

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Department of Strategic Management &
Business Environment invites papers for the conference:



“TOWARDS THE MICRO-LEVEL ORIGINS OF ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINES AND CAPABILITIES”

-- June 12 and 13, 2009, Rotterdam School of Management, Rotterdam, the Netherlands --

Academic key notes: **Nicolai Foss** (Copenhagen Business School), **Sid Winter** (Wharton), and **Maurizio Zollo** (Bocconi)

“At present the origin of routines and capabilities is as vague as their existence.” (Felin and Foss: 2005: 5).

“... the need for a better understanding of the origins of capabilities becomes increasingly apparent.” (Zollo and Winter, 2002: 339)

The Call for Micro-level Origins of Routines and Capabilities

Nelson and Winter’s (1982) seminal work on evolutionary economics, as well as the Carnegie School (March and Simon, 1958; Cyert and March, 1963), has inspired a large literature on the role that routines, resources and capabilities play in our understanding of firm-level behavioral, structural and performance heterogeneity. However, the majority of studies directed at these phenomena rely on aggregated proxies to explain firm-level heterogeneity. Whether one buys a reductionist view of scientific inquiry or not – the view that *reduction is at the heart of scientific progress*, Elster (1989: 74) – it is a fact that a description of how individual and group-level processes enable and/or hinder the development of organizational routines and capabilities is still under-developed (Felin and Foss, 2005).

For example, recent attempts to decipher the role of cognition (Gavetti, 2005) and deliberate learning processes (Zollo and Winter, 2002) as a complement to the automaticity of routine behavior in firms’ learning processes mark initial attempts to develop a better understanding of the micro-level origins of collective knowledge. On a related agenda, the study of managerial attention as driving choice and search efforts (Ocasio, 1997; Cho and Hambrick, 2006) appears to be particularly relevant for uncovering the microfoundations of organizational evolution. Further, the role of motivation in the development of organizational interest alignment, and ultimately of firm advantage (Gottschalg and Zollo, 2007), might offer another approach to shed light into the individual antecedents of organizational competence. Alternatively, sources of deliberate or experiential learning that for example provide acquisition or alliance-related advantages (e.g. Zollo and Singh, 2004; Heimeriks, Duysters and Vanhaverbeke, 2007; McDonald, Westphal and Graebner, *forthcoming*) also comprise a promising avenue. However, direct efforts to explicitly explore the interdependence of different levels of analysis in organizational learning outcomes remain surprisingly rare (Reagans, Argote and Brooks, 2005). In particular, understanding key micro-macro (individual-organization) linkages in routine and capability development is an understudied area with significant promise.

As noted by Coleman (1990: 3): “A system’s behavior [such as an organization] is in fact resultant of the actions of its component parts [such as individuals].” Hence, overall there is a need for research detailing the microfoundations of routines and capabilities, to understand the characteristics and behavior and interaction of actors within a social system. To fill this gap, this Conference solicits papers that explore and analyze ‘the basic elements’ (Lippman and Rumelt, 2003) that drive differences in learning and capability development between organizations.

Some exemplary questions

Without seeking to limit the range of research topics, a number of important questions such as the following are left unanswered:

1. What are the (micro-level) origins of organizational capabilities and knowledge?
2. How do insights on individual and group traits and processes enrich our understanding of origins of routines and capability development?
3. How do individual-level factors (such as traits, abilities or motivation) aggregate to create collective capabilities?
4. What are the microfoundations of recurrent action patterns that shape organizational learning curves?
5. What are the cognitive, motivational and behavioral antecedents of organizational learning rates and collective knowledge creation?
6. What is the relevance of and interplay between mindful and less mindful learning processes in shaping organizational learning?
7. How do initial organizational or institutional conditions influence subsequent individual and group-level search and learning processes?
8. What is the relationship between individuals, organizational forms and collective learning? For example, how does learning aggregate or emerge under various governance structures?
9. What is the role of individual and group traits and processes in learning (or inhibiting learning) for tasks with different levels of complexity and interdependence?
10. What are the micro-level origins of rules and codes?
11. What is the process by which rules and codes are translated into individual actions? And what micro-level factors drive the adoption or rejection of rules and codes?
12. What individual and group traits and processes explain the precise execution of an organizational routine, as well as its adaption in execution?
13. Is there an ‘optimal routine’ or arrow core (Winter and Szulanski, 2001) and what are the micro-mechanisms facilitating knowledge transfer?
14. How do individuals and groups balance the investments in routinization, deliberation, problem-solving and exploration processes to enhance collective effectiveness? How are these processes learned and how do they evolve?
15. What individual and group conditions explain when routines are likely to act as levers of change versus causes of inertia?
16. What individual and group traits explain the effectiveness of knowledge variation, selection and retention processes?
17. What individual and group characteristics influence the firm’s ability to sense, respond to and shape environmental change and feedback?

Welcome!

The purpose of this conference is to bring together world-class scholars from different disciplines to advance our understanding of micro-level origins of organizational routines and capabilities. This Call seeks to encourage fresh interest in the topic of micro-foundations by soliciting papers from various disciplines such as sociology, economics, management sciences, psychology, neuroscience, philosophy and linguistics. In particular, contributions that address the questions raised above (or related ones) in either a rigorous conceptual form or empirical setting are welcome. All empirical methods – including qualitative, quantitative, field, meta-analytical, and multi-method approaches – are considered. Authors are asked to present original, insightful, interesting, important and theoretically bold research. Demonstration of a significant empirical and theoretical contribution is crucial. Participants will benefit from in-depth feedback and discussion.

The conference features the following key-note speakers: **Nicolai Foss** (Copenhagen Business School), **Sid Winter** (Wharton), and **Maurizio Zollo** (Bocconi). Plenary paper sessions with two discussants per paper help provide constructive in-depth reviews. We will conclude with a plenary panel session. The conference will end with a conference dinner.

Deadlines

Authors are invited to **submit full papers before March 1st 2009** to the conference organizer Koen Heimeriks (kheimeriks@rsm.nl). The papers will be accepted on a rolling basis based on relevance to theme, rigor and potential for contributing to the Conference (the notification deadline is April 1st). The final papers will be uploaded on the conference website before the conference. Participants without papers should notify of their intent to attend before May 15, 2009.

Practicalities

There is no conference fee. Hotel accommodation for paper presenters will be covered for 2 nights. Travel is not covered. For administrative issues, please contact Patricia de Wilde-Mes (pwilde@rsm.nl). For other questions, please contact the conference organizer Koen Heimeriks (kheimeriks@rsm.nl). Additional information can be found and will be uploaded at the conference website: www.irim.nl/capabilityconference.