (Langley 2007b).

This discussion of five categories of outcomes, individual, group, strategizing process, organizational and institutional outcomes, which are implicitly present in much s-as-p research, indicates that s-as-p can and already does furnish outcomes. As summarised in Table 1, these outcomes link well to Domains A, B, D, and E, somewhat to Domains C and I, and not at all to the remaining domains, consistent with the amount of empirical research in each of these domains. As the field develops it is important that studies pay specific attention to the outcomes of the phenomena they study. A useful guide in establishing outcomes, which we used to elicit the five categories of outcome in this review, is to query; what does this study explain? Future s-as-p studies might look to the two types of outcomes we identified in

each category, either identifying generative mechanisms that explain strategy praxis within single cases, or conducting comparative studies, even within a case, in order to identify and explain variations in strategy praxis. Indeed, as the field matures, developing patterns within single case research across multiple studies, the natural development may be to move towards research based on comparison and contrast in order to explain variations in strategy praxis.

Conclusion

The above literature review has been structured around the interrelated concepts of practices, practitioners and praxis that have been identified as the research parameters for the s-as-p field. The review also examined two key issues which have been consistently iterated with s-as-p research; the importance of developing stronger, practice-based links between micro and macro phenomena; and the need to shape s-as-p research to substantiate outcomes. This review has contributed to the s-as-p field in three ways. First, it has provided an overview and map of the field, based on its own terminology and issues, which has helped to better explain those terminology and issues. Second, it has exposed gaps in fulfilling the s-as-p research agenda, particularly with empirical work. Third, it has proposed alternative theoretical resources from other fields of research, which may be used to address those gaps.

The first section of the paper illuminates our understanding of what is meant by 'strategy practitioner' and how this concept has been realised, respectively, as an individual, an aggregate actor or an extra-organizational actor. The review illustrates that practitioner does not always mean individual but may well extend to classes of practitioner. It also shows that s-as-p research has, as yet, failed adequately to grasp the concept of extra-organizational actors as strategy practitioners, despite this being a key part of the research agenda. This section of the paper also examines three levels of strategy praxis, micro, meso and macro, which have been espoused in s-as-p research. The review illustrates that more empirical work has been conducted at the micro and meso levels than at the macro level, despite considerable theoretical interest in the macro level of strategy as a social practice and a profession. Together, these two parameters of s-as-p research, practitioners and praxis, were used to develop Figure 1, a typology of nine possible, albeit not mutually-exclusive domains for conducting s-as-p research. This typology present a useful organizing device for mapping the field and highlighting where further opportunities remain to develop research. Indeed, broad questions were developed for each domain, to indicate the type of research that might be done

within that domain. While all domains offer potential, there is particular scope to develop in the direction of macro-praxis and/or extra-organizational actors. Additionally, if the s-as-p field wishes to better distinguish itself from its process legacy, studies might extend beyond Domain E, which focuses upon aggregate actors and meso-level, organizational or sub-organizational praxis.

The second section of the paper examined how practices have been treated in s-as-p research, finding a lack of consistent theoretical and, particularly, empirical use of the term practices. Some theoretical underpinnings of practices were advanced and used to evaluate where the s-as-p field has developed and where avenues for future research remain. We found opportunities and challenges for scholars to examine more embodied strategy practices, such as emotions, motivations, identity and spatial and physical positioning, as well as opportunities to study material practices, such the technologies of strategy-making. There were also gaps in the study of institutionalized strategy practices and the ways that these practices come to constitute the praxis and profession of strategy. Finally, the notion of practice bundles was proposed as a potential area of study, examining what comprises a bundle and how practices within the bundle interact. In order to inform the study of practices, as the least-developed parameter of s-as-p research, we also suggested drawing upon theoretical resources from anthropology, ethnomethodology, sociology and critical theory.

In the third section of the paper, we examined outcomes, finding that s-as-p research has in fact already substantiated a number of outcomes from the personal to the institutional levels. Such outcomes may be quite significant in speaking to practitioners about their own performance of strategy, as well as informing organizational and sub-organizational processes and outcomes. Moreover, the category of outcome relates to both the type of practitioner and the level of praxis. We propose that s-as-p research build upon the ground already made, by better developing two types of outcomes well suited to the nature of s-as-p research: 1) detailed analysis of how what strategists do constructs particular outcomes; and 2). explanations of variation, using comparative methods that examine how differences in what strategists do explains variations in the outcomes that are constructed.

