

# **CONSTRUCTING STRATEGY.**

Strategic practices in positioning the firm in the marketplace

Research Plan for a Doctoral Dissertation

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## Introduction

There are thousands of small technology-oriented firms in Finland, all trying to come up with new offerings to the marketplace. Many of these firms operate either in the so-called environmental technology field, which consists of a wide array of businesses from waste processing to sustainable electricity, or biotechnology, ranging from pharmaceutical to biofuels. The Finnish Innovation Fund, Sitra, has stated that “cleantech” and “biotech” represent major opportunities for Finland, possibly providing jobs and welfare far into the future. No one knows whether these dreams ever realize or not. Having discussed with many experts in the field, the biggest challenge in the way to success is perceivably the lack of business capabilities.

The business world of today is marked by increasingly global competition where it is often no longer viable to be only efficient, firms have to be also flexible. Generally, the answer has been in networks: firms concentrate on what they know best and cooperate with suppliers, customers and other actors in order to bundle and co-create the best possible value propositions. As Vargo and Lusch (2004) have showed, the new business requires new skills and as importantly new mindsets. Relationships have come to the center stage. It is now essential to build lasting relationships through trust and transparency. In addition to actors in supply and product development networks, firms have to engage in real interaction with their customers in order to co-create value through service exchange and shared innovation. All this is a challenge for people used to stay inside their organizations performing their own routines.

No one expects small technology-oriented firms to thoroughly analyze and plan their take on the nature of value creation and relationships – their position in the marketplace. The individuals in firms all have different but related taken-for-granted assumptions of how the business world works and how their firm should operate in it. These assumptions, however, are adapted through time, in relation with other people in and outside firms. Research under the label strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Whittington, 1996) has sought to explain this kind of phenomena in strategizing: how strategic actors are bounded and guided by collective “practices” that are adapted in local contexts.

Currently, we do not really know how firms in practice position themselves in the marketplace. This study aims to find out – by observing strategy meetings as they happen – how small firms in the fields of environmental technology and biotechnology construct their strategies concerning their status in the contemporary, networked business world. Thus, my main research question is:

- How do strategists construct the firm’s position in the marketplace, drawing upon existing strategic practices and discourses that are available to them?

A few subquestions are helpful in determining the scope of the study:

- What are the strategic practices and discourses that strategists draw upon when positioning the firm in the marketplace?
- Can different levels of practices and discourses be meaningfully identified?
- What practices are particularly relevant in the light of the old versus the new marketing paradigm?
- How are the practices and discourses adapted during the strategy making process?

The theoretical as well as the practical contributions of this study stem from the interplay between strategizing and the changing marketing paradigms. Theoretical insights from the strategy-as-practice research help to see how marketing thought is constructed and adapted in practice. I argue that currently marketing research lacks understanding of how firms really come up with their ideas on marketing, be they explicit or implicit. This has resulted in an enormous gap between current marketing theories and the real world business practice. It seems that if firms explicitly use the theories, or should we say tools, they are most often from outdated marketing textbooks. Consequently, the ideology behind the tools directs the firms towards a goods-dominant logic which can result in bad performance in the globalized economy. My aim is to come up with tools that firms can use to (re)direct their practice towards the new marketing paradigms.

To the strategy-as-practice community, I want to contribute by developing the understanding of discursive dynamics related to strategizing. I believe that by bringing in knowledge from cultural and new-institutional research we can better understand the nature of “practices” – including for example cultural-cognitive institutions that are known to guide and constrain organizational practice. Furthermore, as far as I know, there are no previous strategy-as-practice oriented studies concentrating on the role of discourses during strategy meetings as part of strategizing. I expect that although the strategic discourses might not explicitly deal with for example the nature of value creation via networking, the discourses have a very important role in defining the position of the firm in the marketplace.

