
Strategy-as-Practice Perspective from Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic: A Philosophical Rationale

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the philosophical rationale behind a study of the strategy work of organizational practitioners from a Strategy-As-Practice (SAP) perspective using the inter-subjectivity knowledge problematic. The paper is based on a general review of literature on the Strategy-As-Practice perspective, practices, and the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic. It was identified that the ontological assumptions and epistemological stances within the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic can be incorporated into a study with the SAP perspective with the focus on micro-level practices in strategizing since the nature of those practices are compatible with the above assumptions and stances. The paper only focused on the ontological assumptions and epistemological stances, though the methodological and ethical considerations are needed for the comprehensive presentation of a philosophical rationale. At present, even though intersubjectivity is considered an alternative research methodology within qualitative research, it is not a popular paradigm. Yet, it is relatively easy to study emergent intersubjective phenomena like strategy work with intersubjective knowledge paradigm where actions, interactions, and negotiations of multiple organizational actors are inevitable.

Keywords: intersubjective knowledge problematic, intersubjectivity, practices, strategy-as-practice perspective, subjectivity

1. Introduction and the purpose of the paper

Strategy-as-practice (SAP) perspective from Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic is significant because Bourgeois (1980) has distinguished two broader streams of strategy research; namely, content research and process research in strategy. Strategy content research addresses the question of 'what', by examining the conditions of success and failure in strategizing while strategy process research addresses 'how' a particular strategy emerges

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10th ICME at University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka
02nd September 2021
ISBN: 978-624-5553-03-7

by humanizing the field of strategizing (Chia & Holt, 2006). With the process view on strategizing, the focus of concern of the researchers was on the actions, events, contextual circumstances, or the internal organizational goings-on that give rise to strategy (Pettigrew, 1992, 1997; Van, 1992). Accordingly, from the processual perspective on the dynamics and behavioral aspects of organizational processes, the emergence of strategy is deemed to be continuous and changing, and patterned and idiosyncratic with individualistic and group orientation. This perspective focuses on the individuals and organizations, and the sequence of events and causal relationships that lead to organizational change (Van, 1992). Yet, many process-based studies tend to view strategizing as a 'whole process' with less attention to micro-level activities (Whittington, 2004). Later on, less attention to micro-level activities leads to a turn to practices in strategizing to examine its micro-practices. Nelson (1991;1964) refers to this redirection of attention to the internal life of organizational micro-processes through strategy-as-practice (SAP) research as probing the 'black box' of the organization. The SAP research explores strategy by considering it as a socially situated, accomplished activity, and something organizational actors are doing rather than having (Paula et al., 2019; Whittington, 2006). Accordingly, strategizing comprises of actions, interactions, and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon to accomplish activities of strategizing (Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007). Consequently, the involvement of different organizational actors and their interactions in strategy work (Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007), the embedded and embodied nature of those actors (Holan & Phillips, 2004), the effect and use of discourses (Seidl, 2007), and the continuously changing meanings of strategy and strategy work (Knight et al., 2018) of organizations have earned attention within the SAP perspective.

Hence, the questions, what do we need to consider as the nature of knowledge when exploring the practices within the SAP perspective, and what should we articulate about the above inherent nature of practices in understanding the strategy work of organizational practitioners from that perspective, arise.

Thus, this paper discusses the nature of the practices within the SAP perspective. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the philosophical rationale behind a study of the strategy work of organizational actors using the SAP perspective, under the inter-subjective knowledge problematic. Accordingly, the ontological assumptions and epistemological stances which emphasize the practices of practitioners in an organizational context in strategizing are discussed by justifying the suitability of incorporating the inter-subjective knowledge problematic for such a study. With an emphasis on the actions, interactions, and negotiations of organizational practitioners in the SAP perspective, the paper argues that incorporating Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic is likely to be increasingly applicable in strategy research with a behavioral approach in the future.

This paper is organized into three sections. Beginning with a brief explanation of the methodology of the paper, the paper then, moves on to the literature review, as it is the methodology of this paper. Using a general review of the relevant literature, the paper highlights the nature of practices since the practices of practitioners are the focus of attention in SAP research. After that, the paper discusses intersubjectivity, and the ontological assumptions and epistemological stances within the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic, following which, the discussion focuses on the suitability of choosing the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic for research with an SAP perspective by comparing the inherent

nature of practices with the ontological assumptions of intersubjectivity. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings and implications for future research.

