Strategy-as-Practice and the Focus on Sociomateriality

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Structure of webinar

- Traditions and approaches to sociomateriality
- Manifestations of traditions and approaches to sociomateriality in strategy-as-practice
- Implications for ‘doing’ research with a focus on sociomateriality
Traditions and approaches

• Socio-materiality
• Sociomateriality
Focus

• What are we talking about?
  • Social (e.g. sayings, doings)
  • Material (e.g. heuristics, tools, physical arrangements)

• Sociomaterial: the constitutive entanglement of the social and the material in everyday organizational life (Orlikowski 2007, 1438)

• Sociomateriality
  • focuses on everyday organizing is inextricably bound up with materiality and contend that this relationship is inadequately reflected in organizational studies that tend to ignore it, take it for granted, or treat it as a special case. (Orlikowski 2007, p. 1435)
  • it is a serious attempt to understand how human bodies, spatial arrangements, physical objects, and technologies are entangled with language, interaction, and practices in the doing of activities (Jarzabkowski & Pinch 2013, 581)

• Concept or perspective
  
  the novelty of ‘sociomateriality’ (i.e. the term or concept) is ‘new’ but the conversation tied to a longstanding interest in the material and its influence on ‘reality’ (e.g. strategizing or organizing). Yet, there are distinct traditions and approaches which characterise Perspectives
Distinct traditions: premises and approaches to sociomateriality

• Core premises:
  • The relation of the social and material: from interdependence to constitutive entanglement; instead of independence
  • Humans/organizations and technology are assumed to exist only through their temporally emergent constitutive entanglement (Orlikowski & Scott 2008, 457)
  • A focus on sociomateriality recalibrates a dominant focus on discourse and language

• Distinct from other perspectives
  • The *techno-centric* perspective is interested in understanding how technology leverages human action, taking a largely functional or instrumental approach that tends to assume unproblematically that technology is largely exogenous, homogeneous, predictable, and stable, performing as intended and designed across time and place. (Orlikowski 2007, 1436-7)
  • The *human-centered* perspective focuses on how humans make sense of and interact with technology in various circumstances. Here the technology is not black-boxed but understood to be different based on the different meanings assigned to it and the different ways in which people engage with it. (Orlikowski 2007, 1437)
Juxtaposing three traditions

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Research Stream I</th>
<th>Research Stream II</th>
<th>Research Stream III</th>
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<td><strong>Ontological Priority</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary Mechanisms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Logical Structure</strong></td>
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<td>Discrete Entities</td>
<td>Impact; Moderation</td>
<td>Variance</td>
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<td><strong>Key Concepts</strong></td>
<td><strong>View of Social and Technical Worlds</strong></td>
<td><strong>Examples</strong></td>
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<td>Technological Imperative; Contingency</td>
<td>Humans/organizations and technology are assumed to be discrete, independent entities with inherent characteristics</td>
<td>Blau et al. (1976)</td>
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<td>Huber (1990)</td>
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<td>Aiman-Smith &amp; Green (2002)</td>
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<td>Barley (1986)</td>
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<td>Prasad (1993)</td>
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<td>Boudreau &amp; Robey (2005)</td>
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<td>Callon (1986)</td>
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<td>Pickering (1995)</td>
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<td>Suchman (2007)</td>
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Distinct approaches

  ➢ socio-materiality

• Practice theory -> sociomateriality
  • E.g. Schatzki: “an organization, like any social phenomenon, is a bundle of practices and material arrangements” (Schatzki 2006, p. 1863) ... “assemblages of material objects — persons, artifacts, organisms, and things” (ibid, p. 1864)
  • E.g. Heidegger: everyday experiences are defined by the ontological inseparability of material and social entities (Riemer & Johnston 2017)

References
Concepts to pursue sociomateriality

- Actor-network theory (Callon 1986)
- Mangle of practice (Pickering 1995)
- Performativity (Barad 2007)
- Useful for concepts such as ‘affordance(s)’ ‘entanglement’, collection by Leonardi, Nardi & Kallinikos (2012)

For a good overview, see
Manifestations of traditions and approaches to sociomateriality in strategy-as-practice research
Strategy-as-practice: an evolving research agenda

From strategy as an entity to strategizing, emphasizing ‘situated’ and ‘accomplished’ activities

• Take no1: From language activities to recognising ‘doing strategy with stuff’

