



## Implementing Strategy and Avenues of Access: A Practice Perspective

*Harry Sminia and Fredy Valdovinos Salinas*

From its inception, strategic management has been conceptualised as strategic planning (Ansoff, 1965). This presupposes a chronology in that a plan needs to be formulated first, which is then subsequently implemented. Strategy implementation is thence understood as a process of execution, a putting into action of explicitly formulated intentions; often requiring deliberate and managed organisational change. Thinking of strategy implementation in this way has achieved a level of sophistication in that over the years various frameworks have been developed by which managers can execute a strategy (e.g. Ansoff & McDonnell, 1990; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1984; Okumus, 2003; Thompson et al., 2019). These frameworks present strategy implementation as a matter of designing

---

H. Sminia (✉)

University of Strathclyde Business School, Scotland, UK  
e-mail: [harry.sminia@strath.ac.uk](mailto:harry.sminia@strath.ac.uk)

F. V. Salinas

QuodPraesens HR Consulting, Santiago de Chile, Chile  
e-mail: [fredy.valdovinos@quodpraesens.com](mailto:fredy.valdovinos@quodpraesens.com)

an appropriate organisation structure, establishing an incentive scheme, changing the organisational culture and of monitoring and control. This way of thinking has been labelled as the structural control view (Weiser et al., 2020).

Paradoxically, over the years there also appeared much research looking for explanations why implementation continues to fail, which then reach the conclusion that the frameworks are still lacking, and more research needs to be done (e.g. Cândido & Santos, 2015; Kaplan & Norton, 2001; Kiechel III, 1982; Nutt, 1999). Distinguishing strategy formulation from strategy implementation led to problematizing the successful realisation of a strategy as having to bridge the implementation gap (Martin, 2010; Whipp, 2003). Successfully executing a strategic plan appears to be as elusive as it ever was (Bourgeois III & Brodwin, 1984).

Roughly, there are two possible reactions to these observations. One reaction is of resignation and an acknowledgement that a top-down strategic management approach in which managers direct and the organisation responds and realises a strategy is an *IDÉE FIXE* perpetuated by a management rhetoric that can only be delusional. The other reaction, which is more prevalent, builds on what has been labelled as the adaptive view to strategy implementation (Weiser et al., 2020), which recognises that organisation and management is a social process. The aim is to find a way of retaining the possibility of managers intervening in this process to have an effect on eventual outcomes, albeit only a limited one. Instead of a top-down command and control style, more emphasis is put on the people in the organisation with them having to be empowered to decide what is best in the situations that they encounter yet being kept in check by a mission or a vision rather than a plan (Kanter, 1983; Wilkinson, 1998). This has recently been popularised again under the label of agility: an organisational capability to strategically deal with a continuous need for change (e.g. McKinsey, 2015; PwC, 2021). On the basis of this second reaction, what is then required is a specification of how implementation activity can make a contribution. For this we need to liberate implementation from planning and develop an alternative understanding that recognises strategy implementation as an activity in its own right.

Interestingly, implementation as execution is not the only way to define it. Execution comes from the Latin term *EXECUTIONEM* and includes the prefix *EX*, meaning “out”, and the root *SEQUI* meaning “to follow” (Partridge, 2006). The word “sequel” has the same root. Etymologically, execution means “to follow out of”. It signifies the process as an ex-post

exercise of carrying intentions into effect. Implementation can also be understood as generating a whole, a more holistic effort. As a word, it comes from the Latin term *IMPLERE*, and includes the prefix *IM*, which means “in”, and the root *PLERE*, meaning “to fill” (Partridge, 2006). Implementation shares this root with the word “plenary”. Etymologically, implementation means “to fill in”. In this sense, it is not an ex-post activity following on from formulating intentions. Instead, it must be understood as a set of activities aimed at creating a whole, at actualization, or at generating something from nothing. In a way, understanding implementation as execution and as a subsequent stage in a process does not do justice to its etymological origin. The latter understanding of implementation seems to be more appropriate if we take management and organisation to be a social process.

Implementation understood as a generative social process chimes with a conceptualization of strategic management as strategy formation, of realising a pattern in a stream of actions (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). In this view, intentions can make contributions, but these tend to be drowned out by all the little and larger problems that need to be dealt with constantly. The endless succession of (half-baked) solutions is seen as contributing more to the pattern that emerges over time than the execution of periodically produced plans. Accordingly, strategic management has been described as wayfinding rather than planning; as a continuous coping with newly emerging situations (Chia & Holt, 2009).

The process conceptualization underpinning wayfinding is also different from the process conceptualization underneath planning. Wayfinding is more akin to the “strong” process approach that sees organisational reality as essentially processual (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010; Tsoukas & Chia, 2003). From a “strong” point of view, an organisation as it changes and persists exists as an ongoing process with the management challenge being about directing this process towards favourable outcomes. Planning is based on the “weak” process approach that sees process as happening to an organisation. The management challenge according to the “weak” process point of view is about effectuating change when it is deemed necessary. Strategic management as “wayfinding” does away with problematizing strategic management as having to bridge the implementation gap. Instead, the problem is about how strategic management contributes to an ongoing and continuous process by which an organisation performs and changes.

