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A Social Learning Perspective

Heidi Korin

1: University of Turku, Turku School of Economics, Pori Unit,
PL 170, 28101 Pori, Finland;

2: Department of Radiology, Turku University Hospital, Finland

Email: hmkori@utu.fi

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Abstract

Strategy-as-practice sees strategizing as a social practice that is multifaceted and alert to situated adaptations. Actions are adapted in context based on the competence and experience of practitioners. Therefore, strategy practitioners' practical and social skills learned in practice affect strategizing. Learning is often seen as a cognitive endeavor; however, seeing strategizing as a social practice implies that learning is also social. This conceptual paper adopts a perspective of social learning that emphasizes participation in practice as pivotal for learning. Drawing on the theory of social learning in communities of practice, this conceptual paper proposes that social learning in strategy practice is formed around three dimensions of competence, resonating with the main concepts of the strategy-as-practice literature. Social learning through legitimate peripheral participation produces a relational, professional, and instrumental understanding, which enables strategy practitioners' knowledgeable engagement in strategizing.

Keywords: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, Social Learning, Strategy-as-Practice, Strategy Practitioners

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INTRODUCTION

As a research stream, strategy-as-practice (SAP) emphasizes studying strategizing on a micro level to understand the everyday practices related to strategy work (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Therefore, SAP considers strategy as doing performed by people in organizations (Whittington, 2006) and highlights strategy as a socially accomplished and situated activity (Jarzabkowski, 2005). This perspective emphasizes the social construction and situatedness of strategizing. Consequently, previous SAP literature has shown that practitioners apply practices and tools differently to meet the requirements of the situation (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). Therefore, practices are adjusted based on the competence and experience of practitioners to meet the contextual needs at hand (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Whittington, 2006). This means that how practices are enacted depends on who the practitioner is (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016), and their competence may guide the choice of the practices and tools they utilize (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). Furthermore, practitioners' knowledge, skills, and competence direct attention at certain strategic issues (Samra-Fredericks, 2003) and alter the use of practices, or they may even raise new practices if old ones turn out to be dysfunctional (Jarzabkowski, 2004). This, in turn, implies that practitioners and their *ability to competently participate* in strategizing are essential for understanding strategy practice. However, regarding competences, cognition, and learning, the SAP literature has mainly focused on sensemaking (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011), the identity construction of strategists (Laine et al., 2016; Mantere and Whittington, 2020), and adaptation of strategy practices over time (Ocasio and Joseph, 2008), whereas learning how to competently participate in strategizing and individual understanding of strategizing as a social practice have received relatively little interest from researchers of SAP. To fill this gap, this conceptual paper discusses how a social learning perspective could be used to scrutinize what kind of understanding is gained by participating in strategizing and becoming a knowledgeable strategy practitioner.

Social learning theories challenge the conventional view of learning as a cognitive endeavor (Handley et al., 2006, 2007). In early social learning theory, practitioners are seen as learning by observing others and modeling their behavior (Wood and Bandura, 1989); however, the practice perspective emphasizes the importance of social over individual cognition. Thus, the later literature on social learning has turned to consider participation in communities of practice as crucial for social learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The social learning perspective suggests that practitioners gradually become competent members in their communities as they participate and learn required competence (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2000). Therefore, at the individual level, learning is defined as interactions between experience and socially acknowledged competence (Wenger, 2000, p. 227). Learning occurs if practitioners face an imbalance between these and pursue either adjusting their own experience or altering the competence appreciated by the community (Wenger, 1998, 2000). Thus, social learning facilitates an individual's ability to participate in practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and produces a change in understanding that reaches beyond the individual to wider social networks and communities of practice (Reed et al., 2010) and an experience of a meaningful practice. This means that learning is more than gaining new knowledge; it is also about coming to understand the meanings of activities, to be able to use various practices (Wenger, 1998), and to know who we are in relation to others (Handley et al., 2006). This connects learning closely to the identity of practitioners (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Handley et al., 2006; Wenger, 1998) and being embraced as a practitioner in a social community

(Brown and Duguid, 2001). Therefore, participation in social practice is essential for learning and becoming a competent practitioner (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Whittington, 2006).

