



## Strategizing Activities & Practices

Strategy Committee

# **Where to Go, SAP? Potential Strategic Directions for the AOM Strategizing Activities and Practices Interest Group**

October 2021

**Katharina Dittrich\***

U. of Warwick

**Paula Jarzabkowski\***

City U. of London & Queensland U.

**Renate Kratochvil\***

BI Oslo

**David Seidl\***

U. of Zurich

**A. Paul Spee\***

Queensland U.

**Matthias Wenzel\***

Leuphana U. of Lüneburg

\*Authors are listed in alphabetical order

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
The Strategy Committee: Staking Out Potential Directions	5
Activities of the Strategy Committee	7
Images of the Future: Cocreating Potential Directions	9
“Management as Practice”? An Overview of Voices	14
Recommendations	19
Conclusions	20

## **Executive Summary**

The Strategizing Activities and Practices Interest Group (SAP IG) of the Academy of Management (AoM) increasingly attracts submissions that are grounded in practice theories but do not necessarily shed light on strategy-making. This raises questions about potential strategic directions that the SAP IG might ensue.

In order to gain an understanding of potential directions, the executive leadership of the SAP IG set up a Strategy Committee. Among others, the Strategy Committee designed and conducted an “expert workshop”, composed of a diverse set of IG members. Members of the Strategy Committee, then, gained greater clarity about potential directions by engaging in conversations with other stakeholders within and outside AoM.

These insights point to three main potential directions that the SAP IG might ensue: The SAP IG might (1) stay as it is; (2) broaden its scope; or (3) become part of another division, such as the Organization and Management Theory Division. The latter pathway is considered unattractive because it undermines many of the pillars of the SAP IG as an independent community. The former pathways both have merits and pitfalls, whilst leaving a lack of clarity about the details of potentially broadening the IG’s scope.

Conversations with stakeholders that would be affected by broadening the IG’s scope contributed to gaining clarity about the implications of this move. These conversations showed that there is broad interest among practice-based communities at AoM in being part of a broader IG/Division; strategy practice communities outside of AoM find this move favorable for their strategic positioning; and representatives of neighboring Divisions and Interest Groups respond plurivocally at best, raising both supportive and cautious notes.

Based on these observations, we recommend including the SAP community as a whole in decisions on the next steps to take, observing and reassessing the feasibility of options for the development of the SAP IG on a continuous basis, and exploring the nexuses with neighboring communities.

## The Strategy Committee: Staking Out Potential Directions

### *Looking Back*

The past development of the Strategizing Activities and Practices Interest Group (SAP IG) of the Academy of Management (AoM) can be characterized as **outstandingly successful**. When the SAP IG was founded more than ten years ago, it created an intellectual home for scholars interested in the practice of strategy-making and what managers and employees do on a day-to-day basis – a home that they could not find anywhere else at AoM. Ever since its foundation, SAP scholarship stands for theory-driven and empirically substantiated research on strategy-related practices.

Among others, the success of the SAP IG manifests in growing membership, which soon overtook some long-standing AoM Divisions and Interest Groups (DIGs). Furthermore, since the inception of the IG, SAP members have published their studies in most, if not all of the top journals of management scholarship, partly even on a continuous basis. Perhaps even more importantly, the SAP IG is vibrant, as it is driven by highly active members who even intensified their engagement in the ongoing pandemic with initiatives such as the SAP webinar series, SAP reading club, and the SAPIence circles.

### *Looking Forward*

As more than a decade has passed since the inception of the SAP IG, the time is ripe to reconsider the strategic direction of the SAP IG – not despite, but because of the success of the SAP IG. As SAP members' activities blossom, there are **indications** that other **practice-based communities at AoM would like to join** the SAP IG. Among others, this is reflected in a substantial and growing number of submissions to the SAP IG that are grounded in practice theories, but do not shed light on strategy-making as such. In fact, the SAP IG shares onto-epistemological foundations with communities examining routine

dynamics, entrepreneurship as practice (EAP), and the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO), among others.

The SAP IG has already included some of the practice-based communities at AoM in both formal and informal conference initiatives such as joint breakfasts or symposia. Embracing these communities more fully creates opportunities for growing the IG both in membership, communal support, and cross-pollination. However, doing so may challenge some of the distinctive, central, and enduring features of the SAP IG's identity and may change SAP's relationship with neighbouring divisions. This raises **questions about the potential directions** that the IG may ensue.

