

ESTRATÉGIA



STRATEGY AS PRACTICE: A DISCUSSION OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROPRIATION OF HISTORICAL-CULTURAL ACTIVITY THEORY BY THE ACTIVITY-BASED VIEW

ESTRATÉGIA COMO PRÁTICA: UMA DISCUSSÃO SOBRE A APROPRIAÇÃO EPISTEMOLÓGICA DA TEORIA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL DA ATIVIDADE PELA TEORIA DA VISÃO BASEADA NA ATIVIDADE

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ABSTRACT

As an approach in development, Strategy as Practice appropriates other theories with ontological and epistemological assumptions that converge for the construction of their analytical body. Therefore, in this discipline, the assumptions of the Structurationist and Historical-Cultural Activity Theory are to be found as grounded frameworks. This theoretical essay puts forward an argument concerning the appropriation of the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory by the Activity-Based View that figures as one of the analytical epistemological structures of Strategy as Practice. The analytical procedure is guided by the central aim of stimulating the debate about the ontological and epistemological assumptions of assimilation between one theory and the other added goal to dismantle an argument concerning the Ontology of

Strategic Practice. The results of the analytical argument reveal that there is adequate ontological and epistemological coherence in the incorporation of the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory by the Activity-Based View.

KEYWORDS

Strategy as practice. Historical-cultural activity theory. Activity-Based View. Ontological and epistemological coherence. Ontology of strategic practice.

RESUMO

Na condição de abordagem em formação, a Estratégia como Prática apropria-se de outras teorias que possuem pressupostos ontológicos e epistemológicos convergentes para a construção de seu corpo analítico. Dessa forma, observam-se nesta disciplina os desígnios do Estruturacionismo e da Teoria Histórico-Cultural da Atividade como arcabouços de base. Este ensaio teórico propõe uma argumentação sobre a apropriação da Teoria Histórico-Cultural da Atividade pela Teoria da Visão Baseada na Atividade que figura como uma das estruturas epistemológicas analíticas da Estratégia como Prática. O procedimento analítico é orientado pelo objetivo central de incitar a arguição sobre os pressupostos ontológicos e epistemológicos da assimilação de uma teoria pela outra e com o objetivo paralelo de estimular uma argumentação referente à Ontologia da Prática Estratégica. Os resultados da argumentação analítica demonstraram uma coerência ontológica e epistemológica adequada na incorporação da Teoria Histórico-Cultural da Atividade pela Visão Baseada na Atividade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Estratégia como prática. Teoria histórico-cultural da atividade. Visão baseada na atividade. Coerência ontológica e epistemológica. Ontologia da prática estratégica.

INTRODUCTION

Strategy as Practice (S-as-P) is a developing approach in the Field of Organizational Strategy that investigates the practice, practices, practitioners and strategists in organizations with a sociological eye (WHITTINGTON, 2007),

notably different from the traditional economic vision of strategy.

The rise and expansion of Strategy as Practice (S-as-P) stems from a repressed demand for the need for studies in Strategy to be observed “from another perspective” since there is a perceived decline in the contribution of old concepts

and analysis tools (DOZ; PRAHALAD, 1991), which do not account in detail for the reality of procedures and social results of the actors involved in the daily operationalized strategy of organizations.

When dealing with a Social Vision of Reality, it should be understood that organizations do not always seek only economic goals. Frequently, and perhaps even to help them achieve a solution to an economic problem, organizations have to deal with social matters, including their consideration of the social environment in which the organizations are inserted (WHITTINGTON, 1993).

According (DOZ; PRAHALAD, 1991; WHITTINGTON, 1993), among others authors, this work assumes that the old concepts formed by Economic Vision of Strategy merely scratch the surface of the reality that is socially constructed by Strategy in organizations over time. In other words, the researches coming from statistics procedures in the Economic Strategy, in general, seek to highlight What? – in this sense of what elements make up this phenomenon/object - and How? - In the sense of how the variables of these elements correlate between them - and tend to promote a statistical generalization about the phenomenon/object of study leaving to be desired an analytical generalization about the same. On the other hand, the qualitative research based on Social Vision of Strategy tend to go deeper analytically into the phenomenon/object promoting, thus, a deep generalization of contextual explanation about the phenomenon/object of study - in addition to explain what and how explain, either, Why these elements correlate and When? Where? By Whom? Among others contextual questions.

