



## What Is Strategy's Distinctive Competence?

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*How have theory and research in strategy contributed to the broader domain of management? A survey of prominent researchers in strategy and adjacent fields suggests that the answer depends on how "strategy" is defined. Modest and incremental contributions are evident when strategy is defined as a distinct field wherein a small group of scholars labor to develop unique theory, methods, and substantive research findings. More important and valuable contributions are apparent when strategy is viewed as a pluralistic arena where many disciplines and methodologies meet and compete to answer a set of applied research questions.*

### Introduction

*Strategists Do It with Distinctive Competence* read the bumper sticker on a Volvo I passed recently. "Distinctive competence" is Philip Selznick's (1949) term denoting sets of unique capabilities and values possessed by particular kinds of organizations — organizations that come to be valued in and of themselves, not merely for the products or services they produce. This essay gives me a chance to assess strategy's distinctive competence, because my objectives are to take stock of the area and identify its contributions to the larger domain of management.

Strategic management is a young area of academic research with broad intellectual roots. Theories and methods were initially borrowed from economics, organization theory, sociology, and psychology; lately, game theory and behavioral decision theory have been proposed as additional sources of theory and method (Schoemaker, 1990). But after borrowing this intellectual capital, what has strategy produced in the way of returns to the lenders? How might the rest of us profit from the work of our colleagues in strategy? What value has been added?

Boundary problems greatly complicate the asking and answering of such questions. Strategy's boundaries with organizational behavior, organization theory,

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and economics are hotly contested, making it impossible to determine unequivocally whether a given contribution is unique to the strategy area. Some influential strategy researchers also contribute to established academic disciplines such as sociology, or functional areas of business such as finance — making it difficult to say whether or not their work ought be attributed to strategy. A number of major contributions to strategy come from people who did not call themselves strategists: Selznick (1949) was a sociologist; Chandler (1962) was a historian; Caves and Porter (1977) and Williamson (1975) thought they were economists.

These ambiguities arise because scholars engaging in social processes construct the boundaries between academic fields. Accordingly, a social process seemed an appropriate method for identifying contributions of the strategy area. I collected data for this article by conducting long open-ended interviews about such contributions with a group of boundary-spanning researchers. The boundary-spanning construct was operationalized as active researchers belonging to the Business Policy and Planning Division of the Academy of Management and to one of two other divisions: Organizational Behavior or Organization and Management Theory. I reasoned that such individuals were well positioned to distinguish strategy from adjoining areas and identify contributions. Additional interviews were held with researchers trained in the functional areas of marketing and finance, and in the disciplines of economics and psychology. Interviews were transcribed from field notes, audiotape recordings, or the text of electronic mail conversations. In the discussion that follows, quotations set in italics are verbatim statements taken from these transcripts.<sup>1</sup>

My analysis of the transcripts shows that boundary-spanning researchers conceptualize the strategy area in two distinctly different ways. Some conceive of strategy as a definitive field of study whose resolute, full-time membership is in the business of collectively producing an intellectual superstructure of theory, methods, and empirical findings. Others conceive of strategy as a pool of applied research questions providing a pluralistic arena for empirical inquiry and intellectual discourse among all comers. These two perspectives are central to the argument developed here because informants adopting each perspective reported decidedly different contributions from strategy to the larger domain of management. Moreover, adherents of one perspective often overlooked or belittled the contributions perceived by adherents of the other perspective.

### **Strategy<sub>1</sub>: A Definitive Field in the Making**

Many researchers interviewed for this article view strategy as a more-or-less distinct field of study wherein a small number of determined individuals are laboring to develop unique theory and substantive research findings. "*Our mission,*" said one, "*is to legitimate strategy alongside better-established fields like organizational behavior, marketing, finance, and economics.*" The definitive-field-of-study perspective calls attention to strategy's lack of a dominant paradigm (a state that members variously applaud and lament), and it diverts

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<sup>1</sup>Quotations are not attributed to specific informants because several informants asked for anonymity. A few quotes were excerpted from anonymous referees' comments on an earlier version of the article.

members' energy to the task of staking out and defending the area's boundaries. It also fuels continuing controversy about the absence of theory indigenous to the strategy field. But setting these parochial issues aside, what contributions to the broader domain of management are brought into focus when strategy is viewed as a definitive field?