The ambition for this chapter is to look at strategic management from a strong process point of view to specify how implementation activities can have an effect. Implementing strategy then refers to those activities that direct and channel the process that is continuously going on anyway into a desired pattern. We will do that by basing ourselves on Schatzki's (2002, 2019) Theory of Practice. This will allow us to propose an understanding of strategic management as a continuous implementation process that generates both persistence and change. Interestingly, strategy formulation then becomes part of the implementation effort as well, instead of it being seen as a separate activity preceding strategy implementation. We will start by introducing Schatzki's Theory of Practice to then specify how implementation practices can make a contribution to an organisation's strategic management. We finish this chapter by drawing out some implications for strategic management and strategic change.

### THE IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEM ACCORDING TO THE THEORY OF PRACTICE

Looking through the lens of Schatzki's practice theory, an organisation and everything associated with it come into being through and as practices that interact with material circumstances, i.e. "*an organization [...] is a bundle of practices and material arrangements*" (Schatzki, 2006: 1863). Practices in the bundle perform the organisation, with the patterning in this process as practices change, persists and relate to each other and to the wider "practice plenum" (Schatzki, 2019), taken to be what strategic management is about.

Practices are "*open-ended, spatial-temporal sets of organized doings and sayings*" (Schatzki, 2019: 26). "Doings" are the performances of action, events, things that happen—in short: activity. A "saying" is a particular type of "doing", singled out to be able to distinguish between discursive and non-discursive doings; a distinction we will come back to when discussing strategy formulation as an implementation practice. Open-ended means two things. One, a practice only persists if it happens again yet, and two, a practice happening does not guarantee that it will happen again and persist. Whether a practice will happen depends on whether something has happened that prompts a reaction. It is important to understand that to Schatzki, a practice happening is a reaction to something that happened rather than an activity being determined by what has happened. Practices are spatial-temporal because practices happen in

and over time at specific locations. As with the strong process approach, organisations as a bundle of practices and material arrangements are essentially processual, as organisations appear and perform because practices happen. The emphasis is on activity and everything follows on from that.

A practice as it is happening is structured by practical and general understandings, rules and teleoaffectivity (Schatzki, 2002, 2019). Practical understanding refers to knowledge of how to perform the particular activity that makes the practice what it is. Frying an egg requires you to put a frying pan on a hot stove, add some butter, let it melt and heat up, break an egg and add the contents to the pan but throw away the shell to then wait a couple of minutes to let it solidify, but take it out before it burns. This practical understanding is part of the structure of the frying an egg practice. General understanding refers to the overall atmosphere to which the practice is attuned and, in a way, indicates the overall purpose. For instance, the egg is being fried to be served as part of a breakfast in a hotel and therefore serves a purpose in running a hotel business. Rules are directives or instructions that have been formulated to indicate what actions should and should not be taking place. If the frying of this egg is part of cooking a breakfast in a hotel, there are food hygiene regulations that instruct how food preparation is to be done. Teleoaffectivity refers to the particular projects, tasks and ends inherent in the practice as to what needs to be performed there and then. If an egg is being fried as part of preparing breakfast in a hotel, the breakfast is the project within which getting the stove heated up, cracking the egg to get at its contents and not letting the egg burn as it is solidifying are all ends that need to be accomplished. There might be all kind of issues with a practice as it is being performed like not having the right equipment, lacking practical or general understanding, flouting the rules or failing to get specific tasks completed—and we will come back to that later—but these are the four aspects that structure a practice.

As a practice is happening, it interacts with “*assemblages of material objects*” (Schatzki, 2006: 1864). In the case of frying eggs as part of making and eating breakfasts in a hotel, these material arrangements include the kitchen with all its equipment, the food ingredients, the building, but also the chefs, the waiting staff and the guests as bodily entities. The material arrangements are involved in or causally support the happening of the practices that are in the organisation’s bundle. These material arrangements relate to a practice by contributing some causal effect (an egg reacts to heat by solidifying), by helping to constitute (a

pan contains the egg to be heated on a stove) and to prefigure a practice (the hotel kitchen with a hot stove, a chef, a pan and an egg put together allow for the egg to be fried and served as breakfast), or embodying direction and meaning (an egg sizzling in a pan in a hotel's kitchen at 7:03am indicates that a breakfast is being prepared for a guest) (Schatzki, 2019).

Practices are interrelated in that practices link up as they are playing out Schatzki (2002, 2005). Providing a breakfast in the morning is part of the practices bundle of many hotels as is the checking in and out of guests, cleaning and preparing rooms and taking reservations. Without guests making reservations and checking in, breakfasts would not need to be made. Whether and how well breakfasts are provided prompts guests to book a room in this hotel. The practices and material arrangements and the way they interrelate are specific but not necessarily unique to a particular organisation. Frying eggs as part of preparing breakfasts happens in many hotels, although the people involved, the kitchens and how these are equipped, or what kind of breakfasts are prepared and whether these include fried eggs or not varies. The hotel bundle will connect and overlap with other bundles as well, creating larger constellations of practices, with all these constellations put together referred to as the "practice plenum" (Schatzki, 2019). For receiving and taking reservations, hotels sign up to booking companies who maintain websites where prospective guests look for availability and prices, and through which reservations are made, notwithstanding that people can book directly with the hotel as well. Washing towels and bedlinen tends to be outsourced to specialist laundry firms as well as the hotel's housekeeping practices in combination taking care of cleaning and preparing guestrooms. All of this happens as part of wider society.