For S-as-P to propose its turn (WHITTINGTON, 2002; JARZABKOWSKI, 2004) with the positivist paradigm of traditional economic strategy, it transcended to an interpretative and intersubjective ontological position that favors the analysis of practical activities contextualized in the day-to-day work of social actors who are involved in the strategic procedures of an organization in a longitudinal perspective of analysis. It also had to incorporate into its analytical body theories of ontological and epistemological proximity such as Structurationist and the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory so that these could support the intentions and interactions of analysis for the coherent development of its strategies and research procedures in the expanding field.

In this context, S-as-P, more specifically the Activity-Based View Theory, resorts to the epistemological assumptions of the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory, where its main argument, supported in Engeström (1993, 2002), redounds to the shared activity that is directed straight at a result, where this activity is also distributed and collective, because the different actors set their individual actions within activities and results of the activity system. Thus, the individual actors are associated with the community in the construction of a goal-directed activity, thereby emphasizing that "Activity is a long-duration concept, a flow of activity over time" (JARZABKOWSKI, 2005, p. 35). In other words, intersubjective ontology inserted in the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory is perceived as enabling the sharing of meanings interpreted by the cognitive actors and it proposes a sociological analysis appealing

to a structure of shared meaning under an "Ontology of Potentials" (GIDDENS, 1984). This is done in an attempt to capture the strategic practice in power at the moment of its occurrences.

Since the ontological assumptions are coherent, this essay proposes a debate on epistemological assumptions concerning the incorporation of the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory by the Activity-Based View Theory, founded on the concept of Epistemology raised by Grix (2002, p. 177), which refers to Epistemology as the theory of knowledge, especially pertaining to the methods, validations and possible means of achieving knowledge of reality, irrespective of the understanding one has of it, focusing on the process of obtaining knowledge and relating to the development of new models and theories that are better than competing theories and models.

To begin with, Grix (2002, p. 177) turns to Blaikie (2000, p.8) to ask a question about epistemology: "the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality, whatever it is understood to be. In short, claims about how what is assumed to exist can be known".

Grix (2002, p. 177-178) also argues that epistemology focuses on the process of accumulating knowledge and is interesting in the development of new models or theories to better explain current models and theories. "Knowledge, and the ways of discovering it, is not static, but forever changing" (GRIX, 2002, p.177).

Dealing with epistemology redounds to Kuhn's (1962) concept of paradigm, which in brief associates paradigm with the search for the transformation and broadening of knowledge, *i.e.*, it defends the notion

that science produces paradigms that will eventually be substituted by others in the course of scientific development.

Finally, in addition to this introduction, the paper includes a review of the literature of Strategy as Practice and the Activity-Based View (ABV). This is followed by the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory. A discussion is then proposed for the purpose of locating the specifics of how Strategy as Practice, in the elaboration of the Activity-Based Theory, resorts to the epistemological fundamentals of the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory. Finally, the paper closes with conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

STRATEGY AS PRACTICE AND THE ACTIVITY-BASED VIEW (ABV)

The first assumptions of S-as-P are understood to have been made 1993 when Richard Whittington published *What is Strategy and Does it Matter?* This work contains an explanation of the different approaches to strategy. What is important to this present paper is the Systemic Approach, which explains that from a sociological viewpoint Strategies do not have purely economic and utilitarian interests because they are part of a social system that pressures them to adapt to contextual reality. The main objective is plural, *i.e.*, it is related to the social characteristics and the social context, where the rules of social culture have great influence (WHITTINGTON, 1993).

With the publication of *Strategy as Practice* in 1996, Whittington launched the approach that takes Strategy into consideration from a social viewpoint which, backed by the Structurationist Theory and influence by the sociology of organizations, deals with, among other

factors, how Strategy is made and put into effect on a daily basis, who its main actors are and, especially, in which social context the actors and organizations are immersed in the daily business of implementing strategies.

