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Bringing Sociomateriality into Strategy:

The case of strategy formation at Nudie Jeans Co

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Bringing sociomateriality into strategy: The case of strategy formation at Nudie Jeans Co

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Abstract

Strategy-as-practice research has traditionally focused on the relationships between practitioners, practices and praxis. However, the “stuff” of strategizing (i.e. the material objects, artefacts and tools which are part and parcel of the social practice of strategy) is, despite its importance, surprisingly absent in strategy-as-practice literature. Based on an empirical case study of the Swedish garment company Nudie Jeans Co, this paper starts to address this gap in strategy-as-practice literature by analyzing how sociomateriality interacts in strategy making. In addition to contributing to the increasingly vibrant strategy-as-practice literature, this paper also contributes to the sustainability literature by introducing an empirical study of a sustainable strategy formation. There are numerous studies of how sustainability *should* be integrated into strategy, while empirically grounded studies of how sustainability *is* integrated are scarce. Our findings show the importance of taking practitioners at different levels into account and to include everyday activities, material objects and autonomous activities when investigating how a (sustainable) strategy is formed. The findings also show the importance of challenging previous strategy-as-practice studies’ restricted framing of strategy tools as mainly conceptual tools. By including material objects, used as strategy tools, we argue that it is possible to gain a richer understanding of the strategy formation process. Furthermore, the findings not only lends support to the argument in previous studies that abstract ideas become real by first being concretized, but also illustrate reverse and dialectic processes and relationships.

Keywords

sociomateriality, strategy-as-practice, strategy, material objects

Introduction

Strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) scholars have focused on the relationships between practitioners, practices and praxis (Whittington, 2007). However, what is rarely taken into consideration are the material objects and artefacts which are part of the social practice of strategy (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008). This lack of research in the s-as-p field reflects an

omission of the relationship in regards to sociomaterial nature of organizing in organizational theory (Leonardi & Barley, 2010; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). It is, thus, not surprising that there have been recent calls for s-as-p papers where a sociomaterial lens is applied (Clautier et al., 2013).

To address this gap in previous research, this paper draws on an empirical case study of the Swedish garment company Nudie Jeans Co. Conceptually we build on the increasingly influential s-as-p literature. S-as-p is concerned with how the practitioners of strategy really act (Elms, et al., 2010) and what people in organizations really do (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008), instead of that strategy is seen as a property that organizations have (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008). Therefore it could be argued that empirical studies with an s-as-p approach is relevant in order to study how strategies are formed in practice, making it a relevant framework for the field of sustainable strategy formation (Egels-Zandén & Rosén, 2014).

This paper contributes to the s-as-p literature by asking: *How does sociomateriality shape strategy formation?* We show the importance of taking practitioners at different levels in the organization into account and to include everyday activities, material objects and autonomous activities when investigating how a strategy is formed. Furthermore, our findings challenge strategy-as-practice studies' restricted framing of strategy tools as mainly conceptual tool, and argue that by including a wider range of material objects it is possible to gain a richer understanding of the strategy formation process. In addition our findings not only lends support to the argument in previous studies that abstract ideas become real by first being concretized, but also illustrate reverse and dialectic processes and relationships.

Finally, there is an increase in interest and a debate regarding sustainability and sustainable business (Lash & Wellington, 2007). Scholars have developed numerous of conceptual frameworks for how sustainability *should* be integrated in strategy (Galbreath, 2009; Hart & Milstein, 2003; Lash & Wellington, 2007). Still, there is a lack of empirically grounded studies of how sustainability *is* integrated into strategy and scholarly have consistently called for more empirically grounded studies (e.g. Banerjee, 2001; Behnam and Rasche, 2009; Egels-Zandén and Rosén, 2014; Winn and Angell, 2000). Such empirically grounded studies are not only relevant for scholars, but could also provide valuable insights for managers struggling to integrate sustainability into strategy in practice. Hence, this paper contributes to the sustainability literature by introducing an empirical study of a sustainable strategy formation.

Theoretical framework

Strategy-as-practice research and the absence of sociomateriality

To study the formation of sustainable strategies, we make use of the influential strategy-as-practice literature and connect it to sociomateriality. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the gap between theory of what people and organizations do, and what they actually do (Jarzabkowski, 2004). This interest has resulted in the rise of various practice approaches in management studies (Jarzabkowski, 2004). During the last two decades, strategy-as-practice research has gained prominence in the study of strategy formation. Mantere (2005, p. 157) suggests that “strategically important issues” can be defined as “both

issues an individual agent calls strategic and issues the agent reports as crucial for the organization's success, survival or completion of its mission". The traditional view has treated strategy as something that organizations have; a property (Whittington, 2006). However, the s-as-p approach is mainly occupied with the doing of strategy; who does it, what they do, how it is done and with what it is done (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

In the s-as-p field, there are three main concepts, among and between which there exists a relationship; practitioners, practices and praxis (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). The practitioners are the ones who are concerned with and do the strategy (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Practices refer to the various tools, norms, and procedures of strategy work (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). It is through these practices which strategy is exercised (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Lastly there is praxis; the flow of the different activities, e.g. talking, meeting or presenting, that are involved in strategy-making (Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

While s-as-p research has proliferated, scholars like Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008) have identified that the material artifacts, objects, tools and technologies, which are part and parcel of the social practice of strategy (Clautier et al., 2013), are largely absent in strategy-as-practice studies. In particular, the implications of the way that material objects interact with human activity in strategy making remains relatively unexplored (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) are thus arguing that practices are the social, symbolic *and* the material tools through which strategy work is done. Vaara and Whittington (2012) have continued this notion and argued for that material objects, together with social practices, structure activities within the organization and thus the strategy process. In the same way practices can enable or restrain actors actions, these material objects, can exercise power and control over the actors. Hence, the neglect of material objects' interaction with human actors has led Clautier et al., (2013) to call for studies applying a sociomaterial lens to study strategy formation.

Following, some scholars have acknowledged the role of material objects in strategy work and argue for these being included in practices (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Molloy & Whittington 2005). For example, in their observations of meetings within an organization, Molloy and Whittington (2005) noticed that many common material objects were embodied as organizing practices, enabling and restricting activities. For instance, the tables in the conference room were arranged in a certain way, in order to promote collegiality, participation and equality, post-it notes on the wallcharts intended to encourage the participants, and the existence of an overhead projector allowed for spontaneous presentations (Molloy & Whittington, 2005). Nicolini et al. (2012) in discussing the various theoretical perspectives on objects in cross-disciplinary collaborations argue for the importance of so-called sociomaterial infrastructure, which is necessary as it enables collaboration (Nicolini et al., 2012). Further, they argue that collaboration is sustained by objects and artefacts, e.g. rooms, furniture, documents or computers, without which, collaboration would be impossible (Nicolini et al., 2012).

The study of material objects in strategy work is taken one step further in Kaplan's (2011) empirical study as she describes and examines the role of PowerPoint in an organization and the strategy making. She argues that in today's organizational life, PowerPoint is one of the most dominant material features in order to communicate strategies.

Kaplan (2011) found that PowerPoint, as a tool in the organization, not only was a dominant tool in strategy making, but also one of the key elements in knowledge production. Among other things, the results showed that PowerPoint gave materiality to strategic ideas. Until put in a PowerPoint presentation, the ideas were not real (Kaplan, 2011). PowerPoint made knowledge tangible and available for the people around in the organization. It could also be noticed that PowerPoint was not a static tool, but something that changed over time as it was engaged in different practices (Kaplan, 2011).