Practices happening and linking up as they do is what makes an organisation what it is and how it performs. The pattern that emerges is what Mintzberg and Waters (1985) refer to as the realised strategy. It means that strategy is being implemented as long as there is activity, whether specific implementation efforts are part of the process or not. When you hire somebody as a chef, put her to work in a hotel kitchen in the morning, you can expect that breakfasts will be prepared. Schatzki (2002, 2019) stresses that this patterning is not a simple replication of practices time and time again. There is fluctuation to deal with smaller or larger contingencies, as these interfere with what is going on (cf. Feldman & Pentland, 2003). The number of breakfasts being cooked will vary with the number of guests being present every morning. There could be a

sudden issue with the daily egg order and one morning the chef finds there are not enough eggs to go round, or a member of kitchen staff phones in sick and tasks have to be re-arranged. Or there is so little demand for porridge that the kitchen stops preparing a batch in advance to only make a portion on demand, which affects the speed by which porridge will be served and might lead to an unhappy guest, a negative review on a booking website, blemishing, say, the 4-star reputation of the hotel. And, as was written above, there might be all kind of issues with the practices as these are being performed like not having the right equipment, lacking practical or general understanding, flouting the rules or having trouble accomplishing specific tasks. An organisation as a bundle of practices and material arrangements allows for incorporating the fluctuation that is happening all the time.

All of this then qualifies the problem of how strategy implementation is happening into three interrelated questions. As the realised strategy is a consequence of how practices are performed, one question concerns why people in organisations do what they do in the way that they do it? This is about practical intelligibility. The second question is about what lets people do what they do, as surely not every course for action imaginable will be equally feasible. This is about prefiguration. The answers to these two questions pave the way for answering the third question that is central to this chapter. It concerns strategy implementation itself, or implementation practices, and how we are to understand how management activity can make an organisation perform in a preferred and particular way? This is about avenues of access.

With regard to why people do what they do, the answer is simple. People do what makes sense for them to do (Schatzki, 2001, 2002). Such sense making requires “practical intelligibility”. This is a matter of every individual’s teleology (to what ends would somebody want to do something) and affectivity (how it matters to somebody). What makes sense for a chef employed by a hotel to fry an egg is because it earns her a living, but maybe also because she likes people to enjoy food. Practical intelligibility is specific to each individual and is only informed, not determined, by practice structures, or more specifically by practices’ practical and general understandings, rules and teleoaffectivity.

The answer to the question what lets people do what they do is a matter of prefiguration. Prefiguration in turn is about causality, constitution and meaning, as these are posed by how the practices in the bundle interrelate and how these interact with the material arrangements

(Schatzki, 2019). Prefiguration is about the extent to which courses for action are feasible options. Causality refers to an action as being a reaction to something that has happened, i.e. another practice in the bundle. An egg can be fried because it solidifies when exposed to heat. A chef only fries an egg after being notified by a waiter that a guest would like a fried egg for breakfast. As was said earlier, activity is a reaction to what has happened; that what happened does not determine what will happen next. Constitution is about what needs to be in place; about the practices that have to have happened ahead of or what needs to happen in conjunction with, as well as about the material arrangements that have to interact with the actions as these are happening. You cannot fry an egg without an egg. These need to have been ordered and delivered. The stove and the pans have to be present, cleaned and made ready. A guest needs to have woken up and appeared in the restaurant expecting a cooked breakfast. Meaning defines the situation. Being in a hotel kitchen early in the morning employed as a chef tells a person that she is expected to fry an egg when an order comes in. Whether a course for action is feasible is a matter of degree rather than a yes or no situation (Schatzki, 2002).

Consequently, the extent of the feasibility of a practice is very specific to a particular situation and relative to the feasibility of connected practices at that time and place. A chef employed by a hotel and present in the hotel's kitchen receiving an order to fry an egg at 7.09 AM, with eggs being available, will fry an egg, unless the fire alarm has just gone off and the kitchen staff are about to evacuate. She might also not fry the egg when the order is received at 10.33 AM, as breakfast service ends at 10.30 AM and her shift has finished with union regulations telling her not to work beyond her contracted hours. However, prefiguration prompts rather than determines, and with everybody's specific practical intelligibility eventually telling each individual person whether to engage in a practice, "*human activity is fundamentally indeterminate*" (Schatzki, 2002: 232).

Indeterminate does not mean random. The bundle of interrelated practices and material arrangements, which is the organisation, is an orderly but fluent process by which the organisation performs. The practical intelligibility of the people involved in combination with the prefiguration that is present sees to that. The organisation is a process and a bundle of practices and material arrangements, which fluctuates, changes and persists. It is as part of this orderly but fluent process that we can explore how we



**Table 4.1** Key terms and definitions

<i>Key term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Avenue of access	A causal chain of possible events across a number of practices, which links an implementation practice with a targeted practice when these practices are enacted
Practical intelligibility	An individual's teleology and affectivity that tells this individual whether it makes sense to do something
Practice	Doings and sayings of people while being prompted by the practice's structure that consists of general understanding, practical understanding and rules
Practice bundle	The practices and material arrangements that perform the organisation
Practice plenum	A constellation of practice bundles by which social reality exists
Prefiguration	The extent to which courses of action are feasible as posed by the interrelationship of practices by way of causality, constitution and meaning, and by the material arrangements
Strategy implementation	The enacted practices in the practice bundle that is the organisation, by which a strategy is realised

are to understand how implementation practices can make an organisation perform in a preferred and particular way? (Table 4.1).

### IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRING AVENUES OF ACCESS

To understand the possibility and efficacy of implementation practices, we need to go back to Schatzki's (2002, 2019) notions of practice structure, practical intelligibility and of prefiguration. We also need to take into account Schatzki's claim about the fundamentally indeterminate nature of human activity.

