

# **Power strategies and power sources of management: The micro-politics of strategizing**

**NINA KATRIN HANSEN\***

University of Hamburg  
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences  
Department of Business and Economics  
Von-Melle-Park 5  
20146 Hamburg  
Germany  
Phone ++40 / 42838 – 3315  
Fax ++40 / 42838 – 6358  
E-Mail: NinaKatrin.Hansen@wiso.uni-hamburg.de

**WILLI KÜPPER**

University of Hamburg  
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences  
Department of Business and Economics  
Chair of Human Resource Management  
Von-Melle-Park 5  
20146 Hamburg  
Germany  
Phone ++40 / 42838 – 4547  
Fax ++40 / 42838 – 6358  
E-Mail: Willi.Kuepper@t-online.de

\*Corresponding author.

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## **Abstract**

With our paper we contribute to the current strategy-as-practice research by examining the role of micro-politics and management power in strategizing that has not been investigated yet. The focus of attention is directed to the organizational members that act as strategic agents who try to advance and safeguard their individual interests. On the basis of a conceptual understanding of micro-politics, we develop an organization theoretical approach to analyze specific power relationships and power strategies of individuals in the process of their day-to-day strategizing. Against the background of action interdependencies and strategic uncertainty as well as formal and informal organizational structures, we focus on the existence of organizational power games and individuals' usage of power sources that strongly influence organizational dynamics through a process of power institutionalization.

# **Power strategies and power sources of management: The micro-politics of strategizing**

## **INTRODUCTION**

As an alternative to the macro-level focused strategy research that has dominated the management literature for over the last three decades (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003), the central aim of strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) scholars (ibid.; Balogun, Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2004, 2005; Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007; Whittington, 1997, 2003, 2004, 2006) has been to overcome the theoretical reduction of strategy to ‘a few causally related variables’ (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007: 6) and to emphasize the role of human action and strategy practitioners that construct, shape and enact strategies through their day-to-day activities. From this perspective, strategy ‘is not something that an organization *has* but something its members *do*’ (ibid.). Instead of being the property of an organization, strategy ‘is conceptualized as a situated, socially accomplished activity’ (ibid.: 7). Johnson, Melin & Whittington (2003), who shift scientific attention to the micro-level phenomena, introduce the term of ‘strategizing’ to describe the ‘doing of strategy’. The concept of strategizing emphasizes the processual resp. procedural character of strategies that are accomplished through the practices of organizational members. From this view, a successful strategy is not a static capability or a stable disposition of an organization as seen in today’s management literature; strategy rather implicates a dynamic component: it is an activity that can be better described as a process of strategizing and as an ‘ongoing social accomplishment, constituted and reconstituted as actors engage the world in practice’ (Orlikowski, 2002: 249).

In the formulation and implementation of strategies the interests of the individuals involved play a major role, because they have a strong influence on the strategic decisions and their results: In the process of strategizing organizational members act as strategic agents who try to advance and safeguard their individual interests through the mobilization of specific power sources. From this perspective, the organization can be seen as an arena of power structures and power games where power relationships between the strategically acting organizational members evolve. Unfortunately, for a long period of time scientists in the field of business administration and management studies concentrated on a firm’s efficiency conditions and the optimization of managerial and production processes and, thereby, blinded

out fundamental power processes that can be seen as the basis of any organization. This consideration of power processes in organizations refers to a central aspect, the notion of ‘micro-politics’ that underlies a specific stream of research. At the beginning of 1960s, the term ‘micro-politics’ was brought into the scientific discussion by Tom Burns (Burns, 1962); Horst Bosetzky (Bosetzky, 1977) introduced the concept in the German-speaking area. By referring to the strategic organizational analysis of Crozier and Friedberg (Crozier & Friedberg, 1979), Küpper and Ortmann (Küpper & Ortmann, 1986; 1992; Ortmann et al., 1990 as well as Ortmann, 1995) subsequently developed an enfolding research approach that emphasizes the framework and microstructures of power in organizations (Küpper, 2004).

Starting from this theoretical basis, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the current s-as-p research by examining the role of power resp. micro-politics in strategizing that has not yet been investigated intensively (Carter, Clegg & Kornberger, 2008a; b). The focus of attention is, thereby, directed to the specific micro-politics of management. On the basis of a conceptual – in distinction to an aspectual – understanding of micro-politics, we develop an organization theoretical approach to analyze the specific power relationships and power sources of individuals in the process of their day-to-day strategizing. Taking this into account, we draw the following research questions: *Who is a strategist from a micro-political view? How do individuals build their identities as strategic actors regardless of their formal strategic roles?* Furthermore, we examine the additional questions: *In what kind of power practices resp. power games are strategists involved? What specific power sources do manager draw upon to assert their interest and enhance their power position in strategizing?* Another central aspect that we consider is the question: *What types of management power do individuals develop in strategizing?*

To develop our argument we will proceed in the following steps: We begin by identifying power related research gaps in the current s-as-p approach and explaining the starting point of a power analysis of strategizing that is based on a conceptual understanding of micro-politics. Additionally, we apply central theoretical concepts of a micro-political analysis (organizational power games, individual power strategies and organizational power sources) to the field of strategizing and discuss the duality of power and identity. Afterwards we introduce three different types of management power – integrator, broker and negotiator power – and analyze their contextuality and the mutual constitution of management power and identity. Finally, we illustrate how a micro-political analysis can contribute to the key questions of s-as-p research.

## MICRO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIZING

In their introductory article ‘Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective’, Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl (2007: 7) define five key questions to which future s-as-p research should contribute: 1) ‘What is strategy?’, 2) ‘Who is a strategist?’, 3) ‘What do strategists do?’, 4) ‘What does an analysis of strategists and their doings explain?’, and, 5) ‘How can existing organization and social theory inform an analysis of strategy-as-practice?’ To start with the last question of how existing organizational theory and social theory may further contribute to the existing s-as-p research that has strongly been influenced by theories of social practice (Giddens, 1979; 1984; Bourdieu, 1990; Schatzki, 1996; 2002; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Savigny, 2000), we regard the identification of existing research gaps as important. In a recent discussion on the s-as-p perspective Carter, Clegg and Kornberger (2008a; b) state that considerations of power issues are missing in the current s-a-p research and, therefore, express the following criticism: ‘The field of strategy as practice research needs opening up to other areas that are not yet interlinked with it. For instance, studies of power and strategy would advance our understanding of the practice perspective’ (ibid., 2008a: 93). ‘To understand practice, we regard it as important to engage with issues of power [...]’ (ibid.: 96). In a former article, Emazzel and Wilmott (2004) correspondingly remark that the s-as-p approach does not share the sensitivity for issues of power and politics with strategy process research because it focuses on ‘the detail of managerial techniques’ and, therefore, has ‘lost its capacity to analyse power as effectively’ (Carter, Clegg & Kornberger, 2008a: 91).

