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A Constructionist Approach for the Study of Strategy as Social Practice

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to present an analytical perspective of strategy as social practice in organizations by the articulation of proposals by Foucault, Certeau and Moscovici on social dynamics. To accomplish its intents it discusses the convergences and divergences between social dynamics in Foucault (1972, 1999, 2003a, 2003b), knowledge, power and subjectivities from Moscovici (1961), and Social Representation Theory (SRT) as articulated with the concept of everyday strategies and tactics by Certeau (1990). The paper presents the micro and macro delineations in investigations involving strategy-making practices in organizations over time. The studies of strategy as social practices are focused only on the micro-social level of CEO practices in organizations and don't consider the involvement of these practices at the macro-social level. Thus, this paper aims at acknowledging the roles played by experimentation and by the researcher's theoretical position, but also at offering the actors an opportunity to present the micro and macro aspects that involve their strategy practices in a given organization. This way, a dynamic reference is obtained that allows for the comparison of empirical data in the analysis of strategy as a social practice.

Key words: discourse; social practices; social representation theory; strategy.

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to present an analytical perspective of strategy as social practice in organizations by the articulation of proposals on social dynamics by Foucault, Certeau and Moscovici. The proposal defended here related the concept of the relationship between strategies and everyday tactics from Certeau (1990), with the articulation of social dynamic elements presented in Foucault (1972, 1999, 2003a, 2003b), and involving knowledge, power and the subjectivation process found in proposals by Moscovici (1961), concerning Social Representation Theory (SRT). The differences between the authors' approaches offer contributions that haven't been articulated by researchers that focus on social dynamics when discussing strategy as social practice.

This paper intent to fill this gap and legitimate it, offering a way that expands the possibilities of studies in the field of strategy as social practice. It proposes a theoretical-methodological approach that legitimizes and allows the research of the given subjects, as well as the unfolding of the micro and macro aspects involving strategy-making in organizations over time. The orthodox concepts of strategy as a social practice have their starting point at the strategies formally deliberated by a company's board of directors, which reveal how subjects articulate tactically and operationally in order to carry out such strategies – this articulation being called a **social practice** (Jarzabkowski, 2010; Rouleau, 2010). The outcome is the reification of organizations as entities and the neutralization of the strategic plan developed by managers, which consequently excludes from the analysis the sociopolitical aspects involved in the constructions of such strategies.

As Chia (2003) points out, what is defended here is the idea that any organization is a process, not an entity. Westwood and Clegg (2003) emphasize that organizational studies frequently decontextualize them by detaching the economic actions and organizational forms from social and cultural forces, which serve as a place for economic and organizational forms to be established. For the authors, (2003, p. 7) "the structuring of economic behavior reflects social embeddedness and the value that circulate within the cultural, social, and institutional context". Hence, this article aims to discuss an approach that can break with the orthodox view of strategy as a social practice while further showing the theoretical-methodological implications of a new spectrum of analysis.

In order to understand social practices in a broad context, we attempted to articulate contributions from three authors: Foucault, Moscovici, and Certeau. In spite of epistemological differences among them, the articulation of the concept of social practice in Foucault, along with Certeau's strategy and tactics, and Moscovici's social representations, allows for the analysis of organizational practices in a broader social and historical context. Certeau's works are much closer to Foucault's than Moscovici's, and actually Certeau himself emphasizes the influence of Foucault in the elaboration of his concept of strategy. Certeau (1986) recognizes that Moscovici revealed processes related to social practices that go beyond the establishment of an institutionalized normalization in society; that is, the procedures that coexist in a disciplinary process. However, in spite of their differences, Foucault, Certeau, and Moscovici can be seen as representatives of constructionism if their works are analyzed as a whole, along with the questions that rose from posterior developments.

For Westwood and Clegg (2003), social constructionism has as its central concern the lived experience and the production of meanings by people in a specific context. Its main objective is to study the living world and the production of meanings by people in their social interactions. In this sense, reality is not external and pre-given, but instead it is a mutual social construction that emphasizes the process through which meanings are constructed. The primary source of investigation is the use of language and the interpretation is by means of several discourse analysis techniques.

Our intention is to make use of the explanatory potential of this stream of social thinking so as to contribute to the development of the field of strategy – more specifically, that of strategy as a social practice. This approach has gained strength since the mid-nineties and examines what occurs at the micro level of practices by bringing together individual, organizational, and strategic aspects (Whittington, 1996; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004).

In strategy as a social practice, the understanding of strategy making requires recognizing these instances and the powers that influence them, while acknowledging the dynamics that permeate organizations (Regnér, 2008). Because of the diversity of factors that can interfere in these dynamics, Wilson and Jarzabkowski (2004) highlight the complexity of delimiting the edges of the micro and macro levels of investigation. This issue is common in studies in other fields and generally the researcher has the responsibility of defining the delimitation *a priori*. But this advanced decision can overly restrict the scope of the investigation, preventing the achievement of a necessary depth to shed light on strategy as social practice.

As an alternative, a path to these choices is sought in this article. The influence and importance of the experience and theoretical position taken by the researcher is undeniable, but we propose to include among them an approach that enables researched subjects to indicate the limits in which their social constructs are inserted over time.