This conceptual paper draws on Laves and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation and Wenger's (1998) theory of social learning as theoretical resources to investigate social learning within SAP. The theory of social learning provides two opportunities to scrutinize learning: as an individual learning trajectory or as a collective learning process that leads to the adaptation of practice over time. Because individual learning has gained relatively little attention within SAP, this conceptual paper focuses on this. As a theoretical contribution, first, it is proposed that social learning in strategy practice is formed around three dimensions of competence: mutual engagement of strategy practitioners, accountability for strategy praxis, and the negotiability of the repertoire of strategy practices. Second, through legitimate peripheral participation, social learning produces relational, professional, and instrumental understanding, which enables competent participation in strategizing. Third, it is suggested that we can better understand participation and non-participation in strategizing through the lens of social learning.

This conceptual paper is structured as follows: First, the main concepts of SAP related to strategizing as a social practice are introduced. Second, the main content of social learning represented by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) is presented. Third, the implications of these theoretical perspectives for the field of SAP are discussed. The paper ends with concluding remarks that draw together the contribution of its ideas.

STRATEGY PRACTITIONERS, PRACTICES, AND PRAXIS IN STRATEGIZING

As part of a wider practice-based turn in organization studies, SAP researchers have started to pay attention to the mundane activities carried out by strategy practitioners. Thereby, the focus is on micro-level activities and practices constituting strategizing (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2007). Consequently, the SAP literature has opened a perspective of strategy work as a social practice focusing on the actual doings of practitioners (Whittington, 2006). Thereby, SAP allows for drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives to dive inside the strategy processes and investigate strategy practitioners in action (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2007). The research agenda of strategy practice centers on three main perspectives: strategy practitioners, strategy practices, and strategy praxis. Strategizing, which refers to strategy work (Vaara and Whittington, 2012), is seen as taking place at the nexus of these perspectives (Jarzabkowski et. al., 2016; Whittington, 2006).

Strategy practitioners are diverse persons participating in strategizing (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Vaara and Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006). This expands the understanding of top managers as strategists to include actors at different levels and positions in organizations as strategy practitioners. The role of middle managers is emphasized (Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Vaara and Whittington, 2012), but other actors aiming to influence strategizing can also be considered strategy practitioners (Mantere, 2005). Strategy practitioners apply strategy practices; in other words, they apply different tools and frameworks (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Whittington, 2006), normative rules (Reckwitz, 2002), and routinized ways of behavior (Reckwitz, 2002; Whittington, 2006) in the flow of their activity—praxis (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). Strategy practices are often institutionalized in the wider inter-organizational field but manifest in organizations' own way within their practice (Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Therefore, strategizing is always

situated in context, and the enactment depends on the institutional, historical, and social construction of the situation (Jarzabkowski, 2005). However, the action is generated by practitioners (Jarzabkowski, 2005), which highlights the importance of who the practitioners are (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016).

SOCIAL LEARNING IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The definition of *community* is somewhat vague in the early work of Lave and Wenger (1991); however, it is defined by Wenger et al. (2002) as "*groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis*" (p. 4). First, this definition highlights the practice around which the community is formed. Second, it highlights the interaction and participation in a community to develop knowledge and expertise—in other words, learning. Therefore, communities are often seen as informal networks that are not restricted to formal organizational charts (Cox, 2005). However, it is argued here that the focus on informal communities does not rule out formal groups as communities of practice because communities can be oriented around work practices (Brown and Duguid, 2001) or tasks (Hydle et al., 2014) or built in a top-down manner by an organization (Pastoors, 2007). Therefore, it is suggested that the perspective of a community of practice could be utilized to scrutinize learning in informal communities but also in formal organizational groups engaging in strategizing.

Departure points for social learning in communities of practice

Communities of practice and social networks are at the heart of social learning because learning is situated in social interactions within the communities that practitioners belong to (Reed et al., 2010). The social learning perspective emphasizes learning as a natural part of everyday practice. Therefore, participation in communities of practice is seen as a fundamental source of learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, not all activity is considered learning; social learning is determined by increased participation in practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and as a change in practitioners' superficial or deeper understanding (Reed et al., 2010) of how and why to engage in practice (Wenger, 1998).