‘Power is central to organizational life (Clegg, 1989) and underpins the strategy-making process. Understanding of strategy necessitates an engagement with power and politics.’ (Clegg, Carter & Kornberger, 2004: 25.)

We take this identified research gap as starting point for our piece of research that aims at contributing to the current s-as-p perspective through a power perspective on organizations. Our approach directly affiliates to the fifth key question outlined by Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007): From our point of view, micro-politics can function as an organizational theoretical framework for s-as-p researcher to analyze the specific power issues and micro-politics of strategizing. A micro-political analysis of strategizing can enhance our understanding of how power structures and power relationships shape the day-to-day strategizing of human agents. Furthermore, it can investigate the question how actors are

able to constitute themselves as strategic agents and how they balance their identity in organizational interactions.

Our micro-political analysis is based on a conceptual distinction to an aspectual understanding of micro-politics (Brüggemann & Felsch, 1992). An *aspectual understanding* of micro- or organizational politics (e. g. Mintzberg, 1983; 1985; Bodsetzky, 1977; 1992; Neuberger, 1995; Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999) concentrates on a certain type of organizational action that can be characterized through the application of micro-political techniques, for example, the falsification or concealment of information and documents, the blackening and hassling of colleagues, the initiation of intrigues and sabotage or the agenda control and hidden actions in general etc. The ability of an actor to handle these micro-techniques is associated with a special personality type – *the micro-politician* – who regulates his policy in a Machiavellian manner to realize personal advantages against any resistance. On the system level micro-politics are interpreted as a conspirative and pathological phenomenon, a dysfunctional disturbance variable that underruns formal governance structures, undermines organizational effectiveness and, therefore, has to be inhibited through management intervention (Küpper, 2004). Due to the fact, that the aspectual understanding of micro-politics is not able to systematically explain how micro-political actions are based on and how they affect formal organizational structures and governance instruments, we refer to a conceptual understanding of micro-politics in the following.

In contrast to the aspectual understanding of micro-politics, a *conceptual understanding* (Burns, 1962; Crozier & Friedberg, 1979; Küpper & Ortmann, 1986; 1992; Ortmann et al., 1990 as well as Ortmann, 1995; Küpper & Felsch, 2000) considers all organizational – formal and informal – and especially management activities as micro-political action of individuals. In fact, micro-politics are seen as constitutive for organizational action, a common organizational phenomenon and not a specific, temporary or isolatable category of human action. As an action-based approach, the conceptual appreciation of micro-politics consequentially takes the interest-led activities and micro-political strategies of human agents as its starting point and, furthermore, enhances this individual orientated approach through a system perspective of organizations. Its theoretical aim is to overcome the traditional dualism of structure and agency and to emphasize the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984). From this view, structures are generated, reproduced and modified through the micro-political activities of individuals. On the one hand, these actions are contingent and depend on the power structured organizational context; on the other hand, however, they are simultaneously autonomous because actors create, utilize and safeguard power sources to

assert, maintain and extend their individual autonomy (Küpper, 2004). The underlying power conception is a relational one: Power is seen as a social construct and a dimension of social practices that constitutes interest-led, mutually related dispositions of action. Power is not defined as a characteristic, property or authority of a few actors, but as an exchange and negotiation relationship that is bound to specific game structures. From this view, human relationships are always power relationships (Crozier & Friedberg, 1979) and organizations are seen as complex systems that constitute organization-specific power games.

## STRATEGY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL POWER GAMES

Within the strategic (Crozier & Friedberg, 1979) and the micro-political organizational analysis (Küpper & Ortmann, 1986; 1992), the organization is conceptualized as a network of interrelated *power games*. Crozier & Friedberg (1979) introduce the game metaphor as basal instrument of collective action. It emphasizes the assumption of strategically acting agents who due to correlating interests participate in power games and, through this, unintentionally contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. The evolving power games can be seen as an indirect social mechanism that integrate the conflicting interests and divergent behaviors of strategically acting organizational members and ensure the structuring and regulation of organizational power conditions. In general, three types of power games can be identified in organizations (Ortmann et al., 1990): routine, innovation and project games.

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Participation in the different power games is, thereby, structured along the hierarchy. Actors at the operational basis, the middle and lower managers play the routine games that are primarily defined and predetermined by the innovation games. The upper management – the board members as well as the department and factory managers – play the innovation games; parts of this group, the middle management and some members of the operational base are entrusted with the implementation of new strategies and for this purpose unite in project games.

Micro-political conflicts in *routine power games* evolve at the center of the day-to-day strategizing. In general, routine games are oriented towards operational subgoals and allow actors to realize benefits from the solid accomplishment of their ordinary work tasks. Routine games are operational activities and processes that belong to the already implemented strategies in place. These processes are a source of information and uncertainty concerning the performance and evaluation of strategies. They deliver arguments that, on the one hand, may question the existing strategic path, thereby paving the way for strategic change; on the other hand, they may support the adherence to this path, thereby supporting resistance to strategic change. The primary logic of the routine game is the safeguarding and the preservation of established power structures and positions. The micro-political players develop specific norms, standards and corresponding interpretative schemes within different types of routine games. Furthermore they establish an internal power and gratification structure and negotiate resource allocation. As a result, a series of interwoven routine power games are constituted in an organization that follows different and partially conflicting logics, for example, the materials management and control, the manufacturing and the sales department games that constantly have to be adjusted to one another. This reconciliation requires cooperation – as the profitable strategy – at the intersections of different routine games (Ortmann et al., 1990). The production planning game is an example of a monthly cooperation game that takes place at the regular production plan meetings. In this connection, actors of the manufacturing department can realize rewards for the utilization of mechanical and human capacities that secure a frictionless production and, in consequence, the fulfillment of monthly and annual production targets. In contrast, the players of the sales department and material management unit play their own routine games with players outside the organization – customers and suppliers – based on different rule systems, standards and norms that define their specific chances of profit. In the material management game the monitoring of the relevant markets and the preservation of favorable purchasing conditions are central goals. Central factors in this connection are the concrete delivery dates and quantities, the current stock levels and capital commitment as well as adherence to given budgets. Routine game actions in the sales department, however, are orientated towards the accomplishment of customer needs, the achievement of customer loyalty and finally the fulfillment of sales targets. A competitive element comes in because the players of the sub games – manufacturing, material management and sales – follow diverging individual interests. However, for the functioning of the mutual production planning game the three games have to be sufficiently connected. Additionally, unique communication relationships and balanced

negotiation patterns evolve between the different routine game players of the manufacturing control, the material management, and the sales department; furthermore, between the manufacturing control, the factory managers, the masters and the foreman. Especially, in interactions with the material management and the sales department this cooperation strategy has to be adhered to, so that all players of the production planning game can benefit from it. On the one hand, this coordination process is assured through organizational rules, procedures and gratification structures, on the other hand, proceeding and negotiation patterns have to be established by the department managers and executive officers to reach the required agreements between the units (Ortmann, 1995).