Another author with relevant studies on Strategy as Practice is Paula Jarzabkowski, who made her first contributions in 2001 by publishing papers in the periodicals and at international congresses in the area about S-as-P. In 2005, she published a book entitled *Strategy as Practice: An Activity-Based Approach*, which serves as one of the analytical bases for this article.

Briefly, in order to raise awareness of the basic assumptions of Strategy as Practice, Whittington (2002) explains that Strategy as Practice is essentially focused on the social practice of strategy in organizations and analyzes in particular the practice, practitioners and practices of strategy. In simplified terms, this means the work, the workers and the tools involved in strategy. Thus, the author opens up fundamental questions for future research into Strategy as Practice: Who are the strategists in organizations and how do they become strategists? What do these strategists do and what effects do they produce? And what kind of technologies, concepts and ideas do strategies used and where do they come from?

Furthermore, Jarzabkowski (2005) claims that the three elements of Strategy as Practice can be separated: a) Practice may be understood as “the interconnection between the actions of different, dispersed individuals and groups and those socially, politically, and economically embedded institutions within which individuals act and to which they

contribute” (JARZABKOWSKI; BALOGUN; SEIDL, 2006, p. 5); b) Practices are “intrinsically connected to ‘doing’, as they provide the behavioural, cognitive, procedural, discursive and physical resources through which actors construct activity” (JARZABKOWSKI; BALOGUN; SEIDL, 2006, p. 6); and c) concerning the practitioners, they can be defined as “the actors; those individuals who draw upon practices and do actions. Practitioners are thus interrelated with practices and practice” ((JARZABKOWSKI; BALOGUN; SEIDL, 2006, p. 7).

Therefore, Strategy as Practice turns its attention to understanding who the practitioners of strategy are, what they do in their daily working life and what tools they use in their activities.

When it came to formulating the concept of strategizing Johnson, Melin & Whittington (2003) and Jarzabkowski (2003, 2005) proposed an Activity Based View (ABV) for the study of strategy. In short, the ABV considers strategy as a set of interpretations and interactions of the actors involved in strategic activities and for this reason it does not separate thoughts and actions. Interactions provide an interpretative base that conveys a meaning to the actions of organizational actors. As a result, the tension between their categories of analysis also end up demanding an alternative concept of organization, which is conceived as a system of activities in which heterogeneous and highly localized social interactions take place (JARZABKOWSKI, 2003, 2005; JOHNSON; MELIN; WHITTINGTON, 2003).

For the purpose of achieving the localized dynamic between recursiveness (GIDDENS, 1984) and the adaptation of strategy within a flow of organizational

activities, Jarzabkowski (2005) suggests examining the interaction of recursive actions with adaptive actions that mediate between different actors in the organization in the midst of four main elements: "a) top managers (*Top Management Team – TMT*); b) the organizational community; c) strategizing practices; and d) institutionalized rules – rational strategy processes" (JARZABKOWSKI, 2005, p. 44-50).

The Top Management Team are abstracted as an object of interest in their set, i.e., interactions within the group are left in the background and the focus of attention is on the dynamic of how this group relates to the rest of the organization (p.44). The organizational community comprises the peripheral actors in the system of activities that introduce potential reactions when it comes to interacting with the top management team. Through these reactions, they may introduce important parameters for the actions of the top management team (p.45). Strategic practices are a field of goal-oriented activities that are molded over time by the top management team. Therefore, "the relationship between these practices and the top managers in shaping activity is 'Strategizing' – the unity of analysis" of ABV (JARZABKOWSKI, 2005, p.47).

This strategizing comprises social, political and behavioral dimensions, since symbolic, cultural and linguistic resources are important means of constructing and reconstructing strategy, where meanings are not immutable over time. At the most they constitute temporary and dependent states of a continuous rebuilding process in an attempt to survive in time and space, thereby proving their capacity for

dynamic durability (ROSSONI; MACHADO-SILVA, 2008; JARZABKOWSKI, 2005; GIDDENS, 1984).