The theory of social learning sees practitioners first and foremost as social beings who aim to understand their activities as meaningful. Therefore, knowledge is competence in relation to specific endeavors, and knowing is the practitioners' ability to participate in these endeavors (Wenger, 1998). Learning is not just about learning new skills or tasks but also about becoming a practitioner in a specific community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Because a community of practice is formed as practitioners engage in practicing together, this also requires a negotiation of what it means to be a part of that specific community (Wenger, 1998). This means that communities are the foundation of social learning systems because they define what is recognized as competence within a specific practice (Wenger, 2000).

In their studies of apprenticeship, Lave and Wenger (1991) have used the term "*legitimate peripheral participation*," which postulates the idea of practitioners gradually becoming competent members in a community as they learn how to engage in practice. Being a peripheral member of a practice opens up an opportunity to learn the constitution of a practice, how to talk, who to involve, and what to do. This participation gradually enhances newcomers' understanding of the activity and allows them to increase their engagement in practice. Gradually, as

practitioners learn, their inputs to practice become more valuable, and they move from the periphery toward the core of the activity. Simultaneously, as practitioners' engagement is intensified, their responsibilities and tasks become more complicated. This also evolves practitioners' identity as experts. Thus, the process of legitimate peripheral participation is foremost about becoming a full and competent member in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). For a newcomer, this means altering their experience to meet the required competence (Wenger, 1998); however, they simultaneously modify and develop the practice as they observe practicing, experiment with alternative roles and ways of doing things, and adapt their practices (Handley et al., 2007).

Individual practitioners come with unique personal and professional trajectories that affect their perceptions of a practice (Handley et al., 2006) and their experience of their identity in relation to the community (Campbell et al., 2009). Consequently, learning is closely linked to identity, which refers to a long-term yet evolving form of membership to a community (Jørgensen and Keller, 2008; Lave and Wenger, 1991). As practitioners participate, their identity as participants of a community evolves when they acquire new understandings and skills to perform tasks (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Therefore, newcomers develop their own identity as part of a community (Handley et al., 2007). Consequently, learning is a social process (Wenger, 2000) and an "*integral and inseparable aspect of social practice*" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 31) through which identity and community evolve in a reciprocal manner (Jørgensen and Keller, 2008).

Dimensions of competence in the theory of social learning

Competence refers to the ability to act as a competent member of the community (Wenger, 2000). Competence is always an interplay between the individual and collective because competence in relation to practice is defined by community. Simultaneously, it is individual experience gained by participating in practice. Therefore, competence cannot be reduced to skills or explicit knowledge. Instead, competence is about skillful participation in practice. Thus, competence in relation to practice consists of mutuality of engagement, accountability to the enterprise, and negotiability of the shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998, p. 137). To be competent at the individual level and evolve one's practice at the community level requires learning in these dimensions. These dimensions are discussed next in detail.

Mutuality of engagement. Engagement means participation in practice, which enables participants to negotiate meaning, share histories of practice, and develop practice. Therefore, belonging to a community of practice is foremost a question of engagement (Wenger, 1998). Mutual engagement allows practitioners to establish a community that defines the membership, rules, and norms for participation and interaction. Mutual engagement is based on competence and the ability to connect with others either to utilize shared competence or to complement one's own deficiencies (Wenger, 2000). Mutual engagement allows practitioners to combine knowledge of individuals, create a shared practice, and increase their knowledgeability (Wenger, 1998). By engaging in practice, practitioners learn how others respond to their actions. This shapes their conceptions of what to do and their identity as part of the community. Therefore, practitioners may have unique roles and identities as members of a community of practice (Wenger, 2000). However, engagement has a bounded character; there are physical and physiological limitations in participation in practice. Therefore, becoming a member of a community requires practitioners to learn about very practical issues, such as knowing whom to

work with, whom to consult with on specific issues, and how to work with certain persons (Wenger, 1998).