The second game type – *the innovation game* – can be seen as the process of strategy formulation or reformulation that is based on the reorganization of the routine games and their rules. After stages of strategic planning and decision making, a new strategic plan is established to reconfigure the routine games and to reach the official organization's goals (Daft, 2005). So innovation games represent 'meta games' that define new power position and profit opportunities for the actors of the routine games possibly including new actors that enter the arena from the outside. Due to the fact that innovation games destroy the fragile routine games' structures and their secure profit opportunities, innovation games are fiercely disputed and can be seen as 'static warfares' (Ortmann et al., 1990: 59). Strategic goals, modernization and rationalization orientate the innovation games and their logic is directed to risk-taking and change. In contrast to the players of the routine games, who have to possess characteristics like solidity, correctness, and a high professional competence, innovation game players are evaluated and judged by their dynamic and risk-taking behavior as well as their propensity to innovate. Due to the difference of their gratification and career opportunities, the interests of the members of the two groups may strongly diverge. The profit opportunities of innovation and routine game players have a different and partial contradictory logic, so fundamental micro-political conflicts are the consequence (Ortmann et al., 1990; Ortmann, 1995).<sup>1</sup>

The contradictory logic of the routine and the innovation games – preservation of the status quo versus continuous change – reflect central aspects of the organizational action corridor. In terms of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), they represent cognitive and normative structural orders that serve as the basis for the mobilization of organizational

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<sup>1</sup> In general, initiatives for innovation do not only come from the top-management level. They, however, can be blocked by the upper management that plays its own routine game of governing the ordinary work processes. So innovation cannot be enforced without the support of the top management that has the power to intervene and reorganize the routine games of other players (Ortmann, 1995).

resources. Furthermore, they reflect different social norms and conceptions of the world that strategic actors of the opposing power games refer to. Both game types are, thereby, constituted through specific strategic practices of their actors: Innovation games can be seen as an arena of struggle for process control. In contrast to the routine game players that focus on the preservation of the existing process control, the logic of innovation game players is to obtain or to reallocate the control of routine game processes (Ortmann, 1995).

At the stage of strategy implementation which involves ‘the use of managerial and organizational tools to direct resources toward achieving strategic outcomes’ (Daft, 2005: 247) micro-political *project games* arise out of implementation projects for new strategies. Project games can be seen as ‘transmission games’ (Ortmann et al., 1990: 467) that may lead to a new arrangement of the relationship between routine and innovation. In this connection, the role of the middle managers – the department and team leaders – as ‘pivot players’ is of great micro-political interest. On the one hand, the middle managers are responsible for the maintenance of the operational working tasks in their role as department and group leaders; on the other hand, they participate in the strategic innovation games that redefine the organizational autonomy zones for them and their departments in future routine games and give ‘the micro-political cards a new shuffle’. So the double role of middle manager makes them the focus of micro-political conflicts. They have to resist the antagonistic requirements of the routine and the innovation games and have to accomplish the contradictions between stability and change, security and risk, department and project work. Middle managers are often ‘caught between two stools’ and are exposed to the diverging game logics. Due to the lack of an organizational regulation of this double function or ‘double bind’, these actors are over-challenged: They either frantically try to safeguard the existing circumstances and hamper any innovation processes, or they enforce innovations to the disadvantage of the operational business and its concerns (Ortmann et al., 1990; Ortmann, 1995).

To summarize, from a micro-political point of view strategic concepts and firm strategies are not the outcome of a rational decision process of the top management. On the contrary, strategies evolve in a micro-political context and are the result of a negotiating process of micro-political interested actors on all levels of the hierarchy. In the process of strategy formulation and implementation micro-political actions are, thereby, enabled and constrained by existing organizational structures. The perception and the definition of strategic problems as well as corresponding permissions of projects and budgets depend on the prevailing evaluation and gratification criteria that strategic actors have to take into account (Ortmann et al., 1990).

## INDIVIDUAL POWER STRATEGIES, ORGANIZATIONAL POWER SOURCES AND THE DUALITY OF POWER AND IDENTITY

Organizations generate specific micro-political power games and corresponding rules and, therewith, an 'action corridor' in form of a limited number of successful *power strategies* for the individuals involved. In the initiation phase of a power relationship two types of information and communication strategies are central: strategic information search and strategic information offering (Küpper & Felsch, 2000). An actor's *strategic information search* encompasses his search and acquirement of information regarding the situation and context of other actors that enables him to evaluate their interests and relevant action potentials. The question, whether his strategic information search is going to be successful depends on finding as many interaction partners with relevant action potentials as possible. Correspondingly, the signaling of one's interests and action potentials can be interpreted as *strategic information offering* that is aimed to awaken the interest of relevant interaction partners. A strategic information offering will be successful if the actor can convince a great number of interaction partners that his action potential and his interests could be of great advantage to them and, at the same time, is able to hide his real interests and action opportunities now and in the future.

In addition to the strategic information search and information offering, two central individual power strategies that lead to the formation, maintenance or ending of a power relationship can be identified: strategic clarification vs. strategic convincement (Küpper & Felsch, 2000). In the process of *strategic clarification* the actor continuously monitors the activities of his interactions partners, regarding the question, whether the other actors fulfill his interests in the originally intended manner. So an actor's activities are directed to the observation and control of the effectiveness of his interaction partner's behavior. In the second case, the *strategic convincement*, an actor tries to convince his counterpart that his interests are realized according to expectations. Besides a continuous self-expression through his own behavior (for example, the demonstration that he is able to solve a mutual problem in the cooperation relationship), the actor has to justify his behavior and its consequences for his interaction partner (e. g. convincing the interaction partner that a negative effect was caused by external circumstances). Strategic convincement always includes the demonstration that the actor is able to act otherwise (ibid):

'To be able to 'act otherwise' means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. This presumes that to be

an agent is to be able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events.' (Giddens, 1984: 14.)

