

**Call for Papers: Special Issue of *Strategic Organization*
“Exploring the Strategy-Identity Nexus”**

Guest Editors:

Davide Ravasi, Cass Business School, City University, UK (Davide.Ravasi.1@city.ac.uk)

Mary Tripsas, Boston College, USA (tripsas@bc.edu)

Ann Langley, HEC Montreal, Canada (ann.langley@hec.ca)

The domain of strategic management is concerned with *what organizations do* or intend to do to establish a strong competitive position in the market: the emphasis is on how these intentions are determined, expressed and enacted through the configuration of organizational activities. Organizational identity on the other hand is about *who or what organizations are* believed to be or claimed to be. There is clearly a close relationship between *doing* (strategy) and *being* (identity). As Ashforth and Mael (1996: 33) wrote, “*self-definition and strategic choice are intertwined such that an organization may enact and express a valued identity through strategy and may infer, modify, or affirm an identity from strategy and the responses it evokes.*” And yet, while very early empirical studies highlighted the influence of organizational identity on strategic decisions (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Gioia and Thomas, 1996), the strategy-identity nexus has not always received the attention that it deserves. The aim of this special issue is to encourage further exploration of this connection, an aim that fits perfectly with the mission of *Strategic Organization*, a journal that bridges the fields of strategic management and organization theory.

Previous studies have revealed the reciprocal but loosely coupled nature of the relationship between strategy and identity, showing how the two may potentially mutually support each other (Rindova et al., 2011; Anthony and Tripsas, 2016), but also become out of sync. For example, Tripsas (2009) shows how organizational identity serves as a filter that can focus attention productively, but that can also blind firms to competitive opportunities or technological change that would suggest a shift in strategy.

At the same time, when top managers do attempt identity-challenging strategic moves, the embeddedness of identity in practices, routines and culture may inhibit strategic reorientation (Tripsas, 2009; Anthony and Tripsas, 2016). In fact, while strategy is generally oriented towards the future, culture and identity tend to be grounded in the past (Sillince and Simpson, 2010), creating the potential for a serious mismatch that can undermine managerial attempts to renew strategies (see for instance, Huy, 2011; Hoon

and Jacobs, 2014). Ravasi and Phillips (2011) suggest ways in which the mismatch may be overcome by connecting strategy to identity referents from the past (see also Schultz and Hernes, 2013), and Ravasi and Schultz (2006) examine how culture and identity are inter-related over time in this process. There is, however, room for more research on the reciprocal tensions and inter-relations between identity and strategy and the way in which these are managed.

The list below is not exhaustive, but promising topics and themes include:

Strategic change and identity work. One question concerns how identity and strategy are inter-related in the context of ongoing strategic and organizational practices. The notion of “organizational identity work” has recently attracted attention (Clegg et al., 2007; Kirchner, 2013; Kreiner et al., 2014; Watson, 2016) as a concept allowing a more processual perspective on organizational identity (Fachin and Langley, forthcoming). This concept can be mobilized by examining the ongoing discursive “work” that an organization, as a “social actor”, or its senior managers engage in to promote or sustain a particular identity (e.g., in internal and external communications) (Clegg et al., 2007; Suddaby et al., 2010) to align it with strategy. From this angle, we need to study in more depth the historical inter-relations between strategic change and organizational identity work expressed over long periods of time.

Micro-level practices. A second angle on organizational identity work may focus on the activities that *individuals* or *groups* undertake in organizations “*to form, repair, maintain, strengthen or in other ways influence understandings of the central, distinctive and enduring characteristics of a specific organization*” (Fachin and Langley, 2015; Kreiner and Murphy, 2016; Watson, 2016). This perspective draws attention to the ongoing micro-level practices engaged in by people to negotiate meanings in conversations and other activities (i.e., opening up the social construction perspective on identity). From this angle, strategic decisions offer a propitious arena for examining organizational identity, and an organizational identity lens may enhance our understanding of how strategic decisions are arrived at and enacted. The potential link with the strategy-as-practice perspective is evident (Oliver, 2015; Sillince and Simpson, 2010). However, few scholars have so far brought strategy work and organizational identity work together. There are multiple opportunities to do so.