Accountability to the enterprise. The process of learning produces experience of our participation in a practice as meaningful. Meaning is created as a practitioner engages in practice repeatedly with others, negotiating the meaning of their endeavors (Wenger, 1998). Carrying out a practice is a continuous adjustment of these shared endeavors and renegotiation of their meaning while resolving multiple interpretations. In other words, the shared meaning of an enterprise does not mean unanimity but rather represents a temporary consensus of the shared doings. Negotiation of a shared enterprise means establishing settings for activity and resolving content questions, such as the following: What is important? What needs to be taken into account, and what can be ignored? What can and should be done? Participation in the negotiation of the meaning shapes participants' experience of the meaning. Over time, as practitioners work together and a community is constructed, practitioners' identities are moored to these shared doings. This supports the construction of practitioners' responsibility in the shared activities. Being accountable is about being responsible for the shared doings and taking part in practice. Understanding the meaning allows practitioners to be accountable for the endeavors and gives them the ability to take responsibility for and contribute to practice (Wenger, 1998) and legitimate their participation by that contribution (Wenger, 2000).

Negotiability of the shared repertoire. The meaning of *shared enterprise* is materialized in the artifacts, concepts, tools, stories, and symbols that reflect the understanding of the practice itself. These can be used to perform an activity, yet they simultaneously mold practice when new meanings are negotiated. Communities have their own specific histories, which have produced the practices and ways of acting in practice. Indeed, practice is an embodiment of learning history (Wenger, 1998) and has an explicit and tacit dimension. The explicit dimension consists of technical tools, documents and procedures, codes, and other explicit criteria for practice (Handley et al., 2007; Wenger, 1998). The tacit dimension, in turn, includes embodied understanding, implicit relations and values, diverse cues, and assumptions of the practice (Handley et al., 2007; Wenger, 1998). These may be so self-evident that they are taken for granted. In practice, explicit and tacit are combined to enable participation and develop an understanding of the practice. Thus, being able to participate in a practice requires a combination of body and mind (Wenger, 1998).

Being a competent member of a community requires access to this shared repertoire of practices (Wenger, 2000) to understand how they can be interpreted and utilized in practice (Wenger, 1998). It is these explicit and implicit practices to which newcomers are introduced as they participate in practice. Thus, participation in a practice requires learning how to skillfully and legitimately use various practices (Handley et al., 2007), acknowledging internalized traditions and rules to negotiate the meaning of the practice (Jørgensen and Keller, 2008). Thus, being a competent member in practice requires a deeper understanding of the meaning and historical dependencies of the practices. Creating an understanding of a practice may be more or less easy depending on the degree of transparency and how easily the meaning of a practice or artifact is revealed (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Restricting access to this shared repertoire of practices may result in the inability to learn (Wenger, 1998).

IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL LEARNING FOR STRATEGY-AS-PRACTICE

The contribution of social learning in the context of strategy practice is discussed next. The three dimensions of competence suggested by the theory of social learning (Wenger, 1998)—*mutuality of engagement*, *accountability to the enterprise*, and *negotiability of the shared repertoire*—are next connected with central concepts in strategy as practice literature: *practitioners*, *praxis*, and *practices*. It is suggested that because engagement is about working with others, it resonates with the concept of practitioners. Accountability is fundamentally about understanding the meaning and flow of activity and, therefore, is closely connected to the concept of praxis. Finally, the shared repertoire points to recourses that practitioners draw in their activity and thereby becomes close to the conceptual understanding of practices in the SAP literature. Scrutinizing these main concepts of SAP from a social learning perspective leads to suggesting that becoming a competent member in strategizing means learning a relational, professional, and instrumental understanding of strategizing, which is discussed next.

Mutual engagement of strategy practitioners—Relational understanding

Wenger (1998) suggests mutual engagement in practice as one of the dimensions of competence. Engagement in practice requires practitioners to be able to create relationships and participate in practicing with others (Wenger, 1998). SAP has also recognized this need to know the social context and people around the practitioners. Collaboration with others allows practitioners to increase or supplement their understanding by sharing the practical knowledge required in practice (Fauré and Rouleau, 2011). This enables practitioners to cope with their lack of knowledge or adapt smoothly to emerging problems because they know from whom to ask for advice or receive support to execute actions (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). Based on previous SAP research, we know that a lack of formal position in strategy formation may hinder participation of operative-level practitioners in strategizing because they do not know from whom to receive information or explanation of objectives or who to give feedback regarding strategy formation (Mantere, 2005). This suggests that it is important for strategy practitioners to know when and to whom they should talk and, thus, learn to know the social networks and people around them to enable engagement in strategy practice.