This paper proceeds by first defining the worldview of the study, which reveals the cultural approach that I use to analyze the phenomena of strategizing. Second, I construct my flavor of the increasingly popular practice perspective and methodology on studying strategy. Third, I discuss about the evolving marketing paradigms that possibly have huge implications on how business is or should be conducted. These paradigms will be used as a framework for analyzing the strategic discourses and how they position the firm. Finally, I outline the remaining activities of the study.

### **Worldview – A cultural approach to studying practice**

It is useful to first describe my approach to studying the practice of strategizing before actually proceeding to the theories on strategy and how they relate to the new marketing paradigms. Strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) is an umbrella term for research that sees strategizing as “social practice”. There are different schools related to for example how much emphasis is put on physical activities over discourses. In the end, doing s-as-p research says relatively little about the ontological and epistemological basis of the research. Next I will outline the worldview that carries the consequent theories and methods throughout this study.

My take on studying the practice of strategizing can be labeled as a cultural approach, based largely on the views presented by Johanna Moisander and Anu Valtonen (2006). One could say my orientation is one of many possible angles to studying strategy as practice. Cultural research, as well as strategy-as-practice research, stems from the “practice turn” (Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001) or the “linguistic turn” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) in general social theory. Here, culture refers to the systems of representation through which people make and give sense of their everyday life. Although these systems of representation guide and constrain social action, culture is not a stable system of regulations, norms, and beliefs that dictates how people think and act. Rather, it is constantly produced,

contested and negotiated through discourse and discursive action. The cultural approach draws attention to such questions as what kind of meanings does a strategy practitioner give to different actors, say customers, in the business, and furthermore, what are the ways in which he or she goes about strategizing.

Culture is not something that is “out there”, waiting to be discovered. In the cultural approach, cultural data is constructed through interpretive, qualitative research. The data are constructed in their natural settings. The data sources include interviews, business texts, and direct observation. Interviews and business texts are not traditionally viewed as “natural”, but they form an alternative setting for cultural talk, which is different but not less “natural” than other settings. The purpose is not to get inside the subjects’ minds, but to observe and interpret the subjects in a setting that produces cultural meanings.

The data are interpreted as “texts”. The focus on textuality gives voice for the structures, meanings and institutions that are behind social action. This textuality forms the basis for understanding the context of the studied phenomena. Management studies seem to have recently put more emphasis on the importance of business context, referring to the actors, issues, and events in the organizational environment. Apart from the philosophical foundations of interpreting social action as texts, this approach gives researchers the possibility to use several conceptual tools for analysis, drawn from multiple disciplines. These tools include focusing on explicit and implicit norms; categorization and vocabulary; stereotyping, difference and otherness; and using various other rhetoric strategies. Explicit and implicit norms that can be found from the text give an overall idea of the moral and political themes behind the text. Analyzing categorization and the use of vocabulary gives further possibilities to dig deeper into how the text constructs the social reality. Categorization is not a banal naming process but an important and very humane way of making sense of the world. It closely relates to the concepts of stereotyping, difference and otherness.

The purpose of cultural research is not to discover universal causal mechanisms. For example, I am not trying to create a model that predicts what kind of cultural elements in which order will usually produce the best strategic fit with the business environment. The goal of my cultural research is to understand the practice of strategy making, how individuals collectively construct the firm’s position in the marketplace through strategizing. I believe that the main practical contribution of a research using a cultural approach results from what Stake (1995) calls ‘naturalistic generalization’. Consumers of the research report can learn vicariously about the studied phenomena. Thick descriptions and narratives put the reader in the depicted situation, enabling him or her to interpret the research results in relation to his or her own pre-understanding of the situation. However, the reader should not be left without the researcher’s own conclusions, which are elementary in opening up the phenomena, making it intelligible and meaningful.