Coherent with Kaplan (2011), Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2014) conducted another study that is engaged with the role of material objects in strategy work. It is argued that strategy tools come with different affordances that can enable and/ or restrain their use. With strategy tools, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2014) refer to frameworks, concepts, models or methods, e.g strategy tools as Porter's Five Forces. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2014) are arguing for that the materiality of an object has the ability to favor, shape or invite the use of it, but at the same time also constrain. However the usage of the object does not only depend on the material properties, but also on the context and on the actor who puts his/her own interpretations on how to use it. While innovators may have a specific purpose in mind when designing the tools, there is no guarantee that the tool will be used in that predestined way (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2014). Finally, Whittington (2006) argued for practitioners' ability to change praxis. Through reflecting on previous experience, strategy practitioners are able to adapt to existing practices but also to create new ones (Whittington, 2006). If material objects are to be included in practices one could thus argue that these objects can change through the interaction of practitioners, strengthening Kaplan's (2011) reasoning that tools are no static objects, but change over time. As practitioners engage in practices, they reproduce and eventually change those, resulting in new praxis. Practices require interpretations where practitioners reproduce, transfer and innovate these practices (Whittington, 2006).

Top management emphasis in s-as-p studies

Through paying attention to the recursive relationships that occur between strategy tools and actors, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2014) are working for spreading a better understanding of how different tools in an organizational context can shape and influence the environment and highlight their importance in strategy work. Since strategy tools, thought of by Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2014) as concepts, models and methods, are more commonly used by top management it could result in exclusion of lower level workers' impact of the strategy formation. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) did identify that there is a tendency to restrict practitioners to top- or middle-management in s-as-p research. Previous studies have too often focused on top management, and have not taken other practitioners into account, whose emotions, motivations and actions shape the strategy formation (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). For instance, the neglect of strategy practitioners on several organizational levels could be noticed in the work of Whittington (2006), where strategy practitioners are referred to as "those who do the work of making, shaping and executing strategies" (2006:619). Not only should senior management be included as strategy practitioners, but also strategic planners, middle managers, consultants, corporate lawyers and business school gurus (Whittington, 2006). None of the mentioned practitioners are however from a lower level in the

organization, indicating that strategy practitioners are not likely to be found there. This tendency is also noted by Egels-Zandén and Rosén (2014) which have identified that emphasis in the s-as-p field is put on top management as the dominant creators of strategy. However, it is argued that strategy formation is much more complex than that, involving multiple practitioners (Egels-Zandén & Rosén, 2014). In line with other empirical studies with an s-as-p approach, one can argue that Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2014) also are neglecting practitioners from other hierarchical levels in the organization, since emphasis is put on the strategy tools used by management.

Egels-Zandén and Rosén (2014) provide an empirical case study where one has identified four strategic activities that together shape and form strategy. The activities take place on different hierarchical levels within the firm, where strategy not only is formed by activities done by management but also through activities that take place on a bottom level in the organization, referred to as autonomous activities. These activities included regular day-to-day work and hands-on activities operated by employees, where none of which was intended to contribute to strategy formation, but did anyway have an impact on the strategy in the organization. Similar results were recognized in Mirabeau and Maguire's (2013) study. Their empirical illustration shows how a bottom-up emergent strategy becomes recognized and legitimated to influence future top-down deliberate strategy. In addition, the study by Balogun et al. (2015) explores how the everyday actions of frontline workers contribute to an organization's realized strategy. Their findings show how frontline workers (in this study; tour guides) realize strategy through an on-going and mutual interaction with their audience.

While widening the range of practitioners, neither Egels-Zandén and Rosén (2014) nor Mirabeau and Maguire (2013) pay attention to material objects, leaving the issue of how sociomateriality shapes strategy formation in bottom-up processes largely unexplored.

Sociomateriality – a fusion of the social and the material

As the role of material objects in strategy has been increasingly highlighted, we draw on research into sociomateriality and connect it to the above discussed research into strategy-as-practice. According to Orlikowski (2007), materiality has been largely ignored by organizational theory. Materiality is referred to as “properties of the artifact that do not change from one moment to the next or across differences in location” (Leonardi, 2012:28). Orlikowski (2007) claims that materiality is involved in every aspect of organizing, from the visible forms such as chairs, computers, pens and tables to the invisible such as data, electricity and air systems. Further, Orlikowski (2007) argues that since sociomateriality shapes contours and possibilities of everyday organizing, it is crucial to develop new ways of dealing with materiality in organizational research if we are to understand contemporary forms of organizing.

Orlikowski and Scott (2008) refer to the umbrella term sociomateriality when challenging the deeply taken-for-granted assumption that technology (material agency), work and organizations (social agency) should be conceptualized separately. Orlikowski (2007) argues that by giving up this view of treating the social and the material as separate and largely independent spheres of organizational life, it will give us opportunities to gain analytical insight. Organizations are regarded as being sociomaterial because the social and

material are equally established (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Thus, it requires one to understand the physical structures (e.g., computers, buildings and offices) of organizational work in order to understand an organization's structure (Bansal & Knox-Hayes, 2013). The material environment does not act on the social environment or vice versa, resulting in; neither can be defined and described without the other (Bansal & Knox-Hayes, 2013). In other words "the social and the material are considered to be inextricably related — there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social" Orlikowski (2007:1437).

Orlikowski and Scott (2008: 455) have claimed that "people and things only exist in relation to each other". Therefore, Orlikowski and Scott (2008) suggest that a sociomaterial perspective treats all relationships between the material and the social as constitutive relations. In other words, Orlikowski (2007) argue for an approach that consider the assemblages of the social and material in everyday life, a constitutive entanglement. This view believes that materiality is essential to organizing, suggesting that the social and material are constitutively entangled in everyday life (Orlikowski, 2007:1437). In this approach, the engaging of everyday materiality of organizational life is not being ignored, taken for granted or treated as a special case. As Barad (2003:816) argues, this is a constitutive entanglement that does not presume independent or even interdependent entities with distinct and inherent characteristics.

A way of understanding this constitutive entanglement is to see a mutual agency emerging from their intra-action (Barad, 2003; Henderson, 1991). Hence, one should not locate agency exclusively in either the human (in complete control of the technology use) or the material (determining human activity). Rather, sociomaterial entanglements enable actions (Symon & Pritchard, 2015).

Sociomateriality in an organizational context

Based on the understanding of the current state of s-as-p research, it is useful to return to some particularly relevant studies of sociomateriality. For example, to understand the complex entanglement of humans and machines, Wajcman and Rose (2011) argue that machines, in their case communication technologies, can produce social practices themselves. The technical features are important for the shaping of social practices, but they are also entangled with social factors, creating a process of mutual shaping (Wajcman & Rose, 2011). However, Wajcman and Rose (2011) state that the power of the material tool on practitioners is connected to social norms that exist in the organizational context.

Endrissat and Noppeney (2013:59) present another interesting study in a product development process, showing how the immaterial is materialized. Endrissat and Noppeney (2013) argue that ideas need to be materialized in order to become products. Hence, aiming to highlight and observe the material practices that enable the materialization of an idea.