The discussion begins with a summary of the development of studies on strategy in organizations. Then, Foucault's contributions that have driven the recognition of social dynamics in various areas of knowledge are presented; the field of strategy is included among these. From this understanding we argue that the approach to strategy as a social practice is adequate for acknowledging such social dynamics in the field of strategy studies.

To provide theoretical support for the analysis of these dynamics, we proposed the adoption of social representation theory (Moscovici, 1961), contextualized from the critiques by Foucault, among other authors, to representationalism. As an alternative to these critiques, dialogical emphasis is placed on the field of social representation, with the insertion of the concepts of *themata* (Moscovici, 1993; Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994) and communicative types (Marková, 2000; Moscovici, 1993) in studies on strategy as a social practice, based on SRT.

To enable the articulation of these author's contributions, this work resorts to a concept of strategy based on the idea of everyday strategies and tactics as proposed by Certeau (1990), as well as its indications on how to conduct an investigation on practices. Finally, we present our closing considerations by showing the applicability of the contributions to empirical investigations of strategy.

The Development of the Study of Strategy in Organizations

In the 1960s, the field of organizational strategy had a primarily positivist emphasis, typical of the organizational studies at that time (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). Precursors such as Chandler (1962) and Ansoff (1965) influenced authors who focused on positioning and economic bases, such as Porter (1980). From this perspective, the focus of this study is on the investigation of the influence of senior management and strategies on planned interventions in a given environment.

In the 1970s, other approaches to organizational theory started to emerge. Among these alternatives, there was a spread of a view of strategy as the result of emerging processes (Whipp, 1996). Pettigrew (1977, 1992) and Mintzberg (1978) were the precursors of this perspective, which repudiated the conception of strategy as only entailing deliberate planning.

Pettigrew (1977, p. 79) argued that "strategy may be understood as a flow of events, values, and actions running through a context". According to him, this context includes the position of strategy in time; the organizational culture; the environment for action with its levels of change and stability; the activity, structure and technology of the organization; and the organization's system of leadership and internal politics. Through these factors, the **micro** level (everyday actions), **meso** level (organizational culture, system of leadership, among others) and **macro** level (environment of activity) are situated and interrelated, while continuously (re)composing contexts. On the other hand, within these levels these factors influence the possible solutions for the environmental and inter-organizational dilemmas

that constitute the focus of strategic choices. They also act in the political process of making decisions, which defines which dilemmas should be dealt with.

By analyzing these choices, the author overcomes an excessive emphasis on the macro level in economic institutions, as well as on the micro level and instrumental resources, which is predominant in the classic approach, paving the way to what Mintzberg (1978) and Mintzberg and Walters (1985) distinguished as **emergent strategies** and **deliberate strategies**. The first arise in the everyday relations of individuals in an organization, independently of any formal organizational planning. The second are formally prepared and defined by means of organizational planning.

Despite the distinctions between the proposals of Pettigrew (1977, 1992) and Mintzberg (1978), the two of them examine the process of strategy, allowing the development of the perspective that works with strategy as practice or micro-practice. In this case, the focus is shifted to the everyday social practices that mediate such a process (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003). This places organizational studies on strategy within a more dynamic view, which acknowledges the articulations involving the subjects and their practices within organizations. However, while analyzing the micro-practices, these authors do not take into consideration social and historical aspects. This is because they focus their effort on the organizational aspects, most notably the relations among the several actors involved in any organization.

Thus, in order to broadly understand the dynamics of social practices within a specific social and historical context, as well as its relation to the field of strategy, it is necessary to resort to the contributions by Michel Foucault, which have spurred various fields of knowledge to go beyond the simple analysis of supposedly stable aspects and actually investigate the relations between subjects in their everyday life.

Foucault and social dynamics

The effort to understand the implications of Foucault's work on organizational studies is not recent. The author's discussion on social dynamics applies to this context, commonly subdivided into three thematic periods: knowledge, power and subjectification processes. It should be pointed out that the discussions on knowledge are not separate from the analyses of power, which are indispensable to works on subjectivity.

The theme of power in Foucault's work stands out in his archeological period. In that period, Foucault (1972, 1999, 2003a, 2003b) sought to analyze discourse as being comprised of an autonomous system with the main objective of studying and analyzing the conceptual network than can assign a place to the constitutive understandings of human sciences.

For Foucault (2003a), power is not absolute and stable. Power relationships are produced by a network of forces manifested in everyday practices and act to constitute strategies that affect the lives of social actors. The need to recognize the dynamics of such relationships in studying social phenomena permeated by the manifestations of power is evident.

This micro-physics of power does not characterize this as a property, but rather as a strategy; that is, the effects of power cannot be designated to an appropriation of power, but instead to the tactics, techniques, and strategies that arise in an ever-changing web of relationships, which makes power an exercise and a social practice. Therefore, power produces knowledge, and power-knowledge relationships cannot be studied based on a subject who is supposedly free, in relation to the power system, to produce knowledge. On the contrary, the subject who produces knowledge is also inserted in the power-knowledge relationships of a given time.

Allard-Poesi (2010) emphasizes the influence of discursive practices over subjectivity and the behavior of organization members. In this sense, strategy is perceived as a discourse, or a set of practices that regulate one's possibilities to act over a given phenomenon. Like any field of

knowledge, strategy is imbued with social practices that actualize and reproduce such discourses, creating a power-knowledge network.