For organisations to operate and be organised, there needs to be some persistence with the bundle of practices. This persistence appears if a number of things come together. The way in which practices are structured—a practice's practical and general understandings, rules and teleoaffectivity—informs people how to act. Organisations in particular have “practice memory” by which practice structures persist as long as practices happen (Schatzki, 2006). This combines with people's practical intelligibility—each individual's teleology and affect—by which they decide whether to engage in a practice, while also taking into account how the situation they face is prefigured by relations between practices in

terms of causality, constitution and meaning, and by the material arrangements. Although a practice is open-ended and practices are never perfectly replicated, a specific configuration of practice memory, prefiguration and people's individual practical intelligibility can produce a pattern that shows persistence over time and across space. This persistence can even have the effect of returning to form when dealing with some disturbance, as the configuration of practice memory, prefiguration and practical intelligibility can make the process conform to how things have been done previously. Or the process reconfigures itself and adapts to the new situation, as people improvise and adjust. If the chef finds out at the beginning of a morning shift that again that there are not enough eggs to go round, she might instruct the kitchen porter to get some petty cash and go to the supermarket to buy some eggs. This engages various practices of workflow planning, procurement, accounting and kitchen hierarchy, as well as the way practices connect, the material arrangements and the practical intelligibility of the people involved, all in aid of delivering a breakfast service expected from a 4-star hotel. The kitchen porter's supermarket run can become a persistent part of the hotel's practice bundle to compensate for the intermittent food deliveries.

If we take strategic management to be about generating a pattern in a stream of actions (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), the practice bundle that is the organisation has the ability to take care of that all on its own, even when fluctuations and disturbances need to be dealt with. All is well if this activity is what is generating preferred outcomes. However, it is not uncommon that the practice bundle that is the organisation is creating problems and issues rather than solutions, and something needs to change. Such an intervention would require what Schatzki (2019) labelled as "governance": the "*intentional shaping, directing, or making a difference*" (93). Strategy implementation then is about intervening in the bundle of practices and material arrangements, i.e. in the ongoing process that is the organisation, in order to direct the process towards preferred outcomes. For this, Schatzki (2015) developed the notion of "avenue of access".

An avenue of access is a possible "action chain" involving a range of practices including those targeted for change and those that are connected and implicated (Schatzki, 2015). An action chain is one of the forms by which practices connect (Schatzki, 2002). With a practice described as "a nexus of actions" (71), an event is one of these actions. An action chain appears when events react to events, with practices connecting when these

actions are from different practices. In effect, because of the reactions, an action chain is where causality appears. Schatzki (2002: 41) understands causality “*as the relation of bringing about*”. As was mentioned earlier, essential to this understanding of causality is that it appears only if there is a reaction. There is not anything in what triggers the reaction, which makes it inevitable that something has to happen as a consequence. It is the other way around. That what happens as a consequence happens because there is a reaction to what happened. Whether this reaction happens is decided by or built into whoever or whatever reacts. An egg solidifies as a reaction to heat. An egg does that because of the chemistry of the egg. Heat has the opposite effect when ice reacts to it. A chef in a hotel reacts to a breakfast order of two eggs on toast by putting a pan on a hot stove, breaking two eggs, and by adding the contents with some butter to the pan, and by putting a slice of bread in a toaster.

Because of the indeterminate nature of human activity, the chef can react differently if she wants to. She can boil the eggs, do nothing or even walk out. Although being informed by how practices are structured and prefigured, it is her own practical intelligibility that tells her whether and how to react at that moment in time. Practical intelligibility understood in this way is part of the argument why human activity is indeterminate. Nevertheless, because practices in the organisation’s bundle are connected to each other and also link with practices in the wider practice plenum, events through causality appear as action chains (Schatzki, 2002, 2019). On the one hand, the fundamental indeterminacy of human action can make such activity chains rather haphazard. On the other hand, the persistence of practices and the recurrent patterning in the (re-)actions that appear are a pre-requisite of the social phenomenon of the organisation to occur. The result is that somebody can book a room with a hotel on a booking website and have the confidence that on arrival a room will be available. If the box to include breakfast has been ticked, then the guest can also be confident that an egg will be fried in the morning.

The notion of “avenue of access” makes use of action chains as these are occurring. It allows us to explore the efficacy of what can be identified as dedicated implementation practices. The first thing to recognise is that implementation practices are interventions in the ongoing process that is the bundle of practices and material arrangements by which the organisation exists and performs. The indeterminate nature of human activity makes that there is no guarantee that an intervention involving an implementation practice will result in the effect that was desired. However,

the ordered but fluent process by which an organisation performs and persists can also harbour the possibility of an action chain that poses as an “avenue of access” because it connects an implementation practice through a sequence of events with some targeted practices where a change is needed. If such an avenue appears, it would be very specific to a particular organisation at a certain time in a certain place, posing as what is commonly referred to as a window of opportunity.

For instance, if the hotel is part of a hospitality conglomerate and top management has made the strategic decision to become more efficient, the kitchen porter’s supermarket run to stock up on missing food items because of the intermittent food deliveries would be an obvious target to save some costs. Buying food ingredients at supermarket prices on a regular basis quickly adds up and will eat into the hotel’s thin margin quite easily. There is a whole action chain that probably starts with the centralised procurement department that manages the contract with a national food service company who supplies every hotel that is owned by this larger hospitality conglomerate. The action chain includes the food service company having to manage the logistics of sourcing eggs and other ingredients and getting it delivered in the required quantities at the right time to every hotel that is covered by the contract. The action chain also includes local hotel management who have to keep track of food ingredient usage and food waste while hotel occupancy varies daily in order to communicate with the food service company about what the kitchen needs on a day-to-day basis. And this action chain interacts with the material arrangements that are present and involves the practical intelligibility of all those participating. It is in this action chain that one or more practices need to be targeted, with an implementation practice having to link up through an avenue of access that includes this action chain but extends across various hierarchical and coordination practices by which procurement, logistical and kitchen practices can be accessed, all in order to stop the daily early morning supermarket run.