An actor's power strategies and the organizational power that he is able to enfold, depend on the individual's ability to utilize accessible information, formal structures and organizational resources to control the behavior of other organizational members. Negotiations between organizational actors are based on general uncertainty and the uncertainty of a specific problem. Power is an essential ingredient in any social relationship if the behavior of one actor is relevant (of interest) as well as possibly surprising to the other actor. The room of maneuver controlled by one actor generates a zone of uncertainty for other actors as long as the actor is willing to withhold even a small part of his own power in the relationship. The degree of the actor's relational power, therefore, depends on the degree of relevance of the uncertainty zone he controls with regard to the opportunity, ability and willingness of other actors to behave in a specific way. In this respect, power strategies are directed towards the establishment, protection and expansion of such uncertainty zones, i.e. the defense and enhancement of one's own sphere of influence, thereby, reducing the action scope of the other actors. Actors who are able to control uncertainty can take advantage of this circumstance and use it as a strategic resource. The greater the relational power of an actor is, the more he is able to predetermine the actions of other actors that refer to his actions. At the same time, he is able to keep his action open and unpredictable (Küpper, 2004).

So individual power strategies can be interpreted as the handling and mastery of *organizational uncertainty zones* that serve as *power sources* on which actors can base their situational power strategies and draw upon to construct themselves as strategic agents. Referring to Crozier and Friedberg (1979) four types of organizational power sources can be differentiated: 1) An individual's expertise or functional specialization that is needed for the satisfying functioning of the organization, 2) control of the relationship between the organization and its environment (as a specific form of expert knowledge), 3) control of information and communication channels, and, last but not least, 4) the application of organizational rules (work to rule). From an interaction perspective, negotiations that lie at the center points of the above mentioned organizational power games are aimed at achieving an exchange of activity options to act in specific ways: 'If you act this way, I will react that way'. To come to agreements means to be able to handle a more or less problematic dilemma: To possess power in the sense of partial autonomy (freedom to act), i.e. to maintain a specific power relationship, actors have to at least partially answer the expectations of others. If an

organizational member does not in some manner contribute to the solution of problems composing his job requirements and expertise, its power source will dry up. The same thing will happen if the actor solves all problems according to expectations resulting in predictable behavior that can be calculated and planned unmistakably by the other players. For example, a computer scientist, on the one hand, has to provide software solutions that allow end-users in the line departments to produce a sufficient number of mistakes as well as being unable to cope with enough problems by themselves. On the other hand, he has to make sure that the user systems do not completely break down too often. So although power is unequally distributed in organizations and the access to power sources is limited, actors of all hierarchical levels are provided with power potentials. Especially, the fourth source of power – the application of organizational rules – can be a powerful weapon for individuals at the operational base when they engage in a ‘rulebook slowdown’ and, through this, strongly affect organizational and management interests (Küpper & Ortmann, 1988).

It should be clear that the normality of these interaction dilemmas does not lend itself - easily to a rational choice perspective of action. Instead, we were looking for a more general theory of action that allows us to locate the constitutional conjunction of social structure and action (Giddens’s structuration approach resp. the so-called duality of structure) at the micro level of action. As Felsch (1999) has shown, the connection of a relational concept of power with social-psychological constructs of self-identity is very promising in this respect. Moreover, within the framework of a general pragmatic theory of action not only the mutual constitution of situated actions, experiences, preferences and interests but also the creative dimension of action can be accounted for (cf. Joas, 1992; Küpper & Felsch, 2000). According to Mead (1995), the self is constituted in the interplay of two dimensions of experience: experience oneself both as an acting individual (the ‘I’) and as an object of social expectations (the ‘me’). The first partial unconscious dimension of *role making* includes the spontaneous, creative and imaginative part of the self. The second dimension of *role taking*, organized by concrete as well as generalized expected expectations concerning the social setting and milieu that are guided by conventions and habits, allows for a biographical (historical) consciousness of the self; the structures of social communications are, therefore, elementary for the structure of self-awareness. Referring to Goffman (1959), Krappmann (1969) adds the characteristic of self-identity as a performance necessary to participate in social interactions to this understanding. Above all, this performance includes the capability to live and cope with a permanent dilemma of social life: On the one hand, the individual has to meet the divergent expectations of different interaction partners (‘to be as all the others’) and, on the other hand,

it has to present itself as a unique distinguishable person ('to be different from all the others'). This can be described as a difficult balancing act between the antagonistic dimensions or poles of *social identity* and *personal (biographic) identity*, between *role conformity* and *role distance*. The attribution or ascription of self-identity by other actors, especially the direct interaction partners, takes place when an individual manages to accept all expectations directed to it and at the same time to show that fulfillment of all these expectations is impossible. The more an individual is successful in the development and maintenance of self-identity, the more it is saved from a including *social subjugation* (the experience of impotence, powerlessness and personal insignificance, when own needs and expectations are permanently suppressed) as well as an excluding *social isolation* (the negative feelings surrounding fantasies of uniqueness and omnipotence, when there is a sole orientation towards one's own needs by totally disregarding the needs of others). The social recognition of self-identity has to be worked out in every interaction situation; identity maintenance is an ongoing, never-ending process. The individual capabilities that are generated and shaped within this social learning process are: *role flexibility*, i.e. the ability to react to demands of others out of a certain role distance in a flexible manner between rejection and approval, *ambiguity tolerance*, i.e. the ability to bear incompatibilities between one's own and somebody else's needs and to understand giving way to others not in the first place as a dangerous threat of one's own personality and, last but not least, *empathy*, i.e. to empathize with others by getting into the spirit of their situated behavior (Küpper & Felsch, 2000).

If we compare the handling and mastery of organizational uncertainty zones, i.e. the central behavioral part of individual power strategies, with the balancing acts of identity formation and maintenance, it becomes obvious that we are looking at the same phenomenon from different perspectives. In addressing the interactional dilemmas of social relationships, power and identity are two sides of the same coin. E.g. empowerment is a means to encourage personality development in the direction of a more balanced self-identity, i.e. a movement from the pole of social identity to the pole of personal identity. Whereas the power perspective lends itself to an analysis of the structural conditions of organizational power sources, the identity perspective is apt to study the forming of personality traits in the course of organizational (social) learning processes. Concerning the latter, theories of leadership behavior for instance deal with the ability to tolerate fundamental uncertainty as a prerequisite for partially autonomous behavior and to preserve social distances to subordinates. One important structural element that impinges on the requisite ability of this kind (applicable to the analysis of managerial as well as non-managerial organizational roles or jobs) is the

organizational time structure of feedbacks informing organizational members about the evaluated quality of their decisions and actions (cf. Jaques, 1997).