### *The Strategy Committee*

In order to create room for discussing these issues, the executive leadership of the SAP IG has formed a **Strategy Committee**. The Strategy Committee is composed of Katharina Dittrich (as member of the executive leadership), Paula Jarzabkowski (as member of the advisory board), Renate Kratochvil (as representative at large), David Seidl (as member of the advisory board), Paul Spee (as former IG chair), and Matthias Wenzel (as former social media chair). The Strategy Committee had the following tasks:

- **Sketch potential paths moving forward**
- **Discuss the opportunities and threats associated with these paths**
- **Include other stakeholders, such as core members of the SAP IG, representatives of other practice-based communities, and related divisions and communities to learn about their views**

This report provides an overview of the Strategy Committee's work on these tasks, as well as the outcomes generated through this work.

## **Activities of the Strategy Committee**

We, the Strategy Committee, met regularly between November 2020 and July 2021. Over the course of these nine months, we collected and consolidated different perspectives by talking to actors within and outside the SAP community. We drew on these insights to gain a holistic picture of the atmosphere among SAP scholars and their ideas about potential and desired directions of the AoM SAP IG. In addition, we developed a potential roadmap with recommendations for potentially proceeding with one of the potential strategic directions.

We started out with the exchange of our own views and expectations about the activities of the Strategy Committee and potential pathways of the SAP IG. To capture the interests and views among young and established scholars in the SAP community, we set up a “SAP Expert Workshop” (February 2021). We invited 35 SAP scholars to participate. In order to capture a diversity of views, we invited participants based on criteria such as career stage (early-stage, mid-career, senior), geographical location (e.g., Northamerica, Europe, Australasia), and gender. Based on our pre-reflections, we prepared three alternatives that could reflect the future to the AoM SAP IG (see section “Images of the Future”) as a basis for discussion among participants, whilst leaving room for alternative pathways to emerge. We used the collaborative tool Miro to collect and sketch the options in different constellations of actors in breakout rooms.

Consolidating ideas and perspectives from the workshop, it crystallized that broadening the scope of the IG is an attractive option for a diversity of SAP scholars. However, this pathway left a lack of clarity about its specific shape, how it could be reached, and whether it is reachable at all. This led us to engage in conversations with stakeholders who would be affected by this shift.

As a result, we set up meetings with 21 scholars from other research communities (e.g., Entrepreneurship as Practice and the Organization and Management Theory Division). Doing so generated additional insights into the opportunities and threats that other

communities would associate with broadening the IG's scope. Table I provides a detailed overview of the activities of the Strategy Committee.

**Table I. Activities of the Strategy Committee timeline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Format</b>
11/26/2020	Consultation meeting of the SAP Strategy Committee, exchange of views and expectations	ZOOM, 6 participants
1/7/2021	Setting an agenda and timeline, deciding on activities until August 2021, planning for a workshop with other SAP scholars to discuss different options in February 2021 "SAP Expert Workshop"	ZOOM, 6 participants
2/11/2021	Preparation of the SAP Expert Workshop	ZOOM, 3 participants
2/16/2021	SAP Expert Workshop: Collecting ideas and evaluations of four possible future pathways of the SAP IG	ZOOM and Miro, 25-30 participants (see section "Images of the Future: Cocreating Potential Directions")
3/16/2021	Consolidation of the perspectives collected during the SAP Expert Workshop	ZOOM, 3 participants
3/24/2021	Discussion of views collected during the SAP Expert Workshop, planning of meeting with various scholars from other communities	ZOOM, 6 participants
April 2021 and May 2021	Capturing the views and interests of practice-based, and related, scholars who are not (only) part of the SAP community	Meetings with in total 21 scholars from other communities (see section "'Management as Practice'? An Overview of Voices")
7/6/2021	Synthesizing insights gained from talks to various scholars in April and May 2021	ZOOM, 6 participants
7/6/2021	Planning for a report	ZOOM, 3 participants
AOM 2021	Provision of a report	

## Images of the Future: Cocreating Potential Directions

The SAP Expert Workshop took place on February 16, 2021. We outlined three possible future pathways for the SAP IG as a basis for further discussion: (1) “SAP – We stay as we are”; (2) “We broaden our scope”; and (3) “SAP → OMT: We move into another division”; and we left room for “other” options to emerge. We presented these pathways to the participants and asked them to discuss these options during three rounds of breakout rooms:

- **Sessions #1: Initial thoughts and ice-breaker**

Breakout rooms according to early-career vs. experienced scholars

- **Breakout Sessions #2: Discussions on options**

Breakout rooms with randomly assigned groups. Each group discusses all three options by adding reflections to the three Miro (Miro.com).

- **Breakout Sessions #3: Heads down on one option**

One breakout room for each option to which participants assigned themselves

Over the course of 1.5 hours, the perspectives on the three pathways were cocreated by the workshop participants. Table 2 provides an overview.

