

be understood as frameworks that help to formulate convincing *As Ifs* that the organization uses for improvisation.

In summary, the distinction between pure planning and purely emergent strategies is misleading, because the distinction between formulation and implementation is undecidable (Brews and Hunt 1999). By taking the impossibility of strategy formation as a *conceptual limit* for theorizing, we demonstrated how improvisation shapes firms' strategies *despite* their paradoxical foundation. Transforming the underlying paradox into a recursive relationship between thinking and action allows for a certain degree of intention (viz. strategic fictions) but at the same time considers the gradually constructed nature of strategic preferences by means of improvisation. The justification of strategy remains a retrospective undertaking and our reflections on future ways of action always refer to what anyone *will have performed* (future perfect tense).

6.3 Strategy Content – Beyond Simple Generalizations

6.3.1 Context – Beyond the 'Fullness of Rules/Resources'

The dominant logic that arises within strategy content research (i.e. the 'fullness of strategic rules and resources') proposes that strategy scholars conceptualize strategic rules and resources as if they were full of meaning, and thus generalizable, whereas in fact they are empty, waiting to be contextualized in the process of application. As indicated in section 3.2.3, strategic rules are thought to be generalizable *across* a variety of organizations, while strategic resources are usually treated as generalizable *within* a firm. Camillus (2003: 97), for instance, argues that "normative guidelines that possess wide if not universal relevance are obviously invaluable to designers of planning processes and systems." Taking a more critical attitude Grandy and Mills (2004: 1162) state that "[t]he assumption and acceptance that these typologies 'fit' all organizations in all industries is remarkable."¹⁰⁶ The orthodoxy seems to be to rely on principles that praise ana-

¹⁰⁶ A similar point is raised by Numagami (1998: 4) who argues that "[l]awlike regularities in social phenomena are not regularities 'out there', but are created and recreated by human conduct, consciously or unconsciously." Miller and Hartwick (2002: 26) even argue that generalizability is a characteristic of all management fads and suggest that "[f]ads claim universal relevance, proposing practices that adherents say will apply to almost any industry, organization, or culture – from General Motors to government bureaucracies to mom-and-pop groceries. But few management approaches are universally applicable, and attempts to implement a mismatch approach can do more harm than good."

lytical detachment and methodological elegance over insight and prudence, which are necessary to meaningfully apply, and at the same time adjust, prescriptions (Hayes and Abernathy 1980: 70). Inevitably, this raises the question why *oversimplifying* generalizations with regard to strategy content are neither desirable nor possible.

For any principle, be it a strategic rule or a strategic resource, to be generally applicable, one would need not only to anticipate its *context of application* completely but also to regulate this very context (see section 4.2.4). One would need to be able to foresee and manage the context of application of a strategic rule/resource so that generalizations become attainable. A truly generalizable strategic rule would need to include all contextual features (e.g., with regard to the country or industry in which the firm operates). Likewise, a resource that is thought to be valid regardless of the context of application *within* an organization has to disregard contextual features (e.g., the characteristics of the people who apply the resource or their understanding of how to handle it). Can we ‘manage’ those contexts? According to Derrida, contexts always remain open and thus non-saturable. In fact, deconstruction implies paying the sharpest attention possible to context, acknowledging its limitless nature, and giving reference to the never-ending movement of recontextualization (Derrida 1995a: 136). What are the reasons for the non-saturable nature of contexts?

Every context is not simply given, in the sense of some harder reality that imposes on people, but produced, in fact enacted, through actions and interpretive strategies. People, while making sense of their world, fix what belongs to a context and by doing so draw distinctions, which cannot be justified in advance. Contexts are not a simple natural ground on which managers can base their strategic activity but emerge because of their actions and related interpretations. Accordingly, contexts always remain open to further descriptions, as there is no pre-described limit of what might be included.¹⁰⁷ Distinctions can always be drawn differently. For in-

¹⁰⁷Franck (1992: 636) describes this problem by referring to the problem of the frame-axiom. For instance, “if I paint my house red in situation S1, then the color of the house in situation S2 should be red. The activity, rearranging the furniture, that I conduct in situation S2, results in situation S3. Which color does the house have in S3? Of course red, since rearranging the furniture does not alter the color of the house. Though, logically this possibility remains. That is why I would need a frame-axiom stating that rearranging the furniture leaves the color of the house unaltered. However, where are the limits of this frame axiom? From a formal-logical perspective, rearranging furniture could change everything I know about the world. Hence, if I want to describe this situation, I would need a limitless number of frame-axioms.” (Franck 1992: 636-637, translation A.R.).

stance, when talking about suppliers, do we include sub-suppliers or maybe even sub-sub-suppliers as well? Which competitors do we regard as important? Who is a competitor for my product or service anyway? These questions need to remain open and can only be fixed with regard to the specific situation at hand.

The context of application of a strategic rule and resource is open in yet another way. Any effort to describe/codify a context (e.g., ‘the project’ or ‘the industry’) already yields another context that escapes the previous formulation (Culler 1982: 124). In other words, any attempt to describe the limits of a context make possible the displacement of those limits. Contexts always draw upon previous contexts, which are themselves embedded in still other contexts (Dixon and Jones 2005: 243). This inter-contextual character entails that there is no stability that allows us to completely iterate a context without modification. While discussing the quote ‘I have forgotten my umbrella’ that appears in Nietzsche’s unpublished writings, Derrida (1995a: 63) argues that

“[a] thousand possibilities will always remain open even if one understands something in this phrase that makes sense (as a citation? the beginning of a novel? a proverb? someone else’s secretarial archives? an exercise in learning language? the narrative of a dream? an alibi? a cryptic code – conscious or not? the example of a linguist or of a speech act theoretician letting his imagination wander for short distances, etc.?).”

The meaning of this short phrase remains open not only because there is dissemination of meaning *per se*, but also because every reading places this text into a new context and thus allows other contextual specifications to occur. Of course, some contextual factors are less relevant than others and we possess schemes that guide our enactment of contexts (Weick 1979: 133–136), but Derrida makes the point that any specification of context remains contingent. In Derrida’s (1979: 81) view, the ‘totality’ of context is unmasterable, both in principle and in practice.

The limitless nature of the context of application is the condition of strategizing as such. Without the ceaseless destabilization of any context – the possibility of the unanticipatable – there is no need for something like strategic management. In consequence, the condition on which most strategic rules and conceptions about resources rest becomes self-defeating. If these principles could really be applied to each company in every situation, we would end up in a situation where only *violating* these principles enables firms to distinguish themselves from their competitors to create competitive advantage. Take the example of Porter (1980), who advises managers to choose between cost leadership, differentiation, or a focus strategy. If these rules apply to everyone in the industry, strategizing no

longer implies doing things *differently*, which following Porter (1996) is the essence of strategy, but doing the *same* things as your competitors. Hence, the only way to become different is to disobey these rules, which means to end up in a ‘stuck-in-the-middle’ situation that, according to Porter, should be avoided.

In the end, the blind spot of the ‘fullness of strategic rules and resources’ is to neglect the dissemination of meaning. Because contexts are open, they never determine the meaning of a strategic rule or resource. Indeed, if meaning is related to context, there can be no ‘proper’ context that provides proof for a final meaning. We cannot generalize around strategic rules and resources, at least not without recognizing that whatever is at stake needs to be put into a context and consequently needs to be transformed with regard to the specific circumstances at hand; that is to say not without the recognition that “dissemination affirms the always already divided generation of meaning.” (Derrida 1981a: 268) Dissemination discloses the contingency of meaning, not to question every strategic principle, but to insist that whatever we call strategic cannot exist as a universal truth. That is why deconstruction is a strategy without finality (Derrida 1982: 7), a strategy that intervenes into whatever happens and thus *transforms* anything at stake (e.g., a strategic rule) – a transformation that brings about paradox.

6.3.2 Strategy Content and the Paradox of Repetition

“So, at the same time, you have to follow the rule and to invent a new rule, a new norm, a new criterion, a new law.”

Jacques Derrida
(1997: 6)

In the preceding section we discussed the unbound nature of contexts as the blind spot of the ‘fullness of strategic rules and resources’. Based on these remarks, we now demonstrate that the argumentation of the ‘fullness of strategic rules and resources’ obscures a paradox that makes the dominant logic a less proper point of departure for theorizing. Indeed, the fundamental oppositions that strategy content research faces (i.e. rule/application and resource/application) cannot be sustained once we consider the unsaturable nature of contexts. To unfold our argumentation, we need to discuss the *repeatability* of strategic rules and resources, because in order to generalize rules and resources need to be perfectly re-

peatable. A strategic rule is only generalized if the advice that is offered by the rule can be applied (and thus repeated) in a variety of contexts across organizations. Likewise, a strategic resource can only be treated as generalized if it is applied exactly in the same way in a variety of contexts within an organization. Put differently, for application of rules/resources to come about there needs to be repetition.

Of course, repetition is possible *in some way*. In section 2.3.4 we classified strategic rules as codified interpretations of generalizable (i.e. repeatable) procedures of action and strategic resources as manifestations of tangible or intangible transformative capacities. *Codified interpretations* of strategic rules reflect regularities of the type ‘If X, do Y’ that are supposed to be followed by a variety of organizations. Certainly, different managers in different organizations can repeat (i.e. apply) the codified statement of a strategic rule that is provided by some strategy scholar. Likewise, *manifestations* of resources (e.g., a machine or a patent) can be applied and thus repeated in a variety of contexts within one firm. Yet, for generalizations to be valid, strategic rules and resources need to be not only repeated in some way, but in a *perfect way*. Every deviation destroys generalizability. We then have to ask: Is a perfect and unaltered repetition of the intended meaning of a strategic rule possible? Can we apply a generic strategy twice in the same way? And with regard to resources, is a perfect repetition of the use of a manifestation of a resource possible? Can we apply machines/patents/business contracts etc. twice in the same way?