### *Understanding Distinctive Competence*

Certain organizations, as Selznick (1949) noted, manifest "distinctive competence." This may enable them to outperform their competitors consistently, achieving what strategy researchers call "sustained competitive advantage" (Porter, 1980; Rumelt, 1984). "A central aim of strategic management, perhaps the central aim, has been to understand sustained competitive advantage and figure out how it can be systematically created." Recently, it has been argued that a new theoretical organizing framework is congealing out of efforts to spell out the various factors capable of generating sustained competitive advantage (Conner, 1991; Rumelt, 1984; Wernerfelt, 1984). This framework, termed the "resource-based view," maintains that certain organizational resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable can yield sustained competitive advantage if deployed in particular combinations. Such resources are said to encompass a broad spectrum of individual, social, and organizational phenomena. Examples include committed and experienced workers, talented managers, idiosyncratic formal structures, and strong organizational cultures (Barney, 1991).

These, of course, are topics that researchers in organizational behavior (OB) and organization theory (OT) have investigated extensively. However, OB and OT researchers tend to focus their inquiries on the antecedents and characteristics of the phenomena rather than on their consequences for organizations: "Many OB and OT researchers were trained as psychologists or sociologists, and deep down, our real interest still lies in motivation, leadership, social structure, organizational form, or whatever." Thus, a potential contribution of strategy arises from making the link between these internal characteristics and an organization's long-term performance and survival. In this fashion, gains from strategists' efforts to understand organizations' distinctive competence are spilling over into the broader domain of management.

### *Contextualizing Organizational and Individual Behavior*

Strategy research accentuates the multi-level contexts in which managerial and organizational phenomena are embedded. As one informant put it, "Strategists have forced us to expand our frames of reference beyond the focal organization." Indeed, simply entertaining the notion that an organization has a strategy elicits a mental model containing both the organization and its environment. Thinking simultaneously about organizations and environments is a productive exercise for OB and OT researchers because it begins to break down the artificial boundaries with which we habitually circumscribe and reify organizations. The strategy field reminds us that such boundaries are conventions adopted for reasons of conceptual and analytical convenience (Lenz & Engledow, 1986; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985).

The recent proliferation of joint ventures, alliances, partnerships, and consortia underscores the fluid quality of organizational boundaries. Strategy researchers have articulated some novel explanations for these interorganizational linkages. For instance, drawing on human ecology theory (Hawley, 1950), Astley and Fombrun's (1983) discussion of collective strategy helps explain organizations' collective actions and amalgamation into networks. This approach complements prior work in sociology and OT, which was based primarily on exchange theory. Empirical strategy research describing various interorganizational linkages holds considerable promise for adding to our understanding of why and how groups of firms come to be connected by multiple layers of competitive, collaborative, and collusive relationships (c.f., Contractor & Lorange, 1988; Harrigan, 1985).

Strategy researchers also have helped bring the concept of "industry" into the domain of organizational analysis by demonstrating the impact of industry structure (Caves & Porter, 1977; McGee & Thomas, 1986) and industry dynamics (Anderson & Zeithaml, 1984; Harrigan, 1980) on organizational profitability. These concepts are valuable to researchers in OB and OT, who are inclined to view organizations as independent, autonomous entities. Strategists' work nudges us toward a better understanding of how past and anticipated actions of competitors shape the behavior of a focal organization (Conner, 1988).

At an intermediate level of aggregation, between the industry and the organization, the concept of "strategic groups" offers a means of capturing intra-industry variation in organizations' competitive positioning and performance (Dess & Davis, 1984; Hatten, Schendel, & Cooper, 1978). Finally, at the organization level, the literature on strategic configurations (Miles & Snow, 1978; Miller & Friesen, 1984) provides theoretical rationales and evidence for linkages between organizations' strategic postures and their internal structures and processes.

The upshot is that our understanding of organization-environment relations has benefitted, with work in strategy helping to rekindle and focus interest in the context within which organizations compete. Strategy research emphasizes the multidimensional nature of environments, it reminds us that industries can have strong main effects on individuals, groups, organizations and interorganizational links, and it alerts us to the possibility that certain organizational configurations may be better equipped to cope with the demands of a particular environmental niche than others. Consequently, the strategy literature includes potentially useful control variables for OB and OT researchers. As one informant said, "*The effects of particular decision-making procedures might be quite different depending on the industry context, [and] the payoff from realistic job previews might be limited to organizations with a particular type of competitive strategy.*"

At lower levels of analysis such as organizational subunits and individual managers, work on the implementation of strategy has shown how configurations of strategy and structure can constrain the generation of ideas (Burgelman, 1983), the allocation of resources (Bower, 1970), and the implementation of change (Quinn, 1980). The latter point is especially relevant to OB, which has, as one informant put it, "*a technology for affecting change without any means of identifying the specific changes that would be feasible and beneficial in a given context.*" Jeff Pfeffer has observed that "in the field of organizational behavior, there is fre-

quently very little that is either organizational or behavioral" (Pfeffer, 1981: 415). By offering new ways to think about and measure context, work in strategy may help bring the "organization" back into our theory and research.

