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It's Practice. But is it Strategy? Reinvigorating strategy-as-practice by rethinking consequentiality

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Abstract

In this essay we revisit the radical agenda proposed by strategy-as-practice scholars to study strategy as it emerges within people's practices. We show that, while much progress has been made, there is still a dominant focus on articulated strategies, which has implications for what is seen as strategic. We anchor our argument in the notion of consequentiality – a guiding yet, ironically, constraining principle of the strategy-as-practice agenda. Our paper proposes a deeper understanding of the notion of strategy as 'consequential' in terms of both what is important to a wider range of actors and also following the consequences of these actors' practices through the patterns of action that they construct. In doing so, we offer a conceptual and an empirical approach to reinvigorating the strategy-as-practice agenda by inviting scholars to take a more active role in field sites, in deciding and explaining what practices are strategic.

Introduction

This essay is intended to critique the progress of the strategy-as-practice agenda and provoke scholars to take up the more radical elements of that agenda. Our provocation is motivated by my musings, as the first author, over a comment I received in 2009 when I began studying the global trading practices of reinsurance underwriters. While I could not help but see these

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practices, through which the global market for disasters is constructed, as strategic (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Spee, 2015), a senior scholar whom I respected said: 'Well, yes it's practice. But it's not strategy.' I have increasingly reflected on that statement. Was there something about the people I was studying or the nature of their practices that made this 'practice, but not strategy', or was the phenomenon I was following – a global financial market – 'not strategy?'

In discussion with my co-authors on this essay, we considered the strategy-as-practice (SAP) agenda, which was so radical in proposing that strategy is constructed in 'the actions and interactions of multiple actors and the practices that they draw upon' (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007, p. 8; see also Jarzabkowski, 2004; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Whittington, 2006). This agenda included a wide range of actors, like my underwriters, as people whose practices could be strategic and, also, a broad consideration of strategy as 'situated, socially-accomplished activity' (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 7). In doing so, SAP aimed to unfetter strategy scholarship from its economics-dominated obsession with performance (e.g. Porter, 1991; Rumelt, 1982) and also to move beyond the typical strategic planning and strategic change foci of strategy process studies (e.g. Mintzberg, 1990; Van de Ven, 1992). Yet, despite considerable progress in understanding what people do to shape strategy (see Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012 for reviews), SAP scholarship has failed to fulfil this agenda. We argue that this is a symptom of a particular way of defining strategy, namely 'strategy as consequential action'. This definition has focused attention on phenomena that are easily recognizable as strategic by those very performance and process branches of scholarship, rather than setting researchers free to consider and explain alternative phenomena as strategic. The danger is that SAP will simply become a subset of these branches of strategy research and will, inevitably, adhere to the 'traditional'

ways of looking at strategy rather than fulfilling its promise to reinvigorate strategy research. Our aim, therefore, is to empower SAP scholars to identify and define what is strategic in ways that are fundamental to the radical agenda envisioned in SAP.

Our essay takes the following form. First, we outline the view of consequentiality that has come to dominate existing SAP research. In doing so, we show how this has led scholars to focus mainly on a narrowly defined set of activities as strategic, so also constraining the types of actors and practices that are typically studied. Second, we consider what this focus has shown us, but also why it constrains further theorizing. Finally, we conclude with a call to arms to reinvigorate SAP research by reconsidering the role of the researcher in defining practices and the patterns of action that they construct as strategic.

Revisiting the SAP Agenda

SAP is a revolutionary movement, setting out to broaden our understanding of what can be considered as strategy through a practice theory lens (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Nicolini, 2013; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001) on the 'what', 'who' and 'how' of strategy practice (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016a, 2016b). The scope to move beyond 'strategy as . . . simply a property of particular organizations, [to] a social practice with significant and pervasive effects within contemporary advanced societies' (Whittington et al., 2003, p. 397) is exciting. Whittington et al.'s (2003) paper highlighted two important aspects of the SAP agenda in broadening our understanding of the 'who' and the 'what' of strategy practice. First, it mapped out the actors within the strategy field to include both those who are employed by organizations, and those who, while not directly financially dependent upon organizations, are nonetheless influential in their strategy. These include the media, state institutions and pressure groups, to name a few. This was critical, as it broadened our understanding of *who* might be a strategic actor

(Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Second, all of these actors are both producers and consumers of what we choose to define as strategy. That is, the type of actors in the strategy field, through the strategy terminology that they both posit and draw upon as 'important' and 'strategic' (Knights & Morgan, 1991), have consequences for *what* we consider to be strategy. For example, when shareholder value is produced and consumed as a key strategy term, it becomes integral to how we identify and evaluate what practices are strategic: those practices, actors and patterns of action that are oriented towards increasing shareholder value. Yet, in examining how actors produce and consume existing concepts of strategy, SAP also loses sight of wider phenomena that might extend our understanding of strategy.