Many insightful historical case studies dealing with the institutional or cognitive development of business environments have been produced during the last few years (Burgelman, 2002; Lamberg & Tikkanen, 2006). However, they encompass a notable problem in their retrospective approach because they are mainly aimed at studying what has “really” happened in the past. Because of this premise, the approach presents many unnecessary layers of obscurity related to the difficulty of going back in time. As Czarniawska-Joerges (1997) (p.65) argues, this confusion would be largely avoided by admitting that the target of those studies is in the current accounts and constructs of the past events, existing at the time of the studies. In contrast, I am interested in

the process of social construction in its making: the “real” events and the accounts of those events are enacted synchronously. These processes are negotiated with the informants or subjects: what is central, important, ordinary, surprising, and so on. Scott (Scott, 2001) (p.136) argues that “to detect broad institutional effects on instrumental structures and practices, some type of comparative analysis is essential, examining differences in organizational systems over time – perhaps long periods – or space.” However, I believe that the cultural research approach offers a way of constructing insightful accounts of even the most taken-for-granted institutions within only a single case study.

Having already separated “real” from the “construction of real”, it is important to elaborate on the view of reality and knowledge used in this study. I follow the definition that was brilliantly put together by Czarniawska-Joerges (1997) (p.55-59). “As pointed out by constructionists, such as Latour (1993) and Knorr Cetina (1994), there are not two worlds, one “physical” and one “social” [...] The point of constructionism is that the world has no “essence” to be discovered. This stance does not dispute, however, that the construction of meaning is always social [...]” This view is grounded in the belief that a reality exists independently of human cognition. Czarniawska-Joerges (ibid) and one of the most established scholars on neo-institutionalism, Scott (2001) (p. 63) both quote Rorty (1989) (p.4-5) arguing that “We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there. To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations.”

The cultural approach to studying the construction of strategy redefines the focus of study from the vast majority of previous organization research on strategy and networks. The move is from structures to dynamics. This move is well illustrated by Czarniawska-Joerges (1997, 66), who discusses about the concept of action net versus actor network. In traditional network research, actors or neatly defined organizations form the substance of networks. If they “leave” a certain network, a major change in the character of the network takes place. In the cultural approach to institutions, where actor networks are thought of as action nets, it is the cultural change – changes in discourse and discursive action – that is important to the character of the network. If the everyday life of actors in a network is left nearly intact after another actor leaves, it would be misleading to talk about major changes in the network. The dynamics of institutions is in the core of organizational strategy making.

In practice approaches, when trying to define the nature of practice, emphasis is often given to concepts of “practical sensibility” such as Bourdieu’s (1990) habitus and Giddens’s (1984) practical consciousness. These concepts deal with a sort of consciousness and also intention in routine-like behavior. In other discussions, similar phenomenon might be called tacit knowledge. The level and prevalence of consciousness in routines is debatable, and also Bourdieu and Giddens offer diverging explanations. Nevertheless, it is the individual human agency in one form or another that is central in the constant adaptation of practices. In this study, there is no point in going theoretically deeper into the nature of adaptation in practices. In fact, it is hoped that analyzing the cases will shed some light also to this much debated issue.

As Barnes explained (Barnes, 2001), practice should be thought of as collective action. Practice is not a single object that everyone shares as given, nor is it comprised of independent activities by individual practitioners. Instead, it is comprised of social, discursive action that is always

linked to other action. Put simply, human beings are oriented to each other in their every-day life as well as strategizing. This notion makes the old dichotomy of individual/collective – practically – unnecessary.

## **Strategy as practice**

I here use the word strategy to refer to an account of what an organization does or should be doing in order to achieve its goals. More specifically, I am interested in the way strategies define the position of the firm in the marketplace – for example the nature of creating value and the nature of relationships. In the common talk, organizations without strategy are seen as not having a direction in this unpredictable world. However, despite the difficulty for today's researchers and practitioners to imagine a business without a strategy, according to Bracker (1980), the concept of strategy was related to business in as late as 1947, in the form of theory of games.