Derrida (1995a: 117) discusses the question of repetition (iteration) in some depth. According to his argumentation, the perfect repetition that is needed to make generalizations valid is impossible. This, however, does not mean that Derrida totally questions and abandons generalizations; the relation between singularity and generalizability is quite special in Derrida’s thinking. Deconstruction does not neglect the general but tells us that “[t]he singular is in fact always bound up with the general.” (Royle 2003: 120) Each time a manager applies Porter’s generic strategies, s(he) creates something singular, unique, unlike everything else that has existed so far, but at the same time also refers to the general, the same that crosses all attempts to strategize by means of Porterean logic. Every application of a generic strategy is a strategy *in itself* and an example of generic strategies in general. Every repetition produces a difference that alters and defers the meaning of strategy content. Différance is at the heart of repeatability and ensures that the meaning of rules and resources is never fully present.

This interplay of sameness and difference *conditions* singularity and reminds us that repetition is never pure but always leads to alterations. As Lucy (2004: 59) argues, “[t]o repeat something is to alter it, to make a dif-

ference.” The alteration of the meaning of a rule or resource is already represented within these concepts, constantly contaminating their purity (presence). If strategy content were present, it would be a presence without difference, which is impossible (Bennington 1989: 84). This repetition-as-difference enables and limits strategic rules and resources to make us aware that nothing can exist only for itself in a state of self-presence. What permits pureness to occur is ‘this dangerous supplement’ (Derrida 2003a) which constantly adds a new dimension of meaning to the ‘origin’. In our case, the supplement is application – the action that is required for strategic rules and resources to mean anything at all. We cannot refrain from applying strategic rules and resources, as this would make them unessential. Yet application means modification and thus partly destroys rules and resources.

The impossibility of perfect repetition points towards paradox. We cannot replicate strategic rules and resources in their *purest* sense, which is to say without modification. The condition of their possibility (which is their iteration), already modifies, alters, perverts, sometimes even replaces them.¹⁰⁸ Strategic rules and resources do not apply themselves; people apply them within a specific context, a context that cannot be perfectly regulated *a priori* but remains open and thus calls for adjustment. Strategists need to regulate and get by without regulation. To follow a strategic rule and to apply to a strategic resource in a pure way, preserving their ‘original’, intended meaning, is impossible. As Derrida (1992a: 23) argues with regard to just decisions:

“[F]or a decision to be just and responsible, it must, in its proper moment if there is one, be both *regulated and without regulation*: it must conserve the law and also destroy it or suspend it enough to have to reinvent it in each case, re-

¹⁰⁸Ortmann (2003a: 207) remarks that the discussion of rules and resources actually contains a double-paradox. They not only provide generalized principles for specific contexts *but at the same time* are also thought to be generalizable within the scope of a corporation (i.e. applicable to all occurring contexts), although not beyond the corporation (as this would cause an imitation of the competitive advantage). Thus, strategic rules and resources offer uniqueness as a general concept. In the words of Ortmann and Salzman (2002: 224): “the ‘search for strategy’ as an ideal, general way to uniqueness is a paradoxical undertaking, hopeless insofar as it is aimed at generalizable singularity.” Ironically, we face a situation in which most strategic rules and resource-concepts promote uniqueness (viz. ‘make your corporation special’) but offer general prescriptions (viz. ‘that is how everybody needs to do it’). For instance, generic strategies are supposed to be valid ‘inside’ all organizations, but are supposed to also provide a distinct and unique competitive advantage ‘outside’ the firm (see also Vos 2005: 367).

justify it, at least reinvent it in the reaffirmation and the new and free confirmation of its principle. Each case is other, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely. [...] It follows from this paradox that there is never a moment that we can say *in the present* that a decision *is* just [...].” (first emphasis added)

The supplement ‘forces’ the meaning of strategic rules and resources to be contextualized, to be valid for a single case only. But contexts, as indicated in the preceding section, are open and unsaturable and cannot be regulated in advance, at least not in a perfect way. This is the ground from which our reasoning regarding strategy content needs to unfold: strategizing is about *applying* strategic rules and resources (Ortmann and Sydow 2001a: 438), an application which cannot purely reproduce because it always already calls for modification. Strategic rules and resources cannot account for their own interpretation by agents *in situ*; they cannot regulate their own conditions of application. In other words, we cannot understand strategic rules and resources as a *generalized way* for becoming *idiosyncratic* (Figure 29). To think of perfectly repeatable strategic rules/resources means to establish a metaphysics of presence (i.e. an ‘origin’ that is self-defining and does not need any application to create meaning).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹Giddens sets up this paradox as well by arguing that “no course of action can be said to be guided by a rule because every course of action can be made to accord with that rule. However, if that is the case, it is also true that every course of action can be made to conflict with it.” (Giddens 1984: 21) Yet he also resolves this indecision by suggesting that this paradox holds only as long as we think about codified interpretations of rules. If rules are procedures of action, aspects as *praxis*, one looks at their constant enactment and reproduction in social practices (that includes modification and manages to get by without perfect replications). Wittgenstein (1967: 81) remarks in a very similar sense: “This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it.” Barnes (1995: 202) remarks, “nothing of the rule itself fixes its application in a given case, [...] there is no ‘fact of the matter’ concerning the proper application of a rule, [...] what a rule is actually taken to imply is a matter to be decided, when it is decided, by *contingent social processes*.” (as quoted in Tsoukas 2000: 109, emphasis added)

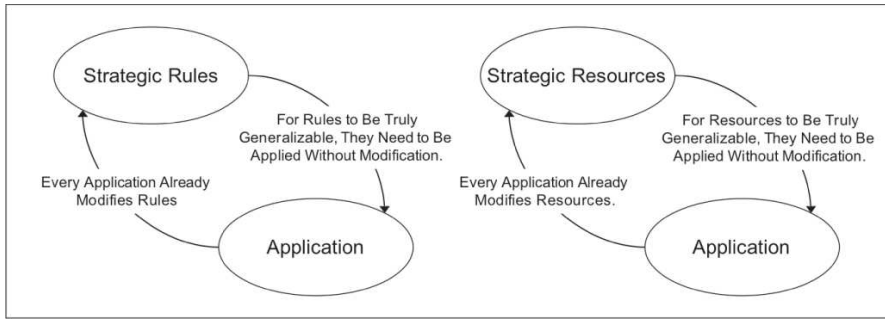


Fig. 29. The Paradox of Strategic Rules and Resources

Based on this paradox, Ortmann (2003b: 33) draws our attention to the unavoidable necessity of rule modification. He claims that rules are inevitably modified, and for resources things are not much different (Ortmann 2003a: 185-209). Because strategic rules and resources need to be applied, they cannot avoid the dangerous supplement that modifies their meaning. Strategists thus need to know that to break with a rule or to alter the meaning of a resource is not necessarily a bad thing, but often indispensable to address the context they face. When talking about deviations from strategic rules and resources, we do not focus on *deliberate* violations (for instance, when a strategic rule like cost leadership is given a twist to legitimize child labor), but on modifications that happen in the spirit of the context at hand. Certainly, it is not always easy to distinguish between both forms of modification. Yet it shows the need to study how managers adjust strategic rules and resources (McKiernan 1997: 794).

While this line of argumentation seems comprehensible for strategic rules, it is less clear for resources. Modification with regard to resources does not imply altering their manifestations (e.g., as a machine) but the *meaning* people attach to them. The meaning, though, is of special importance. With the recent debates on the knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant 1996; Kogut and Zander 1992), the meaning of resources seems to move to the heart of resource-based thinking. Of course, a machine can be used more than one time, but the meaning that is attached to this machine and the way it is used is in a constant state of flux. Whether, how, and in which way a machine is applied is, of course, a question of context. In other words, what is at stake is the meaning that is attached to tangible and intangible resources and not their mere physical qualities (e.g., as machines, patents or IT systems). Hence, it is paradoxical to replicate the unaltered meaning of a strategic resource, since the supplement (application) brings about new facets of meaning, but at the same time acts as the condition of the possibility for resources.

The paradox that strategic rules and resources are unable to define their own conditions of application has been widely neglected by empirical strategy content research thus far. Nevertheless, some scholars have acknowledged the consequence of the paradox (i.e. generalizable statements about ‘what constitutes a good strategy’ are impossible). Pfeffer (1994: 3-4) shows that one cannot simply adhere to Porter’s five forces framework to make out competitive advantage because competitiveness is a dynamic concept that changes over time. He argues that when identifying the five top performing US firms for the 1972 to 1992 period, which according to Porter should be in industries where patent protection of product or service technology could be achieved, one ends up with a list of organizations that operate in industries characterized by massive competition, horrendous losses, widespread bankruptcy, and almost no barrier to entry. The point is *not* to believe that Porter offers a false analytical tool, but that the general nature of his framework does not offer a reasonable explanation of competitive advantage in every industry. The corporations Pfeffer identifies did not get their competitive edge from any of the five Porterean forces but from the way they managed their workforce, a factor that may be included in strategic analysis by supplementing existing frameworks *sensu* Derrida.¹¹⁰

To conclude, the ‘fullness of strategic rules and resources’ aims at impossibility. It assumes that strategic rules and resource are generalizable and thus can be repeated (i.e. applied) without modification. Yet application is not a secondary operation that can simply be deduced; application acts as a supplement that may be restricted (but not determined) by existing meaning structures but leads to a modification that not necessarily runs counter to the ‘original’ but puts it into context and thus preserves peoples’

¹¹⁰With regard to organizational rules in general, the study by Orr (1996) reveals the impossibility of conceiving rules as determining their own application. In his ethnographic observation of field service personnel repairing office machines, he points out that such work is resistant to rationalization, because the necessary expertise cannot be easily codified in rules. While observing the work of service personnel, he realizes that the documentation, which is supposed to help the technicians, “is composed of representations, which inherently afford multiple interpretations and uses, and instructions, which require interpretations by their users in the context of their application. As Suchman writes, following Garfinkel, ‘Indexicality of instructions means that an instruction’s significance with respect to action does not inhere in the instruction, but must be found by the instruction follower with reference to the situation of its use (Suchman 1987: 61). [...] There is also a certain amount of resentment of the diagnostic procedures; as one technician told me, technicians like to think they have more on the ball than just following directions.’” (Orr 1996: 110)

capacity to strategize. Like signs, which are unstable and only gain meaning in and through social praxis (Derrida 2002), to know a universal rule or to apply a resource by itself in no way guarantees that its generality is enabled in the context of application. The supplement always undermines what we think is generally valid. Like a parasite, the social practices of people constantly recontextualize and revise strategic rules and resources. That is why Derrida (1995b: 234) remarks “deconstruction is always a discourse about the parasite.”