Since this is a paper developed based on a general review of literature on the Strategy-As-Practice perspective, practices, and the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic, it intends to justify the suitability of using the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic for the studies with SAP perspective. Accordingly, through a comprehensive review of the literature, the nature of the practices—particularly because the micro-practices are the main focus of the SAP perspective—is discussed and summarised. Then the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic is discussed by highlighting the ontological assumptions and epistemological stances. Finally, the suitability of the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic for studies focused on micro-practices with SAP perspective is presented and discussed.

2. Literature review

2.1. Practices

The focus of SAP research is on the micro-practices in the organizational context where different micro-practices and their consequentiality with the macro-level phenomenon are evident. For instance, the practice of masking negative emotions (Vuori et al., 2018), efficacy driven communication practices (Vuori et al., 2018), the practice of constructing narratives of transformative change (Dalpiaz & Stefano, 2018), knowledge sharing (Neeley & Leonardi, 2018), practice of adopting a broader definition of work (Pettit & Crossan, 2020) use of different communication practices with rhetorical tactics, vocabularies, talk, and text to dynamically shape organizational attention (Ocasio et al., 2018), and using the visual and discursive practice in the construction of PowerPoint slides to influence the strategy meaning-making process (Knight et al., 2018) are some examples for practices focused within this research field. Yet, not all practices are strategic (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). Jarzabkowski et al., (2021) propose to consider the consequentiality of strategy, i.e., what is important to a wider range of actors and following the consequences of these actors' practices through the pattern of action that they construct in deciding whether practices are strategic or not.

The section below discusses the nature of practices by focusing on what is considered practices, how practices are produced, and why they are important.

What are practices and why are they important? Practices are routinized types of behavior (Reckwitz, 2002) or doings and sayings that are spatially and temporarily dispersed (Schatzki, 2002). Practice orients and educates our attention, and shapes our dispositions (Chia & Mackay, 2007), and it is the social skills that enable us to realize what it is to be a person, an object, an institution (Dreyfus, 1991). Further, Chia and Mackay (2007) specifically state that social practices are about understanding what it means to be human and how to act, often unconsciously, through socialization.

How are practices produced? Practices are embodied in us (Dreyfus, 1991) and identified as mindless practical coping (Chia & Mackay, 2007). Dreyfus (1991) has also emphasized the primacy of this form of 'mindless' non-thematic everyday practical skills over mental representations. By making a distinction between the with-ness thinking and about-ness thinking, Shotter and Katz (1996) have discussed articulating practices from 'within' practice itself. Chia and Mackay (2007) referring to social anthropology writers, state one important characteristic of constituted practices and practice complexes. Accordingly, the

'unconsciously acquired practice complexes' (Chia & Mackay, 2007) generate the possibilities for strategies than individual consciousness and intentionality. Further, they state that most human actions/practices occur as 'mindless practical coping'.

How are practices learned? Practices are carried out from a cultural tradition, and they form the background of skilled coping capabilities that enable us to act appropriately (Chia & Mackay, 2007). Thus, practices can be identified as culturally and historically transmitted regularities detectable through the patterns of activities actually carried out (Chia & Mackay, 2007), which are temporarily unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings (Schatzki, 1996) as cited in Chia and Mackay (2007) organized around shared understandings (Schatzki, 2002). Furthermore, practices are also identified as shared know-how and discriminations (Dreyfus, 1991). According to Reckwitz (2002) and Schatzki (2002), to perform and participate in a practice, an individual requires background knowledge and understanding. This implies the trans-individuality with the cultural transmission, socialization, institutionalized constraints, and embodied mannerism (Chia & Mackay, 2007) of practices.

Thus, practices are;

1. Temporarily unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings reflected through
2. Embodied mannerism, mindless practical coping, routinized type of behavior/ patterns of activities which are performed with a
3. Background knowledge and understanding based on
4. Shared understandings or shared know-how and discriminations and culturally and historically transmitted regularities resulted with
5. Cultural transmission, socialization, and institutionalized constraints.