We argue that these existing strategy performance and process concepts of strategy dominate scholars' understanding of what is consequential, so encroaching upon, and directing scholarly attention away from the core tenets of the SAP agenda. Specifically, early SAP articles proposed that

> activity is considered strategic to the extent that it is 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. (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 8)

This definition of 'consequential' activity has two parts that have largely been attached to dominant views of strategy as performance (Porter, 1991; Rumelt, 1982) or strategy as process (Bower, 1970; Mintzberg, 1990; Van de Ven, 1992). SAP studies that take consequentiality from the performance perspective – economic or otherwise – tend to focus on the first part of the definition, identifying strategic activity according to predefined performance measures or espoused measures of success (see Table 1). For example, Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008, p. 1398) identified strategic issues as

those that were 'consequential for the organization as a whole, particularly in terms of their reputation and prestige, their growth, and their financial viability and survival, which are all important sources of competition.' By taking this view of consequentiality, the researcher is trapped in a range of assumptions, most notably that activity can be identified as strategic if it is linked to organizational performance measures. This, in turn, inevitably defines and constrains what does and what does not count as consequential practice and who may enact such practices.

Others have taken the second part of the definition, grounded in a strategy process perspective on what strategy practitioners, through reference to their strategy-making processes, regard as consequential (Burgelman et al., 2018); for example strategic planning (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011; Vaara, Sorsa, & Pälli, 2010), strategic change (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012) and strategy implementation processes (e.g. Hengst, Jarzabkowski, Hoegl, & Muethel, 2020). As with the performance perspective, the process perspective projects a particular set of assumptions onto what practices are deemed appropriately 'strategic' to study – those connected to known strategy processes such as strategic planning and change – and, hence, closing down alternatives. In Table 1, we summarize the ways that these strategy performance and process views have encroached upon SAP definitions of what activity is consequential and, hence, who and what should be studied.

Appropriation of the definition of consequentiality by these performance and process lenses means we have failed to revolutionize strategy research with a uniquely practice-based perspective on the *what* and the *who* of strategy. Rather, these definitions have co-opted the attention of SAP scholars in two ways. First, they have focused attention on those strategies that have been *explicitly articulated*, usually by top managers, as consequential to their organizations (see Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). By articulated strategy we mean that which is formally defined by the organization as 'its

Table 1. Views on Consequentiality in SAP Research.

Dimension	Performance view	Process view	Practice view (reinvigorated)
What is 'consequential'	Identifying strategic activity according to predefined performance measures or espoused measures of success related to the strategic outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage of the firm (Johnson et al., 2003)	Identifying what strategy practitioners regard as consequential with reference to their strategy-making processes (Burgelman et al., 2018)	Identifying indirect and consequential effects of actors' practices upon patterns of action that scholars may assert are strategic, despite being neither articulated strategic performance goals nor associated strategy processes
What is studied	The practices involved in pursuing espoused measures of success such as financial performance, operational performance, and organizational effectiveness (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008)	The emergence of articulated strategies that are formally defined by the organization as 'its strategy' through strategy processes such as strategic planning (e.g. Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011), strategic change (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005) and strategy implementation (e.g. Hengst et al., 2020)	Those mundane everyday practices uncovered by deep immersion that are, often, identified by scholars' hunches about what is important, strategic, or consequential in situ
Who is studied	Primarily top managers as key actors in shaping the organizational definition of strategy (e.g. Liu & Maitlis, 2014; Wenzel & Koch, 2018)	Predominantly top and middle managers and some operational managers active in strategy processes (e.g. Balogun et al, 2015b; Jarzabkowski et al, 2019)	A wide range of actors including those who are not explicitly identified as having strategic roles or responsibilities within organizations
Role of researchers in deciding what is strategic	Passive dictation by existing literature on what is strategic	Passive dictation by the organization on what is strategic	Active selection by the researchers on what is strategic

strategy', drawing from Mirabeau and Maguire's (2014, p. 1205) definition of strategy articulation as 'the issuing of formal statements that describe particular strategic directions in favorable terms'. In taking what is articulated as the phenomena of interest, much SAP research has focused on the practices associated with articulating these strategies. For example, Wenzel and Koch (2018) study the embodied practices of Apple's CEO as he articulates the novelty of their product-market strategy during keynote speeches. Spee and Jarzabkowski