Given that discourses of strategy are now ubiquitous, it is not surprising that academic scholars have had various distinct perceptions of the concept. Ansoff (1965) and Porter (1980; 1985), representing the mainstream at the time, treated strategy primarily as a set of 'rational' techniques and tools for managing complex organizations in a changing environment. Others, such as Mintzberg (1978) and Pettigrew (1988), questioned the 'rationality' of strategic decision making and gave attention to the socially constructed processes of strategizing, which the rational models, they argued, were unable to account for. The distinction between research akin to the work by Ansoff and Porter, and by Mintzberg and Pettigrew, has also been called as the distinction between strategy content and strategy process research, respectively. Strategy content research focuses on the question of *what* strategic decisions are taken, whereas strategy process research studies *how* a particular strategy emerges. More recently, the processual theorists such as Mintzberg and Pettigrew have received criticism for still "clinging to certain positivist attempts to identify and perhaps measure causal processes, as if action can be fully explained through references to interests and the opportunities or constraints surrounding their pursuit" (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Furthermore, the processual research has been said to focus on the whole organization without enough emphasis placed on the individual level (Whittington, 1996).

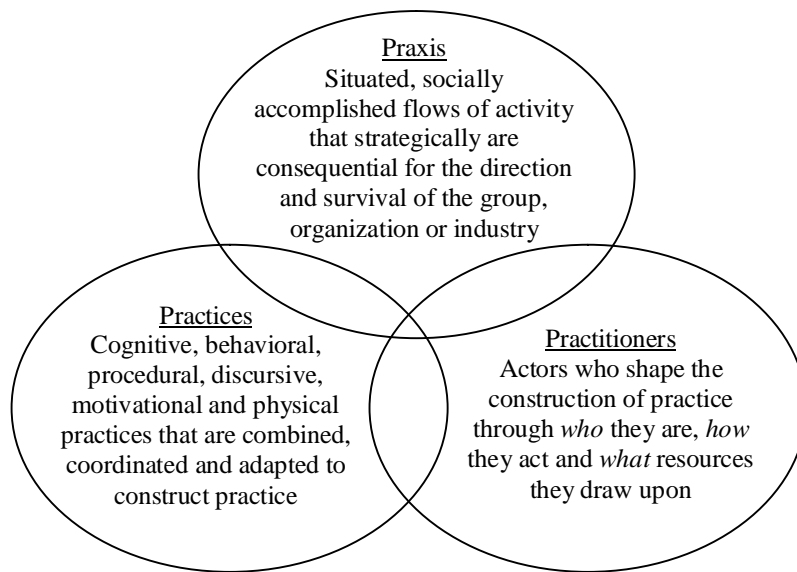
However influential the here so far discussed strategy research had been, it seemed to have lost sight of the arguably important human being, as pointed out by many researchers (Felin & Foss, 2005; Hambrick, 2004; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2003). The research had focused on macro-issues such as corporate structure and mergers and acquisitions without consideration of the human agency in the construction and enactment of strategy. In order to properly understand how strategies are constructed and put to action, research needed to re-focus on the actions and interactions of the strategy practitioner. This move towards appreciating the human agency in strategy making resonates with the wider 'practice turn' (Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984; Schatzki et al., 2001) or 'linguistic turn' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) in the social sciences.

Research on micro-strategizing (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003) initially took up the challenge of tracing the wider strategic outcomes back to their origins, to the micro-actions in the practice of strategy making. These studies suggested that they would help bring the theories of strategic management closer to the managers' actual work. According to this view, strategy is not merely something that an organization *has* but something its members *do*. Whittington (2006) reminded us that, in a sense, the work on micro-strategizing simply extended a long tradition of research closely examining managerial work (Mintzberg, 1971). This tradition was accused of staying isolated from the macro-perspectives of strategy, and thus, giving little material for

connecting the micro-issues to wider organizational perspectives. In fact, the macro-perspectives of the implications of the practice of strategizing remained largely implicit also at the time of the first special issue on micro-strategizing in *Journal of Management Studies* (Johnson et al., 2003).