2.2.The intersubjective knowledge problematic

Morgan and Smirich (1980) provide a rough typology for thinking about the various views that different social scientists hold about human beings and their world based on a subjectivist-objectivist continuum to highlight different forms of knowledge and theory-building (Cunliffe, 2011). Yet and Cunliffe (2011) has replaced this continuum with three problematics—intersubjectivity, subjectivity, and objectivity. Among these three problematics, intersubjectivity can be considered as central to the study of lived experience (Lane, 2014). Thus, lived experience and intersubjectivity go hand-in-hand (Alcoff, 2000) as cited in Lane (2014). Further, it is possible to use aspects of one's own lived experience to understand and engage with others (Lane, 2014). On the other hand, practice (including practices in strategy work) is identified as the negotiated outcome of intersubjective coordination (Bottero, 2010). Hence, understanding the lived experience of organizational practitioners who are engaged in practices of strategy will enable a researcher to uncover the organizational realities attached to strategy and strategy work.

Yet, intersubjectivity is defined in many different ways. The sense of having a shared definition of an object (Mori & Hayashi, 2006), the mutual awareness of agreement or disagreement, and even the realization of such understanding or misunderstanding (Laing et al., 1966) as cited in Gillespie and Cornish (2010), the attribution of intentionality, feelings, and beliefs to others (Gärdenfors, 2008), implicit and often automatic behavioral orientations towards others (with the emphasis on the embodied nature of intersubjectivity) Merleau-Ponty (1945) as cited in (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010; Marková, 2003), the variety of

relations between ‘perspectives’ which can belong to individuals, groups, or traditions and discourses that can manifest as both implicit (or taken for granted) and explicit (or reflected upon) (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010), and the act of transcending the private and becoming one with the other (Easterby & Lyle, 2003), are some definitions of intersubjectivity.

Moreover, with the different meanings presented in the available literature on intersubjectivity, the core idea of where knowledge is generated lies in the concept of between-ness. Gillespie and Cornish (2010) have referred to between-ness as ‘between perspectives,’ while Bessant (2018) stressed ‘between spaces’. The between spaces (perspectives) are created among individuals and/or groups/communities and pertain to personal and societal facets of human social existence (Bessant, 2018). The same notion has been described using the terms ‘inter-world’ and ‘interspace’ within existing scholarly work (Crossley, 1996 ; Taylor, 2016) as cited in Bessant (2018).

As per these definitions and explanations, the below features of the nature of intersubjectivity (the ontology) can be summarised as follows.

- 1) The implicit (taken for granted) and explicit (or reflected upon) / implicit and automatic
- 2) sense/awareness/behavior /behavioral orientation/ understanding or misunderstanding/ agreement or disagreement/ perspective/attribution of intentionality, feelings, and beliefs
- 3) generated between spaces, perspectives or inter-worlds/inter-spaces
- 4) of an object/ other(s)/ background/ individuals/ groups/ traditions/ discourses, and
- 5) that which is shared or mutually held.

Therefore, the ontological assumptions within Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic, i.e., Intersubjectivity, are associated with the emergence of between spaces, perspectives, or inter-worlds/inter-spaces where thoughts, meanings, identities, and actions take shape. These spaces/perspectives/worlds are associated with shared or mutually held meanings, agreements, disagreements, understandings, misunderstandings, behavioral orientations, attributions of intentionality (feelings and beliefs of others), and background. The between spaces/between perspectives/inter-worlds/inter-spaces are shared or held implicitly (taken for granted) and explicitly (reflected upon) or as implicit and as automatic.

The epistemological stances of the study are concerned with the question of what is or what should be regarded as acceptable knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2015) or the nature and purpose of knowledge (Cunliffe, 2011). The key epistemological question of “whether or not human beings can achieve any form of knowledge that is independent of their subjective construction since they are the agents through which knowledge is perceived or experienced” (Morgan & Smircich, 1980) as cited in Cunliffe (2011) will depend on our problematic. Consequently, Intersubjectivism will answer that question with a ‘no,’ and claim that knowledge that is independent of the subjectivity of the knower cannot be achieved.

The SAP perspective with its focus on the micro-level practices is essential to explore how those practices emerge, evolve, and disappear. Accordingly, organizational actors’ interactions, reactions, and negotiations are essential attention points of researchers. Kaplan (2008), for instance, discusses how the organizational strategic response is constructed through the conflict in frames of individual actors. Consequently, the individual actors

(strategists) are seeking to make their own frames succeed over others in interpersonal contests in the intersubjective domains by providing examples for interactions and negotiations within strategizing. Further, Gylfe et al., (2016) have found how strategy is realized through a pattern of reoccurring embodied configurations. Accordingly, they show how middle managers establish a link between strategy and subordinates by creating a sense of inclusion among subordinates and reinforcing compliant behavior among subordinates. Gylfe et al., (2016) using video-based research, further show how these middle managers interfere with the perceptions of the subordinates in their interactions.

