

Methods in practice research

Presentation for Conducting Practice Studies session
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Session 2, 13:00-14:30, Sunday 11 October

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Study 1: Getting beyond superficial surveys

- Question: which tools do strategy practitioners use and how effective do they think they are?
- Problem: most studies limited to a simple empirical view ('fadology')
- Practice perspective:
 - Need to understand praxis as well as practice
 - Tools in the context of strategy action
- Two approaches:
 - Survey that probes for 'how' managers used selected tools
 - Need for taxonomy of functional needs that are served by named tools/theories
 - Interviews focused on activity first, and tools only second.
 - Different list of tools
 - Tools more often help inspire action than help structure action
 - Managers often use bits of lots of tools.

Study 2: A practice view of strategic planning

- Defined planning process provides the context
- Practice element:
 - Network of collaborative relationships
 - Locally (unit) driven planning activity
 - Interface between planning and operations
- Research design
 - Uses a strategic planning dyad as the unit of analysis
 - Multiple embedded case methodology
 - Process data as background
 - Practice data:
 - Who did what and why in an identified set of episodes implementing the process
 - Tracing through progress of an initiative over time & through levels/units
 - eg. policy response to tightened financial conditions.

Study 3: What difference does using a tool (VRIO) really make?

- Experimental research design
 - Not currently conventional in practice studies
 - Practice studies normally seek to study strategic action in context
- Conceptualizing experimental methods in strategy practice
 - Simulated slice of praxis
 - Attempt to isolate the effect of knowledge artifact(s) under test (comparing with and without)
 - Individual level of analysis
- Analysis:
 - NVivo
 - The reasoning is the key; there is no fixed set of outcomes
- Potentially controversial because:
 - Not consistent with s-a-p emphasis on field study
 - Concern about artificial nature of the exercise (individual; no context; student sample) (external validity)
 - Concern about biases in the exercise (demand effect; analysis bias) (internal validity)