Jarzabkowski (2005) explains that due to the activities involved in strategizing, observing institutionalized rules and localized practices, the role of the top management team involves the legitimizing of its activities in the organizational community. These rules take shape from the regulations, norms and conventions that guide the community. Thus, the strategic work concentrates on ensuring an alignment between the analysis, formulation, implementation and control of activities. Consequently, these institutionalized rules serve as mechanisms for the legitimation of Strategy as Practice in the symbolic universe.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the analysis structure the focal actor is the top management. Therefore, through their interaction with the organizational community and strategic activities, it falls to them to explain how strategizing is neatly put to use by the senior levels of the organization for the purpose of achieving structural and interpretative legitimacy (JARZABKOWSKI, 2005).

THE HISTORICAL-CULTURAL ACTIVITY THEORY

The Historical-Cultural Activity Theory is generally considered a continuation of the historical-cultural school that was initiated by Vygotsky. According to Leontiev (1978), the idea of analysis of activity as a method in scientific psychology of the man was formulated in the early works of Vygotsky.

The concept of activity is familiar in the tradition of Marxist philosophy. Activity, the greatest expression of which is work,

is the main form of mediation in the relationships that subjects establish with the objective world. According to Vygotsky (1984), the rise of consciousness is related to human practical activity. Consciousness is a feature of labor activity.

Behind the idea of external activity lies a central element of the dialectical materialist philosophy as a historical and social condition of the development of the human psyche that takes place in the appropriation of culture through communication with other people. These communication processes and the superior psychic functions involved in this process are effected first of all in external (interpersonal) activity, which is then internalized by individual activity, regulated by consciousness. During this internalization of the activity there is the mediation of language in which the signs acquire sense and meaning (VYGOTSKY, 1984).

According to Engeström (2001), three generations of the evolution of the Activity Theory can be identified. The first is found in the works of Vygotsky, when the concept of activity as mediation was formulated, producing the triangular model of relationship of the subject with the object, mediated by material and cultural artifacts. The second generation is based on the formulation of Leontiev (1978), advancing the distinction of the concept of collective and individual action and establishing the structure of activity. The third, proposed by Engeström, stems from Vygotsky's triangular model, expanding it to a model of the collective activity system.

Current theoretical studies of the Activity Theory deal with themes such as activity situated in contexts (space-

time), participation as a condition for understanding practice, identity, the role of institutionalized practices, cultural diversity and others. At the heart of the study of these themes lies the assumption that all individual actions should be interpreted while taking into account questions and factors that are not immediately present, nor exclusively found in the people who operate in these situations, *i.e.*, in the analysis of human practices, factors of a social-historical context stand out because human practices are socially constructed and situated, being decisive factors in mediation processes since they take place in and through participation in social and cultural activities (VYGOTSKY, 1984).

To understand better the Activity Theory and its epistemological appropriation by Strategy as Practice, it is necessary to bear in mind the basic concept that leads one to consider the effects of sign systems on psychological development and the cognition of individual communications, *i.e.*, Vygotsky's thesis of semiotic mediation, the instrument that creates the forms of truly human activities through human consciousness concerning a plan of action based on historically transmitted and socially created means of production. This consciousness and planning skill is a form of generalization, made possible through mediation, in which superior mental processes in human beings would be deeply influenced by the social-cultural means that measure them, so that the central fact is the fact of mediation (VYGOTSKY, 1984).

Analogically, the starting point of this theoretical framework is Vygotsky's statement that learning is an articulation of external and internal processes, with

a view to internalizing cultural signs on the part of an individual, which generates a self-regulating quality concerning the actions and behavior of individuals, highlighting social-historic and collective activity in the formation of superior mental processes. This, therefore, is the character of cultural mediation in the knowledge process and, at the same time, in individual learning activity through which an individual gains social-cultural experience as an active being. However, considering that knowledge and cognitive instruments are constituted in intersubjective relationships (see discourse in Giddens (1984), and semiotic in Peirce (1977), their appropriation implies interaction with others who have already acquired this knowledge and these instruments.

To contextualize the development of the activity theory and its components, Kozulin (2002) recognizes the existence of two lines of research in the same school of thought: Historical-cultural Psychology (Vygotsky) and the Activity Theory (Leontiev), which is in agreement on some points but also, differ. The differences concern the problem of internalization and the relationship between the external activity of the child and corresponding mental operations. For Leontiev (1978), mental operations are determined by the concrete relations between the child and reality, *i.e.*, practical familiarization with objects is what leads a child to its cognitive development.

