Strategizing in pluralistic contexts: Rethinking theoretical frames

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ABSTRACT   Pluralistic organizations characterized by multiple objectives, diffuse power and knowledge-based work processes present a complex challenge both for strategy theorists and for strategy practitioners because the very nature of strategy as usually understood (an explicit and unified direction for the organization) appears to contradict the natural dynamics of these organizations. Yet pluralism is to some extent always present in organizations and perhaps increasingly so. This article explores the usefulness of three alternate and complementary theoretical frames for understanding and influencing strategy practice in pluralistic contexts: Actor-Network Theory, Conventionalist Theory and the social practice perspective. Each of these frameworks has a predominant focus on one of the fundamental attributes of pluralism: power, values and knowledge. Together, they offer a multi-faceted understanding of the complex practice of strategizing in pluralistic contexts.

KEYWORDS   Actor-Network Theory ▪ Conventionalist Theory ▪ pluralistic contexts ▪ social practice perspective ▪ strategizing

The 'strategy-as-practice' perspective takes a particular interest in the way that strategizing takes place in different contexts (Whittington, 2003; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). This article aims to develop a better understanding of the practice of strategy (or 'strategizing') in 'pluralistic contexts', defined here as organizational contexts characterized by three main features: multiple

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objectives, diffuse power and knowledge-based work processes. Clearly, all organizations are to some degree pluralistic and to that extent, the ideas we present here are applicable anywhere. Yet, some organizations appear to be 'more pluralistic' than others. For example, hospitals, arts organizations, universities, professional partnerships and cooperatives have traditionally possessed the characteristics we have described rather strongly. As organizations in many industries enter into various forms of collaborative arrangements, as matrices and networks penetrate organizational structures, and as knowledge workers play an increasingly important role in the economy, pluralistic forms of organization are becoming more and more prevalent (Løwendahl & Revang, 1998). Yet, while pluralism may have benefits, it challenges conventional conceptions of strategic decision-making. As Cohen and March (1986: 195) noted in their discussion of the dilemmas underlying the university president's role: 'When purpose is ambiguous, ordinary theories of decision-making and intelligence become problematic. When power is ambiguous, ordinary theories of social order and control become problematic'.

Our article seeks to enrich Cohen and March's (1986) observation by exploring the potential contribution of some alternative theoretical frames from sociology and organization theory to the understanding of strategy practice. The three foundational frameworks presented here were chosen for their particular relevance in a context of pluralism. They are Actor-Network Theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987), Conventionalist Theory (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, 2006) and Social Practice Theories (de Certeau, 1984; Giddens, 1984).

The three frameworks taken together constitute a multifaceted theoretical base contributing to enrich the overall strategy-as-practice agenda in four complementary ways. First, these three approaches provide distinctive insights into how managers practically construct the links between their micro-daily activities and the macro-structures of their organizations and their environment (Johnson et al., 2003; Regnér, 2003). Second, each provides useful theoretical concepts for understanding what managers and others do when they are strategizing (Whittington, 1996). Third, these three approaches all recognize the importance of dealing with the materiality of the strategizing process, according special attention to the tools and technologies that managers and others use (Whittington, 2004). Fourth, the approaches suggested offer directions for the possible improvement of reflexivity among practitioners, thus assuming one of the most important challenges of a strategy-as-practice agenda (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2004).

We begin the article by briefly reviewing the previous literature on strategizing within the context of pluralism. We then present the three

alternative conceptual frames and explore their implications. Finally, we compare these perspectives to identify commonalities, complementarities and implications for researchers and practitioners.

The challenges of strategizing in pluralistic contexts

Previous literature on 'strategizing' in contexts recognized to be pluralistic (such as hospitals, arts organizations, universities, voluntary services organizations, and so on), has drawn attention to the various ways in which the practices of strategizing diverge from generally accepted thinking about strategic management. For example, Cohen et al. (1972) used the term 'organized anarchy' to describe pluralistic organizations and argued that in such contexts, decisions follow a 'garbage-can' process in which problems, solutions and choices are uncoupled from one another. Later, Mintzberg and colleagues, through detailed studies of organizations such as the National Film Board and McGill University, described the way in which these organizations appeared able to generate coherent patterns in their activities without any clear centralized intention (Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Rather, through the cumulative activities of autonomous professionals, or through spontaneous convergence, a certain consistent orientation became evident that an outside observer would recognize as a 'strategy'. Yet, the deliberate top management process usually associated with strategy making might be either absent or irrelevant to what the organization was actually doing.

Some literature has also looked at what happens when attempts are made to apply modes of strategy making developed for more mechanistic types of organizations in pluralistic contexts. For example, Denis et al. (1995) observed that when strategic planning was adopted by hospitals, great difficulty was experienced in generating plans that were clear and focused. Instead, they found that plans were composed of long lists of vague developmental recommendations that provided little obvious guidance for action. In their work on strategic change in universities Gioia and colleagues (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996) drew attention to the potential symbolic power of a broad vision that revealed to organization members the gap between their own view of themselves (identity) and a desirable image. However, in their studies of leadership and strategic change in health care settings, Denis et al. (1996, 2001) noted the fragile nature of novel strategic orientations in a context where leadership positions were shared. In these contexts, change moved forward cyclically in fits and starts, as the actions of organizational leaders to implement strategic visions often stimulated resistance, leading to leadership turnover and setbacks in implementation.

Overall, the literature suggests that pluralistic contexts present a complex challenge for would-be strategists. Strategizing implies the capacity to influence organizational action. Yet, pluralism (as constituted by the three complementary characteristics of diffuse power, divergent objectives and knowledge-based work) appears to generate at least three types of problems for those interested in promoting concerted organizational action:

1) *Individual autonomy is often associated with collective paralysis*: with diffuse power and an emphasis on knowledge-based work, pluralistic organizations generally provide broad scope for individual action, encouraging local development and flexibility. Indeed, this is one of the advantages often associated with pluralism. Yet this same autonomy can constitute a barrier to integrated organizational action as people are equally free to dissociate themselves from centrally established orientations (Cohen & March, 1986; Hardy et al., 1984).

2) *Participative strategizing produces inflationary consensus*: under situations of diffuse power where multiple stakeholders can have an influence on strategic directions, participative strategizing appears unavoidable to ensure that all actors are involved and committed to emerging strategies. Yet, the literature described above shows that in practice, consensus may often be achieved at the expense of realism in proposed strategies (Denis et al., 1995).

3) *Diffuse power and divergent objectives produce dilution in strategic change initiatives*: in pluralistic organizations, diffuse power structures mean that strategic change must often be negotiated through the same people and processes that produced a perception of the need for change in the first place. Thus, changes are often diluted as they are implemented, producing a 'sedimented' layering of partially digested structures and strategic orientations (Cooper et al., 1996; Denis et al., 2001; Mone et al., 1998).

Clearly, rational models of strategic management are of limited assistance in understanding or confronting these challenges precisely because they tend to assume away pluralism. Nevertheless, various theories that might be more relevant to pluralistic contexts have been explored by strategic management scholars. Most obviously there is a stream of research centred on political processes in strategy making (Hardy, 1995; Narayanan & Fahey, 1982; Pettigrew, 1973). From this perspective, diffuse power and divergent objectives ensure that strategies will be the 'political resultant' of 'pulling and hauling' (Allison, 1971) among competing interests and visions of appropriate strategic directions. A political frame clearly has potential and echoes of

it will be seen in some of our discussion below. However, as noted by Hardy and Clegg (1996), many discussions of power and politics in organizational strategy-making tend to see power as a legitimate resource only for the dominant coalition. Indeed, the very word 'politics' is associated in the minds of many managers and scholars alike with 'illegitimate' (read not managerially sanctioned) behaviour (Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). There is a need for a perspective on strategizing in which pluralism is viewed as a natural state of affairs and not as a subversive aberration.