In conclusion, this review and critical appraisal of the s-as-p field should not be seen as negative. As a nascent and emerging field, there has been tremendous energy in outlining an ambitious research agenda, as indicate in Figure 1. This research agenda has the potential for

substantive and insightful contributions to our understanding of what strategy is and how it is done. Additionally, there is already a reasonable body of empirical work for such a new field, originating in the last decade. It is unreasonable to expect that s-as-p would have generated much more empirical research at this stage, given the type of time investment necessary to collect and analyze practice-based data sets, which typically are longitudinal, rich and qualitative. Nonetheless, the challenge for the s-as-p field in the coming decade is to make good on some of its proposals by designing and publishing within the research agenda outlined, drawing where possible upon other, complementary fields of study to better illuminate s-as-p phenomena and s-as-p questions.

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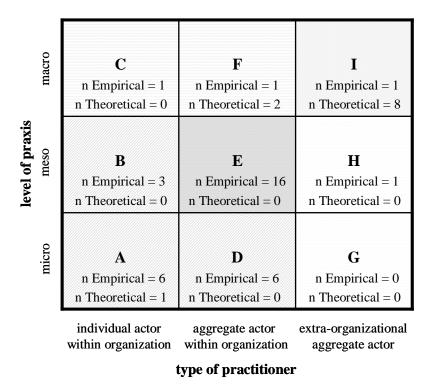
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Figure 1: Typology of s-as-p research by type of practitioner and level of praxis

	individual actor within organization	aggregate actor within organization	extra-organizational aggregate actor
macro	**C** n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 0	**F** n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 2	**I** n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 8
meso	**B** n Empirical = 3 n Theoretical = 0	**E** n Empirical = 16 n Theoretical = 0	**H** n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 0
micro	**A** n Empirical = 6 n Theoretical = 1	**D** n Empirical = 6 n Theoretical = 0	**G** n Empirical = 0 n Theoretical = 0

level of praxis (vertical axis label)

type of practitioner

*NB1: Only those empirical and theoretical papers that explicitly identify with the s-as-p agenda are included here, although more examples of research from other areas that might inform this domain are included in the text.

*NB2: n of theoretical and empirical papers in each domain includes those papers that overlap, appearing in more than one domain.

*NB3: There are no papers in Domains G and H because extra-organizational actors have not been a central focus of any empirical or theoretical papers to date.

Table 1: Summary of theoretical and empirical articles in strategy–as-practice field

Author	Typology	Study	Overview	Practice	Outcome[vi]
Ambrosini *et al.* (2007)	E	Empirical	Resource-based view	- Inter-team coordination practices	- Group outcomes - Organizational outcomes
Balogun and Johnson (2004; 2005)	D, E	Empirical	Sensemaking across divisions drawing upon middle managers	- Discursive practices at the group level	- Group outcomes - Strategizing process outcomes
Beech and Johnson (2005)	A	Empirical	Sensemaking and identity	- Discursive practices at the individual level	- Personal outcomes
Bourque and Johnson (forthcoming)	A	Theoretical/ Empirical	Workshops as rituals	- Ritual Practices	
Campbell-Hunt (2007)	I	Theoretical	Strategy praxis as complex adaptive system		
Chia and Holt (2007)		Theoretical	Social theory on the inter-relation of agency, action and practice	- Embodied practices - Embedded cultural and historical practices	
Chia and MacKay (2007)		Theoretical	Social theory on the interplay between agency and structure	- Embodied practices - Embedded cultural and historical practices	
Hendry (2000)	I	Theoretical	Social theory on strategic decision-making	- Strategy as social practice - Embedded decision-making practices	
Hendry and Seidl (2003)		Theoretical	Social systems theory on strategic episodes	- Episodic practices	
Hodgkinson and Clarke (2007)	A	Theoretical	Cognition	- Cognitive practices	
Hodgkinson *et al.* (2006)	F	Empirical	Institutionalization and diffusion of strategy workshops	- Episodic practices - Management practices	
Hoon (2007)	E	Empirical	Role of committees during an implementation initiative	- Episodic practices	- Group outcomes - Strategizing process outcomes
Jarzabkowski (2003; 2005); and Wilson (2002)	E	Empirical	Strategy process theories; Activity theory	- Administrative practices	- Strategizing process outcomes