Of course, in discussing the duality of power and identity one has to bear in mind that organizational members normally are engaged in different organizational relationships as well as in relationships outside organizational domains. Here the question arises whether individuals try to compensate for a low power potential in one relationship by trying to dominate in other relationships, e.g. an employee with low organizational power who ‘plays the boss at home’. By drawing an analogy between different concepts of organizational viability developed by Coleman (1990), Felsch (1999) discusses normative aspects and organizational consequences of a so-called independent personal identity (to maintain a balanced self-identity in any social relationship) as compared with a so-called global personal identity (compensations between all relevant social relationships in order to reach a balanced set of relation-specific identities, resp. a balanced ‘identity budget’). While we use relational power as a neutral concept, self-identity has normative implications in the sense of a criterion of social existence that should be safeguarded: a manifestation of a mature personality that cannot be measured in a simple way, but can be discussed between social actors as a more or less successful balancing act. The exercise of power also includes the potential of damage and destruction of personality.

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In the next section we will now analyze the specific power sources managers draw upon in strategizing.

## THE CONSTITUTION OF MANAGEMENT POWER AT THE INTERSECTION OF COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

In general, management power in organizations evolves between two poles of power relationships: cooperation versus competition (Küpper & Felsch, 2000). The two types of power relationships can be differentiated regarding the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the interests of the involved actors. A *cooperative power relationship* (e. g. team work) is characterized through actors with converging interests; they come together given that the

coupling of their action potentials promises additional earnings. If actors with heterogeneous or divergent interests achieve a consensus concerning the question whether a partial exchange resp. a mutual transfer of their action potentials is beneficial for both sides, a *competitive power relationship* such as an employer employee relationship is constituted. In general, organizational members are involved in a network of cooperative and competitive relationships to realize cooperation gains to a greater or lesser extent. The only partially resolvable problems of cooperation and competition in organizations provide certain actors with the opportunity to build up power positions on the basis of their ability to offer other actors solutions for their cooperative and competitive relationships and to enable them to realize cooperation rents out of their interactions. This type of power is based on the second and third power source – the control of the relationship between the organization and its environment and the control of information and communication channels – identified by Crozier & Friedberg (1979). We define this type of power hereafter as *management power* in organizations.

There are three different types of management power in organizations (Küpper & Felsch, 2000): the power of integrators, brokers and negotiators. If management power arises at the intersection of *cooperative* power relationships, we call this *integrator power*. The power of integrators can correspond to a managerial function in the organizational hierarchy and entails uniting the interest of different agents so that the formation of a group or the initiation of coalitions across departments is enabled and enhanced. The constitution and protection of an integrator power position encompasses all micro-political activities that facilitate the group formation process, for example, representing group interests to the outside and convincing potential group members of mutual interests and threats. At all levels of group development, integrator power is endangered by the instance that group members regard the integration function to be needless or superfluous. So an extensive institutionalization of relative group power or group internal power can lead to a power reduction of the integrator. On the contrary, the realization of cooperation profits is based on a certain degree of institutionalization and routinization of actions resp. So the integrator aims to sustain a middle degree of institutionalization to be able to control a reasonable uncertainty zone in the perception of the group members. In general, it can be expected that the smaller the relative power of the group in the entire organization is, the bigger is the group internal power of an integrator because he is able to produce an effective group behavior of resistance. Usually, the power of integrators can be constituted on positions of the line management. However, if the solution of cooperation problems comes to the forefront in a project game an integrator power

position can be built up in the organizations' project management, for example, when members of a project come from different departments and have varying functions and professions. As integrator, the project manager has to produce a mutual project interest and identity so that the identification of the project group members with their departments becomes weaker. Furthermore, he has to demonstrate the relevance of the project results to other powerful organizational members like the board members. The solution of the described problems through special micro-political activities is a presupposition for the project managers not only to constitute their internal but also their organizational power.

The second management power type – the *power of brokers* – evolves at the intersection of *competitive* power relationship. *Broker power* can be established in line management positions above the level of business areas or in particularly arranged points of intersection, for example, in the product management. In this connection, the range of tasks that the broker coordinates as product manager may vary from product development to distribution. Beyond that, cross sectional functions like operational planning or quality control serve as broker power positions as well. Positions in the controlling department are ultimately predestinated for the unfolding of a broker power position in connection with a collusion of interests in the budgeting process. A broker function is, thereby, based on the ability of the actor to bring diverging interests of actors together, so that a partial exchange of resources and action control is possible and the interest of all involved opponents can be promoted through a partial reduction of the alternately generated uncertainty zones. So broker power is a matter of creating satisfactory exchange relationships between organizational groups or between the organization and its environment.

Competition regarding the organizational resource allocation is the basis of all *broker power*. However, brokers can only establish and manifest their power if all the involved and opponent micro-political players perceive their neutrality. A broker is always in danger of being captured by one of the opponent parties and that the other party is going to notice this. This danger gets bigger the stronger one side dominates the other. If brokers want to secure their specific power in this situation, they have to take sides with the weaker party and have to convince the stronger party that it is endangered by the weaker party, for example, through potential resting or blockading behavior. At the same time, the weaker party has to be convinced that a partial accommodation is needed to realize potential advantages. Only if advantages can be actually realized, the broker can win in the long run. As with the integrator, the power of a broker declines if the exchange relationships are routinized and not challenged any more (Küpper & Felsch, 2000).

Two different sources and corresponding types of broker power can be differentiated in organizations – *horizontal* and *vertical* competitive power relationships. Both types of relationships and their interdependency are shaped through formal organizational structures in the form of planned and officially defined horizontal and vertical orders of working tasks and organizational functions and, therewith, related incentive and control plans. *Horizontal* competitive power relationships arise at the intersection of inter-organizational unilateral or reciprocal exchanges services. There is a variety of trading relationships in the organization: A primary exchange relationship occurs when the output of one department serves as input for another department; a secondary exchange relationships can arise when the supply of specific services (e.g. maintenance and repair, IT-service), of resources (tools, machines, budgets) as well as information (construction, disposal and planning data) can change the capacity and the productivity of the demanding department. A central micro-political problem in this context is the search for company internal transfer prices.