Multi-level dynamics. The notion of organizational identity work also raises the question of how individual, group and organizational identity struggles may come to be inter-related within strategy formation. When people push for certain strategies and certain expressions of organizational identity, they may be simultaneously expressing individual, group or possibly business-unit identity commitments. Limited work, however, has been done on cross-level identity dynamics (Ashforth et al., 2011). How do the individual identities of organizational leaders express themselves in strategic initiatives and organizational identity work? How might the identity of business units influence organizational strategizing? Such issues are well known to be critical during strategic

moves and major changes, such as mergers, restructuring and turnarounds.

The role of material practices, routines, and artifacts. While both organizational identity and strategy are often analyzed in cognitive and discursive terms, they are both clearly embedded in material practices, routines and artefacts (Oliver and Roos, 2007; Watkiss and Glynn, 2016; Rindova et al., 2011; Zamparini and Lurati, 2016). Just as strategizing often rests on material artefacts that mediate collective interaction and support collective cognition (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Dameron et al., 2015), so organizational identity claims and beliefs are often expressed and symbolized by material artefacts (Watkiss and Glynn, 2016) or negotiated around them. Research on the materiality of strategy and identity, however, is still in an early stage, and there is room to explore in more depth the material aspects of both organizational identity and strategy as well as their reciprocal relations.

Balancing similarity and distinctiveness. Both organizational identity and strategy are concerned with similarity and distinctiveness. The notion of optimal distinctiveness is inherent to the concept of identity (Gioia et al., 2013; Zamparini and Lurati, 2016). The notion of differentiation is central to the concept of strategy, and yet firms still need to conform to certain categorical prescriptions for audiences to be able to even recognize their products as potentially valuable (Deephouse, 1999; Zuckerman, 2016). In addition, the convergence of previously distinct industries and/or the emergence of entirely new industries creates ambiguity about categorical boundaries, which generates both strategic and identity challenges. The interplay and dynamics associated with similarity and difference in both identity and strategy is another interesting area for investigation.

Managing inter-firm relationships. Much research in the field of strategy has focused on how to best establish and manage relationships with other firms in order to access resources and capabilities. However, the potential role of identity in these relationships remains unexplored. Should alliances form their own unique identity or simply reflect identities of their members? How might differences in the identity of members affect the formation, management, and success of strategic alliances, joint ventures, and other inter-firm relationships?

The exploration of the strategy-identity nexus thus offers multiple opportunities for ground-breaking and insightful scholarship. We welcome empirical papers using a variety of methods to address these and related topics. We are also open to considering conceptual papers that make a strong novel contribution to the understanding of the strategy-identity nexus.

Timeline and submission instructions

All submissions should be uploaded to the Manuscript Central/ Scholar One website: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/so> between October 1 and October 31, 2017. Once you have created your account (if you do not already have one) and you are ready

to submit your paper, you will need to choose this particular Special Issue from the drop down menu that is provided for the type of submission. Contributions should follow the directions for manuscript submission described on the SO webpage: <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/soq>. For queries about submissions, contact SO!'s editorial office at strategic.organization@hec.ca. For questions regarding the content of this special issue, contact one of the guest editors.

References

- Anthony C and Tripsas M. (2016) Organizational Identity and Innovation. In: Pratt M, Schultz M, Ashforth BE, et al. (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 417-435.
- Ashforth BE and Mael FA. (1996) Organizational Identity and Strategy as a Context for the Individual. *Advances in strategic management* 13: 19-64.
- Ashforth BE, Rogers KM and Corley KG. (2011) Identity in organizations: Exploring cross-level dynamics. *Organization Science* 22: 1144-1156.
- Clegg SR, Rhodes C and Kornberger M. (2007) Desperately Seeking Legitimacy: Organizational Identity and Emerging Industries. *Organization Studies* 28: 495-513.
- Dameron S, Lê JK and LeBaron C. (2015) Materializing strategy and strategizing material: Why matter matters. *British Journal of Management* 26: S1-S12.
- Deephouse DL. (1999) To be different, or to be the same? It's a question (and theory) of strategic balance. *Strategic management journal* 20: 147-166.
- Dutton JE and Dukerich JM. (1991) Keeping an eye on the mirror: Image and identity in organizational adaptation. *Academy of Management Journal* 34: 517-554.
- Fachin FF and Langley A. (2015) Organizational Identity Work in an Emerging Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Network. *Academy of Management Best Paper Proceedings* doi: 10.5465/AMBPP.2015.52 (published online).
- Fachin FF and Langley A. (forthcoming) Researching organizational concepts processually: The case of identity. In: Cassell C, Cunliffe A and Grandy G (eds) *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Management Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gioia DA, Patvardhan SD, Hamilton AL, et al. (2013) Organizational Identity Formation and Change. *The Academy of Management Annals* 7: 123-193.
- Gioia DA and Thomas JB. (1996) Identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41: 370-403.
- Hoon C and Jacobs CD. (2014) Beyond belief: Strategic taboos and organizational identity in strategic agenda setting. *Strategic Organization* 12: 244-273.
- Huy QN. (2011) How middle managers' group-focus emotions and social identities influence strategy implementation. *Strategic management journal* 32: 1387-1410.