The practical relationship with objects, *i.e.*, practical activity, would be more important than the historical-cultural model developed by Vygotsky. It is worth pointing out that whereas Leontiev emphasized practical activity, Vygotsky

placed more importance on culture, language and symbolic mediation. In short, both explain learning and human development as mediated processes, both supply methodological guidelines for capturing processes and ways that social, cultural and historical factors promote human development, and both, especially, deal with the contexts in which cognitive mediations take place. However, their methodological research procedures and applications in pedagogical practice. It is now time to turn to the work of Engeström (1987) and Hasu and Engeström (1988), which provide an analytical basis for the Activity-Based View (ABV), one of the fundamental theories for Strategy as Practice (JARZABKOWSKI, 2005).

Engeström (1987) begins his works with Vygotsky's theoretical approach in his studies about mediated activity, calling for mediation with artifacts, which can be used to furnish a concept, describe a structure and develop tasks supported by a system, and may involve several techniques and methods.

To Engeström (1987), activity generally evolves through many forms of dialectic interaction between the organism and environment and the activity of the life of species that will determine both problems and solutions simultaneously. Human beings mediate their activities through artifacts. Therefore, a carpenter uses a hammer in order to carry out his daily activities and nurses use language and their records to coordinate actions concerning their patients. Tools are ways of dividing work. Norms, languages and tools are seen as artifacts for conducting activities. Artifacts are made by man and are used to mediate relationships between human beings or between people

and material or products during different phases. Thus, organisms during their individual lifetimes and in the course of their evolution as a species do not adapt to the environment, but rather construct it to be able to arrive at a result (ENGESTRÖM, 1987).

To enhance the collective and social nature of human activities or systems of activities, Engeström (1987) proposes analyzing the relationship between subject and object based on different mediators, highlighting that individuals are constituted in communities. The relationships between subject and community are mediated by the whole set of mediating artifacts in this group. In addition to these mediating artifacts, it is necessary to consider the rules, *i.e.*, the norms and sanctions that specify and regulate procedures that are considered correct and acceptable in the interaction between participants in the community in which the subject is inserted. Communities are also characterized by a necessary division of labor, set in a continuous and negotiated distribution of tasks, powers and responsibilities among the participants of the system of activity. The actions of the subject provoke changes in the whole system of activity, a system that not only leads to the production of objects but also to the production and reproduction of the individual. This either confirms a certain cultural practice or opposes it. These considerations will be seen further on in FIG. 1.

It is on this point that Hasu and Engeström (1988) suggest a way of overcoming the limitation of the first generation of the activity theory, expanding the ideas of Vygotsky by adding the macro level of the collective

(the community in which the activity takes place with its rules and division of labor), to the micro level (the actor or individual agent, operating with tools).

By analyzing the systems of activity in which human beings are inserted, it is possible, according to Hasu and Engeström (1988), to analyze the way concrete tools are used to mediate the motives (direction, trajectory) and the object (the focus) of a behavior or a change in a behavior.

It is important to point out that all this framework of activities and mediation was originally introduced by Leontiev (1978). Engeström (1987) and Hasu and Engeström (1988) are responsible only for the descriptive, analytical and temporal categorization, in which they attribute to Leontiev the second generation of the Activity Theory, and the schematic representation shown in FIG. 1.

The view of Hasu and Engeström (1988) has been criticized in that this version does not account for what occurs when different systems of activity interact and clash. Therefore, Engeström (2001) formulated a new proposal, which is understood to be the third generation of the Activity Theory.

In brief, this proposal seems to facilitate the study of learning that occurs from confronting the conflicts and contradictions arising from the same proposing to develop conceptual tools to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives, and networks of interacting activity systems, thus the object of activity is a moving target, not reducible to conscious short-term goals (ENGESTRÖM, 2001, p.135-136).

Although interesting, the details of the third-generation model will not be

discussed in the present work because the ABV set within Strategy as Practice does not appear to achieve the nuances of this model.