However, knowing physically who the other practitioners are and what they know is not sufficient for competent engagement in practice. Instead, participation requires a deeper understanding of how to adjust activities according to the essence of the counterparts. For example, SAP research has shown that strategy practitioners use their tacit knowledge of social relations as they implement a new strategic orientation by adjusting their sensemaking and sensegiving practices in a social context. This requires understanding of how to approach others, what to say, and what issues to highlight (Rouleau, 2005). Indeed, knowing others allows strategy practitioners to adjust their message and to use different language and tool repertoires depending on whom they are working with (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011).

From the perspective of a newcomer in strategy practice, this raises questions such as whom to strategize with and how to strategize with others to accumulate knowledge or influence them effectively. To summarize, this leads to the argument that engagement in practice with others requires a relational understanding of how and whom to strategize with and leads to the first proposition of social learning:

Proposition 1: Social learning produces relational understanding among strategy practitioners.

Being accountable for strategy praxis—Professional understanding

Another dimension of competence is practitioners' accountability to the shared practice, which can be divided into two perspectives: (1) understanding of the meaning of the practice and (2) ability to take part in the activities (Wenger, 1998). The SAP literature has often adopted a perspective of discourses to explore meaning-making in strategy practice and has well established the importance of discourses in strategizing (Balogun et al., 2014; Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Because discourses include practitioners' conceptions of strategy work and participation, they provide meaning structures of strategizing in organizational praxis (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). In a study on middle managers' sensemaking, Rouleau (2005) shows how practitioners adapt sensemaking and sensegiving practices based on their practical knowledge to create and transmit the meaning of a new strategic orientation. Consequently, the sensemaking and sensegiving literature within SAP has been interested in how practitioners construct meaning, aim to affect others (Balogun et al., 2014; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011), and build a collective understanding of strategy in, for example, conversations (Mantere, 2005). In addition to this collective understanding, individual sensemaking and freedom to interpret strategy creates a sense of ownership in strategic issues (Mantere, 2005). These examples show the importance of collective understanding of the meaning of strategy; however, attention should be directed at how newcomers come to understand the meaning of strategizing. Why have a strategy in the first place, and what makes strategizing successful or sufficient?

It has been argued that becoming a strategist is about allowing an acknowledgement of oneself as a strategist (Mantere and Whittington, 2020) and being a strategist in the eyes of others (Laine et al., 2016). The identity construction of being a strategist is a continuous process (Laine et al., 2016) because strategy practitioners relate their identity to dominant discourses of strategizing (Laine et al., 2016; Mantere and Whittington, 2020). Discourses define the subject positions of practitioners and how they see their role in strategizing. For managers, strategy discourses can serve as a normative ideal to measure oneself against (Mantere and Whittington, 2020) and show mastery of (Laine et al., 2016), as a resource to pursue for professional development, or as an opportunity to fulfill oneself and have an experience of a meaningful work (Mantere and Whittington, 2020). At a collective level, the discourses seeing strategizing as a dialogue or a collective endeavor and meaning-making process support participation in strategizing. The discourses connected to the hierarchical structure of an organization and adopting a meaning of strategizing as a top managerial task with strict evaluation criteria distance the practitioners at lower levels in organizations from strategizing (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Blocking access to actual strategy praxis hinders the learning and development of understanding the meaning of strategizing. Through the lens of social learning, this pushes practitioners to a marginal position in strategizing (Wenger, 1998), hindering their participation. On the other hand, this means that practitioners can adopt different subject positions in relation to strategizing. Jarzabkowski and Balogun (2009) show in their study of integrative strategic planning that less experienced units settled to adopt a less prominent role in strategy formulation. More experienced units, in turn, resisted a role allocated to them and experienced the strategy process as exclusive. A discrepancy between assumed and allocated roles leads to efforts to alter the practice and role of practitioners (Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009).

The adopted role also defines and structures practitioners' accountability of shared activities. Therefore, some actors may have a more intense role in strategizing, whereas others are left in the periphery. In addition to the formal hierarchical position of participation, the practitioners' own skills and willingness to contribute to practice define their participation. For a newcomer, learning in praxis means understanding the expectations of others and the meaning of activities. Therefore, the newcomer learns to understand content-related issues of the professional practice of strategizing, such as why and how strategizing is performed (meaning) and how they can contribute to this practice as professionals. Simultaneously, they learn the limits of their contributions. This is reflected in the second proposition of social learning in strategizing:

Proposition 2: Social learning produces a professional understanding of the strategy praxis.