6.3.3 The Deparadoxification of Strategy Content

As indicated in the preceding section, the *uncontaminated* iteration of strategic rules and resources is impossible. Yet we all know that strategists somehow deal with this paradox. Deephouse (1999), Lozeau et al. (2002), and Zbaracki (1998), for instance, investigate how strategic rules become applied. Likewise a variety of authors have empirically observed that managers refer to resources (Henderson and Cockburn 1994; Lorenzoni and Lipparini 1999). So, where is the paradox? To discuss this question, we need to recall that the paradox that we identified with regard to strategy content research states that a *perfect repetition* of the meaning of strategic rules and resources is impossible. In practice, though, strategists usually neither demand nor desire a *pure* iteration of strategic rules and resources; they are aware that strategic rules formulated by strategy scholars need to be adjusted to fit their context. They also accept that the meaning of those resources that are vital for their company change over time. In other words, practitioners simply modify the meaning of the rule or resource without caring much about their *uncontaminated* iteration.

Yet, to conclude from this that the paradox is not of relevance is misleading. Although strategists do not demand a perfect iteration of strategic rules and resources, they still want to apply not just any rule/resource but *the* intended rule/resource. That is to say, that there are limits to modifications. To obey Porter’s (1980) generic strategies means to give reference to his work, to apply those characteristics that he identified as being relevant within any of the generic strategies. There are limits to deviations and whatever is thought to be general needs to stay at least recognizable under its *proper* name (Derrida 1995a: 9). ‘Cost leadership’ cannot mean just anything, but needs to give some reference to the intended meaning that Porter (1980) had in mind. This is even more important, if we consider that the contextual interpretation of a strategic rule or resource needs to be socially accepted. For example, others need to recognize the proposed cost cutting measures as being part of a ‘cost leadership’ strategy. In a time

where strategic management also has a signaling function to other stakeholders (e.g., stockholders, institutional investors or NGOs), significant modifications of strategic rules and resources need to be justified with regard to their intended meaning. This then makes the paradox more visible and strategists eventually look into the ‘eyes of the impossibility’ that paradoxical indecision brings about.¹¹¹

This brings us to the question of deparadoxification. How do strategists circumvent the paradox of iteration? To escape paralyzing indecision, strategists temporalize paradox; they act *as if* their interpretation of the strategic rule or resource is relevant, whereas they know – or at least should know – that this interpretation *cannot* represent an uncontaminated iteration. This *As If* obscures paradox and demonstrates that *formulated* (written or oral) strategic rules and statements about how resources are understood have the character of a fiction. Faced with the paradox, strategists act as if their interpretation is valid; they act as if the meaning that they ascribe to labels like ‘variety-based positioning’ (Porter 1996: 66) or ‘competence-based leadership’ (Hamel and Prahalad 1998: 189) corresponds with the intended meaning. This, then, establishes a ground from which further strategic action can unfold. Any formulation, of course, is guided by a sense of naivety. Those in charge cannot know in which way and to what extent the meaning of their formulation becomes modified *in praxi*. To treat strategic rules and resource *as if* they were meaningful preserves strategists’ capacity to act despite the underlying paradox.¹¹²

¹¹¹To speak about the ‘proper name’ of a strategic rule or resource is interesting. The word ‘proper’ comes from the Latin *proprius* and has the meaning of ‘one’s own’. To refer to a strategic rule’s or resource’s proper name thus means to acknowledge its ‘own character’ (that which identifies it). Yet, as Derrida (1977: 111) remarks, the identification of propriety requires the existence of signifying elements that are shared with others (and are thus improper). One can only identify propriety by giving reference to its impropriety (that which makes the proper identifiable for everybody).

¹¹²If we consider that those formulations that deparadoxify strategy content are based on performative speech acts, we can emphasize the *bootstrapped* character of formulated strategic rules and statements about resources. Recall that a bootstrapped operation creates its own grounds; performative speech acts bring into existence what they refer to. Of course, strategic formulations become established through performative speech acts. Managers *announce* a ‘cost leadership’ strategy and thus make the strategy a low-cost one or *define* ‘knowledge’ as a key resource and thus make knowledge a key resource. These performative formulations, that are actually supposed to guide strategic actions, come into existence because of the ‘actionality’ of performative speech acts (see section 5.2).

To facilitate orientation and pave the way for the discussion of implications, we will briefly show how strategic rules and resources relate to the fictions that deparadoxify strategy content. Concerning strategic rules, we propose that in an initial sense they can be understood as strategy scholars' codified interpretations of strategic activity. Then, a manager who refers to these codified statements and *interprets* them establishes a fiction and consequently acts *as if* her/his interpretation corresponds with the 'initial' meaning of the rule. This fiction temporalizes the paradox. Of course, the fiction still represents a certain emptiness. Strategists do not know whether, how, and in which way the fiction is socially accepted and embedded in the strategizing routines of their organization. Similarly, strategic resources represent manifestations of transformative capacities. These manifestations (e.g., a license or a machine) can be used more than once; yet the meaning that is attached to these manifestations changes with every application (e.g., a license can be used to produce slightly different goods at different locations with different people who have different knowledge about how the license is supposed to be applied). Accordingly, the meaning that is attached to manifestations of resources cannot be perfectly iterated; this is paradoxical. To deparadoxify this situation, those who apply a resource can act *as if* their interpretation of the resource is valid and somehow corresponds to its proper nature. Certainly, the underlying *As If* is a fiction that is 'filled with meaning' in and through the conduct of organizational members.

The *As Ifs* that are needed to deparadoxify strategic rules and resources help us to understand how managers deal in practice with the impossibility of generalizing strategic rules *across* a variety of organizations and strategic resources *within* a particular firm. The *As Ifs* temporalize the paradox; they defer it into an indeterminate future. Of course, we should suspect that practitioners are seldom aware of the *As If* that underlies their thinking about strategy content. Yet, even though practitioners usually do not demand perfect iterations, their application of a formulated strategic rule or manifestation of a resource is based on a fiction. Fictions are inevitable since managers cannot know whether and in what way the strategic rule they regard as important or the resource they have identified as a strength is applied (and thus modified) over time. In the following, we take the existence of the *As Ifs* as our starting point for discussing 'theoretical' and 'practical' implications of the paradox of repetition.

Inevitably, the discussion of implications needs to demonstrate how the *As Ifs* that deparadoxify strategic rules and resources are further 'filled' with meaning. As indicated above, an *As If* is a fiction that needs to be realized *in praxis*.

6.3.4 Implications of the Deconstruction of Strategy Content

Iterability – The Emptiness and Fullness of Strategy Content

Recall that the paradox that, strictly speaking, makes generalizations with regard to strategic rules and resources impossible is based upon Derrida's (1991: 83-84) claim that every repetition also brings about alteration. Replication is the possibility of singularity; this is paradoxical (and thus impossible) only if we look at an *uncontaminated* iteration. Derrida (1995a) discusses this interconnectedness of repetition and alteration with regard to the term: *iterability*. Iterability, as Derrida (1995a: 7) suggests, comes from the Latin *iter* ('again') and the Sanskrit *itara* ('other') and is the logic that ties repetition to alteration. Iterability asks us to think replication and modification together to consider that reproduction already is the possibility of singularity. Whatever is at stake remains identifiable within and among organizations, but only in, through, and in view of its alteration (Derrida 1995a: 53). The structure of iteration implies both identity and difference. Conceiving strategic rules and resources as being reproduced by iterability entails accepting that they are repeatable in some sense, while at the same time they are modified because of their repetition.

Iterability implies that organizations do not completely neglect the sameness that makes strategic rules/resources in some way repeatable. In fact, according to iterability, organizations base their strategies on an indispensable *emptiness*, which is necessary for repetition, and a gradual *filling* of this emptiness to take specific circumstances into account (Ortmann and Salzman 2002: 212). They consider general (empty) strategic prescriptions and modify (fill) these prescriptions over time. Emptiness, then, represents the repeatability of rules and resources in principle, while fullness characterizes 'the other' that each context brings about and without which no rule or resource gains meaning *in praxis*. Emptiness implies that strategic rules and resources can be repeated and act as a ground for strategizing, whereas fullness points out that this repetition fills rules and resources with contextualized meaning and modifies them to account for the specific circumstances at hand. The question is: How are strategic rules and resources filled with meaning?

To theoretically conceptualize the process of filling, we need to demonstrate how 'empty' strategic rules and resources are 'filled' in the course of application. Of course, the underlying relation is supplementary in a Derridean sense: 'empty' rules and resources are 'filled' (and thus modified and eventually replaced) until the next round of strategizing where the initial filling needs to be reworked according to novel contextual circumstances. In the following, we describe this supplementary relation and its

implication in more depth. To organize this rather long discussion, we have structured our argumentation into five parts (see Figure 30).



Fig. 30. Outline of the Discussion of Emptiness and Fullness

Strategic Concepts-in-Use and Competences

To discuss the supplementary relation between ‘empty’ strategic rules/resources and their gradual filling within the course of application, we need to be able to contrast emptiness from fullness. So far, our definition of strategic rules (as codified interpretations of scholars’ observation of strategic activity and resources as manifestations of transformative capacities) cannot conceptually grasp ‘fullness’. This is because these definitions of rules and resources only refer to their necessary emptiness. In fact, codified interpretations of rules and manifestations of resources *disregard their process of application*. To contrast emptiness from fullness, we need a conception of strategic rules and resources that gives reference to their application. Our existing definitions need to be supplemented by an understanding that grasps the fact that strategic rules and resources become *aspects of praxis*. Figure 31 contrasts the different definitions.