### THE EFFICACY OF IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES

There are a number of implementation practices that are common to the various strategy implementation frameworks that have been developed over the years (e.g. Ansoff & McDonnell, 1990; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1984; Okumus, 2003; Thompson et al., 2019). One of these implementation practices is about re-designing/re-structuring the organisation in

line with a newly formulated strategy. Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) as an implementation effort, for instance, centres on organisational re-design (Hammer & Champy, 1993). The activity that comes with this implementation practice boils down to telling people what job they are supposed to do and how they have to do it. People are told about this by way of job descriptions and organisation charts. In terms of Schatzki's (2002, 2019) practice theory, job descriptions mostly concern the rules part in the practice structure. A job description in effect is a set of rules, directives and instructions telling somebody what actions should and should not be taking place. Nonetheless, the general and practical understandings as well as the targeted practices' teleoaffectivity have to be reflected in the job descriptions and in the organisation chart for these to make any sense. Organisation charts sketch out who is responsible for certain practices and how these are to link up. The organisation chart also indicates what the material arrangements are because it informs the resourcing that allows for the people to do their jobs.

Furthermore, it is the practices that are being subjected to a re-design attempt, which have to respond to the "organisation design" practice for it to be effective. Whether this happens depends on what is going on with the targeted practice, the interactions with the material arrangements and with other practices to which the targeted practice connects, and with the people's practical intelligibility. The organisation chart as well as the job descriptions should take the prefiguration into account for the re-design to make it feasible. The people's practical intelligibility will be telling them whether to change. To prevent the hotel porter's daily supermarket run from ever happening again, the job description could be tightened up to exclude any procurement activity. But to make that work, something also needs to be done about the intermittent food deliveries. The general understanding that this is a 4-star hotel that has to deliver a 4-star breakfast experience tells all the people involved in this that you cannot afford to run out of eggs, no matter what job descriptions have been formulated for kitchen porters. And because she cares, chef will send out the hotel porter to buy eggs if they have run out.

To address the intermittent food deliveries, one or more practices need to be targeted in the action chain that involves the hotel chain's procurement department, the food service company and local hotel management. They could consider replacing fresh eggs with egg powder to deal with the fluctuations in demand for breakfasts in the morning because hotel occupancy varies so much on a day-to-day basis. Egg powder can be

stored over longer periods and it is therefore easier to stockpile in a hotel kitchen and have it continuously available. This would compensate for the intermittent food deliveries. An alternative would be to improve yield management and to vary room rates depending on occupancy to have roughly the same number of guests using the hotel every night and consequently even out the demand on the kitchen, especially if room rates would always include breakfast. With less variability with regard to how many breakfasts need to be prepared every morning, food orders and delivery would settle into fixed quantities, which would make procurement and logistics better manageable. Other options could be contemplated but when these are, their avenues of access would need to be part of the considerations. The two options here already demonstrate how the various practices that are targeted are connected through action chains. By looking into the detail and into the extent to which the action chains pose an avenue of access, the feasibility of each option can be assessed.

Additionally, the avenue of access also has to include the practices by which an option is to be put into effect, i.e. the actual intervention. Apart from the intervention practice itself—which is the “organisation design” practice here—there are further management and coordination practices by which the connections are to be made. The egg powder option requires communication with kitchen staff to prompt alterations to their cooking practices so that fresh eggs can be replaced with egg powder. To assess the effectiveness of this action chain, the reaction on the basis of the practical intelligibility of the kitchen staff, with them being informed by the cooking practices that they undertake and the material arrangements with which these practices interact, is paramount to assess whether egg powder is a viable alternative to fresh eggs, especially because replacing fresh eggs with egg powder changes the material arrangements. A similar consideration needs to be made with regard to the yield management option. It requires communication with hotel marketing and sales staff to prompt them to vary rates on the basis of occupancy levels. This intervention also links into the booking practices of would-be guests, expecting that price is a deciding factor in their practical intelligibility. Again, it is practical intelligibility in combination with practices’ structures and the material arrangements, which inform them how the feasibility of the yield management option will play out. What this illustrates is that an avenue of access on which the efficacy of an implementation practice

relies is very specific and local to the organisation in which strategy is to be implemented.

Similar arguments apply to implementation practices like “incentivisation”, “monitoring and control”, or to “culture” interventions. The assumption with the “incentivisation” practice is that activity that is in line with a formulated strategy is rewarded, mostly in financial terms. From Schatzki’s practice theory perspective, it directly intervenes in the general understanding of the practices in the bundle, which are targeted, with an expectation that the purpose of each practice by and large is about making money by those who are involved in them. Furthermore, incentivization as an implementation practice can be criticised for making the affect in practical intelligibility rather one-dimensional by dismissing any other reason than money as to why it matters to people to engage in a practice. An avenue of access could be present if the general understanding of the practices is mostly about financial rewards. Incentivisation would struggle to generate a reaction that helps to realise a strategy if people’s affect is about non-financial rewards. If incentivisation would be an implementation practice in the hotel that wants to replace fresh eggs with egg powder and kitchen staff care more about preparing good food than about getting top dollar, incentivisation would not generate much of a reaction. If it does, it could skew general understanding away from preparing outstanding food for a 4-star breakfast experience and towards a “what-is-in-it-for-me” culture.

