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Call for Papers

Special Issue on Routine Dynamics: Exploring Sources of Stability and Change in Organizations

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The increasingly uncertain and fast-changing environments in which today's organizations operate call for a shift of attention from organizations—and organizational practices or routines—as fixed entities to the study of the distributed (Hutchins 1995) and situated (Suchman 1987, Lave 1988) dynamics by which they emerge and are constructed. Capturing how organizations learn to strike a balance between stability and coherence, on one hand, and flexibility and change, on the other, however, is non-trivial (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, Farjoun 2010). It requires abandoning static views of organization to reveal the microdynamics of organizing, including the processes through which organizational routines and capabilities emerge and evolve.

The first crucial step forward in this direction has been to relinquish a fixed characterization of routines as monolithic objects to study the internal mechanisms by which they emerge as practices (Feldman 2000, Feldman and Pentland 2003). As a result, we have moved from conceptualizing routines as automatic, as dead or as opaque black boxes, to seeing them as alive, embodying agency and the potential for change (Cohen 2007, Pentland and Feldman 2008). In particular, this reconceptualization has proposed that routines themselves have dynamics. These routine dynamics have generally been theorized around the interaction of performative and ostensive aspects of routines. Empirical research and modeling of routine dynamics has extended our understanding of the role of routines in producing stability and change (Howard-Grenville 2005; Levinthal and Rerup 2006; D'Adderio 2008, 2011; Salvato 2009; Zbaracki and Bergen 2010; Lazaric 2011; Rerup and Feldman 2011; Pentland et al. 2011, 2012; Salvato and Rerup 2011; Turner and Rindova 2012).

While some of the questions made possible by the practice turn in research on organizational routines have been addressed, many questions remain. The following is a thematic list of questions. We do not propose these themes as mutually exclusive as we recognize the substantial interconnection among them. Instead we suggest the themes as points of entry that provide opportunities to explore the effects of routine dynamics in complex empirical field settings:

• *Coordination.* Since Stene (1940), routines have been described as way facilitate coordination. At the same time, we find many instances of routinized action that seem to undermine effective coordination (e.g., when two routines have different time scales). How does focusing on the actions people take as they produce and reproduce routines enable us to understand the role of routines in enabling and inhibiting coordination? What role do the ostensive aspects of routines play in coordination?

• *Interdependence.* Routines have been defined as repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple actors (Feldman and Pentland 2003). Interdependence is an element of this definition that has not received much attention. What is the role of interdependence in the formation and dynamics of routines? Some attention has been paid to the interaction between performative and ostensive aspects of routines. What can we say about the interdependence of performative aspects within a routine, the interdependence of ostensive aspects of the same and of different routines?

• *Multiplicity and ecologies of routines.* Existing research has generally focused on one routine at a time. What happens when routines are interconnected? What happens when single performances contribute to multiple ostensive aspects? What happens when multiple patterns or ostensive aspects impinge upon the same performance?

• *Actants and artifacts.* What is the role of artifacts (material and immaterial), such as standard operating procedures, classifications, computer systems, and so on in the production and reproduction of routines? What is the role of artifacts as intermediaries and mediators (D'Adderio 2008, 2011) in the performance of routines? And how do they interact with the ostensive and the performative aspects? More generally, how are networks of action related to networks of actants (human and non-human, material and non-material)? How do different configurations—or sociomaterial entanglements—of actors and actants influence and shape routines?

• *Routines and institutions.* While research focusing on the dynamics of routines has been fruitful, routines exist within institutional and organizational contexts. What is the role of routines in (re)creating institutional contexts (and vice versa)? How does the practice-based nature of routines play a role in creating and recreating the contexts in which they are practiced? How do the interactions of routines within a context affect the nature of the context?

• *Mechanisms for feedback and change.* Under appropriate conditions, individuals can learn and change their patterns of action through feedback. Do these processes apply to organizational routines and if so, how? What is the role of feedback in the stability or change of routines? How is mutual constitution similar to or different from feedback? Why do some routines stay the same when we want them to change, while other routines change when we want them to stay the same?

• *Recombinations and mashups.* Some argue that routines evolve through variation, selection and retention, but what is the role of recombination (e.g., recombining chunks of routines to create a new routine) and mashups (e.g., combining in ways not defined by predetermined chunks) in routine dynamics? When are recombination and mashups possible? Is there any evidence that they actually occur? What factors facilitate or limit recombination and/or mashups?

• *Granularity and levels of analysis.* Organizational researchers often rely on traditional levels of analysis (individual, group, subunit, organization, field . . .). Can we construct a similar hierarchy for routines? How would that relate to traditional levels in organizational research? How does stability/change at one level influence (or fail to influence) stability/change at the other levels (up or down) in the hierarchy? Would this focus help us understand the relationship between organizational capabilities and routines (Becker, Lazaric, Nelson and Winter 2005)?

• *Time scales.* Routines operate on very different time scales (seconds, minutes, hours, weeks, months, years). The temporal dimension of routines has received very little attention. Does this matter to issues such as coordination, interdependence, institutions, stability, change, etc.? Do time scales help us understand path dependence, path creation and drift in routines?

• *Performance.* Routines are becoming increasingly distributed across projects and organizations. How do routines spread over time and space? How do the ostensive aspects and/or the formal or informal descriptions of a practice become instantiated at different points in time and across different locales? How are different spatial or temporal instantiations/enactments of the routine coordinated? What is the role of artifacts in this coordination?

• *Cognition.* Routines have traditionally been seen as reducing cognitive load and operating through procedural memory. When agency is conceptualized as a feature of routines, then otherwise settled questions of cognition become open to scrutiny. For instance, how do routine dynamics influence cognition, interpretation, and sense-making and how are routine dynamics influenced by cognition, interpretation, and sense-making? To what extent are these phenomena (traditionally conceived as individual level psychological processes) shaped by the sociological processes of organizational routines?

• *Generativity and novelty.* Some routinized processes (e.g., project management routines) are capable of producing significantly different substantive results each time they are performed. For example, an architectural firm may use a recognizable, repetitive process for designing buildings, yet each design is different. Other routines are focused on producing exactly the same result every time. What governs this difference? Are there limits to the generative power of routines? Can routines generate other routines in this manner? What is the role of formal descriptions of routines (such as standards

or "best" practices) and templates (actual examples) in guiding and shaping actions in routines? At what point, and in which circumstances, does innovation/adaptation erase the value of the template or model? And what implications should we expect for innovation and adaptation when formal routines and models become embedded into artifacts?

Review Process

All authors will receive an initial screening, and only papers deemed to have a reasonable chance of acceptance after the two or three rounds of accelerated review will enter the process. Submissions are due September 1, 2013. Manuscript submission is handled electronically via ScholarOne Manuscripts: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgsci.

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