With regard to the market-based view, we contrast ‘empty’ strategic rules from ‘full’ strategic concepts-in-use. Following Giddens’s (1984: 21) understanding of rules in general, we define strategic concepts-in-use as procedures of action that are applied in the enactment of social practices. Formulated strategic rules are thus only special types of strategic concepts-in-use (viz. their codified interpretations). The notion of strategic concepts-in-use reflects our belief that every strategic rule, once applied by managers, becomes an aspect of *praxis*. That is to say, codified interpretations of strategic rules can only be filled with reference to the conduct of people. A strategic rule gains meaning when people start to apply it in the course of social action.

	Emptiness	Fullness
Market-based View	Strategic Rules (codified interpretations of observation of strategic activity)	Strategic Concepts-In-Use (procedures of action applied in the enactment of practices)
Resource-based View	Strategic Resources (manifestations of transformative capacities)	Strategic Competences (deployment of strategic resources over time)

Fig. 31. Emptiness, Fullness, and Objects of Analysis

With regard to the resource-based view, we contrast ‘empty’ resources from ‘full’ strategic competences. We define strategic competences as the deployment of resources over time (Freiling 2004: 31; Ortmann 2005a: 34; Penrose 1995: 25). The competences that are yielded by resources only come into existence in the process of application. Freiling (2004: 31) makes this quite clear:

“The firm itself has to be in a position to make use of these resources in a goal- and market-oriented way. This is only possible in case of available action-related competences. They unfold the potential of resources [...]”

Of course, the idea of competences is by no means a novel one. For instance, Prahalad and Hamel (1990: 82) identify competences as the collective learning in the organization. One may wonder, then, why we still criticize resource-based reasoning for its neglect of the process of employing

resources, if strategic competences already highlight the employment of resources. When taking a closer look at the competence-based literature (Freiling 2004; Prahalad and Hamel 1990; Stalk et al. 1992: 62; Tallman 2003), it becomes obvious that, despite the emphasis on the deployment of resources, competences are still seen as *generalizable*. Prahalad and Hamel (1990: 83), for instance, argue that competences have to be transferable and Freiling (2004: 31) argues that competences are repeatable. Yet, if competences can be transferred and are repeatable, they cannot represent idiosyncratic circumstances (Ortmann 2005a: 34). Competences, as deployed resources, cannot be *a priori* ‘given’.

Emptiness and Fullness and the Lifeworld of Organizations

Having introduced the notions of strategic concepts-in-use and competences, we can now discuss how we understand emptiness and fullness in general. Faced with the emptiness of general strategic rules and resources – or a deparadoxifying *As If* about them – strategists have to ‘fill’ this necessary emptiness with meaning. The process of filling gives reference to the in principle repeatable strategic rules and existing resources *and* considers the context that calls for modification. Fullness is about a contextualized understanding of whatever is thought to be generalizable; it brings about strategic concepts-in-use and competences. Any fullness, though, has to be emptied to factor in inevitable recontextualizations. Emptying implies discarding and unlearning strategic concepts and competences that are currently *in use*; it is about the necessary forgetting of whatever is contextualized. Emptying a strategic concept-in-use or competence implies re-considering its underlying generalizability. Far from being a mere theoretical construct, this ‘looking back’ at strategic rules and resources happens in ‘strategy reviews’ when strategists reflect on their understanding of currently deployed strategic concepts and the significance of strategic competences (see Figure 32).

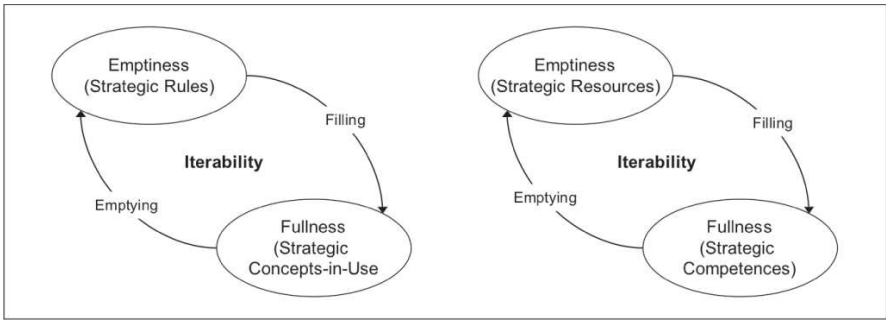


Fig. 32. The Emptiness and Fullness of Strategy Content

Emptiness and fullness allow us to explore in more depth the relation between strategic rules and concepts-in-use as well as resources and competences. But with regard to what conditions does fullness occur? When adopted by an organization, strategists embed rules and resources into their organization-specific lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) and by doing so carve out the meaning of strategic concepts-in-use and competences. We use the term lifeworld with reference to Schütz (1962: 231-233) and its later adoption by Berger and Luckmann (2000: 17). Although Schütz's remarks primarily concern society at large, we interpret his idea of the lifeworld with regard to organizations. According to Schütz, the lifeworld is the paramount reality within which the self suspends all modes of disbelief. The lifeworld is what we take for granted as everyday reality. People in organizations use this lifeworld as a 'home base' for their orientation. The lifeworld acts as an archetype for our experience of reality (Schütz 1962: 233): to a large extent it reflects the regularities that people procure. The organizational lifeworld is also reflected by a certain cognitive style and specific ways of using language. All organizations have their specific way of 'talking' (Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges 1988) and a certain common-sense mode that all people share. This common-sense mode identifies an organization and influences the way people interact. Fullness is always a fullness that can only be achieved with regard to the lifeworld of an organization.

Once embedded in and applied to the lifeworld of an organization, strategic rules and resources gain meaning. What does it mean to possess a 'given' bundle of resources like knowledge and certain high-tech machines? For Sony it implies becoming good at 'miniaturization', for 3M having a competence with 'sticky tape', and for IBM becoming good at 'integrated data service'. What does it mean to choose cost leadership or differentiation as relevant strategic rules? Cost leadership at Tesco is different from cost leadership at Ryanair. Strategists have to modify, corrupt, and even replace the empty codified interpretations with contextualized meaning *in praxis*.

Of course, 'fullness' with regard to the lifeworld can never imply self-presence in a Derridean sense. We cannot stop *différance* from occurring, to suddenly face a fixed center from which our reasoning unfolds. There cannot be full meaning, *only* meaning in the moment. The moment, however, is never fully present (Derrida 2003a). Fullness is by itself in a constant state of flux. Consequently, considering strategic concepts-in-use and competences as stable within the lifeworld of an organization bears the risk of reintroducing these categories as *general means for specification*, while specification can neither be determined nor foreseen by some meta-competence or meta-rule. While this is true from a theoretical lens, we

should not forget that much strategizing is based on routines that possess a relatively stable character (Zollo and Winter 2002) or whose exact modification is not all that relevant within the course of strategizing. All of this leaves the question of *how* emptiness is filled unaddressed. We now examine the process of filling through which rules/resources are transformed into aspects of praxis.

Phenomenological Remarks on the Process of Filling

To understand how ‘empty’ strategic rules and resources are given meaning, we have to consider that the organizational lifeworld holds a variety of interpretative schemes by which people understand their context and make sense of their world (Schütz 1962: 233). Mundane examples of such schemes are symbolic orders, value systems, and stories that actors share to coordinate and assign meaning to their actions (Gilbert 2003: 131). Empty strategic rules and resources refer to contextualized interactions whereby meaning gets mediated by communication and under consideration of the interpretative schemes that actors possess.

We propose, following Duschek (2001), to understand the application of interpretative schemes by referring to Schütz’s (1967) phenomenological conception of the social world. According to Schütz, our reflective grasp on the social world is based on perceived types with which we are familiar. To come to terms with the world we experience and to make sense of it, we classify the specific characteristics of a context we face, referring it back to typical characteristics that are familiar to us. As Schütz (1967: 83) explains, “the lived experience that is to be classified, refers [...] back to the schemes on hand, and fixes its specific essence.” These schemes are interpretative schemes within which actors have organized the experiences of their past. According to Schütz (1967: 84), interpretative schemes are

“the completed meaning-configurations that are present at hand each time in the form of ‘what one knows’ or ‘what one already knew’. They consist of material that has already been organized under categories.”

Interpretative schemes are anchored in the specific lifeworld of an organization. Schütz (1967: 81) makes quite clear that interpretative schemes result partly from our own past experience and partly from what others have taught us. This means that schemes are tied to the *unique* experience of an organization and are bound to its specific circumstances. Every particular experience of a general strategic rule or resource, then, is referred to a *general type* that is part of an interpretative scheme rooted in the lifeworld.

Schütz uses the term *type* to emphasize that interpretative schemes consist of a variety of types that allow people to experience the unique in terms of broader, well-known categories. Typification, which is the proc-

ess of ascribing a general type to a particular experience, applies to all kind of objects and human beings. Organizational members classify whatever they experience in the ‘here-and-now’ as specific and context-bound in a well-known scheme (type) and thereby make these experiences in some way knowable to them. Typification is used because in everyday organizational life the particular characteristics of a context, which make this context *totally* unique and not repeatable, are not always all that relevant (Duschek 2001: 75). This makes typification the abstract act by which the specificity of a situation is detached from the particularities of its context and reduced to its ‘typical’ (viz. for the organizational lifeworld knowable) characteristics. We thus experience the singularity of the situation through a typified interpretative scheme.¹¹³

By typifying, one is attuned to the continuities of experience and tends to disdain special instances and unique detail. This leads to what Schütz calls *idealizations*, which spread through our experience of the organizational lifeworld. Referring to Husserl, Schütz (1964: 285) argues that

“[h]e [Husserl] calls them the idealization of an ‘and so forth and so on’ (*und so weiter*) and – its subjective correlate – the idealization of ‘I-can-do-it-again’ (*ich kann immer wieder*).“ (German annotations and emphasis in the original)

Schütz assumes the adequacy of idealizations until counter-evidence occurs. Interpretative schemes provide a roughly coherent complex of meaning by which organizations interpret present experiences, make them understandable, and to a certain extent decontextualize them to plan their courses of action.