Finally, by focusing on multiple levels and units of analysis simultaneously (Snow & Miles, 1983), strategy has demonstrated more clearly than other sub-fields of management the importance of cross-level effects: Industries can affect individual companies (Cool & Schendel, 1987; Huff, 1982). CEOs can affect whole companies and sometimes even entire industries (Miller, 1990). Long standing boundaries between industries can be destroyed forever by alliances between individual organizations (Contractor & Lorange, 1988).

### *Importing and Refining Research Methods*

True to its general management orientation, the field of strategy has consistently viewed firm-level performance as the definitive dependent variable. Indeed, some strategists maintain that "*research questions are inherently uninteresting or trivial unless they include an explicated linkage to performance.*" After two decades spent grappling with the task of measuring competitive performance in a meaningful way, strategy researchers have developed approaches that are more sophisticated than those available in other parts of the management literature (c.f., Bromiley, 1991; Varadarajam & Ramanujam, 1990; Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1986). Such methodological accomplishments have utility for OT researchers investigating various antecedents of organizational performance, where "we typically do a fine-grained analysis to isolate separate causes but then do a coarse-grained analysis when we examine effects" (Weick, 1974: 366). As a general rule, OT researchers approach the task of increasing the proportion of variance explained in organizational performance by working on the right-hand side of the equation. That is, their efforts take the form of refinements in conceptualizing and measuring independent variables. Strategy research complements these efforts by offering corresponding refinements in the conceptualization and measurement of the *dependent* variable.

In addition, the availability of more fine-grained performance measures should inspire both OB and OT researchers to use performance as an independent variable, examining its consequences for individuals' commitment, motivation, and turnover, as well as organizations' structure, adaptation, and decision making. Organizational researchers might also consider including performance as a control variable. Eliminating the confounding effects of organization-level performance might significantly increase our ability to explain variance in individual and group-level phenomena. As one informant suggested, "*In a high-performing organization, delegation may produce high-quality decisions and happy subordinates. But in a low-performing organization, delegation can breed infighting and backstabbing.*"

Other methodological contributions have come from the strategy field's early adoption of analytical techniques developed in other disciplines. One informant attributes this receptivity to strategy's "*ingrained need to capture the complexity of things, which offsets the pressure of academic life to know more and more about less and less.*" Thus, in an effort to model complex sets of relationships,

strategists were the first management researchers to borrow simultaneous equation models from economics (Schendel & Patton, 1976). In attempting to come to grips with the dynamic character of these relationships, strategists were early adopters of time series analysis and related econometric techniques (Rumelt, 1974). These methods still have considerable unrealized potential for research problems in OB and OT.

Another methodological contribution of the strategy field is cluster analysis, introduced in the early 1980s during a period when empirical research in strategy was dominated by primarily inductive studies using large databases. Cluster analysis, however, was characterized by several informants as a methodological stigma rather than a contribution, for "*the empiricism inherent in this method has been forever branded upon our collective backside.*"

Finally, strategy has capitalized on archival data bases more extensively than have other areas of organizational research. Strategy researchers have shown considerable ingenuity in fashioning objective measures of industries and organizations from archives containing accounting, financial, and demographic information (Harrigan, 1980; Palepu, 1985; Venkatraman & Grant, 1986). In contrast, researchers in OB have relied so exclusively on questionnaires that the field has been described as a science of "questionnaire behavior" equipped to establish little beyond "consistencies among verbal reports" (Campbell, Daft, & Hulin, 1982). To offset their excessive reliance on verbal self-report data (Meyer, 1991), OB and OT researchers could include in their research designs objective measures from archival sources. Doing this would help validate self-report data, substitute unobtrusive measures for more reactive ones, and encourage triangulation among multiple data sources.