This type of critical analysis of strategy resembles historical issues, calling attention to the contextual and accidental character of strategy, as well as the effects of those practices over the subjectivity of social actors known as **strategists**. The orthodox view of strategy sees the strategist as a person capable of carrying out his intentions, designs, and plans, to take risks, and to be an actor for change; an autonomous and responsible strategist able to foresee the organizational environment and future. According to this perspective, a strategy involves the capacity of choice, action, and influence over other people's behavior. However, to analyze strategy as a social practice from a discursive perspective means to withdraw from such an orthodox view of strategy.

Therefore, for Allard-Poesi (2010), what Foucault's analysis emphasizes is how we are shaped as subjects; in other words, what we think, say, and do does not refer to an essence of what we are, but shows that we are instead historically formed. Due to this, strategy as a social practice cannot be studied separately, for it depends on and is shaped by other practices and techniques that build not only knowledge, but also power relations.

Power should be thought of as a flow, something in constant circulation, which only operates within a network, but not as something fixed. Hence, for Foucault, individuals are shaped through the flow of forces that swirl around them. These are the very forces that construct people and their respective subjectivities. Therefore, values that people think are particular to each individual are established by the forces that shape them.

This being the case, strategy for Foucault is never originated from a person's own will or by a possible autonomy of the social actors. All strategy is a strategy without a strategist, without an author. There is no author and formulator for a strategy, because it is produced by the power relationships manifested in a web of forces.

In performing a historical interpretation oriented to social practice, Foucault (1985, 1987, 2003b) developed the term *dispositif* (apparatus). According to him, *dispositif* is something heterogeneous and includes discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulations, laws, administrative practices, scientific statements, moral precepts, philosophical ideas, and philanthropic propositions.

Both Pettigrew (1977, 1992) and Mintzberg (1978) have examined the process of strategy, allowing the development of the approach to strategy as practice or micro-practice, in which the focus shifts to the quotidian social practices that mediate this process (Johnson *et al.*, 2003).

Therefore, to study power relationships according to Foucault (2003a), the field of analysis must be directed to social practices, that is, it must approach the study from the perspective of what is actually done. It is worth noting that, according to the description, the meaning of social practice in Foucault's works has no relations with the use of the same term by Mintzberg (1978), Pettigrew (1977, 1992). For Foucault, the expression "social practice" is inserted in historical and social aspects that limit and determine the action of social agents, therefore including a broader social context and analytical aspects that are not restricted to economic and organizational contexts. The ways of doing things that are more or less regulated, more or less considered, and more or less finished must be studied, by means of which one can delineate the simultaneous ways of constituting what reality is for those who seek to think about it and to control it, as well as how subjects are able to comprehend, analyze, and modify it.

Employing this approach in organizational strategy studies involves the need to examine people's social practices, which eventually leads to the concept of strategy as a social practice.

Strategy as Social Practice

Studies of strategy as practice confront themes of management and organizational planning process with the social practices of the subjects involved in it. Orlikowski (2000), for example, has investigated how people interact with technology in their practices and how they establish structures to influence the use of technology itself. In this and other studies, the focus on the micro-social level – the everyday practices inside organizations – came to be advocated as suitable for investigations on strategy. These studies examine strategy-making in organizations, considering it to be "the skilled ability to use, adapt, and manipulate those resources that are to hand to engage in shaping the activity of strategy over time" (Jarzabkowski, 2005, p. 34).

The concerns about strategy-making in organizations are focused on "the detailed processes and practices which constitute the everyday activities of organizational life **and** which relate to strategic outcomes" (Johnson *et al.*, 2003, p. 3). In this context, then, there is a need to discuss the level to be assumed in the analysis of those **detailed processes and practices**, and consequently, of strategy making in a given organization. Wilson and Jarzabkowski (2004) show that without this delimitation the researcher will be faced with infinite practices among the organizational actors: each glance or utterance can be included within the boundaries of the **micro** level. Besides this, the influences on this level can extend, in the ultimate instance, to the macro-social level, as well as any other influence that may come from the most diverse parts of the planet.

Wilson and Jarzabkowski (2004) suggest that the **micro** level must be defined according to the objective of the study and by what constitutes the macro level in a given situation. This proposition leads to the fact that while analyzing these two aspects, researchers must define the delimitations *a priori*. Researchers will inevitably have to make choices in advance in any investigation. Therefore, in this case, as the authors say in developing their suggestion, the discussion must investigate further, because the choices involve implications for the contextualization of social practices, which is the very basis for studies on strategy as practice. Therefore, in the next topic we discuss the contributions of Social Representations Theory (SRT), first formulated by Moscovici (1961) and already used in other organizational studies (*e.g.*, Laroche, 1995). More specifically, the SRT approach followed here – the dialogical – breaks with the traditional vision that social representations are static, and instead offers a dynamic reference to contextualize social practices in investigations of organizational strategy as practice.

Contributions from social representations to study of strategy as social practice

In this article it is assumed that there is not just a single strategy in an organization, but rather a mosaic of overlapping strategies, resulting from the flows of practices of subjects in their social interactions.