The most recent work under the label strategy-as-practice, carried out during the last five years or so, finally began to emphasize the links between micro- and macro-perspectives on strategy as a social practice (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2006). The general strategy-as-practice framework as described by Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) in a special issue of *Human Relations*, gives a compelling perspective from which to analyze the construction of strategy. Here, 'practice' refers both to the "situated doings of the individual human beings (micro) and to the different socially defined practices (macro) that the individuals are drawing upon in these doings" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007) (p.7). Within this perspective, strategy is conceptualized 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" (ibid). Of course, this definition is so broad that it enables nearly all types of social activities to be considered as part of the analysis. Therefore, as the authors suggested, we should narrow the activities considered strategic according to the extent that they are "consequential for the strategic outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage of the firm (Johnson et al., 2003), even where these consequences are not part of an intended and formally articulated strategy." Strategizing, in turn, refers to the "doing of strategy"; that is, the construction of this flow of activity through the actions and interactions of multiple actors and the practices that they draw upon" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007) (p.7).

Whittington (2006) suggested that the practice perspective on strategy works within three general levels: strategy praxis, practices, and practitioners (see figure 1). While these concepts, together or separately, have been dealt with by many social scientists, Reckwitz (2002) helpfully drew them together in order to develop 'culturalist theorizing' toward a theory of social practices. Generally speaking, Reckwitz defined *praxis* as "an emphatic term to describe the whole of human action" (Reckwitz, 2002) (p.249). Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) added the following to the definition of *praxis*: it comprises "the interconnection between the actions of different, dispersed individuals and groups and those socially, politically, and economically embedded institutions within which individuals act and to which they contribute." In short, praxis is what practitioners do. *Practices*, then, are defined as "routinized types of behavior which consist of several elements, interconnected to one another: 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" (Reckwitz, 2002) (p.249). Practices are something that practitioners draw upon in their strategizing. Practices, in a similar manner to 'social institutions' or 'discourses', enable and define (or bound) the social action of practitioners. At the same time, practices are (re)constructed by the (discourses and discursive) strategizing. Finally, *practitioners* are the actors, the strategists who draw upon practices to act. As Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) note, "they derive agency through their use of the practices – ways of behaving, thinking, emoting, knowing and acting – prevalent within their society, combining, coordinating, and adapting them to their needs in order to act within and influence that society (Reckwitz, 2002)."



*Figure 1. Adapted from Jarzabkowski et al. (2007, 11):  
A conceptual framework for analyzing strategy-as-practice.*

As I already elaborated in defining the worldview of this study, I place emphasis on the discourses that are used during strategizing. Discourses are important to strategic construction in multiple ways. In general, discourses are the building blocks of social reality – we (re)create and give meaning to anything that surrounds us through discourse and discursive action. Vaara et al. (Hendry, 2000; 2004) outline the nature of discourse in relation to strategizing quite simply: first, they see discourses as resources that social actors mobilize and use for their benefit in strategizing processes; second, these actors are also significantly bound by the existing finite number of context-specific discourses, the discourses displaying power over the social actors. Vaara et al. continue by stating that discursive practices are (re)created in the active sensemaking processes of various actors, but they, in turn, influence the strategizing of others. They conclude that the discursive practices, in a sense, start to live a life of their own – I interpret this as a cue towards institutions and other social structures that I will also deal within this study.

Strategic discourses can be analyzed at multiple levels, and the emphasis can be from the tiniest of details to the general thematic level. Samra-Fredericks (2003) developed an approach that combines ethnomethodology and conversation analysis in order to construct rich descriptions of naturally occurring strategizing. The approach can be used to discover how managers strategize through utilizing their abilities to “speak forms of knowledge; mitigate and observe the protocols of human interaction; question and query; display appropriate emotion; deploy metaphors and finally; put history ‘to work’”. In a similar vein, Barry and Elmes (1997) discussed how a narrative view of strategic discourse can help us reveal the power and politics of strategizing. Although my interest is more in how certain strategic views are constructed through discourses, rather than what are the particular processes related to discursive practices that enable and affect strategizing, these kinds of more meta-analytical frameworks are useful for understanding what happens during strategic discussions.