A number of implementation frameworks include the practice of changing an organisation’s culture by propagating a set of shared values and understandings that support the strategy. Shared values and interpretations also chime with notions like mission and vision, which have been assigned a role in keeping empowered employees in check in organisations that are designed as “agile”. Such “culture intervention” practices, by limiting the notion of organisational culture to shared interpretations and values, target the general understanding of practices in the bundle by which the organisation exists. The incentivization practice in effect has been elaborated as a “culture intervention” practice just now in as far that it propagates a specific shared value about the importance of money.

Alternatively, the hospitality conglomerate can have been advised by PwC or McKinsey to become an “agile” organisation. In doing so, kitchen staff in every hotel have been empowered to run their kitchens as they see fit but within the confines of a mission statement and an overall

vision. With efficiency becoming more important, these could be reformulated to now state that the hotel is 4-star but also should be run on a tight budget. The solution to have the kitchen porter do an early morning supermarket run to stock up on eggs is a manifestation of the chef having felt empowered enough to solve a local problem with regard to delivering breakfasts in line with the 4-star rating of the hotel. A re-stated vision and mission that now also emphasises frugality would prompt chef to re-think this solution. In effect, the reformulated mission and vision has implications for practical understanding and for teleoaffectivity because the understandings and values that are being put forward refer to a specific but different way in which practices are to be done.

The expectation is that such explicitly reformulated values and interpretations are to become part of the practice structure. Again, the efficacy of such an intervention is a matter of the reactions that happen, with these reactions just as easily being the opposite of what was intended and the propagated shared interpretations and values getting an ironic ring to them. This mostly depends on the practical intelligibility of the people who are targeted with a culture intervention, which on this occasion includes kitchen staff who have been empowered to marry frugality with a 4-star breakfast service. They might find a way that avoids egg powder and dispels the need for a daily supermarket run. They might not and ignore the newly formulated mission and vision. A “culture” intervention can and should be more sophisticated than simply forcing shared interpretations and values on a supposedly empowered workforce. Aiming for dialogue and enhanced mutual understanding by way of a process of, for instance, Organisation Development or Large Scale Intervention (French & Bell Jr, 1998) could work better but the same argument of having to rely on an avenue of access applies.

“Monitoring and control” is an interesting implementation practice in this respect. It is particular popular in the guise of the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). The idea is that a set of indicators can be developed by which progress with regard to whether an intended strategy is realised can be assessed, in the expectation that deviations of the trajectory leading to realising the strategy can be picked up and measures put in place to put everything back on track again. It is interesting from a practice theory point of view because it can be appreciated in two ways. One way is about the reactions that might occur as a consequence of putting a monitoring and control practice like the Balanced Scorecard in place. The other way concerns the expected effects of the scores and assessments that



are generated, especially, as is often the case, when the strategy that was intended is not being realised.

The activity that takes place to establish indicators that are to be monitored, and maybe even the monitoring itself, on its own can invoke reactions. In a way, this would be a variant of the supposed Hawthorne effect (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) with attention being paid to what people are doing having an effect on how they are doing things. If, for instance, hotel kitchen staff activity is being scrutinised for measurement opportunities, then what they show as being observable might be different to what they normally do because they are being scrutinised. They might hide the supermarket run because they know it has been prohibited but still do it to safeguard their food supply. Or the measurement might actually capture what it intends to capture. The reaction to the monitoring and what the score on the scorecard turns out to be, is a consequence of the conjunction of the practice structure that is being monitored, of how this practice is prefigured as it relates to other practices and interacts with the material arrangements, and the practical intelligibility of the people involved in the practice.

The control part of the practice assumes that any deviation of the trajectory towards realising the intended strategy, once exposed, will lead to a corrective measure. From a practice theory point of view, such a mechanism is not a matter of course. Similar to the reaction to the monitoring, any control effect is a matter of how the practices about which this information is gathered will react to any such deviation when it is being revealed. This information can be ignored; it can be acted upon in that something about these practices will change. However, this change does not automatically direct all activity towards realising the intended strategy. Whether that happens or not, again, is a matter of how practices are structured and prefigured, and of people's, practical intelligibility. As with the other implementation practices, "monitoring and control" practice efficacy depends on how it connects with other practices through an "avenue of access". Probably for this reason, Kaplan and Norton (2001) present the balanced scorecard among a suite of other implementation practices because for monitoring and control to have an effect, at least it needs to connect with the other implementation efforts, although the overall effect depends on the presence of avenues of access across the wider organisation.

The practice of strategy formulation tends not to be seen as an implementation practice but rather as a practice preceding implementation

activity. Intriguingly, the argument can be made that similar to monitoring above, the practice just happening can invoke a reaction. Just talking about what the strategy could be or should be can be picked up in other practices. Kitchen staff who catch a rumour that hotel management is considering replacing fresh eggs with egg powder could create an uproar because they feel that it makes it impossible to provide a 4-star breakfast experience. The only eggs that can be prepared for breakfast with egg powder are scrambled eggs. It would preclude serving fried eggs, poached eggs, boiled eggs or the proverbial 4-star breakfast of Eggs Benedict. However, the dialogue that could ensue between kitchen staff and hotel management about kitchen practices could lead to kitchen staff learning about the hotel's thin margins and the need to be frugal with food ingredients, and to minimise food waste. Strategy formulation is more of a "saying" than a "doing" when it comes to appreciating it as a practice (cf. Schatzki, 2019). Because it can be linked to an avenue of access or action chain by which a pattern in a stream of actions is changed, strategy formulation can be understood as being an implementation practice as well. Top management who are aware of strategy formulation already invoking reactions and contributing to strategy as it is being realised could be using this practice as such.