This interpretation comes close to studies inserted in the Social Representations Theory (SRT), in which the emphasis on these practices is part of the theoretical basis (Moscovici, 1961, 1993, 1984).

Such approach is associated with the social psychology stream argued by Moscovici (1961, 1993, 1984). The concept of social representation was influenced by Durkheim's (1898) concept of **collective representations**, but is distinguished from Durkheim's proposals by the emphasis put on the primacy of the society over the individual, for it assumes that society and individual influence each other.

As a researcher approaches the social representations of subjects, he also approaches the knowledge that exposes articulations featured in their ways of doing everyday things. This justifies the adoption in this article of the approach related to the SRT developed by Jodelet (1989). She stresses such knowledge in her work, because for her (Jodelet, 1989, p. 36) social representations are "a form

of knowledge, socially elaborated and shared, with a practical objective, that contributes to the construction of a common reality to a social set".

According to Jodelet (1989), the operationalization of that approach must respect the understanding that a social representation operates in the realm of the subject (somebody) over an object (something). This understanding is commonly interpreted as the need to define both in advance. But as the subjects are defined, it is possible to allow them to indicate the objects and social representations that are articulated in determined contexts. By offering an epistemological basis to deal with this contextual insertion, the SRT grants important contributions to the approach to strategy as social practice.

This argument emerges from the belief that in order to understand the process of strategizing in organizations, it is not enough to observe and describe the social practices of the organizational members. Social practices must be placed in context to offer evidence of what made the subjects to articulate them, as well as their implications (Jarzabkowski, 2005). This concern leads to a difficulty of operationalizing empirical studies that face infinite possibilities of social practices contexts (Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). Even though there is no definitive answer to this question, SRT has dealt with it since the 1960s, when Moscovici (1961) proposed its initial bases.

Hence, to operationalize the investigation of this process, it is necessary to gather, treat, and analyze data related to aspects such as discourse, behavior, and social practices. There is no specific technique in SRT and various approaches have been followed: quantitative, qualitative or both.

These techniques reveal how subjects become familiar with strange events that occur in their everyday life. Moscovici (1984) points out the difficulty of transforming unfamiliar words, ideas, things or beings into something real, accessible, and usual. This process of familiarization occurs by means of the mechanisms of anchoring and objectification, based on the subjects' previous social constructs. According to the author, the process of familiarization strives to anchor strange ideas, to reduce them to ordinary categories and images and to set them into a familiar context. For this reason, for instance, a religious person uses his or her framework of religious values to confront something new (Moscovici, 1984, p. 29). In turn, objectification means "to turn something abstract into something concrete, to transfer what is in the mind to something existing in the physical world" (Moscovici, 1984, p. 29).

In the case of strategy-making in organizations, the unknown can arise from a deliberate planning process – for example, the acquisition of automated equipment. The news of the acquisition can be anchored by subjects in stories from other organizations, in which many employees were made redundant after the introduction of automation. So this acquisition would also be objectified in concrete visions of the privations inherent in unemployment.

The social practices of the subjects involved reflect this social construct's set, by means of which an approximation is possible through the concepts of anchoring and objectification, present in the initial bases of SRT (Moscovici, 1961). However, the question remains of how they develop interactions with implications positioned in groups composed of subjects who are commonly not part of just one single social group, but instead who are engaged in various ones. A person can be a mechanic, a member of the internal accident prevention committee, an evangelic individual, a member of a neighborhood council, and so forth. The existence of sets of different social insertions in the life of each person recalls the diversity of constructs, not a single homogeneous social representation. In other words, a person does not become another person for each group, but is instead a dialogical subject, able to practice multiple interactions and to engage in dialogue with different situations in specific groups.

It should be pointed out that this dialogical position is not always observed in studies of social representations, many of which are focused on the stability of familiarization in the process of anchoring and objectification.

In departing from the dialogical vision, the idea of social representation gives room for criticism commonly leveled by authors who resort to the so-called **constructionist approach** (Gergen, 1997), such as Spink (1996) and Shotter (1997). These authors criticize the social representation conception because they perceive social construction as a way to reproduce objects of a substantive reality, such as an image in a mirror. Foucault (1999) follows the same direction, for in his view there is no *a priori* stand that precedes the objective and the subjective. He considers that subject and object are mutually constituted and are in constant transformation. For Foucault, as Dreyfus and Rabinow (1995) point out, discourse also must not be analyzed as being something hermeneutic and as a representation of reality.

Despite these critiques, the thoughts of Foucault (1999), Spink (1996) and Shotter (1997) show concerns that are also present in the SRT approach utilized here: the importance of social practices and consequently of common sense in the constitution of reality, as well as the understanding that these practices are in constant flux. Hence, the understanding of social representations advocated here incorporates the idea of dynamic networks, established from the articulations of the *dispositifs*, and does not involve the idea of a reproduced image of reality. There is a need to discuss those critiques more deeply to better articulate the points of convergence between these approaches.