• Take no2: exploring strategizing as ‘doing with stuff’
  • Tools (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2004; Spee & Jarzabkowski 2009; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan 2013)
  • Strategic plans (e.g. Giraudeau 2008; Spee & Jarzabkowski 2011; Demir 2015)
  • Visuals (Knights & Paroutis 2018)
  • Other materials (e.g. Jarzabkowski, Spee & Smets 2013; Whittington & Cailluet 2008)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Theoretical background</th>
<th>Degree of materiality</th>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
<th>Implications for strategy as practice/consequentiality</th>
<th>Exemplars</th>
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<tr>
<td>The communication approach</td>
<td>Speech act theory</td>
<td>Textual agency</td>
<td>Situated speech in action</td>
<td><strong>Theory</strong>: discourse analysis moving towards communication&lt;br&gt;<strong>Empirical</strong>: emphasizes context and detail; communication-based micro-ethnography</td>
<td>Cooren (2004); Schoenborn (2013); Seidl (2007); Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011)</td>
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<td>Language in use</td>
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<td>Assumptions based on actor-network theory</td>
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<td>The technology approach</td>
<td>Performativity of objects</td>
<td>Interaction of human and non-human</td>
<td>Performativity of artefacts and practitioners; Entanglement beyond communication</td>
<td><strong>Theory</strong>: relationality: agreement; entanglement&lt;br&gt;<strong>Empirical</strong>: focuses on the performativity and accomplishing of the strategic plan or strategy tools, such as the BCG matrix</td>
<td>D’Adero (2008); Kaplan (2008); Kornberger and Clegg (2011); Leonardi (2011); Orlikowski and Scott (2013); Whittle and Mueller (2010)</td>
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<td>- science and technology studies - sociomateriality</td>
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<td>The sensemaking approach</td>
<td>Knowledge theory of social practice</td>
<td>Knowledge embedded in material (boundary object; epistemic object)</td>
<td>Individuals interact with materials; Cognition-focused; Backgrounding material; Inter-group dynamics (power), who controls the information</td>
<td><strong>Theory</strong>: use of tools; moving to knowledge inscribed in tools; other objects&lt;br&gt;<strong>Empirical</strong>: group dynamics; ethnography</td>
<td>Bechky (2003); Heracleous and Jacobs (2008a); Stigliani and Ravasi (2012)</td>
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<td>Cognition-based</td>
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<td>The positivist approach</td>
<td>Economic psychology</td>
<td>Physical, material</td>
<td>Individual/group/Response/outcome focus (impact of independent variable on dependent variables)</td>
<td><strong>Theory</strong>: impact of tools; cause and effect&lt;br&gt;<strong>Empirical</strong>: objects in own right; e.g., quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Jarzabkowski <em>et al.</em> (2012); Wright, Froutis and Bliotter (2013)</td>
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<td>Behavioural theory</td>
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A growing debate on sociomateriality in strategy-as-practice (examples)

• Special issue on “The crafts of strategy” (Whittington & Cailluet 2008), Long Range Planning

• Special issue on “Placing strategy discourse in context: Sociomateriality, sensemaking, and power” (Balogun, Jacobs, Mantere & Vaara 2014), Journal of Management Studies

• Special issue on “Materializing strategy and strategizing materials: Why matter matters” (Dameron, Lê & LeBaron 2015)
Implications for ‘doing’ research with a focus on sociomateriality

- Conceptual clarity: consistency in approach, concepts and terminology
- Analytical clarity: method and phenomenon
“if sociomateriality is to be more than a fashion and become an enduring lens through which to understand social phenomena, it needs to go beyond its current preoccupation with the intentions encoded in the objects or materials themselves to examining activities as they are accomplished with objects in a multiplicity of contexts.” Jarzabkowski & Pinch (2013, 579)

• Consistency in philosophical tradition: e.g. Heidegger, Schatzki, Barad, Callon, Pickering

• Ensure clarity on concepts such as ‘affordance(s)’ ‘entanglement’ (e.g., Leonardi, Nardi & Kallinikos 2012)

References
Analytical clarity: method and phenomenon

Two routes to unravel the mutual interpenetration of the entanglement of humans with artifacts (Leonardi et al. 2012):

- An emphasis on the interpretive nature of human agency (here, human agency remains the explanatory medium for the constitution of social reality)
  -> closer to socio-materiality

- An emphasis on the factors that render ‘agency’ possible in the first place (here, agency and materiality are no longer exogenous to each other)
  -> closer to sociomateriality
Socio-materiality (a communication perspective)


*Figure 2. Recursive process of recontextualization and decontextualization*
Socio-materiality (a multi-modal perspective)

Sociomateriality (Schatzkinian approach)

Implications for my own research?

• What data will I need & what methods do I employ?
• How do I analyse the data?
• What research questions can I address?
Questions and answers