#### *Contributions from the "Field" of Strategy*

This section of the essay has approached strategy as a definitive field whose members are collectively engaged in producing an intellectual structure of theory, concepts, and methods. As such, it appears that strategy's progress has been slow, and that its contributions to the larger area of management have been more conceptual than theoretical. Although notions like industry structures and strategic groups are interesting and potentially useful concepts in their own right, they do not coalesce in a new theory of organizational environments. The strategy field has not produced any really big ideas or converged on a dominant paradigm. Although some strategy researchers nominate the resource-based view as a promising candidate for such a paradigm, others dismiss it as "*something that organization theorists could have told them back in 1920, which is that organizations are different and it's darn hard to make one look like another.*" And although strategists have made methodological contributions, here too the gains have come more in the form of incremental refinements than substantive advances.

However, this "structuralist" assessment significantly underestimates strategy's salutary effects on the larger domain of management. The problem is that trying to state the benefits of strategy in terms of intellectual structures and theoretical advances is difficult because the greatest benefits very likely are process benefits. As one informant said, "*Strategy is a field by virtue of its processual dy-*

*namics, not by virtue of its theoretical coherence.*" This point of view is explored in the essay's next section.

### **Strategy<sub>2</sub>: An Arena for Theoretical and Empirical Pluralism**

"*Strategy is not a distinct academic field,*" said several informants. Reflecting the philosophy and focus of the capstone Business Policy course from which it evolved, strategy is marked by a professional orientation, a general management focus, and an emphasis on application that sets it apart from more academically and theoretically oriented fields. Proponents of this perspective characterized strategy as an "*applied arena,*" an "*eclectic forum,*" and a "*theater where people trained in various fields come to grapple with problems relevant to top managers.*" In their view, strategy's contributions to management include "*reinvigorating OB and other moribund areas,*" "*providing a context for testing theories,*" and "*opening up a meaningful dialogue between economists and psychologists.*" A related contribution of strategy arises from the case method: "*Our field's reliance on anecdotal evidence both keeps it rich and makes it accessible to many outside the field.*" These are all process benefits.

#### *Focusing on Top Managers*

"*Strategy brings together the practical and theoretical,*" said one informant. "*There's no question that it is breathing life into the organizational sciences.*" More than any other body of research, strategy has brought the problems and perspectives of top managers to the fore (Hambrick, 1989). Doing this produces substantive contributions to our understanding of organizations because these matters have been largely ignored in the OB, OT, and economics literatures. The more important contributions, however, may have been processual. By asking questions relevant to top managers, strategy helps to legitimate all areas of management research: "*Lots of OB people don't know what firms are about, many OT people don't know what an industry is, and very few economists have any concept of the executive suite. Strategy takes micro and macro people, ties us to outcome measures that top managers care about, and keeps us from becoming totally reified and abstract.*" The upshot may be that the entire field of management and organization research gains credibility, support, and relevance in the eyes of top managers.

Much of the strategy literature is accessible to practitioners because it is written in natural language instead of academic jargon. In fact, many well-established tools of strategic planning were developed initially by practitioners rather than academics (e.g., the experience curve, portfolio planning, and strategic business units). Linguistic clarity has advantages: "*Strategy has become a meeting ground for practitioners and theorists, and because it's an action research arena, there's continuous pressure to ground your theory. You can't retreat behind a wall of academic jargon.*" Another informant commented that "*OT is a theory looking for an audience, and strategy is an audience looking for a theory.*" The potential for symbiotic exchange is considerable.

Researchers approaching strategy as a field engaged in building an intellectual superstructure have deplored the prevalence of "*armchair typologies,*" "*check-*

lists," and "fuzzy frameworks" in the literature. One criticism is that such "pseudos" are formed by casual induction from empirical observation, rather than by rigorous deduction from theoretical principles. Another is that they present facile oversimplifications of complex phenomena.

However, researchers viewing strategy as an ongoing process reframe these characteristics, seeing them as strengths rather than weaknesses. They value induction because it keeps investigators close to the data and ties conceptualization to application. "Strategy lies out there as a set of problems in living organizations," said one informant. "I don't know why there's so much breast beating about 'real' theory. When I was an engineer, we didn't ask ourselves whether there was a theory of engineering."