Another perspective with some relevance is the institutional school (Ferlie et al., 1996; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Townley, 2002) because it focuses on the origins of the values and interpretive schemes that influence organizational members. Pluralistic organizations are characterized by the co-existence of a variety of logics or rationalities which are legitimated by stakeholders inside and outside the organization. Again the discussion presented below echoes some of these ideas. However, institutional theorists have generally not explained the processes by which a strategist in action juxtaposes or reconciles divergent frames, or the processes by which a compromise among competing rationalities may become possible.

In this article, we look beyond the rational, political and institutional models of strategizing to explore the potential of three alternate theoretical perspectives. These view strategizing respectively as a 'translation process', as an 'accommodation process', and as a 'social practice'. In the discussion below, we examine the conceptual roots of each perspective in social and organizational theory, the type of definition of strategy that derives from it, the role of organizational actors within it, and the conceptions of outcomes that it favours. We also identify and examine the limited number of empirical research exemplars from the organization studies literature that draw on these frames. We argue that each individual perspective offers a new way to understand and address some particular challenges of strategizing in pluralistic contexts. The comparison and confrontation of ideas based on these perspectives also has potential to offer richer insights than each perspective alone.

Strategizing as a translation process: Building actor-networks

Conceptual foundations

Actor-Network Theory (or ANT) was originally developed by French sociologists of science Michel Callon (1986) and Bruno Latour (1987) as an

approach to understanding the emergence and dominance of technological and scientific ideas. It is a combined methodological and conceptual tool based on the somewhat controversial idea that technological artefacts and even scientific 'discoveries' are socially defined as scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, and others interact with each other and with existing artefacts in a dynamic and non-deterministic way to bring new objects and new scientific concepts into existence to the point where they are taken for granted. Specifically, the approach views technologies and the networks of human and non-human actors (or 'actants') linked to them as mutually constitutive. The technology and the actor-network are built up gradually and simultaneously as central actors ('translators' in ANT's specialized language) succeed in mobilizing other participants and non-human entities as supporters of their definition of the technology while simultaneously redefining it in terms that can maintain this support. Technological artifacts become taken for granted ('irreversible') as the actor-networks surrounding them are solidified. Actors are attached to the network as the artifact in question is defined so as to 'translate' their needs and identities, with different actors being quite likely to interpret the emerging 'object' and their own role with respect to it in different ways. The trick for a would-be 'translator' is to make the different meanings mutually compatible and to 'enrol' a network of actors so that the object may come to exist.

The theory as developed by its originators involves an extensive and sometimes rather hermetic set of terms to describe its various elements. For example, theorists speak of 'obligatory passage points' as the creation of nodes through which all actors must pass in order to obtain what they need. Theorists also talk of four sub-processes or 'moments' of translation: 'problematization' in which translators attempt to define an issue and offer an 'obligatory passage point' drawing an initial set of actors together to solve it; 'intéressement' in which translators determine and fix the interests of key actors so that they are willing to stay with an emerging project; 'enrolment' in which representatives of main groups of actors are assigned 'roles' and are drawn together to build an alliance; 'mobilization' in which the actor-network is extended beyond an initial group.

The theory obviously recalls a political model of organization and society. Simplistically, 'translators' can be seen as Machiavellian manipulators who use every trick in the book to build alliances around their definitions of the world. Many writers have tended to apply the theory in this way. However, Latour (1996) himself resists this reductionist interpretation of ANT. He insists on the symmetry of the theory as a unified model of the natural and social worlds in which no entity (human or non-human) has particular priority or lies outside the network. For example, translators are themselves constituted by the networks of actors supporting them. Any

technology is itself an actor in a network that contributes to defining the identities and roles of other actors. The theory is also dynamic. While it has often been used to explain how technological artefacts become 'irreversible', that irreversibility is always contestable as the network supporting an artefact or object shifts over time.

ANT and strategizing in pluralistic contexts

So how might this set of conceptual and methodological tools be relevant to strategizing in pluralistic contexts? First, pluralistic contexts are character-ized by diffuse power. It is clear that this feature lies front and centre in ANT to the extent that the theory describes and explains how despite fragmen-tation of power and goals, it is possible to build networks of support around definitions of technology so that they become taken for granted. Second, the flexibility of ANT allows almost any entity to be defined in terms of actor-networks that support it. Thus in this framework, an 'organizational strategy' can be taken as equivalent to any technological artifact or scientific discovery. From this perspective, a particular 'strategy' exists to the extent that its existence is made real by the network of organizational actors (human and non-human) that support it. ANT also offers a series of ideas about how such strategies might be created. Strategizing, within this definition, becomes a 'translation' process with all the potential elements of problematization, intéressement, enrolment, and mobilization leading potentially (but not deterministically) to the irreversibility of a well-defined strategy. The fragility of strategic orientations in pluralistic contexts is explainable by the way in which actors are or are not able to detach them-selves from the definition of strategy and the network of support that dynamically emerges through this translation process. The approach also draws attention to the ways in which certain objects can acquire agency (become 'actants') in the process of strategizing. For example, objects such as strategic plans or resource allocation formulas, once constituted, may serve to define or at least constrain the roles and identities of human actors.

     Based on the analogy above, the application and extension of ANT to strategizing in pluralistic contexts appears immediately obvious and at first sight, appealing. Yet empirical applications to organizational issues are still rare. Most such applications deal with the implementation of artifacts that are to some extent technological in nature and thus closest to the original domain of ANT. For example, ANT has been used to look at the adoption and diffusion of information systems (Lea et al., 1995; Walsham & Sahay, 1999); accounting systems (Chua, 1995; Fussel & George, 2000; Lowe, 2001); and performance models (Hansen & Mauritsen, 1999). While these works are interesting, in this article, we focus more specifically in Table 1 on

Table 1 Illustrative applications of ANT to strategy-related issues

Article	Context and strategic issue/artefact considered	Methodology	Contributions from use of ANT
Knights et al. (1993)	*Organizational context:* Inter-organizational relationships within the financial services industry	Case study	Uses ANT as a tool to trace the complex non-linear processes by which a new intermediary organization is created in an industry. The networking activities among actors and intermediaries required to create this new organization are used to illustrate an important new kind of organizational knowledge-work.
	Focal strategic artefact: a new company to manage electronic interface in the industry		
Ezzamel (1994)	*Organizational context:* University	Single case study (based on participant observation & analysis of documents)	Uses ANT to show how power inherent in knowledge-based artifacts (like a budgeting system) can be mobilized by both proponents and opponents of change to redefine strategic situations (paper uses ANT combined with Foucauldian theory).
	Focal strategic artefact: a new budgeting system suggesting a major reallocation of resources		
Parker & Wragg (1999)	*Organizational context:* Public sector local community domain	Single case study (little information but appears based on interviews and documents)	Uses ANT to illustrate the creation of competing networks struggling to control the definition of a single strategic issue (navigation on the Wye), and the role of 'texts' in glueing together durable networks (in this case, a 150-year-old document was invoked).
	Focal strategic artefact: plans for river navigation		

(cont.)

Table 1 continued

Article	Context and strategic issue/artefact considered	Methodology	Contributions from use of ANT
Demers & Charbonneau (2001)	*Organizational context:* Electricity company and stakeholder groups *Focal strategic artefact:* plan to dam a major river for electricity production	Discourse analysis of a single major document	Uses ANT to illustrate various discursive ('translation') strategies within the text of a single strategy document. The paper shows how the authors of the document position the interests of various other actors, defining the reasons why they should support the proposed strategy (e.g. 'You need what we have', 'We want what you want', 'Don't we all want the same thing?', Latour, 1987).
Hensman (2001)	*Organizational context:* A Cooperative bank *Focal strategic artefact:* customer relations management (but also includes other strategies definable as contributing to customer value)	Case study (participant observation and interviews)	Uses ANT to define strategy-making as a networking process 'in which intermediaries translate their solutions (. .) into obligatory passage points so as to achieve network closure'. Shows how these solutions can become 'black holes' that attract all attempts at alternative solutions and thus prevent constructive change.

the much smaller number of applications that seem to have a closer relationship with strategy and strategizing. Note that since ANT has not moved into the mainstream strategy literature, applications tend to be published in less widely known outlets (some in French).