Using shared repertoire of strategy practices—Instrumental understanding

The third dimension of competence, negotiability of shared repertoire, suggested by Wenger (1998), is discussed next. Being competent means, according to Wenger (1998), the ability to make use of practices and understand their historical construction, which enables practitioners to negotiate new meanings over time. When a novice enters a community, he or she needs to engage in practice to learn these socially constructed practices. These practices embed practical knowledge, which is transmitted to the participants in a community (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000). Thus, learning a practice means understanding how to speak and use explicit material resources, as well as understanding implicit values and assumptions (Wenger, 1998). Over time, practitioners learn how to combine the different practices with the tasks at hand. Thereby, an understanding of the meaning of practices arises from the actual use of different practices in context (Nielsen, 2007).

Strategy practices can be divided into formal administrative practices, discursive practices, and episodic practices (Jarzabkowski, 2005), which are either adaptive or recursive (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Mantere, 2005). Previous SAP literature has devoted much attention to the use of both formal and discursive practices and their adaptation in context. Formal strategy practices serve as boundary objects that frame strategizing and social interaction in different contexts (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009). Previous SAP literature has also shown that formal practices and tools create a sense of predictability and legitimacy and represent a correct way of strategizing (Mantere, 2005). On the other hand, practices and tools are not used, as prescribed in the literature, but adapted to context (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). This requires knowing the formal tools but also having the ability to adapt them to meet the requirements of the situation. Knowing a tool is different from understanding how to use it in practice; therefore, strategy practitioners need to learn how to use different tools and practices in strategizing. The SAP literature has investigated the use of tools in context; however, how newcomers learn to use the tools over time as they learn their way from the periphery to core of strategizing remains an open question.

SAP research has scrutinized discursive practices from different perspectives (Balogun et al., 2014; Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011), and the importance of talk in strategizing has been highlighted (Samra-Fredericks, 2003) because strategizing has its own language (Balogun et al., 2014) and because mastering strategy talk constructs the identity of a strategic leader (Laine et al., 2016). Indeed, becoming a member of the community is also about learning the language of the practice. Learning the language refers not to the understanding of

the instructions provided by full members but to knowing the way and timing of talking as a member of a community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Rouleau and Balogun (2011) call this *discursive competence*. Discursive competence allows middle managers to hold a conversation and situate it in a prevailing context to transmit a compelling message to others (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). These rhetorical skills are used not only to influence others during strategizing but also to sustain collaboration and linguistically display and legitimate the roles of practitioners. Understanding the use of language requires also understanding the right timing of speaking (Samra-Fredericks, 2003), how to display emotions (Rouleau, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2003) and rationality, and using metaphors to skillfully advance the personal or collective aims in strategizing (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). In turn, this means, on the other hand, knowing not only how talk about the practice but also how to talk within the practice. Talking within the practice refers to knowledge processing, which is required to perform strategizing. Talking about practice means passing on the stories and historical legacy of strategizing. Therefore, novice practitioners need to learn both dimensions of talking (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This implies that to be able to act knowledgeably, practitioners need to have the ability to immerse themselves in and use these discourses effectively in practice.

Consequently, the correct and legitimate way of using practices, tools, and language is defined collectively and embedded in strategy practice within the community. Therefore, a newcomer needs to not only understand the available repertoire of practices but also learn their utilization and application in strategizing to enable their participation. This refers to the instrumental use of practices and leads to the third proposition of social learning in strategizing:

Proposition 3: Social learning produces an instrumental understanding of strategy practices.

Wenger (1998) connects these three dimensions of competence closely to dimensions of identity. As summarized in Table 1, it is proposed that these dimensions of competence allow strategy practitioners to gain a relational, professional, and instrumental understanding that forms the basis of their identity as competent strategy practitioners. Thus, the identity of being a practitioner evolves when practitioners engage in practice with other practitioners, using their shared repertoire of practices and becoming accountable for these activities (Wenger, 1998).