- Jarzabkowski P and Kaplan S. (2015) Strategy tools-in-use: A framework for understanding “technologies of rationality” in practice. *Strategic management journal* 36: 537-558.
- Kirchner S. (2013) How Organizations Become Enduring : Disentangling the Organizational Identity Paradox. In: Sydow J and Schreyögg G (eds) *Self-Reinforcing Processes in and among Organizations*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 35-54.
- Kreiner GE, Hollensbe E, Sheep M, et al. (2014) Elasticity and The Dialectic Tensions of Organizational Identity: How Can We Hold Together While We're Pulling Apart? *Academy of Management Journal*: amj. 2012.0462.
- Kreiner GE and Murphy C. (2016) Organizational Identity Work. In: Pratt M, Schultz M, Ashforth BE, et al. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 276-293.
- Oliver D. (2015) Identity work as a strategic practice. In: Golsorkhi D, Rouleau L, Seidl D, et al. (eds) *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 344.
- Oliver D and Roos J. (2007) Beyond text: Constructing organizational identity multimodally. *British Journal of Management* 18: 342-358.
- Ravasi D and Phillips N. (2011) Strategies of alignment organizational identity management and strategic change at Bang & Olufsen. *Strategic Organization* 9: 103-135.
- Ravasi D and Schultz M. (2006) Responding to organizational identity threats: Exploring the role of organizational culture. *Academy of Management Journal* 49: 433-458.
- Rindova V, Dalpiaz E and Ravasi D. (2011) A cultural quest: A study of organizational use of new cultural resources in strategy formation. *Organization Science* 22: 413-431.
- Schultz M and Hernes T. (2013) A temporal perspective on organizational identity. *Organization Science* 24: 1-21.
- Sillince JAA and Simpson B. (2010) The strategy and identity relationship: Towards a processual understanding. In: Baum JAC and Lampel J (eds) *The Globalization of Strategy Research (Advances in Strategic Management, Volume 27)*. Emerald Groupe Publishing Limited, 111-143.
- Suddaby R, Foster WM and Trank CQ. (2010) Rhetorical history as a source of competitive advantage. In: Baum JAC and Lampel J (eds) *The Globalization of Strategy Research (Advances in Strategic Management, Volume 27)*. Emerald Groupe Publishing Limited, 147-173.
- Tripsas M. (2009) Technology, identity, and inertia through the lens of “The Digital Photography Company”. *Organization Science* 20: 441-460.
- Watkiss L and Glynn MA. (2016) Materiality and Identity. In: Pratt M, Schultz M, Ashforth BE, et al. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 317-334.
- Watson TJ. (2016) Organizational Identity and Organizational Identity Work as Valuable Analytical Resources. In: Pratt M, Schultz M, Ashforth BE, et al. (eds) *The Oxford*

- Handbook of Organizational Identity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 123-139.
- Zamparini A and Lurati F. (2016) Being different and being the same: Multimodal image projection strategies for a legitimate distinctive identity. *Strategic Organization* Published online ahead of print, doi:10.1177/1476127016638811.
- Zuckerman EW. (2016) Optimal Distinctiveness Revisited. In: Pratt M, Schultz M, Ashforth BE, et al. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 183-199.