Further, Endrissat and Noppeney (2013) have identified three successive movements, which all are necessary in order to enable the materialization of an immaterial idea and to overcome challenges and boundaries that might occur during the process. Firstly, Endrissat and Noppeney (2013) argue that there is a need for the idea to go from abstract to concrete. In line and in relation to this, Ewenstein and Whyte (2009) argue for the importance of visual

representations as a bridge between the abstract and concrete. Ewenstein and Whyte (2009) argue that these are with what practitioners use when developing knowledge. Thus, visual representations are of important nature in order to communicate knowledge (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009).

The next movement is referred to as going from personal to collective (Endrissat & Noppene, 2013). In this phase, the challenge is to transfer the highly personal, emotional experience and/or message to the potential receiver, without losing the intended message (Endrissat & Noppene, 2013:59).

The third and last movement is referred to as the concept going from artistic to technical (Endrissat & Noppene, 2013). The basic idea and visual concept was provided and used for the further development of the product and served as a guideline for the overall direction.

The findings in the study by Endrissat and Noppene (2013) confirm that the material affordances of an object need to fit with the situational requirements (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2014). Additionally, Endrissat and Noppene (2013) suggest that an object receives its meaning and function through the actors that are using it. Hence, it is the web of relationships between the two, “that decides which matters come to matter” (Endrissat & Noppene, 2013:84).

A final study worth discussing is Henderson (1991) that, in line with Kaplans’ (2011), argues for the importance of material objects, in the study referred to as visual representations, including sketches and drawings. The study showed that these visual representations act as the means for organizing the design to production process, because they are developed and used through interaction, hence serving as the social glue between individuals and between groups. Thus, Henderson (1991) argues that it is the mundane interactions of actors, machines and paper that construct technological innovation. Consistently, Ewenstein and Whyte (2009) argue for the significance of visual representations when facing the challenge to communicate an abstract emotion into concrete.

In relation, the study by Henderson (1991) showed the importance of sketchings and drawings and how these are basic components of communication. For example, an engineer was fighting with the management to get her drawing board back, explaining that she could not think without it. Hence, sketches and drawings are crucial building blocks of technological design and production for engineers (Henderson, 1991). Taken this even further, the study by Henderson (1991) showed that the drawings are so central that people assembled in meetings even waited while individuals fetch visual representations left in their offices. Henderson (1991:467) argues that engineers need informal visual practices to think and to construct new designs collectively. Since sketching and drawing are crucial for communications, Henderson (1991) argues that the world of design engineers is a visual culture.

Methodology

While most companies engage in some form of sustainability activities, it is harder to identify those that attempt to integrate sustainability into strategy. Nudie is one of those companies and it is therefore a relevant company to study. Like many other s-as-p studies (e.g. Egels-

Zandén & Rosén, 2014), this study achieves closeness by examining a specific company.

Qualitative case studies are a preferred method when questions are asked with how or why (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Qualitative research methods also provide an ideal approach to understand work practices and organizational structures (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013), this is also emphasized by Vaara and Whittington (2012), as they are suggesting qualitative studies when dealing with research in the field of s-as-p. Regarding the study of strategy there has according to Vaara and Whittington (2012) been a methodological shift in the last decade. In traditional strategy research emphasis has been on quantitative studies, while the s-as-p approach invites to more qualitative methods, which thus has affected various s-as-p studies in recent years. There have been an increasing number of empirical studies where single organizations have been of interest and where researchers have made great endeavors to come closer to their object in study (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). The trend thus shows that methods such as interviews, participant observations, action research or video-ethnography are becoming increasingly important in the s-as-p field (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Hence, since the purpose of the study is to understand how sociomateriality shapes the formation of a (sustainable) strategy, our qualitative approach is in line with previous s-as-p studies both in general (e.g. Vaara & Whittington, 2012) and in relation to sustainability (e.g. Egels-Zandén and Rosén, 2014).

Data Collection

The empirical material for this paper partly derives from interviews from our supervisor's longitudinal study of Nudie Jeans Co. It consists of 28 interviews that were conducted between 2012 and 2014. Some interviews were already transcribed whilst others were transcribed by us. In addition, we have conducted five interviews with employees at Nudie, six interviews with customers and five observations in Nudie stores in Gothenburg and Stockholm. Lastly, documents including Nudie's website, videos, social media etcetera have been studied.

Advantages of using interviews previously collected for other aims, includes opportunities to read other material with eyes of this study's specific aim and purpose. In addition, a wider time span for the data collection was possible, which makes it possible to follow up on interviews and activities in order to understand how it has unfolded. Hence, an additional five interviews with employees at Nudie were conducted where focus was to follow up on activities concerning this study's focus; the repair service, as well as to sort out ambiguities.

Previous studies have shown that the formation of strategy involves not only top management but also multiple other practitioners (e.g. Egels-Zandén & Rosén, 2014). Hence, studying strategy formation requires empirical material that is gathered through a large range of activities that may have a strategic impact. To achieve this it is necessary to "go inside the process to examine intimately the kind of work that is actually being done" (Whittington and Cailluet, 2008: 244). In order to obtain a multifaceted picture and to get a broader understanding, this has been taken into account by consciously choosing interviews with different actors at different hierarchical levels in the company. This includes the CEO, the Creative Director, the Chairman of the Board but also, the architect at Nudie, employees in store and at customer service etcetera. This helped us to maximize the richness and depth of

the data (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This is, however, not only of importance in order to mitigate the top management bias, but it is also recommended by Czarniawska (2014) to interview several people who participate in the strategy formation, in order to get a broader understanding of how a strategy forms in the organization. In addition, Nudie's formation of their repair strategy unfolds in time period where the start was more than nine years ago. Therefore, it is of importance to have multiple views in order to get a complete understanding as possible.

A general shortcoming of interviews is that they only include the interviewees' own interpretations and thus, they are subjective (Czarniawska, 2014). In combination with the human factor where people could have trouble to remember things, especially details, five observations have been conducted and documents including Nudie's website, videos, social media etcetera have been studied in order to reach a more complete picture than the interviewees were able to provide. The observations were also made to complement the interviews and to compare if what is said in the interviews corresponds to how it unfolds in practice. During the observations that were conducted in Nudie stores in Gothenburg and Stockholm, we adapted roles referred to as observer-as-participant (Baker, 2006). This included short interviews with customers that had just handed in their jeans for repair and customers that dropped by to collect their jeans that had been repaired. Apart from these and the interviews with employees at Nudie, an additional six interviews with customers, with different levels of loyalty to Nudie, have been made in order to get a more comprehensive picture for the study.

With permission from all interviewees, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) audio recording allows the interviewer to concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview. We were interested in what was said during the interviews, rather than how it was said. Therefore, the interviews have been transcribed word by word without considering pauses, feelings, facial expressions etcetera (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Silverman, 2006).

The empirical material that this study had opportunity to collect and access was limited due to the time scope of this paper and the lack of interviews conducted during the earlier phase of the strategy formation. Therefore, suggestion for future research is to more closely observe strategy formation during the entire process. Perhaps, a startup organization where a strategy is not realized yet.

Data Analysis

Having collected the field material, there was a large amount of empirical data in need to be analyzed. Martin and Turner (1986) have suggested making use of grounded theory when dealing with a large amount of qualitative data since it provides a way for the researcher to screen and analyze the material in an efficient way. Turner (1981), for example, argued that grounded theory is suitable with qualitative data collected from observations, interviews, documentary sources or case studies.