In Table 1, we have noted the source, the context and strategic issue considered, the methods adopted and the particular way in which ANT has been used. The first observation about these contributions is that (with no planning on our part) all papers deal directly or indirectly with pluralistic contexts. Three of the five papers explicitly concern inter-organizational issues. The papers by Demers and Charbonneau (2001) and Parker and Wragg (1999) are concerned with public policy questions that involve a variety of stakeholders, while the article by Knights et al. (1993) deals with the creation of a new organization serving as an intermediary in an inter-organizational domain. Thus its mission and strategy are necessarily defined through the networking processes developed among its originators. The other two papers involve single organizational contexts but ones that have pluralistic components: a university (Ezzamel, 1994) and a financial services cooperative (Hensman, 2001). Clearly, ANT has particular resonance for strategizing in pluralistic contexts.

Although all the papers view strategizing processes in terms of the construction of actor-networks, they illustrate between them three different dynamic patterns that can emerge from this process: *strategic convergence*, *strategic conflict* and *strategic inertia*. A fourth dynamic pattern – *strategic instability* – is emerging in some of our own recent research.

The article by Knights et al. (1993) focuses on the development of *strategic convergence* around a single solution from a situation of fragmentation. This is the article that perhaps most reflects the origins of ANT as a means of explicating the social construction of technological artefacts, except that here, the artefact is a new organizational form with a specific mission and role. As we noted earlier, pluralistic organizations may experience some difficulty in achieving strategic convergence in a deliberate way, but Knights et al.'s (1993) article shows that it can be done. Similarly, Demers and Charbonneau's (2001) study of an organizational strategy document shows how a specific actor may discursively construct a convergent network in terms of meanings – illustrating an attempt at 'translation'.

Two of the papers focus specifically on *strategic conflict*. Ezzamel (1994) and Parker and Wragg (1999) in different ways show how distinct networks may develop around conflicting definitions of strategy and how their proponents may draw on knowledge represented in texts or technical expertise in an attempt to solidify these competing networks.

The paper by Hensman (2001) provides an interesting illustration of how *strategic inertia* can develop in a pluralistic context. In his cooperative firm, he identifies a group of actors at an intermediate level between the individual member banks and corporate headquarters that has succeeded in defining its role in such a way as to become an obligatory passage point for any others attempting to develop a new strategic orientation oriented around customers. Yet, at the same time, this group of actors has consistently failed to solidify the organization's strategy and create viable links with the environment. However, paradoxically, it succeeds in maintaining its key role in the organizational network precisely by allowing its strategy to remain ambiguous. Clarity would destroy the support it maintains from the co-operative membership. It thus becomes what Hensman calls a 'black hole' that attracts almost all strategic initiatives towards it, but that fails to achieve substantive change.

Finally, in our own ongoing research on hospital mergers, we are focusing on *strategic instability*, looking at how networks supporting strategic orientations form, converge temporarily and then disband to be replaced by new networks and alternate strategic orientations. Despite huge investments of energy, actors involved in the newly merged hospital's attempt to find a way to solidify the merger project in a new configuration of services, seem unable to reach a stable agreement. Temporary agreements repeatedly break down as the ambiguities that allowed them to exist become clarified and as the links tying people to them are loosened by the appearance of other temporarily more attractive solutions.

Overall, these various pieces of work suggest that there is potential to enrich understanding of strategizing in pluralistic contexts using actor-network theory. The approach seems well adapted to contexts involving atomized participants loosely coupled together – that is, where power is diffuse and objectives are multiple and shifting. The approach focuses simultaneously on the mobilization of multiple meanings and the linking of multiple individuals in a dynamic way. Indeed strategy comes to be defined by the network of actors that support it – so pluralism is embedded even within its definition. A would-be strategist (or 'translator') that sees the world from an ANT perspective will recognize the need to think simultaneously in terms of both strategies and the networks of support that they can engage. He or she will be drawn to consider the diverse meanings that strategic orientations may have for others and how those meanings might be reconstructed to render them more or less attractive. He or she will also be more sensitive to the dynamic and shifting nature of strategic consensus as well as the importance of irreversible investments in solidifying both networks and strategic orientations.

Strategizing as an accommodation process: Managing competing values

Conceptual foundations

One of the main challenges of pluralistic organizations is to generate strategies in a context of multiple or conflicting objectives. The role played by values and potentially conflicting rationalities in shaping behaviours of organizational actors is well recognized in organizational analysis (Gioa & Chittipeddi, 1991; Quinn, 1988; Selznick, 1957; Townley, 2002). However, the processes associated with the reconciliation of competing values systems have not been analysed extensively. A recent body of work by French sociologists (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, 2006), the conventionalist school, focuses on the bases and processes by which actors achieve cooperation despite potentially divergent values. Somewhat similar to the institutional theorists, the conventionalists are interested in the role played by normative systems in shaping interactions between individuals. Based on an historical analysis of emerging core values in the western world, they propose a typology of competing rationalities. The focus of their analysis is on the dynamics involved in securing the legitimacy of these core values and in achieving co-existence and reconciliation when multiple values compete.

More specifically, following an in-depth analysis of classic work in political philosophy, Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, 2006) identify six 'worlds', 'cities' or constitutive value frameworks that structure social arrangements: the 'inspirational', 'domestic', 'opinion', 'civic', 'merchant' and 'industrial' worlds (see Table 2 derived from Amblard et al., 1996; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, 2006).

The 'inspirational' world refers to the legitimacy of the spontaneous vision, imagination and creativity of the artist. It is a highly individualistic world. The 'domestic' world is a world of tradition ruled by the principles of loyalty and the respect of authority based on assigned roles, status and duties among individuals. The world of 'opinion' or reputation values the achievement of public recognition and prestige. The judgements that others make about a person are critical in this world. The 'civic' world values civic duties and the suppression of particular interests in the pursuit of the common good. It is based on an ideal of justice and solidarity. The 'merchant' world is driven by the interests of competing actors who take part in a commercial game in order to achieve their personal goals. Finally, the 'industrial' world is driven by the search for efficiency and standardization. Science and technology are seen to be powerful tools in the service of industrial development.

Table 2 Six 'worlds' or constitutive value frameworks

	Inspirational	Domestic	Opinion	Civic	Merchant	Industrial
Superior principle	Inspiration, originality	Tradition, loyalty	Judgement of others	Collective good	Competition	Effectiveness, performance
Individual qualities	Creative, imaginative, passionate	Dedicated, wise, benevolent	Prestige, public recognition	Representative, official	Defence of self-interest	Dedication to work
Specific investments	Risk	Sense of duty	Pursuit of publicity	Renunciation of personal interests, dedication to solidarity	Search for personal opportunities	Investments in progress
Test	Introspection, solitude	Family ceremonies	Setting up public events	Demonstration in favour of moral causes	Concluding a contract or transaction	Rational tests

Each of these worlds is defined according to a set of dimensions. A given world is based on a superior principle which specifies what needs to be valued or respected in any social situation, the qualities or attributes that social agents must demonstrate, the type of effort or investments that individuals must make to gain respect, and a test ('*épreuve*') that is considered to be fair in order to determine or restore legitimacy within a given world. The previous definitions we provided of the different worlds define clearly their superior principles (respectively, spontaneity or artistic ingenuity, paternalism and hierarchy, opinion of others, collective well-being, competition, instrumental rationality and performance).