DISCUSSION

To begin this discussion, it is necessary to attempt to localize the specifics in which Strategy as Practice, when drawing up the ABV, resorts to the epistemological foundations of the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory.

Initially, Jarzabkowski (2003, p. 24), when preparing an article on an empirical study of the practices of English universities concerning Strategy as Practice, resorts to the Activity Theory to explain that:

Activity theory conceptualizes psychological development as a process of social interaction within particular historical and cultural contexts (VYGOTSKY, 1978). Interaction provides an interpretative basis from which individuals attribute meaning to their own and others actions and so are able to engage in shared activity (VYGOTSKY, 1978; WERTSCH, 1985). Shared activity is *practical*, in that it is conducted with an outcome in mind (ENGESTROM *et al.*, 2002). The context of practical activity is defined as an activity system (Engestrom, 1993). An organization may be considered an activity system comprising three main constituents, actors, collective social structures, and the practical activities in which they engage (cf. BLACKLER, 1993).

However, it is in Jarzabkowski (2005, p. 34-37) that the author resorts to the Activity Theory by stating that the structure she leans on originated through this theory but that it is not a representation of it in its entirety. The author then offers a brief explanation of

the theory, turning to authors that have already been cited, especially Engeström (1993, 2002) and Blackler (1993, 2000), apparently applying the Activity Theory to the field of management.

Her main argument, based on Engeström (1993, 2002), falls back on shared activity directed straight at a result, where this activity is also distributed and collective. This is because the different actors set their individual actions within the activities and results of the system of activity. Thus, the individual actors are linked to the community in the construction of goal-directed activities. It is important to emphasize, again, that "Activity is a long-duration concept, a flow of activity over time" (JARZABKOWSKI, 2005, p. 35).

Elsewhere the author attempts to relate the concept of mediation between the collective subject (top management team), the community and goal-directed activities through mediation in the construction of the activity, transforming this mediation into a level of analysis. Again, Jarzabkowski (2005) resorts to Engeström (1993, 2002) to explain that mediation is a distinctive concept in the Activity Theory that explains how individual actors, the community and their shared efforts are integrated in the search for activity. Thus, mediation occurs through structuring practices, such as roles, division of labor, tools and implicit and explicit rules that enable interactions between actors and their community. In this case, the organization is conceptualized as a system of activities and mediation practices that are situated in the context of the system of activities and enable dynamic deviations of influence

according to the subject or the relative power of the different actors involved.

Conceptualizing activity within an activity system enables us to generate an interdependent view, understanding how the actions in one part of the system affect actions in another part, with these interdependencies mediated by the practices. (...) Such practices are situated, meaning that they reflect both the institutional properties of the wider society in which they are embedded and also the

local interpretations of those practices as artefacts for action (SUCHMAN, 1987; WHITTINGTON, 2002) (JARZABKOWSKI, 2005, p. 36).

The author explains that the structure of the system provides an analytical condition for the view of the ABV in Strategy as Practice and places the TMT at the center of the complex interactions involving strategy as a situated, distributed and becoming activity.

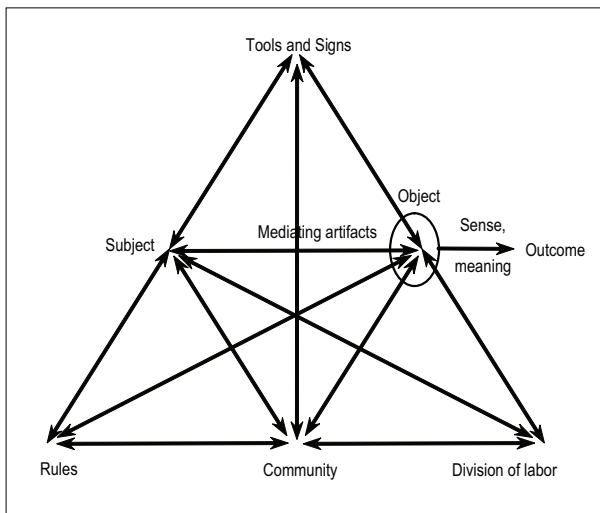


FIGURE 1 - The structure of a human activity system

Source: ENGESTRÖM, 2001, p. 135.