**Table 2. Cocreated potential pathways**

#1: SAP – We stay as we are	#2: We broaden our scope	#3: SAP -> OMT: We move into another division
<b>Strengths</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remain “pure” SAP but continue to stay open for non-strategy submissions and ideas</li> <li>• Control over the SAP agenda (goes back to the reason why the IG was founded in the first place)</li> <li>• Keep sense of community/ belonging</li> <li>• Manageable size</li> <li>• Greater visibility</li> <li>• Stronger research focus/ high quality research outputs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We don’t lose anything: We can sustain our core values</li> <li>• Greater growth potential</li> <li>• Expanded learning and collaboration opportunities across practice communities</li> <li>• Offering a home to other practice communities</li> <li>• Building on prior experience: prior “as practice” sessions, Warwick Summer School, etc.</li> <li>• Opportunity to strengthen our understanding of what we mean by strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential widening of our relevance as we also reach other people</li> <li>• Potentially less administration for current SAP members</li> <li>• Consolidation of memberships as many SAP members are members of other Divisions and IGs too</li> </ul>
<b>Weaknesses</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited growth potential/ remaining small</li> <li>• Doubts as to whether we will ever achieve division status?</li> <li>• Relation with STR remains unclear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utility-related issues: Growth for what? Potential loss of a sense of connection; increasing difficulties of coordinating programs across practice communities</li> <li>• Political issues: Potential rivalries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of community feeling can be threatened, even loss of community feeling</li> <li>• Loss of a brand that was build up over years</li> <li>• Dependency</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Losing people who are interested in practice-theoretical approaches but not strategy/ losing senior scholars who broaden out</li> </ul>	<p>with and adverse responses by other DIGs; potential reception by other practice communities as “hostile take-over”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disciplinary issues: How different are we, except for “practice” as unifying element? Are we able to build a coherent program?</li> <li>• Temporal issues: Asynchronicity of the development of different practice communities</li> <li>• Challenges in terms of labeling an IG with a broadened scope</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of control over program and space</li> <li>• Potentially higher coordinating effort/negotiation effort (PDW, symposia, social media)</li> <li>• Loss of membership due to large size of division</li> <li>• Less options for active involvement through junior scholar</li> <li>• Might weaken SAP Groups/IGs connected to other conferences (e.g., SMS, EGOS)</li> </ul>
<b>Relation to other IGs</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remain small compared to others</li> <li>• Possibility to build collaborations with other divisions in terms of practice-theoretical approaches/ bridging to other practice scholars rather than becoming one with them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be discussed with the other practice communities at AOM</li> <li>• Dropping “strategy” eases the relation to STR</li> <li>• To be coordinated with other DIGs with which the SAP shares membership</li> <li>• To be discussed with neighboring communities, esp. at SMS and EGOS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is not "the one" division to be with (e.g. OMT, STR)</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation program: Steps for realizing the option</b>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsure how AoM will change in the future/ after the pandemic - will it potentially evolve into a more spider net like structure?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining clarity about open issues: interest by other practice communities, potential responses by other DIGs, AOM's plans, etc.</li> <li>• Consider different options for labeling the IG with a broadened scope</li> <li>• How big would we be?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would such a merger take place: subcommunity within an existing division?</li> <li>• Split SAP between OMT and STR</li> <li>• Do others want us? Unclear if it is possible to have a distinctive SAP agenda within another division</li> <li>• Does it impact other conferences?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Attractiveness</b></p> <p>We asked participants to rank each option based on a scale "bar of attractiveness" ranging from -5 to +5.</p>		
<p><b>Ø -1.45 [N=10]</b> <b>SD: 2.43</b></p>	<p><b>Ø +2.57 [N=14]</b> <b>SD: 2.87</b></p>	<p><b>Ø -4.62 [N=13]</b> <b>SD: 1.39</b></p>
<p><b>Meta-observations</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively more senior scholars here</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive sentiments, lots of questions and debates</li> <li>• Fear of losing something</li> <li>• Relatively more junior scholars here</li> <li>• Ambiguity: Repeated requests for added clarity</li> <li>• Some of the weaknesses are manifestations of ambiguity, not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little engagement and active discussion by participants</li> </ul>

	necessarily weaknesses per se	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A broadened scope both reinforces and undermines what SAP scholars find meaningful about our IG</li></ul>	

## “Management as Practice”? An Overview of Voices

Given the emergence of ambiguities around broadening the IG’s scope as a potential pathway that participants of the Expert Workshop considered attractive, we conducted several meetings with stakeholders who would be affected by such a shift, especially members of other practice-based communities, adjacent DIGs, and strategy practice communities outside AoM.