Because those with a process view of strategy tend to see models as tools for surmounting cognitive limitations, they value simplicity. With reference to strategy typologies (Miles & Snow, 1978; Miller & Friesen, 1984) and industry structure models (Porter, 1980), one informant acknowledged that the models may say as much about people's brains as they say about objective reality: "Humans can better understand a few categories that are each more homogeneous than a single whole that is more heterogeneous, and we like to have logical rationales for how things go together." Nevertheless, such typologies and frameworks add value, for they allow researchers and managers to "chunk massive amounts of information to make more sophisticated intuitive decisions about the future." Thus, one important contribution of strategy lies in providing vehicles for thinking productively about complexity.

#### *Rallying around a Research Question*

Strategy has crystallized around one definitive research question: "What causes certain firms to outperform their competitors on a sustained basis?" Several informants argued that some of the most valuable contributions of strategy to OB and OT flow directly from this single-minded focus: "What we [strategists] try to do is to pursue a research question wherever it leads us — we span functional areas, we cross levels of analysis, and we look at a lot of theories en route." One result is that the strategy literature contains some of the more holistic portrayals of organizations available. Drawing on the functional areas of marketing, production, and finance, writers in strategy have synthesized implications of these activities for organizational structure and behavior (cf., Quinn, 1980).

This single-problem focus has also fostered the cross-level thinking and research that characterize strategy. "There's a preoccupation with trying to figure out which level of analysis really drives organizations," said one informant. "Is it environment, industry structure, or characteristics of the top management team? That's a major contribution." Finally, strategy's research-problem focus has led the area to become "interdisciplinary in an unconscious way, flowing easily into the cracks between fields." Accordingly, traditions are developing in the strategy literature that endorse "integrative research" (empirical demonstrations of the convergence of ostensibly different theories), and "comparative theoretical research," (studies contrasting the power of competing theories in accounting for patterns in a data set). Because practices in other areas of management research



tend to encourage the generation and proliferation of theory, strategy's focus on consolidating and discarding theory can yield important benefits (c.f., D'Aveni & MacMillan, 1990; Ginsberg & Buchholtz, 1990; Hansen & Wernerfelt, 1989): "*We refuse to hide behind abstractions or let go of that central question — why do some firms persistently outperform others? This keeps us young and fresh, although it is rather uncomfortable to see our own theories get fried to a frazzle when exposed to the heat of reality.*"

In sum, the strategy literature includes a disproportionate number of studies that are cross-functional, cross-level, and cross-theoretical. Each of these characteristics offers potential contributions to the larger domain of management. It should be noted, however, that each property has costs and risks and that each is viewed as undesirable in some quarters. A cursory effort to integrate across functional areas may lead readers to see the author as a dilettante. The difficulties of making valid cross-level inferences are notorious. To succeed, cross-theoretical research requires both a deep understanding of each theory in its original disciplinary context and the ability to interpret and apply theories to research problems in strategy. Given these difficulties, even well-executed cross-function/level/theory research is likely to attract criticism for simplifying, distorting, or challenging fundamental assumptions of the contributing fields or disciplines. Strategists must pay a price for asking complex questions.

#### *Contributions of Pluralistic Processes*

This section of the essay has treated strategy as an arena wherein a large set of diverse participants, theories, and analytical methods vie to explain competitive advantage among organizations. Processes occurring in this arena appear to have contributed in significant ways to the larger domain of management.

*Advancing theory dialectically.* Research in strategy has played a greater role in advancing theory in organization theory, finance, and economics than is often acknowledged. This greater role arises, in part, from the ecumenical character of strategy, which fosters a willingness to challenge fundamental assumptions that adjacent fields hold inviolate or take for granted. For instance, by demonstrating the latitude available for strategic choice among top managers, strategy has arguably reduced the level of determinism imposed by contingency theory in OT (Bourgeois, 1984).

Strategy research may also have helped temper the deterministic stance of population ecologists. The original statement of this perspective (Hannan & Freeman, 1977) posited environmental selection processes that invariably homogenize populations of organizations over time. Subsequent formulations of the theory (Hannan & Freeman, 1989) hold that not only may different organizational forms coexist within a single population, but different forms face different prospects for survival. In acknowledging an interaction between environmental characteristics and organizational forms, population ecologists have come to adopt a position that is virtually indistinguishable from that of proponents of strategic configurations or strategic groups. Similarly, the concepts of relatedness and synergy, after getting their first serious hearing in strategy, were subsequently assimilated by portfolio theory in finance. In another example of what one informant termed

*“paradigm busting,”* the notion that generic strategies can confer persistent competitive advantages was said to have *“even infiltrated the Chicago school of industrial organization economics.”*