The criticism of representation as the reproduction of an image of reality is coherent, inasmuch as representation is also utilized in this sense, but this cannot be generalized to all approaches to social representations. In the studies of Marková (2000), as well as in the approach advocated here, what stands out is the need to recognize a history, which demarcates a past origin from the representations that continue in the present, in an eternal process of demarcation that involves the time dimension in the social construction of knowledge – the object itself is a cross-section in this dimension. As explained by Marková (2000, p. 430), it is necessary to recognize the difference "between defining static and single objects *versus* defining dynamics and relational phenomena".

The importance of the definition of the object in the study of social representations does not come from its conception as an objective or real reference, but rather from the fact that this object delimits the social context in which the social representation is expressed (Rey, 2002). Without this, one is faced with an infinite number of social relations that are impossible for the researcher to deal with. This is not the place to discuss the need for setting limits for any study, but it is important to clarify the paths to reach these delimitations. In the case of SRT, according to the approach followed here, the object and the subjects are means to this delimitation, of a dynamic and socially constructed reality. Therefore, the object is not the reality, nor is the representation a reflection of this object to a homogeneous group in a static configuration.

In the case of research subjects, even when at a first step of an investigation the researcher chooses the group of subjects in advance in a dialogic cross-section, the role of the subjects inevitably arises in demarcating the spaces of their social relations. As pointed out by Sá (1998), those who adopt SRT and ignore this second step fail by not offering space to the research subjects, which goes against the epistemological bases of SRT.

This step is the principal reason for the proposition in this article of the insertion of SRT in studies of strategy as social practice: a base for the subjects themselves to present the delimitations of the suitable scope to investigate the infinite social relations that can be involved in their strategizing practices, offering a dynamic reference to contextualize those practices.

It remains to be explained how to operationalize this contribution based on studies of social representations. So far we have restricted the discussion to the anchoring and objectification processes that compose familiarization. As already mentioned, these processes are commonly adopted with emphasis on stability instead of the dialogic dynamics, which deferred to the development of other concepts in the field of SRT, in the direction of dialogism: *thema* (Moscovici, 1993; Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994) and communicative genres (Moscovici & Marková, 1998).

The concept of *themata* is defined by Liu (2004, p. 255) as being "historically embedded presuppositions, culturally shared antinomies, and the deeper logic of social thought". This concept is developed by Moscovici (1993) and Moscovici and Vignaux (1994) in SRT starting from the contributions of Holton (1978) to the epistemology, in which the *themata* are presented as relatively stable cognitive units, prejudices, or presuppositions that permeate the experience and training of scientists, capable of transforming and molding scientific thinking.

The application of this concept in SRT is justified by its capacity to generate themes. This means the possibility of addressing them empirically by means of the relations maintained with these same themes, capable of being accessed by the researcher. The themes, considered as units of analysis and accessed by means of the data collection methodologies, are dialogically interdependent in relation to the *themata*. Liu (2006) explains that the themes can be ephemeral, situational and do not necessarily constitute a form of dyad or triad. On the other hand, the *themata* are relatively stable and constituted over time. "They are typically antithetical dyads such as atomicity/continuum or analysis/synthesis, but also occasionally apolar-triads such as constancy/evolution/catastrophic change" (Liu, 2004, p. 254).

The insertion of *themata* in SRT is a response to the search to understand whence came the ideas that permit the subject to act in his or her inexorable dealing with the unknown, by means of anchoring and objectification. Liu (2004) follows this path in studying the question of the quality of life for Chinese, by means of SRT. From the various themes revealed by the informants, the author identified that the social representation of life quality for Chinese is organized around the being/having *thema*. The author revealed that the opposition between being and having involves centuries-old influences of Confucianism, in which spiritualism (being) is celebrated in opposition to materialism (having). At the same time, this *thema* is now caught up in the recent Chinese transition, starting in the 1980s, toward a market economy, marked by material comfort and greater economic freedom.

In Liu (2004) the being/having *thema* present its hegemonic face, to the extent that the antimony between **being** and **having** is present in Chinese society as a whole. However, the manifestations and their themes vary according to the different domains of society, with clear distinctions between the rural and urban sectors of Chinese society. This is a distinction linked to people's positions in the different sectors of the society and in the construction of this society. Thus, the being/having *thema* presents an **emancipated** face as well as a **hegemonic** face, in the sense of being specific to a group in emancipated form in relation to society.

For this interpretation and use of the terms **hegemonic** and **emancipated**, Liu (2004) referred to Moscovici (1988). For Moscovici (1988), the term **emancipated** indicates the emancipated representations, shared within determined groups, in emancipated form in relation to society as a whole. For the author, the shared representations in this society are the hegemonic ones, while those shared by groups that enter into open and explicit opposition in relation to the aspects of these representations are the polemical representations, completing the three types identified by him.

Liu (2006) argues that these three ways of sharing act simultaneously and complementarily in a single social representation. Unlike Moscovici (1988), Liu (2006) shifts the question of the hegemonic, emancipated, and controversial types of sharing social representations to the sharing of their aspects. By doing this Liu (2006) shows a path to understand social phenomena through social representations, focusing on the process of construction in which these representations are inserted, without emphasizing social representation in and of itself, but rather focusing on heterogeneous relegations and aspects involved in its construction.