Hence, we engaged in meetings with different purposes. On the one hand, we aimed to gain a better understanding of how other practice-theoretical communities see themselves at AoM and what their interests are in connecting with the SAP IG, if any. On the other hand, we sought insights into the views of adjacent DIGs and communities within and outside of AoM. Tables 3–5 present information about who we met, as well as the key insights we gathered from these meetings.

**Table 3. Overview of meetings with members of practice-based communities**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Date</b>
Routine Dynamics	5 leading representatives	5/3/2021
“Management-as-practice”	A leading practice scholar in management and organization studies	4/30/2021
Entrepreneurship-as-practice	1 leading representative	5/19/2021
CCO	2 leading representatives	7/1/2021

**Table 4. Overview of meetings with members of adjacent communities**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Date</b>
SAP at EGOS and SMS	2 current and former members of the executive team of the SMS Strategy Practice IG, 5 coordinators of the EGOS SAP Research Community Platform	4/29/2021
OMT	1 former member of the executive team	5/17/2021
OMT	3 current members of the executive team	6/29/2021
OMT	1 former member of the executive team	6/29/2021

**Table 5. Main insights from conversations**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Key Insights &amp; suggestions</b>
Routine Dynamics (RD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Routine Dynamics (RD) is focused on EGOS and smaller workshops, the communities' members are active in various DIGs at AoM. Part of the reason for that is because community-building within broader DIGs is challenging at AoM.</li> <li>● RD shares with SAP that (a) it is very concerned about growing and sustaining the community spirit, and (b) it is not strictly strategy or strictly routine.</li> <li>● A broader scope of the SAP IG would offer RD a “place to be” at AoM and meet like-minded scholars. Also, it would offer a place where to take more polished papers and ways to connect to other topics/ streams of research (“RD needs to build bridges”).</li> <li>● Ideas for broadening the IG’s scope: (1) Establish a committee with representatives from all practice-theoretical streams that help shape the program, (2) what community infrastructures are shared and which one might be doubled? E.g., a dedicated resources for RD within the larger practice-based community structures</li> </ul>
A leading practice scholar in management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Broadening the SAP IG’s scope to become a practice-based community of management and organization scholars “is a timely and excellent idea”, happy to support it. Also, in other areas we see the boundaries between disciplines disappearing.</li> </ul>

and organization studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two constituencies we need on board: (1) Early-/mid-career scholars, and (2) senior people that can support with their intellectual influence</li> </ul>
Entrepreneurship-as-practice (EAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EAP is a young, small, and growing community that organizes its own conference outside AoM.</li> <li>• Currently, a lot of community activities hinge on a few leading figures .</li> <li>• At AoM, EAP is part of ENT; but SAP is the go-to as a big platform at AOM and EGOS.</li> <li>• There is great interest in strengthening connections and leveraging complementarities.</li> <li>• They have heard the idea to set up a practice-based community at AoM before and they are very interested in it.</li> </ul>
CCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCO scholars are members of various DIGs: OMT, SAP, sometimes (but rarely) OCIS.</li> <li>• They noted that neighboring AOM communities do not meet up, despite a lot of overlaps between CCO and SAP.</li> <li>• Suggestions for governance structure: (1) A program community that offers equal opportunities to all communities. (2) Installing a rotating “community chair” who brings people from the different communities together</li> <li>• They offered to leverage the current EGOS SWG and to provide feedback on evolving strategy.</li> </ul>
EGOS group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shifting to MAP would open up points of connection to organizing, which strengthens the group’s reason to exist at EGOS.</li> <li>• A possibility could be to organize a sub-theme or SWG on the broader IG/Division at EGOS so as to kick-start community-building within the new IG/Division.</li> </ul>
SMS group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They view a broadened SAP IG as a big camp, which brings together specialized communities, among others, with a focus on strategy and organization.</li> <li>• Potential for differentiation between SMS and AoM: The SMS Strategy Practice IG may become THE place for strategy as practice scholars, the specialized strategy community at the AoM IG/Division with a broader mission statement. The Strategy Practice IG would then have a similar relationship with the AoM IG as the other SMS IGs (specific sub-fields of strategy research) have with the AoM STR Division (broader community of strategy scholars).</li> </ul>
A former member of OMT’s executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadening the scope is a good idea for SAP - more chances to grow and also to attract key scholars across range of areas</li> <li>• In character, the broadened SAP IG would be similar to MOC</li> <li>• Practice community as a "community of communities"</li> </ul>