The tendency of established fields to disregard the contributions of strategy to their theory base could stem from people's innate propensity to blame bad outcomes on their environments, while taking credit themselves for good outcomes. In an osmosis-like process, a challenge to orthodox theory may be gradually internalized by an established field as its denotation changes from heresy to theoretical advance. By the time a new theoretical notion achieves respectability, its origin in strategy may have been forgotten. *“Strategists,”* said one informant, *“wind up explaining things that people don't want to hear — it's like Copernicus explaining to the Pope that the world is not the center of the universe, and that we orbit the sun.”*

But though strategy researchers question the orthodoxy of other fields, their own dogma has come under attack as well: *“My personal opinion is that the best thing to ever happen to strategy research was the challenge to our own fundamental assumption that ‘managers matter.’ We felt some heat ourselves, and some of us still carry scars. While we are not afraid to challenge the assumptions of others, we should not shrink from challenging our own either.”* As this informant notes, reciprocal challenges to received wisdom benefit all fields involved.

*Desegregating academic enclaves.* Dialogue crossing boundaries of academic areas usually focuses on abstract ideas and often quickly devolves into ideological skirmishing. Afterwards, it is back to the more serious business of normal science, as adversaries retire to their isolated corners and pursue their separate empirical agendas. Strategy is arguably the only arena in the domain of management where sociologists, economists, psychologists, and others communicate comprehensively and regularly about the same research problems and data sets, conferring *throughout* the research cycle of conceptualizing, operationalizing, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting. These interdisciplinary interchanges take place at professional meetings, in the manuscript review process, and in the journals. In effect, strategy helps to desegregate management scholars' academic enclaves.

Strategy is also a meeting place for professors and practitioners. Indeed, the Strategic Management Society is our only professional organization whose meetings are regularly attended by academics, consultants, and CEOs. The result is that top managers' theories-in-use can inform academic theory, and research findings can inform organizational practice. Everyone benefits from these exchanges. Theory is enriched because some executives are astute observers who possess more sophisticated models of their organizations than those proposed by academics. Researchers, on the other hand, come away better equipped to grapple with real-world problems by studying how causal variables that practitioners can manipulate affect outcome variables used to gauge organizational performance. Kurt Lewin once remarked, *“There's nothing so practical as a sound theory.”* Social scientists have invoked this aphorism ever since to parry charges of irrelevance. But research results might percolate more swiftly from scholarship into practice if the aphorism were inverted: *“There's nothing so theoretical as a sound practice.”*

*The Power of a Nonconcept*

This essay has itemized potential contributions of strategy theory and research to the larger domain of management. The argument was developed in conversations with over 35 researchers and scholars. My informants disagreed about the exact locus of strategy within this domain, and they disagreed about strategy's contributions to the domain. Many of these disagreements appeared to originate in two different conceptions of strategy. Some informants conceived of strategy as a definitive field of study whose members are collectively producing an intellectual superstructure of theory, methods, and empirical findings. Others conceived of strategy as a pool of applied research questions affording an arena for research and intellectual discourse to all comers. But whether informants saw strategy as an intellectual structure or as an ongoing process, many held strong opinions and expressed them emphatically.

*"The whole field of strategy" said one, "demonstrates the power of a nonconcept — strategy or policy. Neither strategy or policy has a meaning. In the extreme, they mean everything. For example, Mintzberg's concept of strategy is synonymous with behavior — anything that happens is a strategy. Thus, strategy and policy resemble power in political science. They are catch-all concepts that denote anything and so they mean nothing and they cannot be operationalized. Yet they form the core around which a field has organized itself. There may be a profound point here about the nature of academic fields!"*

A profound point indeed, but each reader's interpretation will depend on whether he or she approaches strategy as an intellectual structure or an ongoing process. Viewed from the structuralist perspective, the implication of this informant's remark is that strategists must select and embrace a rigorous academic discipline, reject ecumenicalism, close ranks, define core concepts, and build theory. Only in this way can strategy achieve legitimacy and build cumulative knowledge that will offer a lasting contribution to the understanding and practice of management.

But viewed from the processual perspective, the profound point is that the power of the strategy concept stems from the fact that every practitioner and scholar of management is a potential strategist. Strategy's contributions to the larger domain of management issue directly from the pluralistic processes enabled by the field's low entry barriers and fluid boundaries. From this perspective, the structuralist response would shut off dialogue between academic disciplines, exclude practicing managers from the field, and eviscerate strategy's distinctive competence.

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