The epistemological stance within Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic: The difference between the intersubjectivist, and the objectivist and subjectivist problematics, according to Cunliffe (2011), lies in terms of the form of knowing in-situ, where all participants are implicitly knowledgeable (including the researcher/s), and therefore, bound tighter in living conversations to shape meanings, insights, and a way of moving on. Knowing is in-situ, simultaneously used, and created intuitively and deliberately between spaces of different individuals, as mentioned above, as they go about living their lives through actions, interactions, and negotiations in their strategy work. Thus, as proposed by Cunliffe et al., (2004), it is a knowing-from-within that is simultaneously retrospective, contemporaneous, and prospective in which ontology and epistemology are inseparable. This renders the requirement of a micro-level focus with an embedded and embodied knower. All participants in the research (including the researcher/s) are thus considered as embodied insiders, and later, the readers may also obtain insights from the conversations and understand how these insights occur.

Why intersubjectivity? Why not subjectivity? The general focus of attention within the SAP perspective on strategy work lies in the actions, interactions, negotiation, situated practices, and embedded nature of the actors. Further, specific attention lies on the practices with shared know-how and understanding of practices transferred through culture, socialization, etc. into embodied mannerism. Thus, this general attention and specific attention requires the consideration of social cognition—the unique processes that enable human beings to interpret social information and behave appropriately in a social environment (Shany & Rankin, 2014). In SAP research the attention to social cognition lies in how organizational actors interpret social information and behave in their respective strategy work.

Both “subjective” and “intersubjective” paradigms have been two major paradigms for the study of social cognition (Ickes, 2002), and research with the subjective paradigm assumes that the best way to study social cognition is to first remove it from the social interaction context in which it naturally occurs (Ickes, 2002). This limits the chances of considering any genuine social processes which can affect their subject’s cognitive activities (Fiske & Goodwin, 1994; Hall & Resnick, 1993). Further, subjective cognition is the product of imagined interaction whereas intersubjective cognitive space is created when two or more individuals jointly construct a shared meaning through their conversation and nonverbal behavior (Hancock & Ickes, 1996; Schutz, 1970). Ickes (2002) contrasts these two paradigms by highlighting their assumptions, focus, and methods of study (See Table 1).

Table 1: Comparing the Subjective Paradigm and Intersubjective Paradigm

Subjective paradigm	Intersubjective paradigm
Views social cognition as the <i>subjective reactions</i> of a single individual to a pre-programmed, ostensibly “social” stimulus.	Views social cognition as the <i>intersubjective reactions</i> of at least two individuals to their interaction and experience as the shared, intersubjective meaning which these individuals jointly construct through their interactive behavior.
Participants are tested <i>individually</i> , considering only the interactions with people whose behavior is constrained by an experimental script.	Participants are tested <i>together</i> , considering the interactions that occur in a naturalistic way that allows genuine, mutual influence to occur.
Studies are designed to ensure the conceptual and statistical <i>independence</i> of each participant’s cognition and behavior.	Studies are designed to permit the <i>interdependence</i> of their cognition and behavior and the patterns of interdependence.
Uses data-analytic models which assume that each participant’s cognitive responses are statistically <i>independent</i> of those of the other participants.	Uses a data-analytic model which assumes that each participant’s cognitive responses are statistically <i>interdependent</i> from those of the other participants in their dyad or group.
The focus of the analysis is on the <i>individual level</i> .	The focus of analysis is on both the <i>individual level and dyad or group level</i> .
Difficult to produce any evidence of emergent, intersubjective phenomena. Relatively easy to study cognitive processes that are uniquely subjective.	Relatively easy to study emergent intersubjective phenomena. Relatively difficult to study cognitive processes that are uniquely subjective.

Source: Adopted from Ickes, 2002

3. Discussion of practices and strategy work from intersubjective knowledge problematic

Table 2 below, presents the ontological assumptions and epistemological stances of practices focused within the SAP perspective from Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic. In this table, the above-discussed assumptions and stances, and the nature of practices are presented in a way that reflects the suitability of using the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic to understand and explore the nature of practices within SAP research. Thus, practices are doings and sayings reflected in the routinized type of behavior/ patterns of activities and they are embodied in mannerisms or mindless copings. The background knowledge/understanding/ know-how, discriminations, and regularities of practices are shared or mutually held and are transmitted by way of cultural transmission, socialization, and institutionalized constraints through the interrelationships which are emerging and shifting in a dialectical interplay between individuals and their surroundings. The durability of practices and their knowledge experienced by actors across time and space are considered

ephemeral, fleeting moments or practices which are temporarily unfolding and spatially dispersed.