We are now in a position to describe the process of filling more precisely. Usually, the emptiness of a strategic rule or resource is introduced by specific ‘labels’. When applying a strategic rule, strategists have to figure out what ‘Cash Cow’, ‘Total Quality’ or ‘transaction costs’ mean *this time*. Similarly, when applying a resource, people need to figure out what their ‘core competence’, ‘market knowledge’ or the ‘availability of top experts’ mean in the specific situation that they face. These labels occur with regard to the specific lifeworld of an organization. To make sense of them,

¹¹³Schütz (1964: 285) gives the following example: “Strictly speaking, each experience is unique, and even the same experience that recurs is not the same, because it recurs. It is a recurrent sameness, and as such it is experienced in a different context and with different adumbrations. If I recognize this particular cherry tree in my garden as the same tree I saw yesterday, although in another light and with another shade of color, this is possible merely because I know the typical way in which this unique object appears in its surroundings. And the type ‘this particular cherry tree’ *refers* to the pre-experienced types ‘cherry tree in general’, ‘trees’, ‘plants’, ‘objects of the outer world’.” (emphasis added)

there are long discussions about what it *means* to have a core competence or what precisely a Cash Cow represents for the organization in its current context. Within these discussions, labels are decontextualized, because people refer ‘this-particular-notion-of-core-competence’, which exists in the ‘here-and-now’ of the lifeworld with its unique meaning, to pre-experienced types like ‘competences in general’, ‘competition’, and ‘resources’. In his empirical observation of how organizations adopt TQM, Zbaracki (1998: 605), for instance, notes that

“[i]ndividuals who encounter TQM must integrate their understanding of the technical dimensions of TQM with the *everyday realities* they encounter in ongoing organizational processes.” (emphasis added)

By embedding strategic rules and resources in their lifeworld, organizations overcome the compatibility gap (Lozeau et al. 2002) between general assumptions and the idiosyncratic context at hand. People include the typified meaning-configurations of concepts-in-use and competences into their ‘stock of knowledge at hand’.

By applying typified schemes, people construct concepts-in-use and competences without giving reference to each and every particular characteristic of the individuality of their lifeworld. The resulting understandings of concepts and competences are thus conveyed into the lifeworld and carry with them the presumption (idealization) of their applicability until counter-evidence occurs. The singular grasp of a strategic rule or resource is transformed into an anonymity that is valid in the organization only (Schütz 1964: 40). The resulting ‘full’ notions of concepts-in-use and competences act as idealizations that are applied routinely in the spirit of Schütz’s ‘I-can-do-it-again’ without recognizing every detail that a context holds.

Understanding the application of strategic rules and resources based on interpretative schemes moves us beyond the dichotomy of ‘entirely empty strategy content regardless of context’ and ‘entirely filled strategy content with regard to a unique context’. That is why Schütz (1964: 42) calls them ‘*mediating* typifications’. In fact, rules and resources are filled with regard to the organizational lifeworld, but not with regard to *every* unique context that pops up in the course of strategizing. Whenever strategy content is filled it conserves a sense of generalizability, as for organizations it is impractical to regard the precise circumstances appearing in time-space. Yet, at the same time, strategy content is also turned towards the exclusivity of an organization. This is why the inclusion of Schützean ideas reflect Derrida’s (1991) iterability – the ‘strange’ recurring character of rules and resources *and* their modification. Of course, Derrida would question the existence of idealizations throughout time and space, as every iteration brings

about a slight (often unnoticed) modification. Schütz's ideas, however, help us understand that even though these slight modifications exist, people often disregard every precise detail that the particularities of organizational life bring about; people work, chat, discuss, argue, and follow their routines (Segal-Horn 2004: 141).

To conclude, the phenomenological interpretation of the process of filling demonstrates more precisely *how* managers cope with the inevitable emptiness of strategic rules and resources. Schütz's ideas supplement Derrida's remarks on iterability and make the idea of iteration-as-modification (i.e. iterability) more applicable to the problems of strategic management. However, our discussion leaves one question unanswered: If concepts-in-use and competences can gain relatively stable meaning (because they are idealized), how do these idealizations change over time? Existing concepts-in-use and competences need to change as organizations face novel situations that make existing interpretations inappropriate. Indeed, whatever is filled also needs to be forgotten ('emptied') to create room for interpretations that fit progressing contexts. That is why the next section discusses the dynamic interplay between fullness and emptiness.

Emptying and Filling as Situated Learning

Any concept-in-use or strategic competence has to change over time. Existing contextualizations are likely to result in incompetence (Argyris 1986); after a while they are applied to avoid surprise, embarrassment or threat eventually resulting in organizational inertia. Inertia reflects an organization's inability to apply distinctive interpretative schemes to update their strategy content regarding new situations. To change concepts-in-use and competences is tough, as the 'taken-for-granted' (idealized) character of our everyday knowledge has to be altered (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995: 45-46).

To reconfigure meaning that has been attached to competences and concepts-in-use requires *learning*, if we interpret learning as the development of new contextualizations in the lifeworld. Yet, for learning to come about there also needs to be *unlearning* – a process through which people discard outdated strategic concepts-in-use and competences (Hedberg 1981: 18). Unlearning is indispensable to embed novel experiences in different cognitive patterns. To empty a concept-in-use or competence can be interpreted as *unlearning*; it implies discarding existing contextualizations of strategy content to clear space for prospective fillings. According to this perspective, emptying (unlearning) paves the way for new fillings (learning) to emerge. We thus agree with Prahalad and Bettis (1995: 10) who argue that "strategic learning and unlearning [...] are inextricably intertwined." (see also Nystrom and Starbuck 1984: 58) This reflects the supplementary rela-

tion between emptiness and fullness. To fill 'empty' strategic rules and resources there needs to be learning (i.e. the development of new idealizations). Because the supplement always adds new meaning (Derrida 2003a), strategic rules and resources are inevitably altered in the process of filling. Unlearning, then, implies discrediting existing concepts-in-use and competences to allow for a new round of filling.

Although learning and unlearning enable us to conceptually grasp the dynamic interplay between emptiness and fullness, there is one important question that remains unanswered: How do people know when and whether their current concepts-in-use and competences are outdated? How do they know when to (un)learn? Weick and Coutou (2003) and Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) address this question and argue that in order to alter existing interpretations people need to draw novel distinctions that make them aware of their context; they need to be in a state of alertness and lively awareness regarding events occurring around them (Albert 1990: 154). To recognize the need for unlearning means to be opposed to the non-reflected application of existing modes of behavior. In other words, people have to identify the singularity of a new situation and experience this singularity ('What is new about the recent project/product/initiative?'). With regard to our phenomenological discussion of emptiness and fullness, to (un)learn means to critically reflect idealized typifications of strategic competences and concepts-in-use regarding their appropriateness (Daft and Weick 1984; Weick et al. 1999).

This insight seems simple but has important consequences. If (un)learning is bound to a context and means giving the sharpest attention possible to contextual features, one cannot generalize with regard to the interplay of emptiness and fullness (Easterby-Smith et al. 2000; Messner et al. 2005: 6). Put differently, no generalizable meta-learning competence can ensure that outdated interpretations of strategic rules and resources are disregarded. This competence, like any competence, is at best a potential that has to be activated with regard to a context. In consequence, the interplay between learning and unlearning, and thus also between emptiness and fullness, is situated. The situated nature of learning has been promoted by a variety of scholars (Brown and Duguid 1991; Brown and Duguid 2001). While discussing the nature of learning, Tyre and Hippel (1997: 72), for instance, remark that situated learning

"reveals that intelligent actors incorporate codified, abstract theory into local, informal routines, freely adapting it as they work on actual problems in their particular social and physical circumstances."

Situated learning gives the sharpest attention possible to the social, cultural, and physical context that affects how and what organizations learn.

To understand the dynamics of emptiness and fullness as a process of situated learning stresses that a change of the idealized ‘stock knowledge at hand’ is by itself a process that is bound to context and not generalizable. Forgetting existing contextualized notions of strategy content is as much context-bound as adding new idealizations by reinterpreting strategic prescriptions according to novel circumstances.

This, of course, is a plea to treat any kind of meta-learning-competence with great care. Such competences suffer from the same problem as the apparent ‘fullness of strategic rules and resources’: they are thought to be generalizable, yet can only provide potentials that have to be activated with regard to a specific situation. Without recognition of this insight, research is likely to engage in a relentless search for meta- and meta-meta-competences that relegate the search for competitiveness to the fringe of an infinite regress. (Un)Learning understood as the dynamic interplay between emptying and filling can be achieved only *in situ*.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴This insight is interesting with regard to the recent development of a *dynamic capability view*. According to dynamic capabilities, it is not a competence *per se* that renders competitive advantage but the way it is actualized with regard to changing market conditions and organizational circumstances. Teece et al. (1997: 516, emphasis added) define such capabilities as “the firm’s ability to *integrate, build and reconfigure* internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments.” Thus, dynamic capabilities represent firms’ ability to empty competences and to refill the latter according to varying contexts. For instance, while product-related knowledge can be classified as a competence, an organization that possesses dynamic capabilities develops routines to reconfigure this knowledge as markets emerge, collide, split, evolve, and die (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000: 1107). That is why Zollo and Winter (2002: 340) identify dynamic capabilities with the organizational manifestation of *learning*; they constitute an organization’s systematic method for modifying its underlying competences.

