



From Reading... to the Construction of Strategic Facts : A Methodological Issue

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Abstract

This article deals with the origins of the diversity of findings in the strategic research field and its conceptual instability. An attentive reading of papers published between 1970 and 1996, in distinguished management sciences journals such as the *Academy of Management Review*, the *Journal of Management Studies*, *Strategic Change*, and the *Strategic Management Journal*, clearly reveals the interchangeability of certain concepts related to strategy. For example, the concepts of *strategy*, *strategic management*, *general policy*, *strategic decision*, and *strategic process*, among others, have become interchangeable. But, this interchangeability is not without consequences, positive and negative, on the evolution of the strategic discourse. There is a positive consequence, in the sense that through multiple uses of analytical concepts and tools, researchers end up retaining only the models having a descriptive, explanatory, and/or predictive capacity higher than the others, therefore *cumulative*. There is a negative consequence, insofar as the interchangeability generates *misunderstandings* (Martinet : 1991) and *overall contradictory results* (Koenig :1993), which leads to reservations about their *replicability* and *generalisability*. So, certain authors evoke disciplinary proximities (Snow and Thomas : 1994) and/or the virtual character of the strategy frontiers. Many others see in this philosophical, epistemological, and ontological embroilment the instability factors of knowledge. However, for Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, this instability reveals a necessary conceptual pluralism “to conceptualize, focus, and order the world of organizational behavior.” (Bolman and Deal :1985) Our reflection is limited to *the methodological factors*, that is, to the determinants of a methodological configuration that are guarantors of the relative stability of knowledge in the strategy field. The *cumulativity*, the *replicability*, and the *generalisability* of the results obtained by various researchers in management sciences form a part of these determinants of relative stability. In targeting this methodological approach to strategy, our objective is simple. It is to show that whatever the philosophical, epistemological, and ontological preferences of the researchers, the relative stability of knowledge in strategic management depends on two requirements being combined during the reading and/or the conceptualisation of strategic facts. In other words, it is essential to establish methodological criteria that can lead to a certain stability of knowledge in strategic management without risking the loss of the advantages of a conceptualisation confrontation (Desreumaux : 1996), thereby avoiding too great a dilution of the results. Initially, we will try to present methodological elements for a shared strategic environment. These are scientific evaluation criteria (internal and external) that, by a selective effect, allow us to arrive at a certain stability of knowledge in strategy. The second part of our paper will be devoted to general information on recommendations and to the integrated and integrative approach as a reliable research method that is compatible with what appears, at least to some researchers, to be the fuzzy nature of strategic practices and reflections.

Key words

Decision-making, strategic process, knowledge management, performance, methodology