(2017) study how strategies come to be articulated in particular terms and words, through the discursive practices of meaning-making within which actors collectively agree upon the terminology of a strategic plan. Others study the practices through which an articulated strategy is implemented. For example, Balogun, Bartunek and Do (2015a) examine the implementation of a strategy articulated as 'consumers and customers first' within a European multinational firm, tracing the sensemaking practices through which this was further

articulated as a 'good to great' strategy during its implementation in the UK subsidiary. Articulated strategies have even been the focus of emergent strategy practices. For example, Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) demonstrate how strategy in a global telecommunications distributor emerged through discursive strategy practices and was identified and acknowledged as the firm's strategy once it was articulated.

Second, this dominant focus on articulated strategy has led to a focus on those actors whose practices are integral to shaping, transforming, or resisting such articulated strategies. Here, the practice lens has uncovered practices and competencies of top managers (e.g. Balogun et al., 2015a; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007), middle managers (e.g. Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Rouleau, Balogun, & Floyd, 2015; Woolridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008), and how these different managerial levels shape and influence each other's practices (e.g. Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere, 2008; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Sillince & Mueller, 2007). Focusing on these actors has indeed given us much insight into a wide range of socio-material, sensemaking, discursive and political practices of strategy-making that might otherwise have been overlooked (for reviews see Balogun, Best, & Lê, 2015(b); Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, & Laamanen, 2020). For example, we now understand much more about practices that were never envisioned as relevant in traditional strategy literature, from how the emotional practices of top managers during meetings shape the articulation of strategy (Liu & Maitlis, 2014), to the role of PowerPoint slides in visualizing and making meaning about strategy (Kaplan, 2011; Knight, Paroutis, & Heracleous, 2018). Yet, such studies consign us to the study of a limited range of people and their practices in doing strategy, those 'usual suspects' predominantly found at the top- and middle-management level (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Rouleau et al., 2015).

Some notable exceptions that shine a spotlight on the practices of actors who are not 'obvious' strategists provide a more holistic understanding. For example, Balogun et al.'s (2015b) museum tour guides realize the museum's strategy on a day-to-day basis through their situated talk, actions and gestures; Jarzabkowski, Lê and Balogun's (2019) telecommunications engineers reflectively enact a legally mandated strategy in their everyday practices of entering customers' houses, resulting in unintended consequences that need to be addressed at middle and top management levels; and Regnér's (2003) engineers are entrepreneurs whose exploratory everyday activities are important for developing new knowledge (Krull, Smith, & Ge, 2012) that becomes articulated as strategy. While such studies, in moving beyond the usual suspects, enable us to discover a wider range of strategizing practices, they are nonetheless constrained by what is articulated, *ex-ante*, or becomes articulated, retrospectively, as strategy.

Following something that has already been articulated as strategy gives researchers 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1984, p. 64) and, importantly when the SAP field was in its infancy, legitimacy with other scholars that these practices 'are strategic', and, hence, that these actors are doing strategy. Certainly, unlike the comment that gave rise to our musings for this essay, other scholars would not comment that such studies are 'practice, but not strategy'. However, in doing so, such studies inadvertently reproduce existing fixations with strategy performance and strategy processes within mainstream traditions of strategy. That is, they are grounded in definitions of activity as strategic because of its articulated performance implications for an organization, or because of the strategy processes through which that strategy is articulated and implemented.