A hybrid form of management power is the *power of negotiators*. Negotiators are able to create a power position through the coupling of an integrator and a broker function and the partial collusion with the leader of an opponent group. On the one hand, there are actors (relais) that control competitive relationships across organizations and, on the other hand, there are actors that function as negotiators in internal customer and supplier relationships. An inverse relation can be identified here as well between the power of the overall organizational and the internal organizational power of a relais: e. g. the more the organization dominates a competitive relationship with a supplier, the weaker the internal organization power position of a relais is by tendency, for example, a purchasing agent that is only responsible for this supplier. In contrast, the internal power of the vendor of the external supplier grows in correlation with the inferiority of his company in relation to the purchasing client. The power of negotiators may be endangered by the possibility that a competitive relationship may lead to a merger of the involved organizations and internal and external power configurations are changed.

*Negotiator* positions in internal *horizontal* competitive relationships can be developed primarily in agency positions of management and expert hierarchies, whereas the collusion between managers and experts of the same hierarchical level can strengthen both power positions reciprocally. The question whether this power fosters efficiency and innovation or whether it furthers a negative coordination process between departments, is influenced by the currently controlled uncertainty zones and the challenges that the other departments bear (Küpper & Felsch, 2000).

*Vertical competitive relationships* are inherent in every employer employee relationship and constituted between the levels of the agency hierarchy. The problem in this connection that has to be solved is the allocation of the value added. As in the horizontal competitive relationships, a *negotiator power* position can be established in the vertical equivalent. A frequently discussed example is the collusion of the human resource department and its board member as representative of the employer and employee representatives. It has to be stressed that there is a strong interdependency between the horizontal and vertical broker power positions (Küpper & Felsch, 2000).

## CONTEXTUALITY AND MUTUAL CONSTITUTION OF MANAGEMENT POWER AND IDENTITY

Combining the duality of power and identity with the constitution-theoretical duality of structure resp. the recursiveness of structure and agency, the contextualization of strategy praxis and of strategic practices clearly comes to the forefront of the s-as-p discourse. The historical path dependency of organizational and strategic developments as well as the embeddedness of strategies in the inner and outer context or environments of organizations advise caution towards any kind of generalization. So if one tries to classify the identities of strategic actors, the organizational roles they take and make in accordance to these identities, the power sources they draw upon, the context they perceive to be relevant to their interests, the strategic behavior they perceive to be effective as well as the organizational power games they are involved in to negotiate their interests and exchange their action options, this only makes sense, if specifically relating elements of such types to each other yield an appropriate theoretical framework to analyze, interpret and understand the unique dynamics of concrete history-bound organizational settings. With this in mind, our preceding descriptions and interpretations of power games, power strategies and management roles in relation to strategizing activities can only be a more or less useful illustration of the analytic power of a micro-political perspective.

Taking as a first step the power games outlined on the basis of empirical research by Ortmann et al. (1990), the specific logic and characteristics of the routine, the innovation and the project games and their respective players were constituted by an outer context (market conditions, technologies etc.) and organizational structures that to a certain degree were typical of comparable industrial settings at the time of observation. The model of divisional corporate structures that dominated the setup of large international companies (global players)

until the eighties of the last century can be characterized as follows (Bartlett & Goshall, 1994; 1995; Goshall & Bartlett, 1995): Organizational structures, supported by planning and control systems (controlling hierarchies), have to be tailored to centrally determined corporate and business strategies. There is a strict separation between a strategic (top management), a tactical (middle management) and an operative (lower management) hierarchical firm level, whereby the entrepreneurial function is concentrated at the strategic level of top management. The divisional and operative units perceive themselves as implementers and controllers of the central strategic targets. Horizontal and lateral flows of information are dominated by vertical (hierarchical) flows. These characteristics together with an increasing intensity of market competition often result in the following negative consequences: long (social) distance between the center and the operative business process, lacking strategic flexibility with increasing market uncertainty and dynamics, drying out of entrepreneurial initiatives at the operative base and a shortage of horizontal transfers of knowledge and experience between divisions and operative units. From a micro-political view, one can point to a general hierarchy effect that is strengthened when the separation between formulator, innovator and implementer roles is organizationally institutionalized (cf. already the tayloristic separation between thinking and acting resp. planning and executing and the resulting differences between a rationality of planning, of decision and of action (Brunsson, 1982; Becker, Küpper & Ortmann 1992): the asymmetry between enforcement power on the one hand and defensive, avoidance or preventive power on the other hand. Briefly speaking, with decreasing hierarchical level the defensive power increases at the expense of enforcement power, resulting in a mutual blockade of innovative activities: On one side actors of lower hierarchical level have increasing difficulties to force through changes bottom-up; on the other side the probability increases that top-down ventures of higher hierarchical levels shatter the resistance of the operational base (Küpper & Felsch, 2000, who included the nexus between personal and organizational risks implicated in organizational change processes in their discussions).

Ghoshal and Bartlett (1994; 1995) observed in their empirical research, that successful global players started at the end of the eighties to restructure activities intended to adapt to the following new model of corporate structure: creation of a comprehensive and attractive corporate vision and mission instead of putting an overemphasis on central strategic planning, focusing on effective management processes instead of formalized and standardized planning and control systems and the development of staff capabilities and perspectives instead of a dirigiste training and control of behavior, thereby, relocating entrepreneurial thinking and

acting back to the operational base (*intrapreneurship*), encouraging the horizontal knowledge transfer and an identification with the organizational vision and mission. Referring to our concept of self-identity, this may promote the attraction and development of more employees with creative and entrepreneurial capabilities as a consequence of a balanced self-identity combining an adequate degree of personal autonomy with a social identity that is more related to the organization than to e.g. one's profession and expertise. As Küpper & Felsch (2000) showed, a balanced self-identity may also be interpreted as a balance between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation the latter being a prerequisite for innovate as well as entrepreneurial capabilities (Khalil, 1997, for an interesting approach to a theory of entrepreneurship).