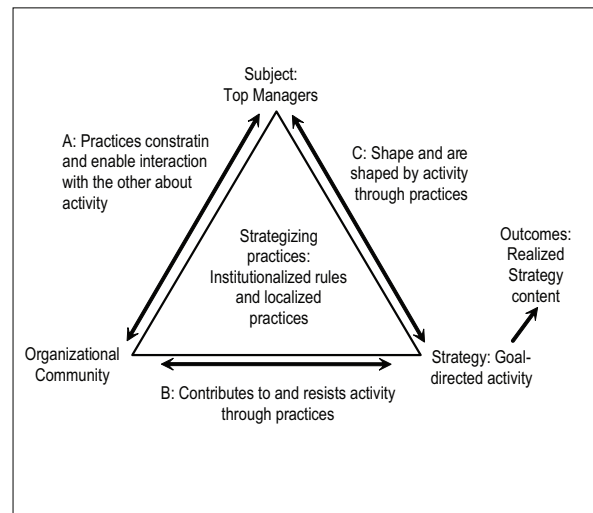


FIGURE 2 - An activity theory framework for strategy as practice

Source: JARZABKOWSKI, 2005, p. 43.

When analyzing the schema in FIG. 1, which means the representation of the Activity Theory as prepared by Leontiev (1978), Engeström (2001, p. 134-135) shows the macro level, the collective (the community in which the activity takes place, with its rules and division of labor) and the micro level (the actor or individual agent, operating with tools, and the upper sub-triangle can be seen

as the “tip of the iceberg”, representing individual and group actions immersed in a system of collective activities. The object is described with the help of an oval indication, indicating that object-driven actions are always explicitly or implicitly characterized by ambiguity, surprise, interpretations, an effort to make sense and a potential for change.

FIG. 2 is explained by Jarzabkowski (2005, p. 42), relating top management, organizational community and strategy to result-driven activities, with strategizing as a central mediator in interaction among these elements. It should be noted that the top management is the interest of the observation and the unit of analysis is the strategizing. Thus, the managers mutually influence goal-directed activities and the organizational community due to their position in the structure and access to resources through the mediation of strategizing practices (indication of the internal lines). This mediation limits and enables interactions between management and the organizational community (Arrow A). They also mediate contribution and resistance to the community (Arrow B) and provide vehicles for the managers and shape and are shaped by activities through practice (Arrow C). The dynamic of the system of activity generates results known as Realized Strategy Content.

CONCLUSION

Through the theoretical review and the above discussion, some nuances of the Historical-Cultural Theory can be briefly perceived to have been absorbed by the ABV while others were not. However, the transposition, direction and epistemological convergence are achieved adequately and without excess. In other words, it can be seen that in the shaping of the ABV care is taken to relate adequately the structural the structural paradigms contained in the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory without lightly transposing its epistemological bases that guide the approach, not a misappropriation of one theory by the

other but as a derivative of a tried and tested theory that "borrows" from another in its shaping, basic assumptions and analytical structure.

Within the context of the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory, there is a perceived derivation of the Activity Theory proposed by Engeström (1987, 2001), since Engeström's main focus lies in activities mediated by artifacts. He also prioritizes different points from those listed by his predecessors (although all of Engeström's theory is based on his predecessors, especially Leontiev, 1978) by not delving deeper into the socio-historical and socio-cultural backgrounds, in addition to semiotic matters and discourse as mediating artifacts broached by Vygotsky. Interestingly, Jarzabkowski (2003, 2005) too makes no mention of these topics, despite citing Vygotsky and Leontiev. This author may have been oriented specifically by the model proposed by Engeström.

Another point that figures as a central theme in the approaches of Vygotsky and Leontiev but seems not to have been emphasized is the matter of learning and human development. These are not drivers of the studies on development of the psyche initiated by Vygotsky in his seminal studies on the learning processes of children and were given a wider scope by Leontiev (1978), who discussed actions and the shape of actions in individual and collective labor activity.