In summary, utilising Schatzki's Theory of Practice, strategy implementation turns into a collection of implementation practices in which efficacy is a matter of the reactions it generates in other practices in and beyond the organisation's bundle. The intervention needs to target specific practices that by themselves are part of an action chain, with the desired effect heavily dependent on how the targeted practice through the action chain of which it is part generates the desired effect. Additionally, practices that are targeted for deliberate change have to be accessible through an action chain themselves. All of these action chains make up a specific and essentially localised infrastructure of change that only appears as practices—with their practice structures and being prefigured by interconnections and material arrangements—line up and combine with people's practical intelligibility so that the action chain triggered by the implementation practice invokes the desired reaction in the targeted practice. Avenues of access are highly contextual because these appear only if all the elements that are required line up and happen to be in place (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2** Implementation practices

<i>Implementation practice</i>	<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Considerations</i>
Job description	Specifies the rules in the practice structure of the practices that are part of a job	Job content needs to consider practical intelligibility of job holders as well as prefiguration of practices that are part of the job Job content has to reflect teleoaffectivity and material arrangements of practices that are part of the job
Organisation design	Specifies how practices in the bundle connect, who should be involved and what material arrangements are required	Design needs to consider practical intelligibility of position holders as well as prefiguration of practices that are part of the design
Incentivisation	Emphasises financial rewards in the general understanding of the practices in the bundle	Struggles to be effective if people's practical intelligibility is mostly non-financial
Culture	Specifies the general understanding and the rules of the practices in the bundle	Has to chime with people's practical intelligibility
Monitoring and control	Signals what general understanding is expected	Has to chime with people's practical intelligibility and needs to take into account how practices are prefigured
Strategy formulation	Signals what general understanding is expected	Has to chime with people's practical intelligibility and needs to take into account how practices are prefigured

## CONCLUSION AND SOME PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

We approached strategy implementation from a strong process perspective utilising Schatzki's (2002, 2019) Theory of Practice. In doing so, strategic management is being understood as a continuous implementation process in which implementation practices aim to direct an organisation onwards on a continuous journey by which a pattern in a stream of activity is realised (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). In this way,

even strategy formulation can be appreciated as an implementation practice. Bearing in mind the indeterminacy of human activity, the efficacy of implementation practices can be gauged by way of the presence of avenues of access that connect the implementation effort with targeted practices. Such avenues are highly contextual in that they are sensitive to time and place. We can also expect avenues of access to open up and close down as the process moves on.

Consequently, implementation practices that have been put forward like designing an appropriate organisation structure, establishing an incentive scheme, changing the organisational culture, empowering people or monitoring and control cannot be expected to have universal applicability. Whether these have an effect is place and time sensitive and depends on the reactions that are triggered. There is no intrinsic causal force associated with any implementation practice that makes that certain effects can always be anticipated. Any anticipation of effects has to take into account the whole practice bundle, the practice's persistence, the prefiguration and the practical intelligibility of the people involved.

As with every practice, implementation practices have a practice structure in that there is practice understanding, general understanding and teleoaffectivity, and there are rules. Implementation practices are also prefigured in that their feasibility depends on how they connect to other practices and how they connect to material arrangements. The highly contextual nature of avenues of access in effect refers to the prefiguration aspect of implementation practices and indicates the fragility of their efficacy.

Using Schatzki's theory of practice also highlights the importance of managers and their role in the process, especially when we consider the role of their practical intelligibility. The practical intelligibility of top managers, with them often put at the centre of an organisation's strategic management effort, can be seen as essential in disentangling the mutual implication of the organisation as a bundle of practices and strategy as a pattern of actions. What this chapter tells us is that strategic management requires managers to always be critical and self-reflective about what is going on and how they go about doing management (Sminia, 2022). Top managers' individual affect and teleology is pivotal for them to appreciate what is happening with the organisation and seeing a necessity to intervene in what is going on or not, as well as being able to see it through. However, affect in particular is only recently being recognised as being of consequence in management and organisation (Gherardi, 2019).

Within the practice structure, practical understanding is particularly apt from the perspective of this chapter because the argument that has been put forward here indicates that this practical understanding has to include an appreciation of Schatzki's practice theory and particularly the notion of avenue of access. Having an appreciation of how the efficacy of an implementation practice is a matter of avenues of access would be an essential element in the know-how of strategy implementation. This is not to say that strategic managers should become experts in Schatzki's Theory of Practice. However, it might supply a vocabulary and a frame of reference, or at least a basic sense for understanding what is going on. What is of particular importance for understanding what is going on is that the practical applicability of any strategy tool or theory is not inherent in the tool or the theory. There is no universal applicability. Instead, usefulness and efficacy are born out of the specifics of the situation in two ways. Firstly, whatever a manager does, its effect is a matter of the reactions that it generates, not a consequence of some inherent power in the tool or method that has been used. Secondly, a manager can and needs to consider any intervention in the ongoing process by which an organisation exists in relation to the appearance of an avenue of access that links the intervention with the effect that needs to be generated.