team	
Current members of OMT's executive team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reservations against a broadening of SAP's domain statement, given that they viewed scholarship based on practice theory as part of OMT.</li> <li>● They were very open for collaboration, but wanted to see more concrete ideas.</li> <li>● Ideas that we jointly developed in the meeting: Creating (1) connections ("islands") that focus on particular topics and (2) informal roles with people representing topics (e.g., routine dynamics, routines, and institutions) and (3) having labels to papers that cut across division/IGs (e.g., routines), and (4) making PDW chairs check before submissions if suggestions for PDWs overlap and ask proposers of PDWs to merge those PDWs before the submission deadline.</li> </ul>
A former member of OMT's executive team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Considers SAP already broader than its domain statement</li> <li>● Very supportive in broadening SAP's domain and didn't see it as conflicting with OMT</li> <li>● SAP could become something like MOC. MOC is collaborating closely with OMT.</li> <li>● Suggestions: Do things informally (within and between divisions) to keep it flexible. Organize yearly informal liaison between SAP and OMT. Organize pilots (e.g., with routine dynamics)</li> <li>● Be the IG that builds bridges to other IGs/DIGs</li> <li>● Broaden before, create a narrative about who you are and where you want to go to and then "it will come naturally that you re-name"</li> </ul>

We did not speak to the AoM Board and other DIGs, such as STR, because we felt it was too early for these conversations. Yet, the feedback on the SAP IG's application for Division status in May 2018 gives some clues of the issues that other DIGs might raise in the face of changes in the SAP IG's purview, and it points out some of the things that representatives of the DIGs and the AoM Board would like to see for the SAP IG to move forward:

- "The boundaries around SAP's domain are not sufficiently visible to AOM stakeholder groups who are both close to, and more distant from, that domain [... AoM board's reading of SAP's domain statement led them to think] that some of SAP's most distinctive features lie in its methodologies and epistemologies, rather than its substantive content."

- “Insufficient evidence of dialogue with OMT and STR about how its joint members and the two divisions would like to see SAP evolve so that everyone is enriched by its growth.”

Based on these concerns, the AoM board made the following suggestions:

- “Differentiate the domain based more on theoretical perspectives and phenomena of study rather than emphasizing methods; many DIGs are methodologically pluralistic, so in the long run that is not as compelling a rationale for remaining a separate entity
- At least one initiative that is more explicitly externally focused and relates to communicating the DIG’s unique niche to those outside the group.
- As a group that meaningfully extends methodology, epistemology and phenomena studied by other Divisions, develop liaisons, events, and activities with OMT, STR, CMS, RM and other Divisions to contribute more broadly to the intellectual development of the field as a whole”

## Recommendations

The Strategy Committee has substantiated fleeting observations that other practice-based communities are interested in being included more formally in the SAP IG, especially when the IG broadens its scope beyond strategy-making; and that a potential move to broaden the IG's scope also resonates with a diversity of IG members. It is, now, on to the IG's executive team to decide which steps to take next. We recommend giving consideration to the following issues in this process.

First, all three directions sketched in this report offer potential benefits and drawbacks, some of which are more consequential than others. Therefore, we recommend drawing on ways to include the SAP community as a whole, or at least a higher number of IG members, in the decision process. Among others, such inclusion may take the shape of a world café, a strategy workshop, a “strategy jam” (as a spinoff of so-called “sustainability jams”), or a survey through which options for the development of the SAP IG are evaluated.

Second, we recommend observing and reassessing the feasibility of potential directions for the SAP IG on a continuous basis. This is so, among others, because the compositions of executive teams both within DIGs and at AoM more generally change in rather short cycles. These changes may turn strengths of an option into a weakness, or vice versa and, thus, reinforce the importance of the strategic development of the SAP IG as a continuous task.

Third, this report showcases the plurality of voices related to some of the identified strategic directions. Yet, at the same time, it demonstrates the omnipresence of interests in building, strengthening, and harnessing connections with other practice-theoretical communities and DIGs within and beyond AoM. Therefore, we recommend exploring the nexuses with neighboring communities as a springboard for dialogues about the future development of the SAP IG.

## **Conclusions**

In the course of the last nine months, we obtained a general picture of the atmosphere, ideas, and perspectives of scholars of the SAP community and beyond in order to discern potential strategic directions of the SAP IG as well as the opportunities and challenges associated with them. In this report, we described our observations. By handing over this report to the executive leadership of the SAP IG, it is on the executive leadership to decide on the next steps both for the IG and the potential future work of the Strategy Committee. We are happy to assist in the strategic work of the IG in the future as well.

October 2021, SAP Strategy Committee