A few studies have endeavoured to surmount this dominant focus on articulated strategy in current empirical work, by theorizing strategy as immanent in everyday practical coping. For example, Chia and colleagues propose a post-processual approach for studying strategy practices, where 'everyday strategy practices are discernible patterns of actions arising from habituated tendencies and internalized dispositions rather than from deliberate, purposeful

goal-setting initiatives' (Chia & MacKay, 2007, p. 217). They propose that, rather than studying strategic activities that are purposefully articulated within strategic plans, scholars should adopt a 'dwelling' perspective, in which strategy emerges non-deliberately through everyday practical coping (Chia & Holt, 2006). Indeed, they emphasize that an articulated strategy with a deliberate design and a desired strategic outcome may very well become ineffective or lead to unintended consequences (Chia & Holt, 2009). These rare attempts to shed light on strategy as a flow of activity that emerges within practice are important in indicating the potential for empirical and theoretical novelty. Yet, studies grounded in this perspective still focus largely on the limitations of formally articulated strategies in responding to, for example, relentless change (e.g. MacKay & Chia, 2013). We thus have few practice-oriented ways to define particular activity as strategic and justify its study. What would it take for a study of the practices of reinsurance underwriters or other actors beyond the usual suspects, and the patterns of action that they construct, to be considered strategy?

A Call-to-Arms: Reinvigorating SAP by Rethinking Consequentiality

In order to reinvigorate the SAP agenda, we need to rethink the notion of strategy as consequential (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington et al., 2003). *Consequential* means both (1) something that is important or significant, and also (2) an action or effect that arises indirectly from another action, rather than as an intended cause and effect. The SAP focus on articulated strategies has been grounded primarily in the first meaning of consequential, which largely accords with the legacy of mainstream strategy performance and strategy process perspectives. Such studies have not negated the second meaning of consequential in terms of the indirect effects of actions, as indicated by the many studies demonstrating how indirect consequences emerge

in implementing articulated strategies (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Mantere et al., 2012; see Weiser et al., 2020). However, few studies have taken the second definition as the guiding principle for their identification of strategy, examining the indirect and consequential effects of actors' practices upon patterns of action and asserting that these are strategic, despite being neither articulated strategic performance goals nor their associated strategy processes. We thus need to empower SAP scholars to enter the field and, equipped with a practice lens, follow practices that they have a 'hunch' are consequential (see Table 1). As Jarzabkowski et al. (2019, p. 853) note, the 'pattern of collective practice that *we* label strategy . . ., is produced within multiple people's actions distributed across time and space' (emphasis added). The point is that *we*, the researchers, are able to label something as strategy.

A few papers are insightful in showing how researchers may examine what becomes labelled strategic or consequential within organizations. For example, Gond, Cabantous and Krikorian (2018) explain how corporate social responsibility was turned into strategy at a UK electricity company. They show that actors who engage in 'strategifying' (Gond et al., 2018, p. 242) work practices, including cognitive coupling, relational coupling and material coupling, change the boundaries of strategy so that corporate social responsibility becomes included in a company's official strategy. In a similar vein, Mantere (2013, p. 13) points to the language games by which things are made strategic, noting that strategy itself is 'a language game that governs the proper use of strategy labels at the level of the organization'. His contribution is important in showing how language shapes which practices become strategic and so consequential for the organization. Yet, at the same time, his concept of language privileges those who are in command of 'the proper use' of concepts, that is, those actors who already have the training, authority and influence to shape what constitutes strategy in the organization. These studies are important in

showing that what is strategically consequential need not be what the organization articulates as its strategy, but rather may be what activity actors make strategic through their linguistic skills and 'strategifying' work (Gond et al., 2018; Mantere, 2013).

Yet even these studies allow strategy to be defined by those actors inside organizations who have the power or influence to define what is strategic. We need to move beyond studying the practices that participants in the field have identified as strategic. The onus is, rather, on SAP scholars to decide what practices, by which actors, to follow, being open to the patterns of action that may emerge from these practices and drawing on their immersive experiences of the field (Watson, 2011) to define these patterns as strategic.