Table 2: Practices From Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic

Assumptions and stances in Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic	Nature of Practices	Practices from Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic
of an object/ background/ groups/ discourses shared or mutually held sense/awareness/behavior /behavioral understanding or misunderstanding/ agreement or disagreement/ perspective/attribution of intentionality, feelings and beliefs The implicit (taken for granted) and explicit (or reflected upon) /implicit and automatic	doings and sayings shared background knowledge/ understandings, know-how, discriminations and regularities based on embodied mannerism, mindless practical coping, routinized type of behavior/ patterns of activities	doings and sayings shared or mutually held background knowledge/understanding/ know-how, discriminations, regularities embodied mannerism, mindless practical coping (implicit) and routinized type of behavior/ patterns of activities (explicit)
Interrelationships are experienced differently by different individuals. Interrelationships emerging and shifting in a dialectical interplay between individuals and their surroundings.	cultural transmission, socialization, and institutionalized constraints	Knowledge and understandings of practices are transmitted in way of cultural transmission, socialization, and institutionalized constraints through the interrelationships which are emerging and shifting in a dialectical interplay between individuals and their surroundings.
The durability of society, meanings, knowledge, social experiences, etc., across time and space, is considered as ephemeral, fleeting moments	temporarily unfolding and spatially dispersed	The durability of practices and its' knowledge is experienced by actors across time and space is considered as ephemeral, fleeting moments or practices that are temporarily unfolding and spatially dispersed.

Source: Developed by the Authors based on the above-reviewed literature

Interrelationships emerge and shift in dialectical interplays between individuals and their surroundings in their strategy work. Intersubjectivity recognizes co-existence, co-presence, and co-being of selves-in-relation-to-others occurred during this strategy work, which is reflected through interactions, actions, and negotiations.

What meaning is and where that meaning is located can be considered as indeterminate. Furthermore, meanings are neither fully in nor fully out of the control of actors. Meanings are 'at the moment' and 'between people'. Thus, meanings of practice and strategy work for organizational actors are indeterminate. Practitioners of strategy, such as managers, can intervene in the sense-making of the strategy work. Yet, the meanings are neither fully in nor fully out of the managers' control. Thus, practices and strategy work result from we-ness, and complexly interwoven and actively responsive relationships. Consequently, different actors in and around the strategy may absorb different meanings at different points in time. Hence, meanings of practices and strategy work are located at the moment between different organizational actors.

Thus, the interrelationships are experienced differently by different individuals leading to multiple 'between spaces/perceptions' which will emerge and shift. Thus, the durability of society, meanings, knowledge, social experiences, etc. across time and space is considered as ephemeral, fleeting moments, though some common 'sense' of social and linguistic practices play through interactions. Hence, the meanings of practices and strategy work lie in ephemeral, fleeting moments. Thus, they are in continuous change, which has resulted in their continuously emergent nature. Some common 'sense' of social and linguistic practices that have resulted in discourses, play through interactions and contain a shared or mutual understanding.

Individuals are inherently embedded and embodied in historical, cultural, and linguistic communities. Time is experienced in the present— in living conversations with others. Therefore, organizational practitioners are inherently embedded and embodied in historical, cultural, and linguistic communities. This embodied and embedded nature of organizational practitioners is also reflected in their strategy work. Hence, time is experienced by organizational practitioners in the present, i.e., in living conversations with others.

4. Conclusion

With the practice turn in strategy research, the SAP perspective emerged with a particular focus on the micro-practices in strategizing. The nature of practices could be identified when considering the areas of practices and their importance, how practices are produced, and how those are learnt. Then the ontological assumptions and epistemological stances within the Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic, and the suitability of intersubjectivity over subjectivity for a study within the SAP perspective with the focus on practices were discussed. This was done in order to justify the suitability of Intersubjective Knowledge Problematic to study practice within strategy work. At present, even though intersubjectivity is considered an alternative research methodology within qualitative research, it is not a popular paradigm. Yet, it is relatively easy to study emergent intersubjective phenomena like strategy work with the intersubjective knowledge paradigm where actions, interactions, and negotiations of multiple organizational actors are inevitable.

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