Table 1. Dimensions of competence in strategizing from the perspective of social learning

Regimes of competence *(Wenger 1998, p. 137)*	Examples of questions regarding learning (see Wenger, 1998)	Social learning produces	SAP perspective
Mutuality of engagement The ability to engage with others in practice and build reciprocal relationships	*How do I strategize with others, and who do I strategize with?* *Who knows or doesn't know about the relevant issues?* *Whom do I ask for help?* *How do I approach others during strategizing?* *How do I adjust actions to meet social aspects?*	Relational understanding	Practitioners
Accountability for enterprise The ability to understand and contribute to shared endeavors	*What is the meaning of strategizing?* *What do we want to achieve?* *Why do we need strategy, and what do we do with it?* *What is my role, and how can I contribute to strategizing?* *What can I do or cannot do while strategizing?* *What should I do or should not do?*	Professional understanding	Praxis
Negotiability of the repertoire The ability to recognize and apply the repertoire of practice	*What kinds of routines are there?* *What tools can be used, and how are they used in practice?* *What kind of artifacts are produced, and how are they used in practice?* *What is the past of our strategizing, and how to use it in practice?* *What is the language of strategy, and how is it used in practice?*	Instrumental understanding	Practices

Becoming a strategy practitioner in a community of practice through legitimate peripheral participation

The concept of legitimate peripheral participation suggests that practitioners gradually come profoundly engaged in practice as their level of participation becomes more intense (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The intensity of participation varies from non-participation to full participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and can be divided into four different levels: a core, an active, a peripheral, and an outsider. The core group consists of full members who have a leading role in the community of practice. Active members are also active in the community, but the intensity of participation is lower compared with the core group. Peripheral participants, in turn, participate more rarely, which makes their role more like that of an observer. Outsiders are not explicit members in a community, but they have an interest in the community. However, these boundaries are flexible, and members may move across them over time (Wenger et al., 2002).

Previous SAP literature has scrutinized how strategy practices (Mantere, 2005) or discourses impede or support participation in strategizing (Mantere and Vaara, 2008) and suggested that some practitioners are excluded even if they have the potential to influence strategizing (Mantere, 2005). Conceptualizing strategizing as legitimate peripheral participation has implications for understanding participation and non-participation. It is suggested here that the level of understanding defines participation in strategizing because the level of engagement may affect practitioners' role and activities in strategy practice. In relation to the SAP literature, this means that we should be sensitive to the level of membership in a community of strategy practice. This is important as SAP has enlarged the comprehension of strategists to include practitioners in diverse roles and at different levels in organizations as potential strategists (Mantere, 2005; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). The social learning perspective suggests that the mere attendance to strategizing does not make a strategist. Opening strategizing up to organizational members at different levels enables participation in the praxis of strategizing. However, participants located at the periphery may have a limited relational and instrumental understanding, which makes their participation ostensible if they are unable to contribute to the shared endeavors. These issues of competence are also essential at the managerial level. Practitioners who have not participated in strategizing before may lack the needed competence. If, for example, top management teams are investigated, attention should be put on individuals. There may be members who can be considered a core group; however, there may also be members who are active or even in the periphery (Wenger et al., 2002). This may limit their participation, and their contributions to strategizing may vary and affect the practice itself. However, practitioners experiencing their participation as insufficient pursue alterations to be able to move toward the core. Gaining access to praxis allows practitioners to deepen their understanding of the practice over time (Wenger, 1998). In communities, this movement has been suggested to happen in stages: raising awareness of the community, allocation of the opportunity to become a more active member, increasing the accountability of enterprise, legitimating the new core members, and delivering one's own expertise (Borzillo et al., 2011). However, we know rather little regarding strategy practitioners' learning trajectories to competent members of strategizing over time as they move from the periphery toward the core.