Notwithstanding these conceptual advantages, there are also critical aspects that become evident from the perspective of a deconstructed resource/application opposition. First, whereas Teece et al. (1997) tell us what dynamic capabilities are, they tell us nothing about *how* firms reconfigure their competences. Second, it remains unclear how firms *develop* dynamic capabilities (Helfat and Peteraf 2003: 997; Moran and Ghoshal 1999: 409). Eisenhardt and Martin (2000: 1107) still conceptualize such capabilities as ‘given’ and argue that one can identify them quite easily. In fact, they argue that “dynamic capabilities can be duplicated across firms” so that a ‘best practice’ exists which all firms can use as a benchmark. If dynamic capabilities are generalizable across firms, they exist in an *a priori* manner, but not with regard to the specific lifeworld of an organization. The development of competences is as much based on situated learning as the development of the development of competences. If learning is situational, the learning of learning cannot be generalizable.

Implications of the Discussion of Emptiness and Fullness

The outlined supplementary relation between emptiness and fullness as well as our phenomenological interpretation demonstrate that strategy scholars can learn a lot more from deconstruction than the exposure of paradox. To summarize what other scholars can take away from our discussion, we integrate our key points into a short conclusion. The conclusion consists of two parts: (1) remarks on the resource-based view and (2) remarks on the market-based view.

Remarks on the Resource-based View: Current theorizing lacks an elaborated understanding of the relation between resources and competences. To discuss this relation, strategy scholars should consider the work of Penrose to a greater extent. According to Penrose (1959/1995), firms do not create value because they possess resources but only due to their effective and efficient use.

“Strictly speaking it is never resources themselves that are the ‘inputs’ in the production process, but only the services that the resources can render. The services yielded by resources are a function of the way in which they are used – exactly the same resource when used for different purposes or in different ways and in combination with different types or amounts of other resources provides a different service or set of services. The important distinction between resources and services is not their relative durability; rather it lies in the fact that resources consist of a bundle of potential services and can, for the most part, be defined independently of their use, while services cannot be so defined, the very word ‘service’ implying a function, an activity.” (Penrose 1995: 25)

Competences portray such services, because they reflect an organization’s ability to organize, reflect, co-ordinate, and govern tangible and intangible resources in time-space. This makes competences unique combinations of ‘lifeless’ resources.

However, the simple ability to make productive services (i.e. competences) available from resources is not enough. To stay competitive, firms strive for the ability to *constantly reconfigure* competences. As Penrose (1995: 137) explains:

“Even when a firm enters a new field armed with a revolutionary innovation and is able to ward off competition with patent protection or other restrictive devices, it must expect that in time it will be overtaken if it fails to continue to develop its advantage.”

Penrose asks us to think of the services yielded by resources not as something that happens once, but to recognize that constant renewal of these services is part of the competitive process. To conclude, a stronger consideration of the work of Penrose (1995) should make strategy scholars aware that (a) resources are potentials and consequently that (b) the process of re-

source application and modification should be of greater interest to strategic management than it has been so far. It seems only of secondary importance whether scholars identify ‘quality’, ‘financial strength’ or ‘good relations to the government’ as key resources. Theorizing has to focus on *how* people generate and reconfigure competences out of these resources.

Remarks on the Market-based View: A similar line of reasoning applies to strategic rules that represent the market-based perspective in our treatment of strategy content. Strategy scholars need to realize that managers tend to overestimate the value of strategic rules. As Starbuck and Nystrom (1984: 59) explain, “[m]anagers often get in trouble by trying to follow prescriptions that have been formulated by someone else in a different situation.” Consequently, the work of strategy scholars should not be limited to defining strategic rules, but investigating what people make of these rules, how they make sense of and customize them to fit the idiosyncrasies of their context. Certainly, scholars’ advice to managers should not be that it is unimportant which strategic rule to choose, but that this decision is (a) contingent and (b) only an initiator for strategic sensemaking. From our perspective, these issues deserve more attention in the current scientific debate (for exceptions see Lozeau et al. 2002 and Rigby 2003).

Our discussion also shows that the emptiness of strategic rules and resources is *not* a shortcoming of current theorizing, but a precondition to make them fit into the idiosyncrasies of organizations. From our perspective too few strategy scholars acknowledge the emptiness of strategic rules. Nicolai (2004: 954) argues that the neglect of this insight leads to the impression that knowledge about strategy passively flows from the domain of research to the one of practice. Organizations can adopt the labels of strategic rules (e.g., ‘differentiator’), but their strategic concepts-in-use necessarily differ. This insight has two implications for researchers. First, scholars who research the ‘successful’ application of strategic rules often focus on labels (see for example Marcus et al. 1995) and thus gain the *impression* that general strategic rules are applied effectively. Second, those who research how consultants introduce general strategic rules can contribute by acknowledging that if organizations possess their own lifeworld, ‘empty’ strategic rules (like the ones introduced by consultants) can at best cause perturbations that lead to organization-specific reactions (see also Seidl 2006).

Our comments on the resource-based and market-based perspective are *not* supposed to imply that strategic rules and resources are unimportant. Consider the example of chess. As a beginner chess player, one finds a variety of books that offer very precise rules, explaining how chess is supposed to be played and even how experienced players can improve their

performance. Yet the question of how, where, and in which way these rules shall be applied *need* to remain unanswered and depend on how one makes sense of them. This makes these rules neither unimportant nor obsolete.

Managing for the Iterability of Strategy Content

The preceding section discussed the emptiness and fullness of strategic rules and resources as a consequence of their iterability. We argued that if strategic rules and resources really are modified every time they are applied (i.e. repeated), we have to understand the supplementary relation between ‘empty’ strategic rules/resources and their application as a constant movement between emptiness and fullness. Now we must inquire into the ‘practical’ consequences of this discussion. What can organizational members do in their efforts to strategize to consider the more theoretical ideas that were presented throughout our discussion of emptiness and fullness? Of course, there is *no* checklist-type catalog of recommendations. Nevertheless, there are some issues that can help practitioners not to disregard the issues that have been discussed. To organize the discussion, we distinguish between two sets of ‘practical’ advice. First, we recommend that strategists gain *a different understanding of strategy content in general*. Second, we advise managers to develop *a different understanding of people within developing strategy content*. Of course, both sets of advice interrelate and are distinguished for analytical purposes only.

A Different Understanding of Strategy Content in General

We encourage managers to view their strategy content as being shaped by *quasi-experimentation*. ‘Quasi’ because we cannot randomly choose strategic rules and resources to define strategy content, strategic rules and resources have substance and to believe that ‘anything will do’ may turn out to be a costly and delusive endeavor. ‘Experimentation’ because we cannot foresee what rules and resources may mean in the lifeworld of an organization. Benders and Bijsterveld (2000: 61) conclude from their empirical observation of the adoption of lean management that the action undertaken in the name of the concept became completely decoupled from the concept’s original intent and were experiments on their own. Likewise, in his empirical study of firms’ adoption of TQM, Zbaracki (1998: 620) argues that many of the TQM efforts looked like experiments. Experiments are usually conducted when facing uncertainty to find out whether something will fulfill the desired purpose. Managers who understand the development of strategy content as quasi-experimentation take uncertainty and the unsaturable nature of contexts serious. They are prepared to corrupt strategic rules

and resources and see the process of filling as experimentation. These managers neither offer nor accept ‘strategic truths’.

One possibility to put strategy as quasi-experimentation into practice is to emphasize the role of stories within strategizing.¹¹⁵ Story-based knowledge integrates the general and the particular and thus allows strategists to experiment.¹¹⁶ Organizational knowledge is often reflected by stories that highlight the discursive and contextualized nature of strategy (Barry and Elmes 1997: 430; Boje 1991a; Weick 1995: 127). Stories provide managers and workers with clues about how to encounter new situations and trigger novel actions that lead to competent modifications of existing concepts-in-use and competences. Allowing stories to unfold helps people to understand the particularities of their lifeworld, since stories reflect “the complex social web within which work takes place and the relationship of the narratives, narrator, and audiences to the specific events of practice.” (Brown and Duguid 1991: 44) Stories are storehouses of past problems as well as diagnoses and thus media by which interpretative schemes are shared (Brown 1997: 349). Listening and making sense of stories go hand in hand with *storytelling*. Strategists who are able to formulate strategies as convincing stories integrate general knowledge of strategic rules/resources with the idiosyncrasies of a particular context. In this case, stories not only *foster* but also *reflect* prudence. Strategizing is about narration, yet narration can also be a strategy.

Conceiving strategy as made up of stories that ‘flow’ through the organization allows managers to extend the clarity they may have achieved in one area (e.g., market definition) to adjacent areas that are less orderly. This seems to be of special importance since strategic concepts-in-use and competences affect different parts of the organization. Consequently, their filling occurs alongside a variety of, often unconnected, issues (e.g., R&D and distribution). Based on this, Weick (1995: 128) argues that stories provide cues (viz. indicators) that act as a pretext for updating existing inter-

¹¹⁵Other possibilities that put a more practical twist on strategy as quasi-experimentation are: to foster the development of communities of practice (Wenger et al. 2002), to make managers aware of the need to disregard existing defense routines (Stacey 2003: 113), and/or to teach managers that arguing and debating are not an obstacle to the development of strategy content (Weick 1995: 185).

¹¹⁶The literature on stories and storytelling in organizations is diverse and cuts across a variety of sub-fields (e.g., HRM – see for example Denning 2001; consulting – see Boje 1991b; and change management – see Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges 1988). It is thus surprising that stories have not made their way into the strategy discourse yet (for laudable exceptions see Barry and Elmes 1997 and Hardy et al. 2000).

pretative schemes. Communicating strategy by stories and understanding strategizing itself as influenced by stories is more practical than one might think. Usually, people find it easy to relate to stories. Individual life consists of a variety of characters, plots, and scripts, all of which can be found in stories (Fleming 2001: 35). Strategists are not primarily analyzers and decision-makers, but they listen to and present stories that help people make sense of the stream of unexpected events.