In doing so, scholars are provided with an alternative avenue of inquiry that takes the notion of consequentiality beyond its preoccupation with strategic performance and/or known strategy processes and into the unique territory of the practice realm in two ways. First, researchers that are immersed in a context are well placed to identify practices that, even if it is not evident to their research participants, are important, strategic or consequential in some way (Watson, 2011). This surmounts one conundrum in practice theorizing: that participants cannot easily identify which of their own practices are important, precisely because they regard such practices as taken-for-granted. Second, the researcher is able to follow hunches about mundane practices that seem to have no ostensive consequentiality and yet appear important to them through their own unique interpretive lens. As Chambliss (1989) has shown in his study of the practices of excellent swimmers, sometimes the very actions that, together, produce excellence are 'really a confluence of dozens of small activities . . . There is nothing extraordinary in any one of those actions; only the fact that they are done consistently and correctly, and all together, produce excellence' (Chambliss, 1989, p. 81). Our aim is that SAP scholars can uncover these perhaps overlooked and not extraordinary actions in order to show how they fit together to produce patterns of action those scholars can label strategy. The skill of the researcher is in uncovering those practices that participants may take for granted, and/or that may be considered too mundane to be consequential.

Such practices are not strategic per se. Rather, the strategic character of practices is defined in situ by the researcher. What is strategic today, in this context, may not be strategic tomorrow, even in the same context. For example, at most times the uses of a lift in an office tower block are not strategic. They are simply part of the mundane practices of getting to the office floor. However, during Covid-19 the practices of getting to work and to an office floor have become very consequential to how and indeed whether business can continue being conducted (Pradies et al., 2021). Practices are, thus, not strategic in isolation (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016a), but rather may be identified as strategic through the researcher's immersive experience of such practices 'in-use' (Feldman, 2004; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015).

This potential of the practice approach to unleash new insights into what is consequential places greater demands on our reflexivity as a scholarly community of researchers, authors, reviewers and editors. Although the majority of SAP studies rely on qualitative methods in which researchers actively explore lived experience through participant observation and interviews (Balogun et al., 2014), these studies have tended to de-emphasize the role of researchers in deciding what is strategic. Rather, we as researchers have been constrained in defining the boundaries of consequentiality with reference to others' accounts; either what our participants articulate as strategic (e.g. Balogun et al., 2015a; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014), mobilize in their efforts to be strategic (e.g. Gond et al., 2018; Mantere, 2013), or what we believe other scholars grounded in the strategy process and performance genres will accept as 'strategy'.

Embracing the practice perspective means researchers must take an active role in defining what practices are strategic and the consequences

of the patterns constructed within these practices. Legitimizing this choice requires transparency about how these practices were identified and why they are considered strategic. Here, it is important to show and interpret data in a fine balancing act that 'couples the data to theory' (Jarzabkowski, Langley, & Nigam, 2021, p. 78). Some 'legitimizing tactics' that aid this process include detailed narratives developed from field notes (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Lê, 2014), use of tables to display the relationships claimed (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021) and analytic storytelling that invites the reader, reviewer and editor to follow the researcher's journey from the hunch that these practices are strategic to the presentation of analytically sound findings (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008; Lê & Schmid, 2020). However, it is important to note that there is no single template or tool set (Corley, Bansal, & Yu, 2021). If crafted well, such studies will deepen our knowledge of what other practices might constitute strategy beyond those articulated strategies and strategy-making processes that are typical in the organizations that we study. It will also open up the possibilities to explore strategy in other forms of organizing, such as family businesses or start-ups (Kavas, Jarzabkowski, & Nigam, 2020), where strategy may not be so clearly planned or articulated, as well as extending our horizons beyond the usual suspects involved in strategy-making in organizations (Seidl, von Krogh, & Whittington, 2019).

While our argument indicates that any practices may, potentially, be strategic in use (Jarzabkowski, 2004), the onus is on researchers to substantiate their consequentiality through the patterns of action to which they give rise, possibly indirectly or unintentionally (Feldman, 2015). In doing so, we move from studying practices in isolation to examining how they become consequential in emerging a pattern of action, characterized by repetition, flow and some regularity or habituated tendencies that we, as researchers, recognize and can explain as emerging from those practices (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Feldman, 2015). The patterns that these practices give rise to are one way in which we

may understand and explain them as strategic. This, in turn, may also enable us to link with other avenues of management and organization scholarship that draw upon practice theory, generating rich cross-fertilization with areas such as routine theorizing (e.g. Feldman, 2015), socio-technical studies (e.g. Orlikowski, 2000), or knowledge management (e.g. Nicolini, 2011). For example, drawing on both SAP and routine dynamics, Grand and Bartl (2019) explain how the dynamics of strategizing routines shape strategic outcomes. Such studies demonstrate the potential for cross-fertilization, in which those phenomena we identify as routine practices may also extend knowledge of strategy practices (Grossman-Hensel, Seidl, & Jarzabkowski, forthcoming). As confidence in the practice lens underpinning the reinvigorated view of SAP grows, practice theorizing in the wider area of management and organization theory may further illuminate those phenomena that we study and the practices that we label as strategy.