The data from Nudie Jeans was collected in two main rounds with inspiration from grounded theory. Through making use of the comparison- and contrasting practices of grounded theory, it has been possible to develop categories and thus the movement from data

to concept could be done. Czarniawska (2014) emphasizes that by searching for similarities and differences between what is said in different interviews, documents or observations, it is possible to compare and contrast the data continuously. This process was necessary in order to find connections and as Martin and Turner (1986) are stating, this is seen as going to a higher level of abstraction in order to get a more theoretical meaning and thus make these connections in the empirical data visible. Hence, interviews, notes and documents were divided into categories which captured the main ideas. In this case, the data was screened and four broader categories were identified; “the importance of taking material objects into account”, “practices and material objects that change over time”, “the movements in a development process” and “social factors”.

However, there were some difficulties after having categorized the data since it was collected from different interviews which are based on different people’s perceptions, stories and memories. Thus, it was noticed that there were some gaps, inconsistencies and ambiguity in the empirical events. Some facts were missing and sometimes data was contradictory.

Therefore there was a need for a second round of data collection, where follow up interviews and observations were made in order to sort out the questions. During these interviews, focus was on the repair service, since this was of particular interest for this study. After having collected the additional empirical data, the same procedure of screening and categorization was conducted and placed in the right context to fill the gaps in the already existing data. Through the process of analyzing the data, connections have continuously been made between the empirical data and the theoretical framework, something that also is recommended by Czarniawska (2014). This, for example, resulted in the four initial categories that soon were reduced to three. This because one category did not appear as strong enough standing for itself, as it did not appear to contribute to any major findings. However, as we continuously worked with the three themes, patterns started to become clearer and the decision was made to go back to separate the category of “the movements in a development process”, from the rest again, and instead exclude a category titled as “social factors”. This, since parts of the analysis from this category could be integrated with others and the other parts were not contributing to existing research. The categories that were finally chosen were thus; “the importance of taking material objects into account”, “the movements in a development process” and “practices and material objects that change over time”. Throughout the analyzing phase, the theoretical framework has been used to provide an understanding of the empirical data and reversibly the data has in turn been used to strengthen the theory with the existing case study.

The naked truth about Nudie Jeans’ Repair Service

Nudie Jeans is a Swedish clothing brand originating from Gothenburg, Sweden. It was founded in 2001 by two of the three current owners, the Creative Director and the Chairman of the Board. Their stores consist of nine fully owned stores in Gothenburg, Stockholm, Oslo and London. There are also franchise stores that can be found in countries such as Japan, Australia and Germany.

The brand name Nudie, which means naked, stems from the idea of how the jeans should feel when using them; they should feel and behave like a second skin. The emphasis on a second skin has led Nudie to mainly work with denim that has the ability to age and form beautifully by its user. In addition, Nudie believes that jeans get more beautiful, attitude and character the longer you wear them and that a pair of jeans carries different stories depending of the owner of the jeans.

“Your jeans go where you go. They live your lifestyle.
They get abrasions and scars. They bleed. Just like you”
(www.nudiejeans.com).

Using the jeans the intended and desired way will result in that the jeans will have to be repaired at some point. Jeans are made of cotton which eventually will tear and make the jeans fall apart. In order to combine the actions of using the jeans as a second skin and the fact that they will break, Nudie offers a free repair service to their customers, in order to extend the life cycle of the jeans and thus to be able to use them even more. “When you love your jeans the most, you will come back and we repair them for you and thus, we have doubled the lifespan compared to when people throw them away” (CEO, 2013-02-28)

Further, Nudie has created an illustration; the eco-cycle, consisting of four activities, including the repair service that visualizes the life cycle of a pair of sustainable jeans, from the moment it is produced to the moment it is recycled. The ideas that are the foundation of the eco-cycle have always been embedded in the culture of the people and the company, but they were conceptualized in a brainstorming session and visualized by the Creative Director in 2011. However, it was not until the Creative Director took a pen and draw a simple sketch on the slate that the eco-cycle was created. Since then the eco-cycle has been the core strategy of Nudie Jeans. “Finally she just took some damn pen and drew on that damn slate [...] and then just boom, boom, boom. It was awesome” (Chairman of the Board, 2013-03-05).

Repair Shops

As a part of the eco-cycle, repair has become the most important part of Nudie’s business. Nudie has a service in their stores which offers customers free repairs on all Nudie jeans. Hence, customers can hand in their Nudie jeans to a Nudie store and get them repaired free of charge, without having bought the jeans at that specific store or even having the receipt left. The repair service was officially launched in the spring of 2011, in Nudie’s two stores in Gothenburg and Stockholm. The Creative Director explains that she grew up in an era and in a family where repairing, reusing and taking care of the resources was central. Accordingly, repairing and patching clothes was a part of her upbringing. “If you are from the 70s, of course you extended things when you grew, with different things like bands and put stars on the butt” (Creative Director, 2013-03-25).

The practice of repairing jeans in stores partly stems from the former store manager in Gothenburg who together with a colleague started to repair, first and foremost, their own jeans, as they had experience of hemming and repairing from their previous retail jobs. This developed as they began to repair jeans internally for colleagues at the headquarter and later for some loyal and favorite customers, who came by the store with their jeans that were in a

need of smaller repairing, for instance a torn knee or a crotch. Since they had the equipment, such as the sewing machine (which was there for hemming), threads, denim patches and the knowledge needed for simple mending, they felt that it was kind towards the customer to do it themselves instead of offering the service of taking the jeans to the tailor which charges around 300 SEK for a small repair. At the beginning, there was no intention for it to become an official and/or big service and the customer related repair activities were not officially sanctioned from top management (although these managers certainly would not have objected to the activities).

At the same time, unaware of that the employees at the store in Gothenburg repaired jeans for their colleagues and customers, employees at the store in Stockholm did the same. In both Stockholm and Gothenburg, they had the proper equipment (such as the sewing machine) and the store employees had personal interests in repairing jeans. Combined, this was the starting point for the practice of repairing jeans.

In sum, the combination of the knowledge and previous experience and at the same time, the result of commitment and passion for the products, employees at Nudie started to offer a repair service. In addition, the company environment, the love for vintage and the products, together with the belief that denim becomes better-looking with time, might also have contributed to the development of the repair service.

Inspired by the ideas of repairing that had emerged in the Nudie stores, ideas of repairing jeans and selling them as second-hand came up in a meeting about an upcoming event called “Klädbytardagen” (Clothing-Exchange-Day). “The car industry, they sell a car 20 times. They sell it when it is new, then you give it service and you sell it again. They earn money every time they sell that damn car and they sell it 20 times” (Sales and Marketing Director, 2013-02-14). At the event in April 2011, Nudie started to offer free repair service of their old Nudie jeans. In addition, people who did not want to get their jeans repaired could hand them in and in exchange get 20 percent discount on a new pair.

Currently, the repair shop at Vallgatan in Gothenburg receives about 70 jeans per week (including Nudie jeans bought from other retailers) that are in need of a repair. At the same time they sell 100 pairs of jeans per week in the store. If a customer would like to have his or her jeans repaired, he or she needs to go to the store and also a few weeks later go back to pick them up. The Sales and Marketing Director and the Chairman of the Board both see the repair service as a possibility to increase the traffic to the stores, and hence this will hopefully result in a sales increase. The sales for two repair shops in Gothenburg and Stockholm did increase dramatically between 2011 and 2012, after the launch of the repair service. “... [T]he first three month we increased the sales with 30 percent compared to before [...] maybe it was very good weather or something, but I don’t care. I think it was because we started the repair service” (Sales and Marketing Director, 2015-04-17).