To gain respect in a given world, individuals have to show the attributes that incarnate the superior principle. The artist will be unpredictable, passionate and eccentric, the patriarch of the domestic world will show wisdom and benevolence, the prestigious individual will constantly seek recognition from others, civic heroes will promote solidarity and genuine collaboration, the 'rational actor' in the merchant world will be a strong promoter of his or her own interests and the industrial figure will demonstrate dedication to work and performance. Similarly, the search for respect in a given world will imply specific investments on the part of the individuals. The artist must take risks, the patriarch must demonstrate a sense of duty, the merchant must look for opportunities and so on (see Table 2).

Finally, to exemplify each of these worlds, some ideal tests are suggested by the conventionalists. The great artist will be someone who has passed through the loneliness and trauma of an introspective adventure. In

the domestic world, family ceremonies restore the weight of tradition. In the world of opinion, remarkable public events may increase reputation. In the civic world, public demonstrations in favour of moral or humanitarian causes are appreciated. In the merchant world, the signing of contracts and the completion of economic exchanges reaffirm legitimacy. Finally, formal testing procedures for judging products and work methods are mechanisms by which the industrial world shows its virtuosity.

In general, the ordering of the social world according to a fixed set of logics does not leave much freedom to social agents to modify or adapt forms of rationality. An individual's scope for action will consist mainly of working out compromises between pre-existing and competing logics. However, despite a limited set of recurrent value frameworks, collective settings or situations will rely on a mix of the different worlds. This is where the notion of 'conventions' becomes important. Conventions make the co-existence of heterogeneous worlds possible by providing an acceptable compromise between competing value frameworks.

A convention is an artifact or an object that crystallizes the compromise between various logics in a specific context. Because individuals in an organization will not always identify with similar worlds and because a single individual may identify with multiple worlds, the invention and negotiation of conventions becomes critical to ensure coordination and cooperation. For example, a convention might be a quality improvement policy in a public service organization where the rules of the merchant and the industrial worlds act in synergy. A new copyright law could bridge the inspirational world with the merchant world. Star and Griesemer's (1989) work on 'boundary objects' echoes the conventionalist stance. Boundary objects (as conventions) are objects that can be interpreted differently by different groups and may thus bridge different worlds. Star and Griesemer (1989) suggest that various scenarios can be identified for creating such bridges, from the use of a lowest common denominator which minimally satisfies each world to the generation of complex agreements in which each world recognizes its fundamental values, to the deliberate separation of the different worlds allowing them to evolve in parallel with minimal coordination.

Of course, conventions in themselves can be a source of tension and critique in society and organizations. If people feel that some fundamental principles associated with a world with which they identify are not respected, they may contest the legitimacy of the rules or instruments used in the regulation of a situation (e.g. contracts, performance measures, criteria used to assess the value of research in academia, etc.) taking on the key role of 'critic' (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999) and becoming a potential agent of change and adjustment. Changes in the environment may also undermine or favour the relative legitimacy of the various worlds. Boltanski and Thévenot

(1991, 2006) suggest two main processes by which social agents will try to restore normative legitimacy of current rules and regulations. They may become involved in short-term local and superficial compromises, or they may attempt to negotiate durable agreements that respect the competing worlds in a more integrated way. In pluralistic contexts, conventions will develop according to the need to secure acceptable compromises between the various logics that compete for legitimacy.

In summary, the conventionalists have provided an interesting analytical framework for defining competing values in organizations that extends analysis beyond instrumental and formal rationality. Further, their approach pays attention to the processes by which a normative order gains or maintains legitimacy and by which a compromise among competing rationalities may become possible. How then might these contributions be relevant to the study of strategizing?

Conventionalist theory and strategizing in pluralistic contexts

In this section we will attempt to extend the conventionalist approach to an examination of strategizing processes in pluralistic contexts. In contrast to our previous discussion of ANT and our subsequent discussion of the social practice perspective that draw more strongly on previous empirical research, our analysis here is almost exclusively conceptual partly because there have been few empirical contributions so far (but see Chiapello [1998] on modes of control in artistic organizations and Demers et al. [2003] on the 'worlds' reflected in corporate merger announcements). Specifically, we will focus on three themes: the role played by the constraints imposed on the manifestation of the various worlds and their impact on the shaping of strategies, the active positioning of actors in strategizing processes and the conditions of legitimacy in a world of conventions.

Strategy as convention rooted in history and societal norms: from a conventionalist perspective, we propose that organizational strategy can be defined as a convention: a sustainable compromise among competing values. Because pluralistic organizations are by definition not mono-logic, strategies must incorporate a variety of logics or rationalities. For example, tensions between the inspirational world and the merchant world are inherent to the evolution of artistic organizations (Chiapello, 1998; Townley, 2002). Strategies in such contexts will be a compromise between these logics. They will be legitimate as long as the ordering of multiple logics is acceptable for the various stakeholders inside and outside the organization.

From a conventionalist perspective, organizational strategies are the resultant of deliberate and emergent actions. Emergent strategies develop in response to broad societal or institutional trends and also to the cumulative

effect of previous compromises or conventions. The legitimacy of a given normative order (world) will fluctuate over time (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) and strategies will shift to follow broad changes in institutional environments. For example, recent analysis of the impact of the 'New Public Management' in different public sector domains suggests that 'managerialism' as a set of values has recently taken precedence over more 'traditional' logics (Ferlie et al., 1996; Townley, 2002). Strategies will thus partly emerge from these environmental or external determinants and organizations will have a limited set of worlds or values to rely on in the definition of its strategy. Organizational strategies will also be constrained by the nature or content of previous compromises/conventions and will thus tend to follow a path-dependency logic. As we see below, this does not mean, however that organization members cannot play a role in their development.

Strategizing as accommodation; strategists as critics. Strategizing consists of a set of processes that generate accommodation between competing values that cannot be discarded but that, at the same time, are sources of tension. Based on this conception of the strategy formation process, managers and other individuals have some opportunity for short-term deliberate action. In fact, the strategist, for the conventionalist, can be conceived as a 'critic'.

The role of the 'critic' is central to the argument of Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) in their analysis of contemporary capitalism. It is only or mostly by contesting explicitly predominant or emerging logics that organization members will secure a role in the strategy formation process. Without active critics, the strategy will take shape according to previous arrangements among the different worlds. Critical thinking questions the normative assumptions behind current strategies or developments (which worlds are favoured or rejected) and may help in fostering change. For example, the presence of individuals who favour increased social responsibility with regard to the environment may invoke a reframing of organizational strategies. In such situations, the critic is a vector for an increased consideration of the 'civic' world in strategy formulation.

The active involvement of actors in the reading of institutional orders and in the critique of strategies does not imply that the outcome of the strategizing game is predictable. When multiple actors seek an active role in strategizing, the resulting strategies will be the product of a mutual adjustment process between conflicting expectations. This is why we insisted earlier on seeing strategies as a relatively sustainable compromise among competing logics. Moreover, because these value frameworks are highly institutionalized for the conventionalist, it may be difficult for actors to act deliberately

on the content of a given world. Strategizing is more a task of combining and weighting existing value frames than of shaping them directly.

Performance as legitimacy. As we saw, Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, 2006) used different dimensions to define their six value frameworks. These dimensions can be used to understand the performance of organizational strategists. Because the fundamental problem of the strategist is to ensure the legitimacy of organizational strategies, the process of strategy formation will be partly an exercise of demonstration. Strategy takes shape by demonstrating an affiliation or identification with core values that are central for a specific organizational and environmental context. Thus, a high-performing strategist will demonstrate his or her virtuosity in competencies or behaviours that are viewed as appropriate with respect to different worlds. For example, a designer who produces a highly creative piece (inspirational world) and who also achieves success in obtaining contracts for the firm (merchant world) will probably be a credible participant in the definition of organizational strategy. A successful strategist may be someone who is able to navigate with credibility between different worlds. Co-strategists who individually incarnate different worlds but can bridge their differences at the personal level within the 'domestic' world (illustrated in Chiapello's [1998] work on a film company) may also be effective in achieving accommodation (e.g. the administrative and artistic directors of an arts organization; or the administrative and clinical leaders of a health care organization).