By investigating these multiple dimensions, it is possible to take an approach that joins previous socio-historical elements and the interactions of the moment. Based on the former, the latter are responsible for restructuring social representations and the knowledge filtered through our experiences, our groups and the discourses of others (Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994). Familiarization occurs this way, by means of anchoring and objectification, based on *themata* and communication. But this filtering means the researcher must face the challenge of finding a way, at least partly, to deal with

the influences of these *themata* and communication while analyzing themes and figures from the data gathered.

The issue can be illustrated according to the strategy as social practice approach, by returning to the example of the plan to acquire automated equipment. In this case, the technology/productivity/prosperity *thema* anchors distinct representations of the technology/productivity/unemployment *thema*. The first tends to shape constructions in a judgment of value associated with prosperity; the second, with unemployment, with a series of distinct implications. To identify these two *themata*, or any other, it is necessary to examine them in the themes and figures that the subjects themselves manifest in their social practices in the organization in question, while carrying out their strategies. But since they filter these manifestations, what is evidenced should not be considered in itself. It is necessary to contextualize these manifestations in relation to the situation and the way they are expressed.

In the case of acquisition of the equipment, the subjects, during a meeting with senior managers that deals specifically with acquisitions or during the lunch break, while just idly conversing and making jokes about these acquisitions, will adopt different filters. In the light of Moscovici and Vignaux (1994), this is explained by the fact that the subjects rely on previous insertions that lead them to contextualize their expressions in relation to the moment, the place and the people.

To recognize this process when analyzing the data from an empirical study, it is necessary to delineate this insertion of the manifestations, which can be achieved by an investigation of communicative genres, the last concept of SRT discussed in this article. The concept of communicative genres results from the contributions by Bakhtin (1986) to the field of linguistics, regarding discursive genres. That author's concept of genres was combined by Moscovici (1993) with the latter's concept of communicative systems, adopted in his previous studies based on SRT (Moscovici, 1961).

Marková (2000) clarifies that these systems both mold representations and are molded by them. By incorporating the idea of **genres**, the previously labeled **communicative systems** gained sustenance from the contributions of Bakhtin (1986), whose works reinforced the idea that through them different questions are emphasized or minimized, based on the use of specific terminologies and according to the social practices and groups to which people belong.

Bakhtin (1986, p. 87) explains that "genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and, consequently, also to particular contacts between the **meanings** of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances". He clarifies that the selection of the words to be used to construct a particular locution is not based on the neutrality of the linguistic system, but rather on previous locutions, mainly those that are familiar, becoming something typical, and composing certain discursive genres.

The combination of the concepts of *themata* and communicative genre, which arose with the development of the field of SRT (Moscovici & Marková, 1998), explains the dialogical position reached by some approaches within SRT.

The last two concepts are assumed to be inseparable for understanding the process of constructing social representations, going beyond stable concrete aspects. In this respect, Rosa (2006) makes clear that whatever people perceive as **concrete** is presented in a more stable way in their everyday lives and is used in the process of objectification of other elements that are considered abstract and non-familiar. In this process, whatever was assumed as stable acquires new meanings. This is a phenomenon in which the opposition between stability and dynamism is subjected to the dialogic of social representations, associated with the four concepts presented, articulates with each other in the following way (Marková, 2000): (a) the communicative genres have as a characteristic the formation of *themata*; (b) as this occurs, they serve as a basis to deal with the unknown by constructing social representations that incorporate and articulate the unknown with the *themata* (what is known); and (c) in turn, this construction is based on the process of anchoring and objectification,

inserted in communicative genres necessary to the symbolic exchanges that enable these processes to happen and express social representations. Through this relationship of dependence the communicative genres influence the social representations, which in turn become the pragmatic assumptions of the very communicative genres in which they are inserted, influencing these genres with the emergence of new or renewed themes and means of expression.

Articulating these elements in studies involving the social representations there is an epistemological break with the traditional idea of representation as the reproductions of something or a reality: and idea openly criticized by the constructionists and supported by Foucauldian constructionists to oppose the SRT. However, precisely this opposition legitimizes this approach within the SRT as it assumes such disruption as part of the SRT development in the direction of constructionism. This outlines the convergence, despite the differences, between the Foucault's ideas and Moscovici, as epistemologically adequate to guide the study of social practices embedded in a continuous process of (re/de)construction. A design not clearly outlined in the beginning by the authors, but that was articulated by both over the years with the development of their proposals about social dynamics.

In addressing these relations in this article, we advocate the possibility of a better understanding to the meanings of social practices and their relations in guiding specific practices, such as those referring to individuals' strategies within organizations. Based on the theoretical discussion presented, we argue that the approach towards strategy as social practice adopted here offers contributions that permit further developing the field, by incorporating elements of the SRT.

We assume that the strategies in and of organizations only exist based on social practices, complex and heterogeneous interactions and constructs. Hence, a path must be sought to reveal the existing relations in the strategy-making process and thus allow for its understanding in organizations.

Certeau highlights the contributions to his proposals and, in some way, the gap in the work between two previous authors. Although Certeau discusses Foucault's work deeper than Moscovici, Certeau (1986, p. 188) makes it clear that Moscovici, among others, revealed a "technological apparatus, which know an analogous interplay with ideology" referring, as well as Foucault's studies do, to the process related to social practices that go beyond the construction of normalizations institutionalized in society. In specifically studying these practices, Certeau (1986, 1990) allows the articulation between the contributions of Foucault and Moscovici, placing them within the focus of studies of strategies as social practice. The challenge is to find support in social theory so as to allow the comprehension of this articulation of social practices in strategy-making in organizations as compatible with the SRT approach. For this, we resort to the contributions by Certeau (1986, 1990).