Jarzabkowski (2004)	I	Theoretical	Social theory on management practices	- Recursive and adaptive practices - Management practices	
Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006)	I	Theoretical	Use of strategy knowledge	- Management practices	
Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008)	E	Empirical	Strategy meetings	- Episodic practices	- Strategizing process outcomes
Jarzabkowski *et al*. (forthcoming)	H	Empirical	Pluralistic institutions	- Group interaction practices	- Strategizing process outcomes
Laine and Vaara (2007)	D, E	Empirical	Sensemaking drawing upon discourse analysis	- Discursive practices at the group level	- Group outcomes - Strategizing process outcomes
Lounsbury and Crumley (2007)	I	Empirical	Institutional theory and practice theory		- Institutional outcomes
Mantere (2005)	A	Empirical	Sensemaking; Structuration theory	- Strategy formation practices - Recursive and adaptive practices	-Personal l outcomes
Mantere (2008)	A	Empirical	Social theories on role and agency	- Discursive practices at the individual level	- Personal outcome
Mantere and Vaara (2008)	B	Empirical	Discourse theory	- Discursive practices at the individual level	- Personal outcome
Maitlis and Lawrence (2003)	B	Empirical	Discourse theory; Theories of power and politics	- Discursive practices at the individual level - Episodic practices	- Personal outcomes - Strategizing process outcomes - Organizational outcomes
Melin and Nordqvist (2007)	F, I	Theoretical	Institutionalization of family businesses	- Institutional practices	
Molloy and Whittington (2005)	D, E	Empirical	Social practice theory on organizing	- Episodic practices	- Group outcomes
Palmer and O'Kane (2007)	F, I	Theoretical	Social practice perspective on corporate governance		
Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007)	E	Empirical	Strategy process theory on strategy teams	- Corporate and peripheral practices	- Group outcomes - Strategizing process outcomes
Regnér (2003)	E	Empirical	Strategy process theory on strategy evolution	- Corporate and peripheral practices	- Strategizing process outcomes - Organizational outcomes
Rouleau (2005)	B	Empirical	Sensemaking	- Discursive practices	- Strategizing process outcomes

Salvato (2003)	E	Empirical	Dynamic capabilities	- Organizational practices	- Strategizing process outcomes
Samra-Fredricks (2003; 2005)	A	Empirical	Conversation analysis on strategy talk	- Discursive practices at the individual level	- Personal outcomes
Seidl (2007)	I	Theoretical	Systematic-discursive perspective on the field of strategy	- Management practices	
Sillince and Mueller (2007)	D, E	Empirical	Middle managers responsibility and accountability during an implementation initiative	- Discursive practices at the group level - Episodic practices	- Group outcomes - Strategizing process outcomes
Sminia (2005)	E	Empirical	Social theory of practice; Strategy process theory on strategic emergence	- Episodic practices - Discursive practices	- Strategizing process outcomes
Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007)	B, E	Empirical	Sensemaking; Linking an organization's response to a change initiative with individuals' responses	- Corporate and peripheral practices - Discursive practices at the individual and group level	- Personal outcomes - Group outcomes - Strategizing process outcomes
Vaara et al. (2004)	C	Empirical	Critical discourse analysis on strategy talk	- Discursive practices at the individual level	- Organizational outcomes - Institutional outcomes
Whittington (2006a)		Theoretical	Social theory on strategy	Practices occur at multiple levels spanning micro and macro	
Whittington et al. (2006)	D	Empirical	Social practice theory on organizing and strategizing	- Episodic practices - Organizational practices	- Strategizing process outcomes
Whittington (2007)	I	Theoretical	Strategy as socially embedded institution		

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iii We identified as many in-press papers as possible using the www.strategy-as-practice.org bibliography, google searches and calls on the s-as-p discussion list. While this may have missed some in-press work, there is little else we could do to find work that is accepted but not in the public domain.

iv Other, more recent studies that outline research agendas are likely to become foundation pieces as the field evolves and their research agendas feed through into new work (e.g. Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Whittington 2006a; 2007)

v As individuals are not raised in the external category within the literature, we do not speculate about individual external actors, which is beyond the scope of a paper that reviews existing literature. However, as the field develops this may prove a valid category for analysis.

vi Only outcomes based on empirical research are included in this section