Finally, as we saw, one of the main components of the conventionalist approach is the notion of 'test' (*épreuve*), implying the reaffirmation of core values by the performance of critical processes or events. By extension, the very processes used to formulate strategies may be an occasion to affirm or reaffirm certain core values. In consequence, the legitimacy of a strategy may depend on the nature of its formulation process. If the process used is in tune with predominant value frameworks, the strategy may be seen as being more acceptable in the eyes of concerned organizational members. Would-be strategists (or critics) in pluralistic contexts need to consider the value-implications of both the content of their strategic proposals, and the processes through which their critique is introduced and integrated into strategic discourse.

Although some may argue with the restrictive conception of values described by the conventionalists (why just six worlds?), their work defines several dimensions that seem helpful to understanding the linkages between values and actions in organizations. The emphasis on multiple value schemes and the ways in which they are accommodated has clear resonance with the preoccupations and issues associated with strategizing in pluralistic contexts.

Strategizing as social practice: Mobilizing knowledge in action

Conceptual foundations

In contrast with the two perspectives so far described, the third theoretical perspective examined constitutes one of the pillars of the micro-strategy literature. An emerging stream of theoretical and empirical work in strategy (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2003; Rouleau, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Whittington, 2001) draws explicitly on theoretical resources associated with the broader 'practice turn' in social theory (Schatzki et al., 2001) and in particular the work of social theorists such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens, de Certeau and Vygotski. These theorists all contributed to the questioning of the systemic and deterministic approaches that dominated American sociology until the end of the 1970s. Most manifest a strong interest in the practical accomplishments of skilled social actors in the production of social life, adopting a position that recognizes the competencies of the individual and the centrality of knowledge to the production and reproduction of the social world (Schatzki et al., 2001).

Albeit to different degrees, these social theorists claim that there is a practical rationality rooted in the concrete detail of daily life. As Gherardi (2001) argued, practice connects knowing with doing. This perspective therefore promotes a focus on the nature of everyday life and the central role it plays in the social world (de Certeau, 1984). The everyday is where we enter into a transformative praxis with the outside world, acquire and develop communicative competence, and actualize our normative conceptions. Although daily life is generally associated with routine-driven behaviour, it can also reveal contradictions of social life and activate the possibilities of change that lie hidden in it (Feldman, 2000).

These social scientists are also preoccupied with the fact that knowledge coming from people must be connected to context or at least to indexical meanings in order to be understood. Practical activity cannot be detached from wider social, cultural, and historical development (Giddens, 1984). In action, people use these global structures in various ways through a set of objects and artefacts that symbolize their material existence.

Social practice and strategizing in pluralistic contexts

Drawing on the theoretical roots described above, strategy is considered as a social practice just like any other practice (Chia, 2004; Hendry, 2000). Specifically, from a social practice perspective, strategy is enacted through a set of social interactions, routines and conversations through which

managers and others project a direction for their firm and activate it (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). Here, the definition of strategy embraces all the conversations, routines and interactions which contribute to activate and transform the firm's direction on a daily basis. Also, like any other social practice, strategy, carried out through individual discourse and action, is contextually embedded in a set of social, political, and economic relations (Hendry, 2000). Put another way, strategy is fabricated by situated and local practices of strategizing using strategic tools and models which are mobilized through tacit and collective knowledge regarding the future of the enterprise.

While authors in this tradition do not identify their work as particularly associated with pluralistic contexts as we have defined them, it is clear from the above description that the approach has particular resonance in pluralistic domains: strategizing is described as a social practice involving multiple individuals. For example, several authors focus on the importance of understanding how strategic plans are influenced, consummated and understood by all actors in the organization, whether or not they are senior managers (de la Ville & Mounoud, 2003; Whittington, 2001). Westley (1990), in particular, looks at how middle managers participate in strategic 'conversations'. At the same time, other authors extend the notion of strategizing to include actors outside the organization. For example, Whittington et al. (2003) include consultants, as well as all institutional actors who, from far or near, contribute to the creation and diffusion of strategy models. Thus, strategy as a social practice is embedded in a wider organizational field that groups together firms, consultants, business schools, government, and financial institutions (Whittington et al., 2003). In sum, while pluralistic contexts in the extreme sense of some of our earlier illustrations are not the only domain of application for the practice perspective, social practice theorists have a tendency to see all organizational contexts as, in some way, pluralistic.

In fact, an increasing number of contributions to the literature have adopted the social practice approach and many of these refer to pluralistic situations either explicitly or implicitly. In Table 3, we provide illustrative theoretical and empirical examples of recently published articles that are engaged in the development of this perspective. All of these draw on the social scientists associated with the 'practice turn' and are interested in the way people talk, act and interpret when they are strategizing.

Among these contributions, Samra-Fredericks (2003) paid special attention to the skills or social competencies that managers and others display in strategizing (for other relevant work, Samra-Fredericks, 2000a, 2000b). For example, she examined the relational-rhetorical skills of one strategist (not the CEO) and identified six features including the ability to 1)

speak forms of knowledge, 2) mitigate and observe the protocols of human interaction, 3) question and query, 4) display appropriate emotions, 5) deploy metaphor, and 6) put history to work. The probable relevance of these social skills for strategizing in pluralistic contexts is immediately evident. In a different vein, Rouleau (2005) examined middle managers' routines and conversations related to the implementation of a strategic change in a top-of-the-line clothing company. The interpretive analysis of these routines and conversations highlights four micro-practices of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving: translating the orientation, overcoding the strategy, disciplining the client, and justifying the change. This article demonstrates that middle managers, through their tacit knowledge of the social structures they belong to, strategize by enacting a set of micro-practices which allow them to interpret and sell the change to outside people at the organizational interface.

Others centre their efforts on the everyday activities that individual actors perform in enacting strategic orientations (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Oakes et al., 1998). These activities take different forms such as committees, formal strategic planning, board meetings, and so on. In this vein, Jarzabkowski (2003) showed how the formal strategic practices of three top management teams in universities structured the subjective and emergent processes of strategizing. The study suggested that contradictions in existing strategic practices (as displayed in two of the three universities) tended to be supportive of change.

It is also important to note that language is often at the centre of these works although it takes on different labels (e.g. talk-in-interaction: Samra-Fredericks, 2003; communicative discourse: Hendry, 2000). A social practice perspective of strategy is based on the idea that actors ensure the mediation between action and cognition through ongoing talk and thus contribute to the structuration of strategic change processes (de la Ville & Mounoud, 2003). Put differently, it is through language that strategy is linked to action and routines in practice (Rouleau, 2005).

These works propose some compelling and interesting theoretical debates and notions which, for the moment, do not have the strong theoretical unity of the ANT or conventionalist perspectives. However, they have generated considerable questioning about what characterizes the social practice of strategy. The practice perspective suggests that strategizing consists of mobilizing explicit and tacit knowledge through everyday discourse and action. While formal strategizing episodes such as strategic workshops and planning meetings have been identified as providing a particularly interesting focus for research attention on the social practices of

strategy (e.g. Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2005; Johnson et al., 2005), the practice perspective may also be particularly powerful when it reveals hidden micro-dynamics and processes that might not at first appear to be strategic (Rouleau, 2005). For example, Samra-Fredericks' (2003) description of how a strategist skilfully constitutes 'facts' about organizational weaknesses implicitly through talk about operational issues stands in contrast to the explicit and formalized SWOT analyses usually proposed as tools for strategy formulation.