The Study of Strategy as Social Practice and Contributions by Certeau

Among the various social practices, Certeau (1990) acknowledges their position in the mediation of stability, in the sense of maintaining it together with the legitimacy of the practices themselves; and the position of others acting in favor of determined interests (of groups or subjects), by means of creative subversion of the elements and the legitimacy that belongs to that stability. For the author, social practices can be supported by, and directly aligned with, the privileged spaces of power and stability; reproducing them, or using elements of that space in transgressions that can subvert it, in favor of the interests of a powerless transgressor in a process that has the potential to produce diverse spaces. In the first case, the author identifies the social practices as articulated everyday strategies, and in the second, as everyday tactics.

This perspective offers two basic interdependent contributions for the study of strategy as social practice: (a) a way to understand how established strategies (including organizational ones) change over time; (b) within this scope, it focuses on the process through which agents subvert

institutionalized spaces (including organizational ones) towards various interests, which might or might not be convergent with the organizational strategies.

By emphasizing how subjects resort to everyday practices, Certeau (1990) indicates the conformation of his proposals to the study of strategy as practice, as he proposes to investigate the "art of doing". In order to achieve this, Certeau (1990) suggests the investigation of people while they carry out their everyday tasks and questioning the alleged passive submission to the discipline that permeates this quotidian. His intention is to furnish pathways to pending analyses, by means of methods and theoretical questions that go beyond practices; that is, the ways of doing things, no longer considered as a backdrop for social activity.

The author starts from the assumption that the passive and disciplined users of ordinary everyday practices also relate to each other in an anti-discipline, based on what he calls *bricolages* (expedients) in their everyday practices (ways of doing things). When this perspective is transposed to making strategy in organizations, this passivity and discipline contribute to the actions of certain people in deliberate planning efforts. But there is also resistance (anti-discipline) in the organization, which enables a certain degree of transgression by all organizational actors.

To investigate this **expediency**, we apply this concept of *bricolage* proposed by Certeau (1990): the creative inventiveness or art of expediency associated with getting things done. This concept composes the base for **tactics**: a calculus that cannot count on a proper (a person in control in a relationship or positioning), or on a frontier to distinguish the other (the weaker or subservient) as a visible totality. According to the author, this occurs because of the fact that **make do** dwells in the spaces for transgression that remain inserted in the place controlled by the other. It is in these spaces for expedients in the place controlled by the **strong** that the **weak** articulate to take advantage of outside forces, through movements including everyday practices, such as shopping, reading, speaking, and walking around (Certeau, 1990).

The place that permits differentiating the other is based on disciplinary procedures (Foucault, 1987) and enables what Certeau (1990) calls strategy, namely the calculus of force-relationships that is possible when a subject of will and power can be isolated from an environment. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with a distinct exterior reality.

For Certeau (1990), strategies exist to the extent that the other is observed from a place where he is presented as a visible and delineated totality, with power acting over him. This place is based on discipline, on the **microphysics of power**, evidenced by Foucault (1977). But although he acknowledges this author's contributions, Certeau (1990) disagrees with him when arguing that discipline is transgressed by the web of an **anti-discipline**, based on a shrewd and opportunistic use of the procedures themselves.

In the interplay between discipline and anti-discipline, everyday strategies and tactics are present in all people's lives, including in organizations. Therefore, a common link that would permit investigating these quotidian strategies and tactics would also enable the study of strategy-making in organizations. This link is offered by Certeau (1990): they are practices, acting in places and spaces, in strategies and tactics, in discipline and anti-discipline.

This understanding has led to the search for a concept of organizational strategy that acknowledges the practices of subjects in their very constructions and strategy-making within a given organization. In this respect, the Pettigrew's contributions (1977, p. 79) stand out, for he describes strategy as "a flow of events, values, and actions running through a context". The actions, the values of subjects, and the events are articulated and inseparable from practices. In turn, practices also configure a unit of analysis capable of evidencing the organization's strategizing (Jarzabkowski, 2005).

Based on this interpretation, we propose to replace the three elements (event, values and actions) with a synthesis: the practices. Besides this, the idea of insertion **in a context**, in the singular form, does not delineate the adequate complexity of the various contextual insertions, from the more

ample macro level down to the more localized micro level, with its passage to the plural remaining as a second proposition. Finally, among the diversity of possible contexts, such as the treatment of a concept of organizational strategy, it becomes necessary to highlight this context, without limiting it, because the subject is simultaneously inserted in more than one social context. Based on these propositions, in this article organizational strategy is considered as a flow of social practices inserted in specific organizational and more ample social contexts; *i.e.* its analysis does not have strategical plans elaborated by the companies' directors as a starting point, nor is it restricted to or limited by it (Jarzabkowski, 2004, 2010; Rouleau, 2010; Whittington, 1996). We disregard the production devices of social practices that act on the cultural and social context, including the very elaboration of strategies by a company's board of directors, but not only delimiting the social practices at their tactical and operational levels.