Because learning is a constant process of sensing how to respond to current situations (Chia, 2017), knowledge cannot solely be reduced to universal rules but rather is embodied practical knowing (Contu and Willmott, 2003). Practical knowledge is transmitted to novices in shared

practices, which are constructed as practitioners engage in action by utilizing their individual experience and skills (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000). Thus, practices are central to the creation and sustainment of knowing how to act in certain situations and contexts (Gherardi, 2009; Orlikowski, 2002). Joining a community opens access to this collective knowledge and opportunity for social interaction, which supports learning (Brown and Duguid, 2001). This means that participation is crucial for learning; it is through engagement that practitioners gain experience, which matures, over time, into practical knowledge (Wenger, 2004). However, if practitioners are excluded from participation, this inhibits learning. Practitioners as outsiders may be aware that a practice exists; however, they do not possess the intimate knowledge of its practical manifestation needed to be able to engage competently in activities with others. Indeed, the knowing of outsiders could be described as "knowing-a-practice" whereas competent members are "knowing-in-practice." Furthermore, some practitioners may remain in the periphery and never reach the core. Especially if non-participation dominates, learning becomes problematic because the actual access is marginal and pushes practitioners away from the core of the community (Wenger, 1998).

To summarize, legitimate peripheral participation enables strategy practitioners to learn as they participate in strategizing. Using the four forms of participation (core, active, peripheral, and outsider) presented by Wenger et al. (2002), it is suggested that as a newcomer to strategizing, practitioners' participation intensifies over time. This is achieved as practitioners participate in practice, apply, reproduce, and transform their knowledge of the relevance of actions (Wenger et al., 2002) and achieve relational, professional, and instrumental understanding of practitioners, praxis, and practices.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This conceptual paper set out to discuss the perspective of social learning within SAP and argues that the competence of strategy practitioners is essential for understanding strategizing in organizations. However, previous SAP literature has not directly discussed the meaning of learning for strategizing. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) theory of social learning and Laves and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation, this paper suggests, as a theoretical contribution, that competence is constructed around three dimensions in strategizing: mutual engagement of strategy practitioners, accountability for strategy praxis, and negotiability of the repertoire of strategy practices. However, practice cannot be learned by reading, observing, or hearing from it; practice can only be learned by practicing. To be able to learn, newcomers need to gain access to a community's strategizing to become gradually identified as strategy practitioners by themselves and others. This legitimate peripheral participation allows newcomers to deepen their understanding of these dimensions of competence. Thus, social learning produces a relational, professional, and instrumental understanding of how to engage in strategizing and become a competent strategy practitioner. The varying level of understanding affects practitioners' ability to contribute to strategizing, which leads to different roles and forms of participation. This helps in understanding participation and non-participation in strategy practice.

This perspective of social learning opens up an interesting avenue for future research. Previous SAP research has shown that depending on the groups and their position in the organization, strategizing activities can differ in organizations. In the periphery, strategizing is inductive and aims to explore new opportunities and create new knowledge, whereas in the center, strategizing

is more deductive, relies on formal instructions, and attempts to exploit existing resources (Regnér, 2003). This implies that different types of strategizing competence are appreciated in different positions. Considering these diverse groups as communities of practice opens up the opportunity for future research to scrutinize strategizing and learning from several perspectives. First, because practitioners can belong to multiple communities (Wenger, 1998), future research could shed light on how practitioners adjust their strategizing activities at the micro level based on their relational, professional, and instrumental understanding of strategizing as they move between, participate, and contribute to the different communities they belong to. This could enhance our understanding of the micro-level of strategizing. Second, beyond individual learning, social learning theories allow SAP research to scrutinize learning at a collective level. It has been established that strategy is not just a pre-established plan that is executed in organizations, but rather, it emerges over time as a progressive learning process (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). Because communities of practice can be task or learning oriented, learning can be focused on conducting the task or in sharing knowledge (Hydle et al., 2014). Focusing solely on formal strategy workshops and meetings—in other words, communities of task—rules out communities of learning: informal communities that have practitioners individuals can turn to for advice. Because strategizing also takes place in informal networks (Mantere, 2005), exploring communities of learning could shed light on what these informal communities are, who belongs to them, and what their role is in strategizing. This could enhance our understanding of the emergent side of strategy. Third, regarding participation, it remains unclear what the learning trajectories of peripheral practitioners who are drawn into strategizing are. Future research could analyze their learning over time. There may also be participants who participate out of necessity. What kind of impact does their participation have on strategizing, and are they able and willing to learn? Are they gradually left outside of these strategizing communities, or are they forced to adapt to these expectations? Approaching these issues could help in understanding more of the learning trajectories of strategists.

Acknowledgments

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