Although performance is not the main issue in studies of strategy using a social practice perspective, it is no less a fundamental component of them. However, it is an indirect and subjectivist view of performance. Several of these works are interested in reinforcing the effectiveness of managers and others participating in strategy formation (Whittington, 1996). By tracking the skills, the activities and knowledge that are more or less explicit to strate-gizing, these studies can produce knowledge that is more adapted to the needs of managers. Awareness of the existence of the micro-dynamics revealed by these studies is likely to contribute to reinforcing managers' reflexivity regarding their way of doing things, thus allowing them to acquire greater control over what they do and what they say.

Overall, the contribution of this perspective to understanding strate-gizing in pluralistic contexts is undeniable. By considering that strategy formation is not just the prerogative of the dominant coalition, this approach invites us to consider the actions of a greater number of actors, whether they are managers or not. This wider view of strategy focuses attention on micro-dynamics, discourses and activities that, while perhaps peripheral to formal strategic activity as usually considered, are likely in the end to affect the process and its outcomes.

In addition to throwing light on the social dimension of strategy-making, the strategy as social practice perspective also emphasizes the routinized, even mundane, character of organizational life and tries to under-stand how change emerges from routines and conversations. Much of the strategy literature assumes change to take the form of radical discontinuity. A perspective that considers strategizing as a social practice adopts a differ-ent viewpoint. It looks instead at the routine and discursive nature of strate-gic episodes (Hendry & Seidl, 2003) to understand how change emerges through recursiveness and continuity rather than radical breakdown (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2002). A strategist cognizant of this perspective may see more clearly how any strategic initiative will necessarily be constructed, reconstructed and renegotiated through ongoing practices and routines (Lozeau et al., 2002).

(cont.)

Table 3 Illustrative articles adopting a social practice perspective

Article	Organizational context and strategy definition	Theoretical influences Methodology	Major contributions for a social practice perspective of strategizing
Oakes et al. (1998)	*Organizational context:* Introduction of business plans in museums & heritage sites in Alberta *Strategy:* plans as pedagogical practice (naming, categorizing, regularizing)	Bourdieu, Foucault Longitudinal study (1993–5)	Shows how business plans introduced a hidden curriculum into the field involving participants in activities that undermined their own symbolic capital; examines language & control in a changing institutional field.
Hendry (2000)	*Organizational context:* Brunsson's empirical work on decision-making in bureaucratic organizations *Strategy:* a technological and appropriative social practice	Giddens, Harré & Gillett Theoretical article	Develops an integrative conceptualization of strategic decisions as discourse; suggests that a decision should be communicated and recommunicated – continually refined and adapted through dialogue.
De la Ville & Mounoud (2003)	*Organizational context:* Emerging high tech firm and emerging green industry *Strategy:* ongoing process involving what strategists produce – or write – and the ways organizational members consume – or read – their productions	De Certeau Empirical fragments extracted from two cases studies	Proposes a shift from discourses of 'grand strategy' to the minutiae of everyday narratives; illustrates three strategizing tactics (poaching, humour, plotting); emphasizes the contrast between the discursive nature of strategy and the narrative nature of practice.
Jarzabkowski (2003)	*Organizational context:* Strategic change in UK universities (direction, resource allocation and monitoring) *Strategy:* set of practices for continuity and change; patterns of interaction and interpretation	Vygotski, Engeström Three longitudinal in-depth case studies (1992–8)	Illustrates how practices contribute to generate continuity and change in structuring the emergent strategic process; concludes that change is not attributable to external causes or top managers but to change interpretations and systemic needs through activities and practices.

Table 3 continued

Article	Organizational context and strategy definition	Theoretical influences Methodology	Major contributions for a social practice perspective of strategizing
Samra-Fredericks (2003)	*Organizational context:* Manufacturing investment decision *Strategy:* talk in interaction on a daily basis about the firm's direction	Garfinkel (Sacks, Goffman) Conversation analysis of four sections of dialogue	Describes skills & forms of knowledge for strategizing: speak forms of knowledge; mitigate and observe the protocols of human interaction; question & query; display appropriate emotions; deploy metaphor; put history to work.
Chia (2004)	*Organizational context:* Academic production of knowledge in strategy *Strategy:* a matter of style, a style of existential engagement; strategy-in-practice as skilled improvised in situ coping	Bourdieu, Dreyfus, Heidegger Theoretical article	Examines some underlying conceptions of practices and their implications for the strategy-as-practice agenda; seeks to advance the debate on research on micro-strategizing; proposes a revised view of practical logic and style.
Rouleau (2005)	*Organizational context:* Implementation of a strategic change in a top-of-the-line clothing company *Strategy:* it is accomplished in the day-to-day encounters at the organizational interface where the strategic positioning of the firm in its environment is enacted	Giddens, Foucault, Gioia & Chittipeddi Interpretive analysis of routines and conversations	Illustrates how middle managers interpret and sell change through their daily activities at the organizational interface; demonstrates how strategic sensemaking and sensegiving are anchored in managers' tacit knowledge and embedded in a broader social context; proposes a third-order explanation of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving in highlighting four of its micro-practices.

The three perspectives compared

In the previous sections, we have presented three theoretical approaches that could be useful to understand and respond to the challenges of strategizing in pluralistic contexts. As we saw, the social practice perspective has already achieved a significant level of penetration in the strategy field. Another approach (ANT) is gaining more and more attention from management scholars, while a third approach (conventionalism) has developed mainly in the field of sociology and is so far largely absent from scholarly works in organization theory and strategic management. We now summarize the critical insights of each of these approaches (see Table 4). We first describe their main commonalities and complementarities before concluding with an analysis of their potential for integration and implications for researchers and strategists.

Commonalities

The three approaches presented have a number of common features. First, and perhaps most importantly for our analysis, all recognize and attempt to deal explicitly with the pluralism inherent in organizational and societal contexts, albeit in different ways. Also, none of these approaches draws hard distinctions between internal and external organizational contexts – an interesting feature for a field such as strategic management that has often defined itself in terms of managing organization–environment relations. For example, actor-networks may include internal and external actants indiscriminately; conventionalists clearly view their worlds as traversing all levels of society and organizations; the social practice perspective recognizes that routines and interactions relevant to strategy-making may involve individuals with various organizational memberships and loyalties.

Another common feature of the three approaches concerns the attention given to material objects as mediators of strategic action. Actor-Network Theory explicitly recognizes the potential role of non-human actants in the construction of actor-networks. The social practice approach focuses on the mediating role of formal tools such as plans in structuring strategizing routines, while for the conventionalists, emergent conventions among competing values may be reflected in strategic plans or even the very nature of the products and services that organizations produce. Star and Griesemer's (1989) notion of the 'boundary object' could thus play a role in the development of each of these perspectives, constituting a common theme among them. More specifically, their work suggests that in order to produce cooperation among potentially divergent interest and values, the translation

process central to ANT needs to be an open process that is not under the control of a single actor. Looking at our alternative theoretical frames, it appears that the blending of ANT's core preoccupation for the persuasion and mobilization of divergent interests and the conventionalist focus on harmonizing divergent worlds provides a basis to conceive of strategizing as a process of translation that is subject to multiple influences and that is not solely driven by dominant views.

Finally, empirical research applications of these three approaches have all tended to emphasize two different types of qualitative analysis, one adopting a realist perspective and concerned with tracing action over time in longitudinal case studies to directly capture the phenomena at their core (the creation of actor-networks; the establishment of conventions; the routines of strategists), and the other adopting a discursive perspective aimed at examining the way in which core concepts (e.g. translations; worlds; strategic conversations) are reflected in the language of organization members. The second of these two complementary modes of analysis illustrates the importance of underlying meaning systems to all of these approaches, although theorists of each school may hold different assumptions about their nature and effectiveness. This brings us to an analysis of the complementarities between these approaches.