Eventually Ghoshal and Bartlett (1994; 1995) suggest a radical reform of management responsibilities that can be interpreted as a relocation and institutionalization of management power in the form integrator and broker power. Looking at the three basic types of organizational processes, management responsibilities are shifted in a way that appears like turning the traditional organizational pyramid upside down: *Operative Management* is primary responsible for the *entrepreneurial process* which is directed towards the creation and utilization of opportunities by exploring actual market information in connection with one's own knowledge base. While the middle management should promote this process by reviewing developmental and supporting activities (broker power), top management should deliver guidelines for this process by formulating strategic missions and performance standards (integrator power). The primary responsibility of the so-called *integration process* rests with the *middle management* that by horizontal coupling of capabilities, knowledge and resources should ensure the creation of synergies for the corporation as a whole (broker and integrator power). Top management supports this process by cultivating organizational values (corporate identity: integrator power), whereas operational management should handle the resulting operational interdependencies and personal networks (broker power). The primary responsibility of *top management* rests in the *renewal process* (organizational and fundamental strategic changes) by forming and anchoring of a corporate vision (integrator power), supported by middle management that should build up trust relationships as a basis for the development of cooperative attitudes (integrator power), whereas the operative management should be able to handle the tensions between short term performance and long-term ambitions (broker power).

Even if a lot of questions concerning the details of resulting power games remain, empirical evidence points to a potential of entrepreneurial effectiveness and innovativeness that can be

seldom realized in big companies that are confronted with a high degree of market competition and dynamics.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

‘We cannot enquire into power without an enquiry into its organization. Equally, we cannot make serious enquiry into organizations without an enquiry into power. Power is inscribed in the core of organizational achievements.’ (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006: 2.)

Referring to Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips (2006: 1) ‘power is the most central concept in the analysis of organization(s) and organizing’. Taking this into account, power can also be seen as a central concept for the analysis of organizational strategizing and the three central terms ‘praxis, practices and practitioners’ (Whittington, 2003; 2006) that serve as the basic s-as-p conceptual framework and vocabulary can be complemented by a micro-political approach. From a micro-political view, an explanation of the ‘[s]ituated, socially accomplished flows of activity that strategically are consequential for the direction and survival of the group, organization or industry’ (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007: 11) starts with a consideration of the micro-political context of strategizing. The organization is defined as a system of interwoven power games and structures that enable and restrict the strategic activities of the organizational members (Crozier & Friedberg, 1979; Küpper & Ortmann, 1986). As strategy *praxis* encompasses ‘all the various activities involved in the deliberate formulation and implementation of strategy’ (Whittington, 2006: 619), we have illustrated how it may be constituted by and shaped through routine, innovation and project power games.

Additionally, we emphasize the role of a micro-political perspective for the central concept of *practice*. As far as all social resp. strategic practices are bound to relational structures of interaction, they comprise a relational power dimension that reflects power relationships of participating agents. These practices are, therefore, integrated into the organizational network of power games in which strategically acting agents mobilize their power sources and try to build up strong power positions. Due to the fact that the whole range of strategy practices is of peculiar interest for the s-as-p approach (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007), a micro-political lens can especially facilitate an analysis of informal and emergent strategy practices as well as explain deviations between planned, implemented and routinized strategy practices due to power processes.

The concept of the strategy *practitioner* (Whittington, 2003; 2006) can also be complemented by the concept of the micro-political agent. The concept of strategy is related to individual behavior: The behavior of the organizational members can be interpreted as the expression of their individual strategies. This implicates that collective behavior like organizational strategies can be reconstructed from the interdependent strategies of individuals. Furthermore, it is assumed that individual behavior follows a subjective rationality. Subjective rationality does not necessarily require a subjective consciousness of the actor, however, in terms of a research strategy the particular rationality has to be reconstructable by means of the actor specific perception of the context (Küpper & Felsch, 2000). With reference to the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984), the strategic behavior of organizational members is always contingent behavior that depends on an organizational context, related opportunities and constraints. At the same time, this behavior is autonomous and indeterminate. Through an affiliation of the relation power concept and social-psychological identity constructs, the duality of structure and agency can be located at the micro-level in this connection (Küpper, 2004 referring to Felsch, 1999).

To illustrate the contribution of a micro-political analysis to the s-as-p approach, we will associate our five research questions to the key questions outlined by Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl (2007) in the following section. With the examination of our first research question (*Who is a strategist from a micro-political view?*) we contribute to the second key question stated by Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007: 7): **'Who is a strategist?'** S-as-p research is based on a 'broader conceptualization of who is a strategist and a more detailed analysis of what that means for strategy research than is traditionally posed in the strategy literature' (ibid.: 11). S-as-p researchers especially aim to open a research agenda that goes beyond top managers, their decision making and their formulation of strategies. It focuses on the implementation of strategies through a wider group of important strategists on the level of middle management and the operational base as well as external actors like strategy consultants and investment bankers (ibid.). A micro-political view corresponds to this target: From the perspective of micro-politics, every individual or collective actor acts strategically when by following his or her interests and by mobilizing his or her power potentials he or she intentionally impinges on the patterns and structures of activity flows attributed to an organization. In this respect, actors of the operational base may act strategically by resisting to change that is intended to restrict or alter officially planned and implemented organizational strategies. In terms of an aspectual understanding of micro-politics, Ackroyd & Thompson (1999) call this 'organizational misbehavior'. In contrast, we have focused on managers and

experts (often on the level of middle management) as strategists who draw their power from performing managerial functions as integrators, brokers and negotiators, thereby influencing and shaping the process of strategy formulation, implementation and routinization as well as the control and evaluation of organizational strategies. The roles of these ‘pivot players’ are a matter of peculiar micro-political interest because they underlie a ‘double bind’ and act at the heart of micro-political conflicts. Moreover, a micro-political perspective allows us to analyze the influence of actors who lack a formal strategic role.

In this connection and with our second research question, we have also asked for terms of agency and the actor’s experience of being a strategist: *How do individuals build their identities as strategic actors regardless of their formal strategic roles?* A corresponding analysis of the formation and balancing of a strategist’s identity in micro-political practices can further the analysis of the question ‘[w]hat constitutes a strategist as a subject’ (Carter, Clegg & Kornberger, 2008a). We have shown that the connection of a relational concept of power with a social-psychological identity construct could be promising in this respect.

[...] [W]e can say that action logically involves power in the sense of transformative capacity. In this sense, the most all-embracing meaning of ‘power’, power is logically prior to subjectivity, to the constitution of the reflexive monitoring of conduct.’ (Giddens, 1984: 15.)