With the expansion of their repair service, Nudie’s managers realized that they had to replace the in-store sewing machines with more advanced machines. The old ones were standard hemming machines which only could sew straight in a speed that was constant. As a result, with the new sewing machines, the time to repair a pair of jeans shortened significantly.

Since the repair service has developed and is now such a large part of their business, the top management at Nudie Jeans has decided to rename all their fully-owned stores to “Nudie Jeans Repair Shop” instead of “Concept Store”. This, to reflect the focus on repair.

However, before the decision was made it was debated and discussed among several employees at the head office. There were arguments against the transformation of the name as “Repair Shop” entailed a negative connotation. For example, the former Retail Manager was not convinced that the change to “Repair Shop” would receive only positive reactions and thus, may cause some negative marketing. On the other hand, arguments in favor of “Repair Shop” meant that it was unique; no other brand offered free repair service, it was bold and that a “Concept Store” required a concept and according to for example the CEO and Chairman of the Board, Nudie had not fully developed their concept at this time.

“This is not a god damn concept store, this is a repair shop”
(Chairman of the Board, 2013-03-25).

The restructuring from concept stores into repair shops was first introduced in the fully owned stores, but later also successfully implemented in franchise stores, however this did bring about some problems. For example, in Japan, there was hesitation from the distributor to actually offer a repair service for the customers. There was fear that the customer might be dissatisfied with the mending since Japanese customers were known to have high expectations. The managers at Nudie’s Swedish headquarter finally managed to convince the Japanese distributor by, for example, showing statistics on customer satisfaction and increased profitability after the introduction of the repair service. Once convinced, this led to extensive repair workshops in Japan, where the staff was taught how to do proper repairing.

As a part of the transformation from concept store to repair shop, Nudie has put more emphasis on the sewing machine. For instance, the Chairman of the Board believes that the sewing machine needs to have the best possible location in the store. According to him, it would be perfect if there was someone repairing during opening hours in order to give the impression that something happens instead of the shop feeling empty.

The ideas of having the repair service and the sewing machines in focus stem from the fact that the Chairman of the Board believes that one should; “...do what you want to talk about. You should not need to talk about it, if you need to talk about it is because you are unclear” (Chairman of the Board, 2013-03-25) referring to the sensitive fact that jeans are torn and eventually are in need of a repair. The issue of the material; cotton, is central and the employees are well aware of the problems regarding this. “Cotton is cotton, cotton tears” (Retail Manager, 2013-03-25). Nudies Retail Coordinator states that it is important to explain to the customer how the fabric behaves and, thus, get more understanding when customers’ jeans are torn.

When Nudie started their production of jeans, their fit ‘Slim Jim’ was the slimmest on the market. Nowadays this fit is categorized as regular, thus the view of the jeans fit have changed in favor for tighter jeans. In addition, compared to previously, many people now wear their jeans lower than they did in the 70’s and 80’s. All these factors affect the material and leads to larger tensions. The fabric will tear if you wear tight jeans low and if you ride a bike without pulling up the jeans etcetera, since this creates friction. Concerning this, Nudie’s

Retail and Webshop Manager explains that he has to repair his jeans more often compared to others, since his thighs are larger than average and consequently it creates friction.

The Retail Coordinator claims that customers generally have a view that jeans will last forever. There is not the same understanding for the material of jeans as it is for other fabrics. “No one would have the idea to wear his suit pants to crawl around in the same way on the floor or ride the bike in them or whatever it is” (Retail Coordinator, 2014-02-28). By communicating on the Nudie website how one should take care of jeans, that they will eventually tear and how one can repair them, Nudie representatives believe that they will gain more credibility but also educate and create awareness among consumers.

“... many, you just put makeup on the pig, one just keeps on putting make up on pigs. [...]

Everyone knows that it is a pig, but one tries to put makeup on to make them not look like pigs. It looks like a zebra. And then we sell zebras. But actually it is only pigs. If you look at Stuk [...] their name is Stuk Manufacture and everything feels like there is a connection with some kind of manufacture and crafts, but in fact, it is cloths that they have bought from others and which is mostly made in China”

(Chairman of the Board, 2013-03-25).

In addition, Nudie believes that visualizing their repair service in store, instead of hiding the sewing machines, is a way of communicating their ideas into practice and creates a feel of knowledge and credibility; that Nudie actually has the knowledge of what they are doing and are not just talking. In addition, it counteracts the fact that some companies appear as something that they are not. By having the repair service visualized in the stores through the sewing machines, it is possible for the customer to see how the repair service is connected to the name “Repair Shop” and to the visualized eco-cycle on the wall etcetera.

“As much as it is a service to repair jeans in the stores, just as much it [...] embodies the eco-cycle. To show and indicate when you enter the store; here you repair jeans. Ah..repairs.”

(Sales- and Marketing Director, 2015-04-17)

However, the repair service has not developed entirely without resistance and anxiety from the employees at the headquarter with concerns and discussions have arisen. In the eyes of the Retail Manager, the purpose is to operate as good stores as possible and to sell clothes. Will customers understand that it is a clothing store if they only see sewing machines from the windows? Thus, there were different opinions and a situation where the operational and strategic priorities were not clearly aligned.

As mentioned, the visual is crucial at Nudie. The Project Manager started in 2013 to work on a tattoo inspired book with pictures of different styles of mending. With this, Nudie wants to, yet again; communicate their ability and their knowledge of repairing. So far, the book is still under development and in the hands of the Architect at Nudie. Further, on the wall at the store at Vallgatan, Nudie has put polaroid pictures of different jeans and repairs. This to involve the customers, but also to show the customers the different possible appearances that can arise with the dry jeans. “We are a brand that wants to involve the

customers. We want to become friends with the customers in some way” (Architect, 2014-02-11).

Currently, the repair service has almost only received positive response from the customers and the repair shop at Vallgatan receives loads of jeans per week, a regular week they can receive 70 pair of jeans. This has led to the fact that it takes longer for a customer to get his/her jeans repaired, approximately 4 weeks. In addition, the repair service has evolved and the employees at store have also helped customers to repair knitted sweaters, (denim) shirts, hats etcetera, in case they believe they are able to do it. However, the current sewing machine is not optimal for this since the needle sometimes is slightly too rough.

Repair Kit

Nudie Jeans offers besides the possibility to repair worn jeans for free in their repair shops, a do-it-yourself solution for people whose jeans are broken. This, in terms of a repair kit, is currently a small envelope containing the most important parts needed for repairing your jeans. The repair kit has come in different versions throughout the years and has always been offered for free. The first version appeared in 2006 as an accessory for the jeans fit Baggy Björn.

The majority of the employees at the headquarter use snuff, a tobacco product very characteristic for Sweden. “[T]here is no other place on earth where one gets an abrasion of a snuff box on the jeans” (Creative Director, 2013-03-25). The snuffbox is often put in the back pocket of the jeans. So with time, the jeans would get a circular abrasion from the box. This abrasion commonly appeared on the dry jeans of Nudie employees and thus the Creative Director used this abrasion of a snuff box on a pre-washed fit that was sold in 2002 and sold for several seasons.