Complementarities

Each of the three perspectives focuses on different levels and units of analysis, emphasizes a different dimension of pluralism, and suggests different but complementary research questions. They also offer different visions of the role of the strategist and of the nature of performance.

The approaches can in fact be placed on a continuum going from micro- to macro-levels. At one extreme, the social practice perspective is clearly most explicitly associated with the individual and with micro-processes, whereas the conventionalist stance implies a reference to broad value systems at the level of society (macro-level). Actor-Network Theory lies somewhere in between in its concern for networks that may have a local or broader scope.

Similarly, the three approaches tend to emphasize different dimensions of pluralism. Actor-Network Theory draws attention to diffuse power structures in its focus on the construction of networks that pull diverse actors together, the conventionalist approach explicitly emphasizes the role of divergent value systems, and the social practice perspective is more concerned with individual autonomy and the distribution of tacit knowledge. In correspondence with this, each of the perspectives tends to see strategy in different terms and to ask different research questions.

Table 4 The three perspectives compared

	Actor-Network Theory: Strategizing as a translation process	*Theory of Conventions: Strategizing as an accommodation process*	*Social Practice Theory: Strategizing as a social practice*
Central unit of analysis	Networks of actants (meso-level)	**Conventions** reconciling competing worlds (macro-level)	**Routines** and interactions (micro-level)
Dimension of pluralism most invoked	Diffuse power	Multiple value systems	Distributed knowledge and autonomy
Definition of strategy	A conceptual artefact constituted and rendered irreversible by a network of supporting 'actants'	A sustainable compromise between competing values (convention)	The set of actions and interactions which contribute to activate and transform the firm's direction on a daily basis
Definition of strategizing	**Translation**: the process of constructing networks (alliances) among actors in a diffuse field	**Accommodation**: the process of negotiating compromise among competing values	**Practice**: mobilizing explicit tools and tacit knowledge in interactions to produce strategies
Role of actors (managers and others)	**Translators** who enrol others in networks; **Actants** in networks that reciprocally construct organizational strategies	**Critics** of established compromises; **Negotiators** of new compromises	**Social actors** at all levels inside and outside the organization who through their practices and interactions contribute to enacting strategy
Organizational and individual performance preoccupations	**Power**: Building networks that attract support from external and internal actors	**Legitimacy** (greatness): Building an organization (or individual identity) that is highly valued according to its reference worlds	**Knowledge** of how to build and maintain effective strategy-making routines
Link to environment	No clear distinction between internal and external actants able to form networks	Conventions and value systems are societal, traversing organizational boundaries	Practices of individuals inside and outside organizations participate in strategizing

(cont.)

Table 4 continued

	Actor-Network Theory: *Strategizing as a translation process*	Theory of Conventions: *Strategizing as an accommodation process*	Social Practice Theory: *Strategizing as a social practice*
Preferred research methods	• Qualitative case studies • Discourse analysis	• Qualitative case studies • Discourse analysis	• Qualitative case studies • Discourse analysis
Research questions in domain of *action*	• How are networks made irreversible? • How do stable networks break down?	• How are competing values reconciled? • How are stable conventions questioned?	• How do routines reproduce strategies? • How do routines contribute to strategic change?
Research questions in realm of *discourse*	• How do translators discursively construct networks with the environment?	• How do organizations and actors discursively justify strategies?	• How does discourse contribute to define strategic practices?

As indicated in Table 4 for the actor-network theorist, research questions deal with *translation*: how to build, maintain and reorient networks in a context where power is diffuse. In contrast, for the conventionalist, research questions deal with *accommodation*: how to develop durable compromises that can reconcile competing values and at the same time with how these conventions might be questioned. Finally, for the third perspective, research questions deal with *practice*: how micro-routines contribute to reproducing or changing strategic orientations. The research questions based in each theoretical perspective are not necessarily contradictory and may be mutually supporting. For example, the translations that allow the construction of networks may draw on accommodations among competing values. Conventions among competing values may be operationalized through micro-level routines, and routines may serve to link networks of actors together. However, each of the three theoretical frames approaches the understanding of strategizing from a somewhat different angle.

Each of the three approaches also suggests different roles for the strategist and tends to value different dimensions of performance. The strategist of the actor-network approach is a translator who will be recognized in his or her ability to pull together a powerful alliance. The strategist of the Theory of Conventions is a critic who through his or her personal association with highly valued worlds is able to open up and renegotiate established conventions leading to enhanced organizational and personal legitimacy. The strategist of the social practice perspective is a skilled practitioner who contributes to the organization's strategic capability by mobilizing tools and routines in interaction with others.

Towards integration: Implications for researchers and strategists

How can these theoretical perspectives assist in understanding and confronting the challenges of strategizing in pluralistic contexts? What avenues might they suggest for overcoming some of the problems that we argued are endemic to these contexts? Taken individually, each of the three perspectives presented seems to focus attention on one of the essential dimensions of pluralism. The ANT perspective most obviously addresses the issue of diffuse power, the conventionalist perspective emphasizes the reconciliation of divergent and multiple objectives, and the social practice perspective emphasizes the importance of knowledge-based work. Since pluralistic contexts combine all three of these features, can the insights drawn from these frameworks be combined or integrated to suggest coherent approaches to strategizing?

As suggested in the preceding discussion, the three frameworks are not entirely commensurable. Each is grounded in different sociological theories and has its own language, concepts and assumptions. One way to use them in research might be to take them as alternate lenses that could be confronted, compared and contrasted in the style of Allison's (1971) analysis of the Cuban missile crisis. This is a plausible approach and one that is worthy of consideration. However, we argue here that a second approach may be possible – one that does not deny the distinctiveness of the theories, but that asks the question: what if we took all of them seriously as partial representations of the phenomenon? If pluralistic contexts combine all three of the features addressed by these perspectives, may there not be a zone of intersection amongst them that would lead to more focused propositions about strategizing in pluralistic contexts compatible with all of them. Figure 1 shows a first attempt to view the theoretical frames in this light.

In Figure 1, the core concepts associated with each frame and their dominant level of analysis are indicated. Also as we see in Figure 1, each frame is associated with one of the critical dimensions to strategizing in pluralistic contexts. Through its emphasis on drawing together networks of actants supporting a strategy or other artefact, ANT focuses on the *power* dimension. In its emphasis on the accommodation of competing value systems, conventionalist theory is preoccupied with the *legitimacy* of emerging strategies (or conventions). Finally, in its focus on the everyday mobilization of tacit knowledge in the creation of strategies, the social practice perspective emphasizes the *knowledge* dimension. Strategizing in pluralistic contexts requires all of these and lies at the confluence or inter-section of these poles: power acquired by collectively operating within networks, legitimacy acquired by incarnating and bridging the values that lie at the heart of organizational identity, and knowledge that is embedded in and acquired through participation in organizational routines and practices. The arrows in the figure thus suggest the need to combine these three elements in successful strategizing. But is this a plausible option? Is the inter-section of these perspectives a null set or can the three demands be recon-ciled to deal with the challenges associated with strategizing under pluralism that we described earlier. If so, how? In the following discussion, we argue that they can but only under certain conditions.