Practitioners of strategy use strategic discourses, which in this study are mainly derived from strategy meetings, first and foremost to construct strategy for their firm. They may have the intention to use those discourses for various reasons: to share their thoughts with others, to persuade others, to gain new knowledge, and so on. However, discourses during strategy meetings also work in more subtle, or less intentional, ways. Through discourses, practitioners collectively make sense of the endless possibilities for the direction of the firm. They do not just come to the meetings with simple questions and answers, instead they have to progress through an intense web of meanings. They are guided and bound by existing strategy practices and discourses but they simultaneously adapt and (re)create them creatively in order to gain a possibility to competitive advantage.

### **New marketing paradigms– Positioning the firm in the marketplace**

Marketing thought is evolving toward a new paradigm, and this shift has been dubbed a transition from a goods-dominant (G-D) logic to a service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In a potentially seminal article by Vargo and Lusch (2004), they describe how both marketing practitioners and researchers are starting to embrace the foundational idea that instead of being embedded in products, value is co-created by marketers and others in use and in exchange. If taken seriously, this innocent-looking realization leads to multiple implications regarding the marketplace, including the nature and role of firms, suppliers, competitors, and customers (see table 1).

No longer can firms be thought of as fairly independent producers of value through products. Products are valuable to customers as distribution mechanisms for service – products themselves *have* no value. So what is exchanged between the firm and its customer is not products to cash but service to service. Firms do not market *to* customers, they market *with* customers. Furthermore, the time logic of marketing exchange becomes open-ended. The value is not moved from firm to customer in transaction. Rather, it is co-created by many actors and their actions before and after the transaction, once thought of as the main focus of marketers' interest.

Obviously, marketing and marketplace activity comprises interactions within networks of relationships (Gummesson, 1999). In research following the S-D logic, relationships of all kinds necessarily come to the center of analysis. Marketing exchange cannot be properly described through transactions. As basic as this statement can seem, mainstream marketing scholars have remarkably often forgotten this true nature of marketplace activity. Elaborating on the S-D logic, Ballantyne and Varey (2006) suggest that exchange is based on three types of value-creating activity: relationship development, communicative interaction, and knowledge renewal. They remind us that it is the quality of the relationship that can be “managed”, not the relationship as such. The emphasis is on dialogical interaction that is open-ended, discovery oriented, and value creating. Furthermore, Ballantyne and Varey underscore the meaning of tacit knowledge, which is an operant resource, in co-creating value. Finally, all relationships and consequently all interactions are based on trust.

Ideas supporting this shift in marketing thought have been advanced in multiple research fronts, such as studies in business networks, consumer culture, services and relationship marketing, and market orientation, among others.

<b>Foundational premise of S-D logic</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
FP1. The application of specialized skills and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange	Service – applied knowledge for another party’s benefit – is exchanged for service
FP2. Indirect exchange masks the fundamental unit of exchange	Micro-specialization, organizations, networks, goods, and money obscure the service-for-service nature of exchange
FP3. Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision	“Activities render service; things render service” (Gummesson 1995) – Goods are appliances
FP4. Knowledge is the fundamental source of competitive advantage	Operant resources, especially “know-how”, are the essential component of differentiation
FP5. All economies are service economies	Service is only now becoming more apparent with increased specialization and outsourcing; it has always been what is exchanged
FP6. The customer is always a co-creator of value	There is no value until an offering is used – experience and perception are essential to value determination
FP7. The enterprise can only make value propositions	Since value is always co-created with and determined by the customer (value-in-use), it cannot be embedded in the manufacturing process
FP8. A service-centered view is customer oriented and relational	Operant resources being used for the benefit of the customer inherently places the customer in the center of value creation and therefore implies relationship
FP9. Organizations exist to integrate and transform micro-specialized competences into complex services that are demanded in the marketplace	The organization exist to serve society and themselves through the integration and application of resources

*Table 1. Lusch et al. (2007): Summary of the premises of the Service-Dominant logic.*

If strategy is about the direction of a firm, the (future) position of a firm in the marketplace is certainly among the key ingredients of strategy. The service-dominant logic can be used as a starting-point for a framework for determining the way a firm is positioned in the marketplace: e.g. how it relates to its suppliers, competitors (coopetitors), customers, and other stakeholders; how value is (co-)created; and how does it get its competitive advantage. I cannot argue that firms that best followed the S-D logic would profit the most, but I do believe that the framework opens up relevant viewpoints in estimating the success potential of firms in contemporary markets. One of the key challenges in this study is to build a framework that could be rigorously used in examining firms’ alignment with the S-D logic.

