

# Special Issue Call for Papers

## JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES

### Micro-Level Origins of Organizational Routines and Capabilities

**Submission Deadline 30 November 2009**

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#### Purpose

The aim of this Special Issue is to advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of the micro-level origins of organizational routines and capabilities. Specifically, a central premise of this Special Issue is that examining the role of individuals and their social interaction holds great promise as a new direction for understanding the drivers of firm behavior, organizational change, and firm heterogeneity in general.

#### Background

Inspired by Nelson and Winter's (1982) seminal work on evolutionary economics and the Carnegie School (March and Simon, 1958; Cyert and March, 1963), a vast amount of literature has emerged in which organizational routines, resources and capabilities are central to explaining differences in firm behavior. 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) --- nonetheless it is clearly also important to understand how individual and interactional processes enable and/or hinder the development of organizational competence and capabilities (Argote, 1999; Felin and Foss, 2005).

Some recent, promising work has begun to explore the micro-level origins of both routines and capabilities. 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, show promise in helping us understand some of the micro-level origins of collective outcomes. On a related agenda, the study of managerial attention as the driver of choice and search efforts (Ocasio, 1997; Cho and Hambrick, 2006) appears to be relevant for uncovering the microfoundations of organizational evolution. Furthermore, 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 and interactional antecedents of organizational competence. And,

sources of deliberate or experiential learning, as illustrated in the acquisitions and alliances literature (e.g. Zollo and Singh, 2004; Heimeriks and Duysters, 2007; McDonald, Westphal and Graebner, 2008), also comprise a promising avenue.

However, direct efforts to systematically 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 learning and capability development is an understudied area with significant promise. Thus, the premise of this Special Issue is that there is a need and opportunity for research to detail the micro-level origins of organizational routines and capabilities. To fill this gap, this Special Issue solicits papers that in essence explore and analyze ‘the basic elements’ (Lippman and Rumelt, 2003) that drive differences in learning and capability development between organizations.

## Focus of the Special Issue

Our focus is specifically on micro-level foundations that incorporate both individual-level and social interactional factors that might explain a variety of collective outcomes. Thus, while other recent calls have focused on the psychological foundations of strategy, this call for papers incorporates a broader perspective that also emphasizes the importance of understanding the social interactional, emergent and meso-level dynamics that may help us better understand collective outcomes, specifically collective outcomes related to the origins and emergence of routines and capabilities. In general, we are open to any perspective that furthers understanding of the micro-level origins of organizational routines and capabilities.

We encourage submissions that focus on the following questions:

1. What are the (micro-level) origins of organizational capabilities and knowledge? Where do capabilities come from?
2. How do individual-level factors (such as traits, abilities or motivation) aggregate to create collective capabilities?
3. How do insights on individual and group traits and processes enrich our understanding of organizational routines, learning and capability development?
4. What insights or theories from organizational behavior might help us further understand the development of organizational capabilities?
5. What are the microfoundations of recurrent action patterns (such as routines) that shape organizational learning curves?
6. What are the cognitive, motivational and behavioral antecedents of individual and organizational learning rates and capability development?
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, specifically when dealing with different levels of task complexity and interdependence?

10. What are the micro-level origins of rules and codes?
11. How are rules and codes translated into individual actions? And, what micro-level factors drive the adoption or rejection of rules and codes?
12. Is there an 'optimal routine' or 'Arrow core' (Winter and Szulanski, 2001) and what are the associated micro-mechanisms facilitating knowledge transfer?
13. What individual and group traits and processes explain the precise execution of an organizational routine, as well as the evolution of routines over time?
14. How do individuals and groups balance the investments in routinization, deliberation, problem-solving and exploration processes to enhance collective effectiveness?
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 or choices explain the effectiveness of knowledge variation, selection and retention processes?
17. How do individuals and organizations deal with non-routine events and exceptions?
18. Should routines be the foundational building block of organizational capabilities, why or why not?
19. What individual and group characteristics or processes influence the firm's ability to sense, respond to and shape environmental change and feedback?

We are mindful of the fact that topics related to the above questions have been studied in the social sciences, and for this Special Issue we deliberately encourage cross-disciplinary collaborations between management scholars and scholars rooted in different scientific traditions. We will give special attention to empirical contributions, but welcome submissions of varying kinds, including theoretical or methodological insights into our understanding of micro-level origins of routines and organizational capabilities.

## Deadlines and Submission Process

To be considered for publication in this Special Issue, manuscripts must be received by **November 30th, 2009**. Papers should be submitted as e-mail attachments to Koen Heimeriks ("JMS Special Issue" in the subject line) at [kheimeriks@rsm.nl](mailto:kheimeriks@rsm.nl). All manuscripts will be double-blind reviewed. Details concerning submission procedures will be available online and in printed versions of the journal. Please conform to the normal guidelines for submission to JMS (see [www.blackwellpublishing.com/jms](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/jms)).

The guest editors are seeking reviewers for this issue and solicit nominations and volunteers to assist in the review process. Reviewers are kindly asked to contact guest co-editor Koen Heimeriks. For remaining questions about the Special Issue, please write to one of the guest editors: Teppo Felin ([teppo.felin@byu.edu](mailto:teppo.felin@byu.edu)), Nicolai Foss ([njf.smg@cbs.dk](mailto:njf.smg@cbs.dk)), Koen Heimeriks ([kheimeriks@rsm.nl](mailto:kheimeriks@rsm.nl)), or Tammy Madsen ([tmadsen@scu.edu](mailto:tmadsen@scu.edu)).