Strategizing as the creation of value-based networks constituted through routines

Actor-Network Theory directs strategists, as translators, towards the consideration of how to build networks around strategic orientations. It suggests that strategy can only be constructed in synchrony with the network
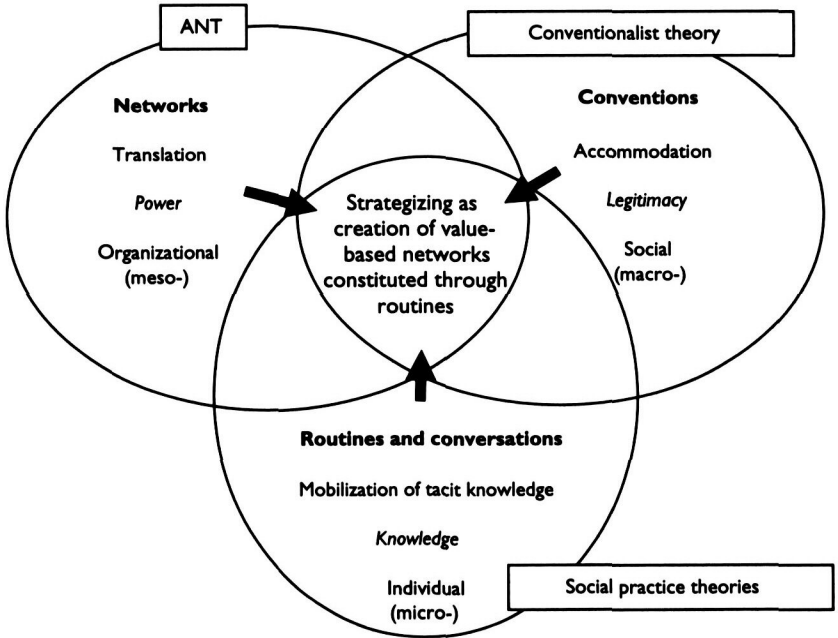
Figure 1   Strategizing in pluralistic contexts at the intersection of theoretical frames

that defines it. In pluralistic settings, the strategist must therefore see him or herself as embedded in an ongoing process shared with others (an active node in a multifaceted constantly shifting network), not as an external authority able to impose strategies. Attention must therefore be devoted to under-standing what actors inside and outside the organization want and can support, and designing and redesigning strategic projects that can slide through windows of opportunity where interests converge long enough to ensure irreversibility. As such, this approach may at first sight suggest a somewhat opportunistic view of strategizing. The key to overcoming inertia appears to lie in collectively imagining a project that can satisfy multiple interests and in ensuring that actors linked to a supporting network make commitments and investments that irrevocably fix their attachment to it.

In contrast to the ANT approach that seems to play on short-term self-interest and expediency, the conventionalist perspective takes a longer term and more idealistic view. It directs strategists to consider what fundamental societal value systems are in play, how they are currently reconciled, and how both the organization and the strategist as an individual might position them-selves to best represent values at the heart of the organization's identity. This suggests, for example, that a strategy that exhibits 'greatness' in terms of

highly significant organizational values can be a key motivator that has a better chance of overcoming the inertia associated with pluralism than one which compromises those values for short-term gain. This will be doubly the case if the strategist who promotes such a 'noble cause' appears to personally and authentically incarnate those values. This recalls Gioia and Thomas's (1996) insistence on the importance of identity and image, and Thompson's (1967) reference to 'charisma' as the only possible mode of conflict resolution in anomic organizations.

Recall however that pluralistic contexts imply multiple value logics tied together by conventions that accommodate their contradictions. Thus the strategist must attempt to simultaneously tap into the value systems that reflect key aspects of organizational identity while bridging alternate identities and value systems that are nevertheless inherent to the organization's existence and survival. In this sense, the notion of the actor-network is not necessarily incompatible with the conventionalist view of strategizing. (The intersection is not null.) However, for the conventionalists, 'translations' that enable actor-networks to cohere will be defined above all by reference to a limited set of socially accepted value frameworks rather than by the locally specific (and possibly crass) interests of individuals. To the extent that individuals seek not only to satisfy their own personal preferences and needs but also to legitimize those preferences and needs, the lesson for strategists is that alliances and networks based on local expediency and political sleight of hand alone are fragile. Genuine commitment to a valued cause and the ability to interpret that cause in terms that legitimate it with others (while respecting their personal interests) can perhaps help to make strategy stick in pluralistic contexts. Thus combining actor-network and conventionalist insights leads to the conclusion that the creation of actor-networks is important, but that for this construction to be durable, the networks need to be drawn together by both interests *and* more fundamental values. In other words, networks must be value-based. But *how* can this be achieved? This is where the social practice perspective contributes.

Indeed, the social practice perspective brings the strategizing process down to earth by showing how patterns of strategic decision-making are embedded in positioned practices and routines. The practice perspective clearly indicates that some strategists are more skilful than others in using routines, interactions and the other tools available to them to move events in directions they seek to promote. One of the messages of the practice perspective is thus that strategizing is a skill that can be acquired both individually and organizationally through active participation in its routines. A second message is that achieving genuine strategic impact in pluralistic contexts requires skilful effort over a long time: this is a call for patience,

persistence and subtlety. In pluralistic contexts, practices and routines are not instantaneously changed. Often, they incorporate participative mechanisms that may make strategizing slow and somewhat inflationary as we described at the beginning of this article. However, routines are never perfectly reproduced and changes can build on one another. For example, Oakes et al. (1998) showed how museum managers were imperceptibly socialized to the language of strategic planning. As Lozeau et al. (2002: 559) note: 'Imperfections in the reproduction of routines and shared understandings at one time can be skilfully mobilized to consolidate further change later.' From this perspective, the most successful strategists will be those who are willing to commit both to their organizations and to strategy development over the longer term.

The social practice perspective thus emphasizes both the need for skilful practice and for persistence and long-term effort in making an impact. Linking to the discussion of ANT and conventionalism and moving to the zone of intersection, such persistence and long-term effort seem somehow implausible if their object is not in some way value-driven. The conventionalist view explains how the value commitments and compromises reflected both in strategies and in the behaviour of strategists may operate to increase or decrease the likelihood that any moves towards strategic change will be acceptable. At the same time, Actor-Network Theory suggests that these strategies can only exist to the extent that they are supported by networks of actors that see in them a reflection of their own values and interests.

In summary, the three perspectives, when cumulated, offer a rich view of the process of strategizing in pluralistic contexts that has real plausibility. This combines political manoeuvring in networks, rehearsal of societal and organizational value systems, and the mobilization of the tools, routines and interactions of everyday organizing. Our proposal does not suggest simple solutions – if such solutions existed, the challenges observed at the beginning of this article would not exist – however, it does suggest that successful strategizing in pluralistic organizations is a long-term project, accomplished through routines, driven by values and embedded in evolving networks. This is not an easy prescription. Impatience and short-term pressures can easily seduce pluralistic organizations and their multiple strategists into forsaking the progressive value-based approach for more dramatic but ultimately less powerful modes of strategizing.

For researchers, the insights we derived above from the three frameworks clearly need further investigation and validation. More generally, and perhaps more importantly, our multifaceted framework suggests a need for strategy researchers to direct studies towards a more dynamic, processual

and contextual vision of strategizing that adds richness and depth to the conventional view of strategy formation which does not take into account the specific nature of pluralistic contexts. However, this will require greater reliance on qualitative, longitudinal research methods that follow actors involved in strategizing over time to reveal processes of translation, accommodation and mobilization of knowledge that are at the core of the strategy-making process and to track their organizational consequences.

For researchers engaged by the strategy-as-practice agenda, this multi-faceted framework offers a series of complementary perspectives for understanding and influencing the way managers strategize. Their confrontation and integration allowed us to simultaneously take into account different levels of analysis (micro-, meso- and macro-) and to consider representations, materiality and action. This framework also provided a stronger basis for capturing the essence of strategizing in a context characterized by multiple goals, diffuse power and knowledge-based work processes. To the extent that pluralism exists in all organizations, albeit to different degrees, the insights we develop have broad application. More generally, and perhaps more importantly, our multifaceted framework moves away from a perspective on strategy formation as a disembodied and asocial activity to view it as dynamic, social, and fully contextualized.

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