A Different Understanding of People While Developing Strategies

Whereas our remarks on strategy as quasi-experimentation called for a different understanding of the development of strategy content in general, there are also implications that address the role of people more directly. Our remarks on emptiness and fullness reveal the need to highlight the process of application of strategic rules and resources. Nevertheless, this cannot be just any application, but must be a *competent* application; the interpretation of the strategic rule and resource needs to suit the organizational context. Of course, managerial competency cannot be acquired like some asset. This is not a weakness of our argumentation. On the contrary, it puts the filling of strategic rules and resources where it belongs – in *praxis*.¹¹⁷ We cannot say all too much about peoples' competency in *praxis*, as most of this remains a matter of contextualized, single case-based empirical research (Orr 1996). However, 'not too much' does not mean 'nothing'. One possible way to understand practitioners' competency in applying strategic rules and resources is to emphasize a 'competency of forgetting'.

As indicated in the preceding section, filling always implies emptying because contexts are not stable (Derrida 2002). Strategic concepts-in-use and competences need to be reworked quite frequently. To rework strategy

¹¹⁷Speaking with Aristotle (1962), we can be even more precise: the filling of strategic rules and resources is not only a matter of *praxis* but peoples' *practical wisdom* (*phronésis*) within this *praxis*. Practical wisdom is about knowing what is good for humans in general and *competently applying* this knowledge to particular circumstances (Oliver et al. 2005; Tsoukas and Cummings 1997: 665). In terms of strategy, *phronésis* implies that it is not enough to know about strategic rules and resources, but to have the ability to put them into practice in concrete situations. Phronetic strategizing highlights case-based knowledge and practical rationality, leading to a concern with fine-grained contextual factors that occur *in situ* (Wilson and Jarzabkowski 2004: 16). We find a similar treatment of practical wisdom in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant refers to the power of judgment (*Urteilkraft*) as "not merely the capacity to subsume the particular among the general (whose idea is given), but also in reverse, to find for the particular the belonging generality." (Kant 1996: 22, translation A.R.)

content, people need to learn to forget and discredit what they believe. Discrediting emphasizes the need to purposely turn one's back on what has worked so far. Weick (1993a, 1996b), for instance, argues that firefighters are most likely to get killed in their 10th year on the job, when they think they have seen everything. At that time, they are less open to new information that would allow them to update their interpretative schemes. Typically, discrediting means a refusal to accept a given stock of knowledge as true. Weick (1979: 221, emphasis in the original) even urges managers "*to treat memory as a pest!*" To discredit concepts-in-use and competences is a vital competence, because already existing interpretations of strategy content tend to be very sticky and are usually reinforced by path-dependent processes (Zbaracki 1998).

To practically rethink the role of people requires stating more precisely what practitioners should discredit. We suggest that managers have to discredit their *idealized* understanding of existing concepts-in-use and competences. To make this understanding somewhat visible, we can turn to the idea of 'strategy maps' (Kaplan and Norton 2004; Wright 2001). According to Kaplan and Norton (2004: 45), a strategy map is a visual representation of strategists' mental pictures of strategy content. Strategy maps explore the manifold relationships that interconnect a company's objectives. Needless to say, there is not *the* appropriate strategy map. Indeed, strategy maps are all about filling an empty idea (viz. mapping) with contextualized content. When referring to strategy maps, our focus is not so much on visualizing strategy for the sake of it, but to highlight that the very activity of mapping enables people to see new conclusions and thus helps them discredit what they believe to know. Discrediting makes the point that anything that is done to a strategy map can also be undone to change it. By discrediting strategy maps we do not mean that people have to refuse a strategy map altogether. Rather, people need to question the accuracy and reliability of their understanding of concepts-in-use and competences. After all, doubt means tolerance for novel perspectives raised by outsiders.

6.4 A Résumé – The Neither/Nor of Strategic Realities

What can be concluded from the deconstruction of strategic realities with regard to strategy context, process, and content? Each of the three deconstructions shows that (a) many authors have neglected a paradox so far, a paradox that shows that the identified dominant logics (i.e. the 'necessity of adaptation' with regard to strategy context, the 'primacy of thinking' with regard to strategy process, and the 'fullness of strategic rules and re-

sources’ with regard to strategy content) are aimed at an impossibility; and that (b) based upon this impossibility, we can reconceptualize research with regard to strategy context, process, and content in a way that considers paradox as a limit to our reasoning yet does not conclude impossibility, but rather demonstrates supplementarity. In this sense, each deconstruction has ‘destroyed’ something (i.e. a dominant logic) and created something new (i.e. a supplementary relation). That is why the term ‘deconstruction’ is itself made up of the words *destruction* and *construction*. Figure 33 outlines this relationship between destruction (i.e. creating strategic realities because of paradox) and construction (i.e. creating strategic realities despite paradox) with regard to our own structure of analysis.

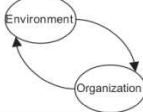
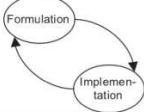
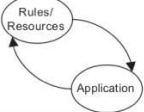
		Strategy Context	Strategy Process	Strategy Content
Theory Building Because of Paradox	Blind Spot <i>(compare sections 6.1.1, 6.2.1, and 6.3.1)</i>	Strategizing means complexity reduction. Yet, if organizations reduce complexity, they construct their own strategic environment.	Strategizing means being concerned with the unknown. Contingency permits us to fully grasp the future. That is why decision premises cannot be perfect.	Strategizing means making yourself different. Yet, you can only make yourself different if you consider the specific nature or your organization's context.
	Paradox <i>(compare sections 6.1.2, 6.2.2, and 6.3.2)</i>	Adaptation to the environment is always self-adaptation. Organizations cannot adapt to something that exists despite and because of them at the same time.	Because the meaning of strategic decision premises is constituted in the course of action, decisions are necessary when they are actually impossible to justify.	To apply strategic rules/resources one needs to iterate them. Pure iteration is impossible because of the open nature of contexts. Strategists regulate and get by without regulation.
Theory Building Despite Paradox	Deparadoxification <i>(compare sections 6.1.3, 6.2.3, and 6.3.3)</i>	Strategists act as if their construction of the environment provides a point of reference for the development of a strategy.	Strategists act as if their justification of the strategic decision is valid and reasonable in the light of their organization.	Strategists act as if their interpretation of a strategic rule or resource is relevant and represents their generality.
	Implications <i>(compare sections 6.1.4, 6.2.4, and 6.3.4)</i>			

Fig. 33. The Deconstruction of Strategic Realities

As depicted in Figure 33, we started each deconstructin with a discussion of a blind spot. Indeed, we suggested that the exposure of these blind spots is a precondition for discussing the paradoxes. Because of these blind spots, the dominant logics could not see that they could not see paradox. With regard to *strategy context*, we demonstrated that, since strategizing means complexity reduction (see also section 2.1), organizations only face a construction of the environment (because they sort alternatives out). Yet, if this is true, organizations have no reference point for adaptation anymore. With regard to *strategy process*, we illustrated that strategizing means to prepare a firm for the unknown. However, because of the contin-

gency of social life, we can never entirely grasp the future. If the future remains necessarily uncertain, we cannot fully justify the premises of strategic decisions prior to implementation. With regard to *strategy content*, we argued that strategic management is supposed to make firms different from their competitors. However, firms can only make themselves different if they consider the idiosyncrasies of their context – a context that is always unbound. Because contexts are unbound, generalizations are less likely to be possible. Overall, we discussed the concepts of ‘complexity’ (strategy context), ‘contingency’ (strategy process), and ‘the unboundedness of contexts’ (strategy content) from Derrida’s perspective.

As a next step, we used the insights from the discussion of the blind spots to expose paradoxes. Each paradox demonstrates that the metaphysics of presence that the dominant logics try to establish is impossible to achieve; there is no origin from which our reasoning can safely unfold. Concerning *strategy context*, we argued that companies cannot regard the environment as existing despite them but need to do so for adaptation to occur. This, of course, is a consequence of the recognition of complexity; without the insight that strategic management reduces complexity, we cannot accept that organizations just face a construction of their environment. Concerning *strategy process*, our discussion of contingency revealed that, strictly speaking, strategy formulation cannot precede implementation because the meaning of the underlying decision premises is fixed in the course of action. In consequence, strategic decisions are necessary, if they are impossible to (fully) justify. For implementation to come about there needs to be strategy formulation. Yet the meaning of a formulated strategy does not exist without implementation. Concerning *strategy content*, our discussion of the unlimited nature of contexts showed that generalizations with regard to strategic rules and resources are impossible. In fact, to generalize means to be able to perfectly repeat a rule or resource. But because contexts are not determinable, such perfect iterations are unachievable. Indeed, every repetition of a strategic rule or resource brings about a modification.

After we discussed the paradoxes, we demonstrated that the impossibility that each paradox brings about does not imply ‘the end of strategic management’. On the contrary, we argued that the impossibility occurs as impossibility only if we try to get to the bottom of existence by demanding an *objective* strategic environment (strategy context), a *final* justification of a strategic decision (strategy process), or a *pure* iteration of strategic rules and resources (strategy content). Based on this insight and the remarks in chapter five, we demonstrated how scholars and practitioners can deparadoxify the apparently impossible situation. In fact, we made use of

one particular way of deparadoxification: the temporalization of paradox via fictions. Scholars and practitioners get around paradox (most often in an unnoticed way) by acting *as if* their constructed environment provides a point of reference (strategy context), *as if* their justification of the strategic decision is fully valid and thus able to inform strategy implementation (strategy process), and *as if* their interpretations of strategic rules and resources somehow correspond to their generality (strategy content). These *As Ifs* endow strategy scholars, but most of all practitioners, with a non-metaphysical ground from which further theorizing can unfold. This ground is non-metaphysical because it rests upon rather 'naïve' assumptions, but no final truths.