### **Analyzing the cases**

The strategy-as-practice framework, as described by Jarzabkowski et al. (2007), provides a set of tools and directions that future research is encouraged to undertake. This study focuses on the interplay between strategy praxis and strategy practices: I will study how practitioners construct

their firm's strategy through strategy meetings, and what kind of practices they draw upon while doing so. The strategy meetings represent a part of the strategy praxis, i.e. the actual strategy making. While there certainly are important "strategic events" happening outside the meetings, I believe that the discourses during the meetings nevertheless reflect the outcomes of such off-the-meeting strategizing. In fact, although I consider the strategy meetings a very real part of strategizing, the discourses during those meetings also function as "text" that gives me access to the context of the discourses. Thus, the strategic discourses serve a dual function: first, combined with rest of the discursive action in the meetings, the speech is part of the actual strategy praxis, and second, it provides a way to go beyond what the researcher sees, to study the environment or the context where the strategy making takes place. This second goal can be achieved through a set of linguistic and other tools common in cultural, interpretive studies.

In the case of my study, the strategy-as-practice framework draws attention to at least the following aspects of constructing strategy.

1. In the strategy meetings, what expressions are used to construct the firm position in the marketplace and what are the "practices" or cultural-cognitive institutions behind these expressions?
2. What are the roles of other discursive practices in the meetings, related to for example group dynamics, negotiation processes, and style of speech?
3. What is the role of strategy meetings vis-à-vis other types of strategizing?
4. What are the nature and functions of the meetings? What is discussed, what is not?
5. What is the impact of the practitioners in the meetings, including their background and style of strategizing? Who is involved and who is not?

Importantly, all of the above aspects can and should also be studied through time, as a process or more fittingly as a practice. How is the practice adapted through time? Why? Furthermore, what is the relation of strategy meetings to the whole firm? To the population of firms in the industry? To the society at large?

My emphasis in this study is on the first aspect listed above: on the ways strategic discourses – and assumptions and "certainties" behind them – construct firm position in the marketplace. However, because the discourses cannot be separated from practitioners or the context in general, I will deal with those questions where necessary. Implicitly the context is always part of the discourse, but I will explicitly raise the issue whenever it seems appropriate.

Strategic discourses themselves, here referring to the text at face value, may already say something about how practitioners align the firm with the S-D logic. This would happen if the talk turned to for example how value is created in networks, but it is admittedly rare in day-to-day strategizing. However, it is the practices that the practitioners draw upon in the discourses that most often and more subtly position the firm in the marketplace.

## **Conducting the study**

In the contemporary strategic management research, there is an apparent need for longitudinal, observational data that would allow the analysis of organizational strategy evolution. However, it is often the case that researchers do not have access to empirical material which would give them the possibility to study the evolution of strategies from inside an individual organization.

Fortunately, I have already been able to gain access to the strategy meetings of one environmental technology start-up.

My plan is to observe and record the monthly strategy meetings of one environmental technology and three biotechnology start-ups during one year's time. In addition to observing the meetings, I plan to collect complementary data, such as the managers' perceptions of the relevant business networks, via interviews.

The research report will be a monographic dissertation, and it will be conducted as follows:

(Fall 2006:) Literature analysis

(Spring 2007:) Familiarizing with the field of commercial environmental technology;  
Constructing theory;  
Gaining access to selected companies

Fall 2007: Conducting empirical observations;  
Constructing theory;  
Gaining access to selected companies

2008: Finishing conducting empirical observations;  
Analyzing data and constructing theory

2009: Finishing the report

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