In combination to the popularity of the snuff box abrasion, there was a growing idea in the company to offer the customers something more than just the jeans. They wanted to add something, create more value for the customer, and create something fun. There were discussions regarding the possibility to send real snuff boxes with the jeans and hence, make it possible for to the customer to break in their jeans themselves with this abrasion. This idea was however later rejected since questions arose what it meant to send snuff boxes with the jeans to customers. From the previous experience of having a snuff box abrasion on jeans, Nudie knew that it could be problematic. It could create a connection to the tobacco industry which is not ideal when having such a broad range of customers. If doing so, it could be interpreted that Nudie promoted snuff and tobacco, something that actually causes an addiction and damages the health of people. In previous years, worried mothers had called and accused Nudie of lobbying for the tobacco and snuff industry. “[T]here was always some mother who got in touch and wondered why we advertised tobacco” (Creative Director, 2013-02-25). Furthermore, while it in Sweden rarely is a problem for customers to understand that it is the abrasion of a snuff box, since this is a regular product found in stores, for people outside Sweden it was not always clear. There are stories where customers thought it has been a jar of Nivea creme, a lid for pringles or even Swedish condoms.

In order to avoid further confusion and connections to tobacco, Nudie representatives decided to send a circular tin box with the jeans that would make the snuff box abrasion

possible. To avoid the connection to tobacco, Nudie representatives filled it with sandpaper, a button, thread and fabric and thus, the focus could shift from tobacco and an addiction, to a more consumption conscious approach. Now one could actually refer to the tin-box as something that would increase the life span of your jeans; a repair kit.

During the last eight years, there have been several versions of the repair kit. The first repair kit, as described, was very simple and consisted of only sandpaper, some fabrics, thread and a button, something that employees have described as insufficient and not really destined for the work that repairing need. “I mean, the first repair kit - it was totally worthless! Like very little thread, sandpaper [...] I do not know what you could do with it.” (Project Manager, 2015-04-13).

Even though the first repair kit seemed to be very simple and did not live up to its name, it was very popular and eventually ran out of stock. It was however unclear if the repair kit was requested because it was practical for repairing the jeans or if it just was an accessory, an item with symbolic value for the customer as it is a symbol for the brand. “I don't see any need for those (i.e. the repair kits). I think that's kind of a kitsch-gift thing” (Retail Manager, 2013-02-25).

A new version of the repair kit was released in 2012, designed and developed by the web shop coordinator as he still was an intern at Nudie Jeans. The new repair kit consisted of a thimble with the brand name inscribed, a needle, thread, denim patches and with a booklet describing how to repair your jeans. There were also references to the webpage where the customer easily could access additional information and video tutorials of how to repair the jeans in the best way. Another difference with the second version was that it was distributed through a rectangular box and it was also possible to order it, for free, on Nudie Jeans' webpage. This made it possible for Nudie's customers worldwide to order the repair kit, but this also create a huge problem. Since it was for free, American “freebee” sites ordered a huge amount of repair kits, and over a night the orders had exceeded 7000 repair kits. This was not manageable and the solution was to require a sort of counter performance from the customer, so if wanting a free repair kit, one needed to upload a photo of the torn jeans.

During the first months in 2015 the repair kit was once again out of stock, however a new repair kit, the third version, was launched in April 2015. The new version is more compressed, the thimble is removed and it is packed in an envelope allowing cheaper shipping fees and the production cost for the repair kit in itself have reduced from 36 SEK to 22 SEK, almost a 40 percent price reduction. However, it is not stated if the current version is final and optimal version. The Project Manager sees different options for the development of the repair kit. “Maybe we could have as with ice-cream. Five optional components are free, but if you add this topping and this topping you have to pay” (Project Manager, 2015-04-13).

Starting as a fun accessory to the Baggy Björn jeans, the repair kit evolved in a way where it became more than just fun; it increases value for the customer. Today it has become a natural part of the overall repair service in the eco-cycle. However, a problem that rises with the repair service is that not every customer has the possibility to drop by a repair shop, which is the only way to get your jeans repaired for free. The few geographical locations of the repair shops are creating limitations for customers to actually get their jeans repaired. Due to this, Nudie is continuing their action in sending out repair kits to customers asking for it and to customers that are from different cities or countries; “Well, yes, I mainly distribute it

to tourists or customers who do not live in Stockholm [...] in order for them to repair it themselves and to get more value...” (Store Manager, Jakobsbergsgatan, 2015-03-12). So this is one of the reasons for the repair kit to exist, to be able to offer the same service everywhere in the world. However there is also another, yet very important feature that comes with the repair kit; the possibility to educate customers how to repair the jeans when broken. With the repair kit comes a description of how to repair the jeans and also references to the Nudie Jeans website, where there are videos posted, showing how to repair your jeans.

“...but the large purpose is to remind people to not throw their jeans away, for god’s sake. Use them a little more, now is the time when you love them the most. Use them and repair them” (CEO, 2013-02-28).

Today, maybe the most important purpose is to remind people to keep their jeans, to stop the wear and tear culture. This is one of the core elements in the Nudie Jeans culture, influencing all activities.

Discussion

The importance of taking material objects into account

Our case findings echo the importance of taking all practitioners into account and to include everyday activities and autonomous activities when investigating how a strategy is formed (Balogun et al., 2015; Egels-Zandén & Rosén, 2014; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013). For example, the practice of repairing stems from the employees praxis rather than from those of the top management at the headquarters. The previous experience and knowledge that the former store manager and his colleague had in combination with their passion and love for vintage, second hand and their product contributed to the development of the repair service. Therefore, it could be argued that the repair strategy was a result of emergent activities that occurred at lower levels in the organization and that the repair service was not intended as a strategy at the beginning, but was formed through autonomous activities that later were pulled together and formed a strategy. Hence, our case findings support Egels-Zandén and Rosén’s (2014) critique that it is central to move beyond the top management bias in strategy-as-practice research. The findings are also in line with Mirabeau and Maguire’s (2013) finding about how bottom-up emergent strategy becomes recognized and legitimated to influence future top-down strategy.

Strategy is defined as “both issues an individual agent calls strategic and issues the agent reports as crucial for the organization’s success, survival or completion of its mission.” (Mantere, 2005:157). By taking this into consideration, it is seen that Nudie’s strategy has changed when the repair service appeared. Nudie started off by selling jeans, nowadays, they sell jeans *and* a repair service in order to differentiate from competitors. Through consciously positioning the sewing machines in a central spot in the stores, renaming their stores to “Repair Shop”, piling up jeans waiting to be repaired and displaying the repair service on the walls, we argue that the repair service has moved from being an emergent activity to become a strategic activity and a strategy for Nudie. Hence, as the repair service became strategic it led to reconfigurations in the stores.

While highlighting the importance of extending beyond top management practitioners, the Nudie case also illustrates the importance of these top managers. While our results resonate with Henderson's (1991) argument that mundane interactions of actors, machines and paper that construct technological innovation (or in our case strategy), it also modifies it in that the mundane interactions in our empirical case did not *construct* the strategy but rather led to emergent activities that in turn could, by top managers, be re-interpreted and connected into a strategy.