Furthermore, this take on strategic management as effectively being a continuous implementation process urges managers to show some humility, firstly, because an organisation will realise a strategy because the process will be happening anyway, despite or in spite of what a manager does or does not contribute. In a way, this practice approach to strategy tells managers that in many instances they could and should trust the process for sorting itself out. Secondly, if they choose to intervene, they should be aware that to successfully implement strategy, their activity must invoke a reaction of the actual practices and actions that configure the organisational doings. Simply formulating a desired strategic position, identifying a strategic capability, stating the required culture through visions and missions, designing an organisational structure or acquiring new tangible assets is not enough to safeguard an organisation's viability and success. Whether any of this has any impact is a consequence of the reactions it generates. Chances are that whatever happens next is a circumstantial alignment of many factors. Attributing it all to the brilliance of a strategist is just another instance of what has been labelled the "romance" of leadership; of wanting to understand achievement as a consequence of deliberate managerial activity (Meindl et al., 1985). Practical strategic

managers should primarily be focused on the avenues of access that pose as affordances (Gibson, 1979) as these open up and close down, to have interventions ready to be activated if and when this is required.

## REFERENCES

- Ansoff, H. I. (1965). *Corporate strategy*. McGraw Hill.
- Ansoff, H. I., & McDonnell, E. (1990). *Implanting strategic management*. Prentice Hall.
- Bourgeois, L. J., III., & Brodwin, D. R. (1984). Strategic implementation: Five approaches to an elusive phenomenon. *Strategic Management Journal*, 5, 241–264.
- Cândido, C. J., & Santos, S. P. (2015). Strategy implementation, What is the failure rate? *Journal of Management & Organization*, 21(2), 237–262.
- Chia, R. C. H., & Holt, R. (2009). *Strategy without design: The silent efficacy of indirect action*. Cambridge University Press.
- Feldman, M. S., & Pentland, B. T. (2003). Reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 48(1), 94–118.
- French, W. L., & Bell, C. H., Jr. (1998). *Organization development: Behavioral science interventions for organizational improvement* (6th ed.). Prentice-Hall.
- Gherardi, S. (2019). Theorizing affective ethnography for organization studies. *Organization*, 26(6), 741–760.
- Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton-Mifflin.
- Hammer, M., & Champy, J. A. (1993). *Reengineering the corporation: A manifesto for business revolution*. Harper Business Books.
- Hrebiniak, L. G., & Joyce, W. (1984). *Implementing strategy*. Macmillan.
- Kanter, R. M. (1983). *The change masters: Innovation & entrepreneurship in the American corporation*. Simon & Schuster.
- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2001). *The strategy-focused organization—How balanced scorecard companies thrive in the new business environment*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Kiechel III, W. (1982). Corporate strategist under fire. *Fortune*: 34–39.
- Langley, A., & Tsoukas, H. (2010). Introducing “Perspectives on process organization studies.” In T. Hernes & S. Maitlis (Eds.), *Process, sensemaking, and organizing* (pp. 1–26). Oxford University Press.
- Martin, R. (2010). The execution trap. *Harvard Business Review*(July-August): 1–6.
- McKinsey. (2015). *The keys to organizational agility*.
- Meindl, J. R., Ehrlich, S. B., & Dukerich, J. M. (1985). The romance of leadership. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30, 78–102.

- Mintzberg, H., & Waters, J. A. (1985). Of strategies, deliberate and emergent. *Strategic Management Journal*, 6, 257–272.
- Nutt, P. C. (1999). Surprising but true: Half the decisions in organizations fail. *Academy of Management Executive*, 13(4), 75–90.
- Okumus, F. (2003). A framework to implement strategies in organizations. *Management Decision*, 41(9), 871–882.
- Partridge, E. (2006). *Origins: A short etymological dictionary of modern English*. Routledge.
- PwC. (2021). *How to make agility more than a buzzword: Empower your teams, deal with disruption and drive productivity*.
- Roethlisberger, F. J., & Dickson, W. J. (1939). *Management and the worker*. Harvard University Press.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2001). Practice-minded orders. In T. R. Schatzki, K. Knorr-Cetina, & E. von Savigny (Eds.), *The practice turn in contemporary theory* (pp. 42–55). Routledge.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2002). *The site of the social: A philosophical exploration of the constitution of social life and change*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2005). The sites of organizations. *Organization Studies*, 26(3), 465–484.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2006). On organizations as they happen. *Organization Studies*, 27(12), 1863–1873.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2015). Practices, governance, and sustainability. In Y. Strengers & C. Maller (Eds.), *Social practices, intervention and sustainability: beyond behavior change* (pp. 15–30). Routledge.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2019). *Social change in a material world*. Routledge.
- Sminia, H. (2022). *The strategic manager: Understanding strategy in practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Thompson, A., Peteraf, M. A., Gamble, J., & Strickland, A. J., III. (2019). *Crafting & Executing Strategy: Concepts and Cases* (22nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2003). Everything flows and nothing abides. *Process Studies*, 32(2), 196–224.
- Weiser, A.-K., Jarzabkowski, P. A., & Laamanen, T. (2020). Completing the adaptive turn: An integrative view of strategy implementation. *Academy of Management Annals*, 14(2), 969–1031.
- Whipp, R. (2003). Managing strategic change. In D. Faulkner & A. Campbell (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of strategy* (pp. 729–758). Oxford University Press.
- Wilkinson, A. (1998). Empowerment: Theory and practice. *Personnel Review*, 27(1), 40–56.