To further articulate our reinvigorated agenda, we return to the opening example and our hunch that reinsurance underwriters were doing strategy, albeit that they had no such formal role and would not have identified their practices as strategic. Through deep immersion in the field, we began to identify practices as mundane as tweaking the cells in a spreadsheet (Spee, Jarzabkowski, & Smets, 2016), crafting an email (Bednarek, Burke, Jarzabkowski, & Smets, 2016), or putting on a tie (Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spee, 2015) as consequential. Of course, crafting an email or putting on a tie is not strategic in itself. Neither are we, as SAP scholars, aiming to generate a theory of strategy as tie-wearing or email-crafting. Rather, these are the mundane everyday practices that reinsurance underwriters take for granted and that we began to understand as the dozens of small activities (Chambliss, 1989) that together are consequential in constructing the patterns of action that constitute trading relationships. For example, the clothes worn in different office and trading venues underpin

different aspects of competitive or communal action (Smets et al., 2015), while the emails crafted and the spreadsheets tweaked are the way deep professional knowledge is brought to bear in placing vast sums of capital on the risk of volatile and uncertain disasters, such as hurricanes or bushfires (Jarzabkowski et al., 2015). We could thus confidently assert that these practices and the trading relationships they construct are demonstrably important to the way a global market for disaster recovery functions.

We could stop there and also say, 'this is strategy'. Indeed, what could be more strategic, as in consequential, than explaining the way that the market that pays for the increasing incidence of disasters is able to function. Still, the question arises: is there also a need to validate such consequentiality within the legacy of mainstream strategy traditions?[1] That is, can we also show that these patterns of action, by these actors, provide a unique practice perspective on something that is labelled strategy within those traditions? Here, our deep immersion in the practices of underwriters and the pattern of trading relationships they construct enabled us to generate an alternative explanation of competition. Specifically, we show how these practices shape relational principles of competition through which actors, interacting indirectly, are able to stabilize this market for volatile risks, and which is counterintuitive to the rivalrous principles that dominate theories of competition (Jarzabkowski & Bednarek, 2018). In doing so, we also realize the power of a practice perspective to explain large-scale strategy phenomena (Seidl & Whittington, 2014), such as the competitive dynamics of a global market, as they are instantiated within the mundane practices of actors within that market. The point is that if scholars set out to study the competitive dynamics of a global market or to extend theory on competition, they would hardly start with the mundane practices of reinsurance underwriters, and so might well miss such compelling alternative explanations of competition. That is the power of SAP scholarship. Immersion in the field, belief in scholars' hunches about what is consequential in situ, and trust in their analytic capabilities to render that consequentiality apparent to others, such that they can assert: This is practice. And it is strategy.

Taking the SAP agenda seriously is important. To date, we have been constrained by legacy traditions in strategy research to underplay the power of a practice perspective; focusing on what others – either the participants we study, or the reviewers and editors we imagine – assert is strategy. Some of this has been necessary and pragmatic in developing and legitimizing the SAP field (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2015). Yet if we truly want to confront existing theory and reconsider what activities might be strategic, it is time to stop being co-opted by these other voices and agendas. Rather, we need to advance the tremendous legacy the SAP field has built in only two decades by genuinely reinventing the answers we can provide to the question 'what is strategy?' To do so, we will need to engage more deeply with and trust our own immersive hunches as researchers and also to impose greater demands on ourselves as editors and reviewers to be open to new phenomena and new explanations of what is strategy. That is both our call to arms to other SAP scholars, and our challenge to ourselves as an author team in realizing the potential of SAP.

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Note

1. Given our argument that a practice perspective empowers researchers to assert what is strategy, we suggest that this should not be a necessary test of 'Is it strategy?' Nonetheless, we recognize that such pragmatic concerns may remain, particularly for early career scholars aiming to convince supervisors and editors that this is strategy. Yet our ambition is for SAP scholarship to be respected for and evaluated by its consequentiality within its own domain.

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