Based on these deparadoxifications, we outlined detailed implications for 'theory' and 'practice'. We argued that Derrida's (2003a) supplementary logic cannot only be used to discuss paradox, but also to show the recursive linkage between the poles of the underlying oppositions (i.e. environment/organization with regard to strategy context, formulation/implementation with regard to strategy process, and strategic rules and resources/application with regard to strategy content). Starting from the belief that each supplementary relationship becomes in principle possible because of the *As If* that displaces the paradox, we illustrated how strategy context, process, and content can be reconceptualized as resting on supplementary relationships. To describe these relationships, we offered undecidable terms (i.e. 'framing' for strategy context, 'improvisation' for strategy process, and 'iterability' for strategy content). Regarding *strategy context*, framing shows that the environment depends as much on the organization as the organization depends on the environment. Concerning *strategy process*, improvisation works against the Cartesian split between mind and matter. Not only are strategy formulation and implementation deeply intertwined, they also exist in a mutually supportive way. With regard to *strategy content*, iterability points out that strategic rules and resources are in some way repeatable, however when repeated also change and distort their meaning. Iterability moves strategy content beyond a Newtonian fixation obsessed with causal logic and general laws to argue that it is more important what people do with given strategic rules and resources – how they make use of their potential – than which rule or resource is considered to be of importance.

These undecidables move theorizing from an either/or to a *neither/nor*-mentality revealing the unity of the differences those prominent oppositions consist of. Strategic realities, both in 'theory' and in 'practice', constantly face this undecidable nature. Undecidables disrupt the oppositional logic, which is fundamental to hierarchical structures; they skim across

both sides of an opposition but do not appropriately correspond with either; they exceed the clearly defined boundaries of the oppositions and challenge the very tenets of metaphysical thinking. While for Derrida undecidable terms remain unresolved concepts that illustrate the contradictions inherent to any kind of determinism, we have shown that there is a way to acknowledge these contradictions, not to finally resolve them, but to use them as a limit for strategic reasoning in order to consider strategizing as a relentless oscillation between the poles of oppositions. As academics, we should have the sovereignty to draw our distinctions in favor of undecidables, because “[w]ords of this type situate perhaps better than others the places where discourses *can no longer dominate*, judge, decide: between the positive and the negative, the good and the bad, the true and the false.” (Derrida 1995b: 86, emphasis added)

7 'After Derrida' – Strategy-as-Practice

Having discussed the deconstruction of strategic realities with regard to strategy context, process, and content and outlined detailed implications of our analysis, we now show how our remarks can be *connected with the most recent research* in the field of strategic management. This is important because scholarly work in general, and a critical study in particular, needs to be accessible to other researchers; others have to be given the opportunity to relate similar pieces of work to the key conclusions of a treatise. Because the three deconstructions underscore the significance of situated managerial activity, we relate the implications of our study to the recent discussions of a *practice perspective* on strategy (Jarzabkowski 2005; Johnson et al. 2003; Whittington 2002a, 2002b). Of course, the deconstructions in chapter six already point to the importance of practice. Yet what is different – and this is where chapter six and seven vary – is a *systematic discussion* of strategy practice by embedding our remarks in an existing research framework.

We start by demonstrating how the deconstruction of strategic realities leads to practice-based strategy research (section 7.1). Because scholars in the social sciences have discussed the term 'social practice' with regard to a variety of notions, we offer a definition that can inform strategy research (section 7.2). Based on our discussion of the term 'social practice' and in consideration of existing conceptual work regarding Strategy-as-Practice, we outline a research framework that contains a taxonomy of terms scholars can use to study strategy from a practice perspective (section 7.3). We move on with an *exemplary* application of this framework and demonstrate how it helps us to understand one particular phenomenon (i.e. communities of strategy formation), which is of relevance to Strategy-as-Practice (section 7.4). Finally, we give a short conclusion of what it means to do strategy research 'After Derrida' (section 7.5).

7.1 From Deconstruction to Strategy-as-Practice

When looking at the deconstruction of strategy context, process, and content, there is one common issue running through all discussions: *the importance of the situated activity of people* (see Figure 34). In the following, we distinguish mere human activity (*praxis*) from *social practices*. Practices are routinized patterns of activity while praxis represents the whole of human action (Jarzabkowski 2005: 8). In consequence, the practices that organizational members perform are embedded in praxis (see also sections 7.2 and 7.3). In which sense do strategy context, process, and content refer to social practices that are embedded in in praxis?

The deconstruction of the 'necessity of adaptation' (*strategy context*) makes obvious that, far from being determined by the environment, strategists actively influence and shape what they subsequently perceive as their relevant environment. Strategy context is influenced by what people *do*; enacting strategy context is not something passive but an activity. What we label 'environment' and 'organization' are constructed in the social practices that people perform. Regarding *strategy process*, the deconstruction of the 'primacy of thinking' points to the importance of conceiving strategy formation as a stream of improvisations within issue streams. Improvisation shifts the focus from understanding the strategy process as a macro-level phenomenon, assembled by formulation and implementation, to a micro-perspective highlighting the importance of the everyday doings of people. To conceptualize strategy as improvisation implies that strategy formation does not merely happen at the desk of the CEO, but is a constant process of reworking strategic fictions within the social practices that people perform. Again, the focus is not on conceptualizing some abstract process model that is remote from managerial activity, but to explore the detailed and situated activities that reflect what actually gets *done* in the everyday work of strategists.

The deconstruction of 'the fullness of strategic rules and resources' (*strategy content*) demonstrates that strategic rules and resources gain meaning (i.e. are 'filled') in the process of application. Focusing on application implies centering attention on the daily activities through which people make their strategy content meaningful. To make strategy content meaningful is not a passive operation, but only happens in and through activity (i.e. the strategy practices in praxis). Strategists act, and in doing so create the material that they use for sensemaking; it needs the situated actions of people to create meaning, not merely a process of thinking. Once again, the center of attention is on the contextualized doings of people that bring about strategic concepts-in-use and competences.

	Strategy Context	Strategy Process	Strategy Content
Deconstruction Demonstrates That...	... strategists actively influence their relevant environment / strategy context is influenced by what people <i>do</i> Strategy context is (re)produced in practices.	... strategy formation is about improvisation / improvisation is about situated activity The strategy process is (re)produced in practices.	... the meaning of strategic rules and resources is produced in and through activity Strategy content is (re)produced in practices.
Need to Systematically Research 'Strategy-as-Practice'			
Strategy-as-Practice Suggests...	... that strategy context, process, and content are not abstract phenomena, but something people in organizations <i>constantly actively (re)create</i> Researching strategic management implies uncovering the <i>situated practices</i> people perform.		

Fig. 34. From Deconstruction to Strategy-as-Practice

If we look for a common ground regarding the deconstruction of strategy context, process, and content, we can suggest that they highlight the need to study strategy as an activity, something that people *do* in the social practices they perform. This insight is in line with the findings of strategy scholars who have recently called for the development of a 'practice perspective on strategy' (Jarzabkowski 2005; Johnson et al. 2003; Whittington 2002a, 2002b). Consequently, we suggest treating the deconstruction of strategic realities as one possible theoretical approach to give emphasis to the need for a practice perspective on strategy.¹¹⁸ Deconstruction uncovers the need to study *strategy practices in praxis* in order to explore the detailed processes of organizational life that relate to strategic outcomes (Johnson et al. 2003: 3). To take the implications of a deconstructive analysis seriously, scholars have to ask what situated practices people perform when they strategize, where they do this, when they do this, which organizational members are involved, and, most important, how such practices are performed. Answering these questions implies shifting focus from a perspective concerned with the problem 'Why do we do strategy?', which resulted in a plethora of models about competitive advantage, to address the question '*What do we do when we strategize?*'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸Other possibilities to underscore the need for a practice perspective on strategy are discussed by Whittington (2002b), who refers to Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, and Jarzabkowski (2004), who refers to de Certeau's (1988) theory of everyday life.

¹¹⁹Understanding strategy as consisting of practices occurring in praxis does not imply merely focusing on strategy process issues, as the word practice might indicate. Traditional process research focuses on the organization as a whole and is less concerned with related managerial activity (Whittington 1996: 732).

What are the contributions of a practice perspective on strategy? First, a focus on strategy practices allows us to study strategy in its micropolitical and historical context to pay attention to existing power relations and the identities of the actors involved (Knights and Morgan 1991). Second, Strategy-as-Practice allows us to refocus research from cross-sectional macro-analyses, in which firms are treated as black boxes, to concentrate on the 'real work' of people. In pursuit of their aims, strategists engage in a variety of practices that are worth studying. Third, and from the perspective of this study probably the most important contribution, to research Strategy-as-Practice disregards the opposition between strategy process and content. As indicated in chapter two, strategy context is usually not seen in opposition to process and content, since process and content cannot be meaningfully investigated without any reference to context (*et vice versa*). Nevertheless, strategy process and content research are often conceptualized as an opposition (Ketchen et al. 1996; Moore 1995). From the perspective of Strategy-as-Practice, both the formation of strategy (process focus) and the outcome of strategizing (content focus) occur in and refer to practices. Certainly, scholars can focus their investigation of strategy practices on either content or process issues. Nevertheless, whenever one is studying the improvisations that happen within the strategy process, one is also studying the enactment of strategy content.

To conclude, deconstruction is one perspective which shows that the question 'What constitutes a winning strategy?' is not answerable in principle, but only with regard to the situated practices of people. We cannot eliminate the difficulties of defining competitiveness by gathering more cross-sectional data about entire companies, but need to start studying what strategists do, how they do it, and in what situations they do it. Like in medicine, where no practitioner or researcher can make meaningful statements without some knowledge of anatomy, strategic management should take its anatomy more seriously. Yet, to explore the anatomy of strategy, we first need to know what represents a social practice in general to then discuss strategy practices in particular.

7.2 'Social Practices' – What's in a Name?

As indicated in the previous section, social practices occur in praxis. Whereas the notion of praxis is fairly easy to understand, since it merely incorporates the flow of human activity, the concept of practices *within* this praxis deserves some explanation (Jarzabkowski 2005: 8). If social practices are important to strategic management, we need to know what a