In addition to re-emphasizing the importance of both bottom-up and top-down processes, our findings extend previous research by showing the importance of taking the everyday material objects into account when extending the scope of practitioners. The wear and tear of cotton fibers, the sewing machines, the piles of jeans waiting to be repaired etc. were all integral in the strategy formation. For example, would the current repair strategy have formed if there were no sewing machines in the stores at the beginning? Would the process have occurred in the same way if there would have been no slate in the room where the eco-cycle was invented? These very concrete, material objects i.e. the pen and a slate on the wall, available in the room where the strategy formation partially took place, had very strong influence of that the eco-cycle strategy formation even was possible. Hence, it has been noticed that the material objects that have influenced and shaped the strategy formation in the Nudie case were not just a coincidence; rather, it has been the everyday material objects that have existed close to the different practitioners.

As noticed in the study by Molloy and Whittington (2005); many common material objects are embodied as organizing practices that enable, or restrain, activities. Our findings, thus, resonates with Jarzabkowski and Whittington's (2008) argument that material artifacts, objects, tools and technologies are part and parcel of the social practice of strategy (cf. Vaara and Whittington 2012). The findings also start to fill the gap in previous s-as-p studies that have paid limited attention to the way that material objects interact with human activity in strategy making (Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009), and allows for discussions of how strategy making is affected by the interaction between the social and material.

Given the top management bias in previous strategy-as-practice research it is not surprising that the "strategy tools", as defined by Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2014), mainly are those tools used by management rather than lower-level workers. For example, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan's (2014) "strategy tools" mainly comprise frameworks, concepts, models or methods such as Porter's Five Forces and SWOT analysis. The Nudie case highlights the importance of challenging this somewhat restricted framing of materiality. We argue that the s-as-p focus on practices and "strategy tools" would be enriched by taking material objects in the wider sense into consideration, by including material objects that lower level workers are more likely to use. For example, the sewing machine was of importance for the employees at Nudie, and indirectly the repair strategy formation, since it enabled them to repair jeans.

Furthermore, we need to expand the scope of material objects used by top managers in order to gain a richer understanding of the strategy formation process. Since, as argued previously, the pen and the slate enabled the Creative Director to create the eco-cycle and what was about to become the eco-cycle strategy.

The movements in a development process

In addition to emphasizing the sociomateriality of strategy formation and the importance of everyday objects throughout the organization, the Nudie case lends further support to the finding in previous studies that abstract ideas become real by first being concretized (Endrissat & Noppene, 2013; Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009). For example, Nudie use various material objects in order to communicate their visual model and strategy; the eco-cycle. Both the sewing machines and the piles of broken jeans waiting for mending represent and communicate the repair service. This action can be seen as the abstract strategy visualized as a model on the wall, the eco-cycle, becoming concrete and understandable for the customer. Thus, the eco-cycle communicates and spreads knowledge to customers, similar to what Kaplan (2011) where PowerPoint acted as a tool for knowledge production.

The activities from the repair strategy are embodied by the eco cycle. By actually repairing in store and that this is done by their own employees, the immaterial ideas of the importance of taking care of and reuse resources and the desire to double the lifespan of a jeans become materialized. The Nudie case, thus, strengthens the findings of previous studies by providing an additional study that has recognized the one-way relationship between moving from an abstract idea to something concrete in order to become a product, where the “repair service” can be seen as a product.

However, the Nudie case also illustrates the reverse relationship where the development of a product, in this case the “repair service”, moves from a concrete practice into an abstract idea, i.e. the reverse relationship compared to what has been identified in previous studies (Endrissat & Noppene, 2013; Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009). It could be argued that the product of “repair” was already a concrete practice in store before transformed into an abstract idea at the headquarter. The abstract idea then turned into a concrete product, “the repair service”, an actual official offer to customers.

The dialectic relationship between abstract and concrete could be taken one step further with the aesthetics (abstract idea) at Nudie partly explaining why the practice of repairing developed at two different stores simultaneously without communication. As Wajcman and Rose (2011) argue, the power of the material tool on the worker is connected to social norms that exist in the organizational context. It is reasonable to assume that the interaction between the employees and the sewing machine has been influenced by the aesthetics and the common view of what a pair of beautiful jeans look like. In other words, the abstract idea (aesthetics) lead to a concrete practice (repairing jeans) that in turn leads to an abstract strategy (the repair service) and subsequently concrete practices (repairing jeans on a large scale). The abstract idea thus found its concrete application (repairing the broken jeans) and enabled the emergence of the strategy.

Additionally, it can be argued that Nudie produce replicas of well-worn jeans; with mending, abrasions and tears, in order to communicate that jeans age and grow more beautiful with time and that this is part of authentic jeans. Nudie, through a pair of physical jeans i.e. replica, are thus communicating their repair service indirectly; a pair of beautiful jeans includes mending, thus when your pair of jeans are torn you should repair them.

In previous studies, researchers have argued for the important bridge between abstract and concrete (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009). In the situation regarding replicas, this relationship is going in both directions. Not only does the replica work as a bridge between the abstract

and concrete, but also as a mediator of the concrete into something abstract. Arguably, there is a concrete to abstract relationship; a physical and very concrete pair of worn jeans, to the abstract idea about the beauty of it and the idea of producing a replica as an optional shortcut to a pair of jeans with this authentic look. Later on, the relationship becomes reverse, stemming from these abstract ideas of the authentic look, to a pair of physical replicas i.e. concrete pair of jeans sold in store. Therefore, even though the findings recognize, that immaterial ideas need to be materialized in order to become products (Endrissat and Noppeney, 2013), it has also unveiled the dialectic relation between abstract and concrete.

In this empirical situation, the possibilities to concretize an abstract idea stem from the fact that this abstract idea rose as a result from a concrete product. Therefore, this study not only contributes by recognizing the reverse relationship but also recognize a situation where the abstract ideas that were concretized rose from a concrete to abstract relationship. In other words, the origin of the abstract belief of the authentic look rose from a concrete pair of jeans. Thus, in order for it to even result in a pair of replicas sold in store, there was a need for a concrete pair of jeans to become an abstract idea of an authentic look.

Another interesting situation is the moment the Creative Director drew the eco-cycle and visualized it into a model; it was concretized and became a concrete model and strategy. However at the same time as the model connected concrete practices to an abstract logic, the eco-cycle is an abstract model derived from concrete practices e.g. the concrete practice of repairing jeans.

Visual representations are significant when communicating an abstract emotion into concrete, as they act as a bridge between the abstract and concrete (Ewenstein and Whyte (2009)). This study has, however, again, shown the reverse logic with concrete leading to abstract. Here, the eco-cycle is a visual representation which acts as a bridge between the concrete practices in store and the abstract ideas of the strategy.

In this study, emphasis is put on the importance of the visualized model, preferably visualized on a wall, slate etcetera. Through the eco-cycle, the concept and strategy of repair was visualized and enabled communication from the small management group to others in the organization, both at the headquarter and to the stores, where the concept also was communicated towards the customer. Arguably, the eco-cycle acts as glue between individuals and groups, as stated by Henderson (1991). Further, the eco-cycle enables a connection between a customer's experience of a small activity, e.g. a free repair service, into a broader and complete picture of Nudie's strategy, the eco-cycle. Thus, the eco-cycle creates a sense of activity. The repair service is not just an offer that Nudie has; it is a part of a strategy.