Our research questions three, four and five (*In what kind of power practices resp. power games are strategists involved? What specific power sources do manager draw upon to assert their interest and enhance their power position in strategizing? And what types of management power do individuals develop in strategizing?*) contribute to the analysis of the key question three: **‘What do strategists do?’** We have illustrated the micro-political activity of strategists that are permanently involved in organizational power games (routine, innovation and project games), mobilize their power sources (1. expertise, 2. control of the relationship between the organization and its environment, 3. control of information and communication channels, 4. the application of organizational rule), and follow their power strategies (strategic information search and offering as well as strategic clarification and convincement) to build up power positions in an organization’s strategizing.

**‘So what’ does a micro-political analysis of strategists and their doings explain?’**

A micro-political analysis of strategists and their doings can explain the situated strategic practices and outcomes that are shaped by the specific power configurations of a firm in form of the power relationships between micro-political actors with divergent interests and identities. It can illustrate the macro-consequences of power institutionalization in strategizing

and micro- and macro-perspectives on strategy can be interlinked. In addition, empirical research can be facilitated through the historical and contingent perspective on strategizing and corresponding social dynamics. Furthermore, a micro-political perspective on strategizing can encourage strategy practitioners to reflect on their own strategy practices and further their interaction skills. An experienced based typology of individual power strategies and organizational power games could also further the formulation of hypotheses regarding potential micro-political effects of strategic change in the future. However, a conceptual understanding of micro-politics cannot replace general social theories, it can rather foster social theoretical reflections through the visualization of organizational politics as a consequence of structural formations on the micro-level (Küpper, 2004).

To conclude: A conceptual understanding of micro-politics corresponds to the theoretical basis of s-a-p because it refers to a constitution-theoretical framework (Joas, 1992) resp. a practice theoretical one (Giddens, 1984). It offers a power related contextualization of strategizing and provides 'conceptual explanations of the social dynamics involved in accomplishing strategy' (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007: 11 referring to Seidl, 2007). Finally, a micro-political view emphasizes the role of the human being and a positive understanding of power that can contribute to strategy research in general:

'Power and politics generally carry negative connotations, and yet are a vital perspective on the strategy process.' (Chakravarthy & White, 2002: 190) 'When words such as manipulation, violence, and domination are so often associated with power, it is not surprising that power is often seen as something bad, something ignoble, indeed as famously remarked by Lord Acton, something corrupting. [...] Yet, power is not necessarily constraining, negative or antagonistic. Power can be creative, empowering and positive.' (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006: 2.) 'Power is a positive phenomenon in the sense that the only meaningful way for us to exist is within all sorts of power structures.' (Mantere, 2003: 42.)

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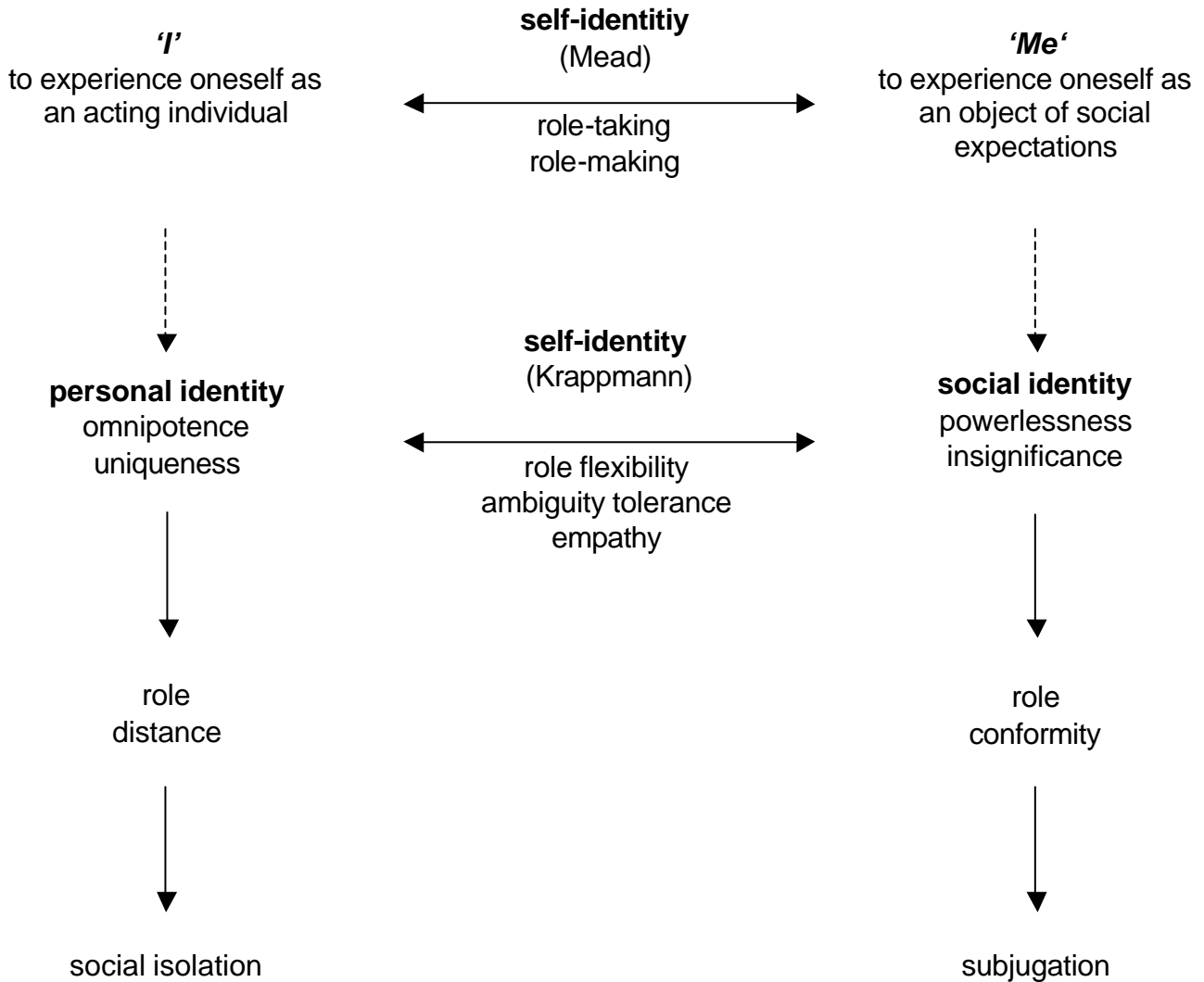
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**Figure 1: Identity constructions by Mead (1995) and Krappmann (1969)**

(Modified figure from Küpper & Felsch (2000: p. 300))



*Figure 2: routine, innovation and project games*

(Modified figure from Ortmann (1995: p. 64))