Jarzabkowski appears to lean heavily on Engeström to base her constructs of the ABV. This can be seen by the number of direct citations of Engeström in her works (JARZABKOWSKI, 2003, 2005), despite the fact that the author only categorized his predecessors temporally

and analytically, with emphasis on Leontiev (1978). Therefore, some points of agreement can be identified, along with others that are abandoned.

The ABV clearly absorbs the concept of mediation through artifacts from the Activity Theory and opts for strategizing as the central mediator (artifact) of its elements, emphasizing the capacity for mutual influence of the managers' activities, which are the focus of interest, on the other elements. Another point of agreement is the interactivity mediated by strategizing, which provides the institutionalized rules and the division of labor through localized practices, thus favoring the capacity for agency (EMIRBAYER; MISCHÉ, 1988; GIDDENS, 1984) of the top management team in shaping the activity system due to interpretative practices that tend to be legitimized by the activity's structure of shared meaning.

Nevertheless, the ABV model has been shown to be simpler than that of the Activity Theory because it concentrates its categories of analysis in the strategizing practices and imposes the same practices of institutionalization and localized practices, a point that appears more complex as described by Engeström, where the analysis variables can be moved by the different convergences of the arrows shown in FIG. 1. Thus, the ABV abandons the matters proposed by the Activity Theory concerning the configurations and specifics of the macro and micro level of interactions and mediations of individual or collective actions of activity.

Another important question that is not debated in the ABV but which raises possibilities for analysis by the

observation of FIG. 2 is the direction of goal-directed activities, which are later named Realized Strategy Content. This direction misses the bias that the focus of observation is on the top managers, the artifact that provides this result are the practices of strategizing and the extreme organizational community appears to have no relevance on the theoretical/analytical composition. However, this could not be avoided since it is part of the organization and is widely discussed in Leontiev (1978). Therefore, it may be assumed that the ABV model contemplates a mechanistic view adapted to the Activity Theory of organizational reality by striving for the extreme of the Realized Strategy Content, although this is not totally clear in the theoretical explanations. In FIG. 1, the Community is variable at the macro level, center of analysis. Another support for this bias can be inferred because the model contemplates only the group of top managers, leaving individuality to one side. Once again, in FIG. 1, the individual (subject) figures as a variable of analysis and also of connection between the macro and micro levels of the model.

It must be emphasized that the assumptions Weick's (1995) Sensemaking is complementary to the Activity Based View (ABV) prepared for S-as-P by Jarzabkowski (2005) from the assumptions of the Historical-Cultural Activity Theory (ENGESTRÖM, 1987).

Irrespective of any conclusion that may be arrived at, Strategy as Practice and the ABV are theories that are being shaped and expanded. Recognizing certain limitations of the theoretical appropriations, Jarzabkowski (2005) proposes different agenda of research and research questions in an attempt to

transcend and mature the theories.

The recommendation is for future studies to delve deeper, be it theoretically or empirically, within the epistemological coherence suggested here, into the questions proposed by the author, such as:

- a) What are the implications of procedural and interactive strategizing for shaping strategy?
- b) How are different activity system dynamics involved in shaping strategy as a pattern in a stream of goal-directed activity over time? (Jarzabkowski, 2005, p.64).

Finally, this discussion appears to deal taciturnly with the construction of Ontology of Practice that, again, but now about Ontology, leans on Grix (2002, p.177), turns to Blaikie (2000, p. 8):

Claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other. In short, ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social

reality. [...] An individual's ontological position is their answer to the question: what is the nature of the social and political reality to be investigated?

A conclusion can be reached that it is the ontological feature of the "Ontology of Potentials", in Intersubjectivity of shared activities in the analysis of "Practice", as argued here, figures as the nature of social activities among social organizational actors through their shared meanings and the localized spatial-temporal interrelations of these analysis units immersed in multilevel socially constructed contexts in organizations that appears to attract the ABV Theory to Organizational Studies; more specifically, the analytical assumptions of the "Strategic Practice" in organizations that instigate this studies. As shown above, this ontological investigation of Strategic Practice in its potential, *i.e.*, at the moment in time-space when it occurs via Strategizing Practices (FIG. 2) is that corroborates with what the researcher thinks can be researched as an Organizational Strategic Social Practice.



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