This conceptual framework provides room for the integration of the contributions by Certeau (1986, 1990) and the SRT within the scope of the approach of strategy as practice. In order to carry this out, we take advantage of what Certeau (1986) identified in the precursor study of SRT published by Moscovici (1961): the possibility for revealing social processes related to social practices, which go beyond the constructions of norms for social submission. With subsequent conceptual developments, this allows not only for studying determined social representations, but also understanding social phenomena in a specific *locus*, such as strategy-making in organizations.

Final Considerations

Social practices are always present in individuals' everyday strategies and practices (Certeau, 1990). Consequently, they are present in organizations and organizational strategies as well. Since they are closely related to social representations (Vergès, 1989), capable of elucidating them (Jodelet, 1989), these practices constitute a unit of analysis suitable for analyzing strategy-making in organizations.

The positioning of social practices as a unit of analysis is not a contribution of this article. Other authors in the field of strategy as practice have already revealed the adequacy of this option (Jarzabkowski, 2005). The contribution of this paper is to propose a way to investigate these practices from the recognition of the complexity of the social dynamic that permeates them. The complexity and the ways to deal with it were evident in this paper in Foucault's definition on social practices, especially through the observation and analysis of the devices in meaning construction, allied with the concept of strategy by Certeau and that of social representation by Moscovici. Although Allard-Poesi (2010) has referred to Foucault in the studies of strategy as social practice, our use of Certeau's and Moscovici's contributions is quite novel, as is the articulation of these two authors with Foucault's work.

SRT emphasizes the processes of **anchoring** and **objectification** of subjects in dealing with everyday experience, which includes a diversity of interactions and contextual insertions present in the *themata* and the communicative genres articulated by the subjects. This process is subjected to the hegemonic, emancipated, and controversial faces of their social representations.

Therefore, SRT enables the contextualization of the practices being studied in strategy-making. In contrast, the contributions of Certeau (1990) allow the understanding of how this process is rejected or appropriated by certain subjects, revealing a certain amount of freedom, even within their given social insertions. In this author's conception, what is relatively stable, with the potential of making subjects be submitted to it – a characteristic of social representations – also supplies the arsenal of elements for expedients (*bricolages*) in the articulation of their own interests.

According to this, a boss and his personal or organization intentions, for instance, are resources articulated by the organizational actors, just as are the possibilities of sabotaging a machine or

promoting an increase in productivity. Therefore, by agreeing with the Certeau's (1990) propositions, we assume that the subjects will not necessarily accept that which has been decided for them. There will be interplay: a mediation of interests involving a diversity of contextual insertions. The final outcome may even be what was desired by the individual who initially created the plan, but behind it there is a whole set of negotiations among subjects and their contextual insertions, which includes their social representations.

The comprehension of this social complexity is the focus of investigations of strategy as practice. Based on SRT, the challenge of making such studies feasible begins with the researcher's definition of the subjects; that is, those who are to be investigated in order to reveal information about a given organization's strategy-making options. After this is defined, it is necessary to use data collecting techniques. Based on the proposition urged here, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observation tend to be the most suitable, as these allow the subjects to indicate the delimitations at the **micro** and **macro** levels of analysis. This is not a classic method of delimitation, for without giving up the attempt to make the delimitation, it seeks to do this by allowing for people themselves, who are permeated by issues involving the micro and macro levels, to reveal the limits of the levels with which they coexist.

This delineation provides room to deal with the organizational *locus* so as to recognize its social dynamism or, in other words, the devices that build social practices. This concern involves Foucault's (1979, 1987) contributions, by analyzing power relations in their social, cultural, and historic context, while not having as its main focus the center, that is, a company's board of directors or its CEO. Instead, it is focused on its extremities, where power is distributed and ramified, where power is capillary and it is possible to observe the diversity of forces acting in an organization. There must be an effort to discover what the intention of power is in real social practices, or what Foucault (2003a) calls **its external face**. The idea here is not to analyze a subject's intention, what someone intends to achieve when exercising power, for the devices that build social practices do not originate from people, much less from a company's board through the formalization of its organizational strategies, but actually its external face, the several power devices existing in specific social and historic contexts, which constitute the subject's social practices.

This is precisely the main aspect that sets Foucault apart from Moscovici and Certeau. This does not diminish his contribution to social dynamics for the theoretical articulation proposed here. Certeau (1990), in discussing the work of Foucault, makes clear his intention to subvert this view by proposing that tactics act through expediency, at the same time he acknowledges the contributions of Foucault in the sense of clarifying the mechanisms that enable strategies and the place of the proper in the social dynamic peculiar to discipline.

By articulating these contributions in this article, we aim to stress the need to promote more intense mediations between certain interests and, in the final analysis, an infinity of social constructs belonging to people, organizations and the strategies developed in them. We do not believe that a contribution to the field of strategy can be done by denying such constructs, which legitimize the proposal of a pathway to approximate them and understand the process associated with them.

In conclusion, we suggest that the proposals discussed here be applied and expanded. It is not our intention that this article concludes the discussion. Much to the contrary, our intention is to open further debate, to add to the knowledge of researchers and groups interested in developing the approach of strategy as social practice.

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