Further, the development of the repair kit is interesting in terms of the abstract-concrete relation. The initial idea was to add a fun gadget for the customer and to build on the snuff box abrasion (a trademark for Nudie Jeans). However, an actual snuff box would signalize the promotion of tobacco and an addiction, making a tin box a more attractive gadget. However, it had to be given both a physical and symbolic meaning, i.e. it had to go from a personal to a common understanding (Endrissat & Noppeney, 2013). Thus, the thoughts at the headquarter needed to be mediated to the customers. In addition, this collective understanding had to shift from associations with tobacco to something more legitimate. Therefore, Nudie filled it with basic tools for repairing which created a new

connection and idea which was more accepted by society. Through this, a product development process is recognized that is different from previous studies (e.g. Endrissat & Noppeney, 2013). In this development process, there is a movement and a two way relationship between an abstract idea and a concrete product compared to the previous anticipated process moving from abstract to concrete.

Practices and material objects that changes over time

The case findings of Nudie suggest that material objects are central practices in strategy formation, acting upon the structure and activities in the organization, enabling and restraining action (cf. Vaara and Whittington 2012, Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009; Molloy and Whittington 2005). Our findings also extend the discussion of materiality in strategy-as-practice research by highlighting the importance of the opposite direction of the social-material relationship, i.e., that social practices also affect material practices. This has so far been ignored in strategy-as-practice research, while being recognized in sociomaterial research (Barad, 2003; Orlikowski, 2007; Wajcman and Rose, 2011). Henderson (1991) has argued, in line with sociomaterial research, that there are no one-way relationships between the social and the material, instead they mutually influence and construct each other. For instance, through the mutual interaction between the material and the social practices, the sewing machine in the Nudie case was central for the formation of the repair service, and thus the repair strategy. At the same time the sewing machine gained a new meaning as the social practice changed and materially developed and later was replaced with a more flexible version, suitable for repairing.

Similarly, the social practice of wearing low, tight jeans was central for the strategy formation as it lead to more readily torn jeans through it constantly being in touch with the human body. In other words, the need for repair become more central to increase the longevity of the jeans and thus to achieve the aesthetic ideal of Nudie. As Endrissat and Noppeney (2013) argue, it is the web of relationships between the social and the material which determines “which matter comes into matter” (2013:84).

This mutual relationship between the social and the material has in sociomaterial research been referred to as a constitutive entanglement, where mutual agency is emerging (Barad, 2003). None can say which of the two, the social or the material have stronger agency, hence, one should avoid locating agency in either the social or the material (Barad, 2003). Moreover, focus should be put on that the material and the social practices have been mutually influencing each other and together formed the repair strategy. In the same way that tables in a conference room are organized by human actors and thus changes the practices to enable collegiality and participation (Molloy and Whittington, 2005) or collaboration is sustained by objects and artefacts (Nicolini et. al., 2012), the sewing machine and the denim fibers both affect social practices and at the same time enable and restrict practices. Also one can argue that the sewing machine and the denim material are no static objects, rather they change and are flexible as they engage in different practices over time (Kaplan, 2011). For example, there are instances in the Nudie case where store employees repair other products than jeans (such as sweaters), which if scaled up likely in the future will require other more flexible sewing machines.

The empirical case findings also show that the development of material practices and their impact on strategy formation is strongly reliant on practitioners. With a strategy-as-practice approach, strategy is not something static that organizations have, but something that people in the organizations do (Whittington, 2006). Kaplan and Jarzabkowski (2014) emphasized the importance of social practices in strategy work since people put their interpretations on how to use and make sense of strategy tools as material practices. In the Nudie case it has been seen that the context and the practitioners surrounding strategy tools, in this case the sewing machine and the denim material, are of importance since they can change the practices surrounding these tools. This is cohesive with Whittington's (2006) statement; practices require interpretations. The practitioners interpret the practices and thus they reproduced, transferred and innovated (Whittington, 2006). The practice of how people wear jeans; tight or loose, high- or low waist, can be seen as an interpretation of what that particular person prefers, which affects the denim and how the material is torn. Likewise, the social action of people coming to the store and asking for a repair could be an interpretation of what the company is offering or is able to offer. Hence, the material practices of the sewing machine changes.

Following, it becomes interesting, that as the material practices have changed, the strategy formation has been affected. As social and material practices interacted in the Nudie case there has been a development that was not intended from the beginning. The development of the practice and the materiality of the sewing machine and the denim material was not expected, and can thus be seen as a result of the mutual relationship between the social and the material. This strengthens theories that argue for that practices are dependent of praxis (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Without someone asking for a repair or someone actually wearing the jeans, the material practices have no meaning and cannot develop. A sewing machine itself has no wider meaning; it is in connection to social practices that it comes into action. The denim material will not be torn and will not break as long as it does not stay in contact with the human body. Practitioners are thus central in reproducing, transferring and innovating practices (Whittington, 2006), thus as customers have engaged in the different material practices at Nudie, these have changed and created new practices. This realization to include sociomaterial aspects in the strategy-as-practice case studies would provide a more nuanced picture of how strategy actually unfolds in practice and how practices evolve.

Conclusion

It has been seen that recent strategy-as-practice literature has paid limited attention to sociomateriality. To address this gap in previous research, this paper has, based on an empirical case study of the Swedish garment company Nudie Jeans Co, asked: "How does sociomateriality shape strategy formation?"

Our findings show that employees at lower level have had an impact on the strategy formation; it was even found that Nudie's current strategy stem from the praxis of lower level employees. Previous studies have too often focused on top management, thus, other practitioners that may contribute to the strategy formation have been neglected (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Hence, this study have taken this into consideration, and showed the

importance of taking all practitioners into account and to include everyday activities and material objects when investigating how a strategy is formed. However, it has been noticed that the material objects that have influenced and shaped the strategy formation in the Nudie case were not just a coincidence; rather, it has been the material objects that have existed close to the different practitioners. In addition, the material objects themselves have not formed the strategy. Instead, it is in relation and together with practitioners that strategy appears. In regard to this, the study challenge previous researchers that have neglected everyday material objects and their role when considering strategy tools.

Further, the findings show that strategy formation includes situations where a material practice and/or product, together with the social, move to an immaterial idea, as part of the strategy formation. Hence, the study highlights a dialectic relation between material and immaterial as compared to previous studies that have mainly stressed the importance of an immaterial idea to be materialized in order to become a product.

In addition, this paper extends the discussion of materiality in strategy-as-practice research. The notion to include material objects in s-as-p research is not a new idea per se, however, what has so far been neglected are the relationships between the material and the social as emphasized in the research of sociomateriality. Material practices do affect social practices like s-as-p scholars are arguing for (Jarzakowski & Spee, 2009; Molloy & Whittington 2005; Vaara & Whittington, 2012), but also the reverse. The empirical case has shown that the material and the social practices have affected each other mutually. It is due to this interaction between the social and material that existing practices have changed and new practices have been created. Not only have practices changed over time, but the relationship between those have in the long run contributed to the strategy formation.

Our case findings highlight the importance to include sociomaterial aspects in strategy-as-practice studies. Therefore, we encourage future research to take this in consideration, since it would provide a more nuanced picture of strategy formation and how practices evolve. As indicated by the case study, strategy formation might well start before it is even realized that it is a part of the strategy formation.

Finally, it is interesting that the emergent activities have resulted in a sustainable strategy. Thus, the case of Nudie Jeans provides an empirical example of how a sustainable strategy is integrated in practice. Materiality have had a significant role in the formation of Nudie's sustainable strategy, hence, perhaps materiality is particularly important to *sustainable* strategies. Therefore, future research considering both s-as-p literature and the sociomaterial aspects would provide more empirical support regarding the role of materiality in the formation of sustainable strategies.

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