

Organization Science
CALL FOR PAPERS

The Genesis and Dynamics of Networks
Deadline: October 31, 2008

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The use of network research in the fields of organization and strategy has exploded in recent times, with several special issues in top outlets like *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, and *Strategic Management Journal* testifying to the popularity of the paradigm. However, a cursory look at the empirical and even the theoretical organizational network literature presents a rather unbalanced picture in terms of the focus of the current research. Specifically, while an extensive body of knowledge exists on how network structures may contribute to the creation of outcomes at different levels of analysis (individuals, groups, organizations and populations of organizations), less attention has been paid in the literature to understanding how and why networks emerge, evolve and change.

A second, and related, issue with the organizational network literature is the strong likelihood that the current set of results in the literature that relate network structure to outcomes such as performance, may be spurious because they assume that network structural positions are exogenous. However, both the creation of and the positions that actors (whether individuals, groups, or firms) occupy in networks are likely to be endogenous to network outcomes.

We elaborate on these issues below.

Network Evolution and Dynamics. We know a great deal about the effects of networks; yet, most of our theorizing suggests a curiously static approach on the part of these actors with respect to the network itself. For instance, we know that actors that span structural holes can use their position to benefit themselves as they trade information, favors and the like. But this raises the natural question - why do structural holes remain unfilled? What happens as other players in a network observe the returns to network entrepreneurship of the sort envisaged most famously in Burt's work? Would they not be motivated to replicate these returns by restructuring their networks? Or would they respond by trying to partially appropriate the benefits that have emerged through side-payments rather than restructuring a known advantageous network structure. Thus, over time, why would opportunities conferred by a network not get redistributed through the reorganization of the network?

Similarly, it has often been argued that networks also serve as sources of constraint, restricting the focal actor's ability to change by embedding them in a web of relationships. Yet, one might surmise that once actors sense this limitation it is only natural for them to try to find release from these constraints. Limited, if any, research has so far examined whether such constraints can and are removed as actors change their patterns of embeddedness in response to their survival needs in an evolving environment.

Alternately, networks have often been argued to be a form of governance structure, a set of relationships that enables trust and thus fills an institutional void enabling economic activity. Yet, most institutions in societies are themselves evolving, and it is likely that institutional voids are filled by the emergence of new institutions or the strengthening of old ones. If so, are networks then redundant, their constraint costs now exceeding their opportunity benefits? Under what circumstances might this be so?

The rapidly evolving world of global business provides significant opportunities to do cross-national research in this arena. The economies of Asia are all historically characterized to a significant extent by a network form of capitalism. Yet, the development (and evolution) of institutions has proceeded significantly and rapidly in several of these nations. Does that therefore imply that the historic social and business networks that have been at the core of these economies must now evolve? Clearly, the changing nature of global business is providing both, a wonderful natural experiment to understand the consequences of firm behavior upon network structure and evolution, as also a powerful practical reason for us to explore issues of network dynamics. This serendipitous co-emergence of both theoretical and practical significance suggests that the time may be right for the next push in network research.

Endogenous concerns ignored. In addition to the important theoretical and practical reasons for drawing attention to network dynamics, there is also a salient methodological reason. To the extent that changes in the network emerge as a consequence of motivated actors driving those changes it becomes important to control for the econometric implications of network change, even to obtain accurate estimates of the network's effects on behavior and performance. Modeling this endogeneity and assessing its role in driving existing results on network effects may be another reason to focus on understanding network dynamics.

However, empirical research on network dynamics has been quite sparse. The paucity of empirical research likely stems from challenges such as the practical difficulties posed by obtaining longitudinal network data, the complexities of handling networks over time, and a lack of familiarity with the econometric handling of endogeneity concerns. In order for the field to advance, a cumulative body of empirical evidence is needed to advance our understanding about the emergence, evolution, and dynamics of networks.

Topic Areas

The above arguments suggest that a number of interesting and important theoretical questions fall within the ambit of this special issue. We would encourage papers that ask questions such as the following, at the individual, group, organization, or higher levels of analysis:

- How do networks evolve? Where do network structures come from?
How do network structures emerge over time?
- How does network evolution influence network outcomes?
- What causal antecedents influence the formation of network structures over time?
- What factors enhance stability in networks and which factors promote instability?

- How do networks and nodal characteristics co-evolve over time?
- How do networks and institutions co-evolve?
- How do networks get restructured? What is the role of network entrepreneurship in network restructuring?
- How do networks constrain or facilitate change and how do actors respond to these constraints and opportunities to restructure the network?
- How do network properties like structural holes manifest their action over time?
- How does social capital evolve and co-evolve with other network properties over time?
- Networks and geography: How do distance and time together influence network structure and outcomes?
- How do traditional networks in emerging economies adapt and change to rapid economic and institutional development and with what effect on outcomes?

The above is only a suggestive list -- we would also encourage authors to explore issues of network dynamics that extend beyond this list.

Deadlines and Submission Instructions: The deadline for submission of papers is **October 31, 2008**. Please submit your papers online on the *Organization Science* website and be sure to strictly follow the Submission Guidelines available at http://www.informs.org/site/Organization_Science/index.php?c=13&kat=Submission+Guidelines. Please identify Gautam Ahuja as the Senior Editor for your paper and also indicate at least three preferred reviewers.

Review Process and Special Issue Conference: The Guest Editors are seeking reviewers for this issue and are soliciting nominations and volunteers to participate in the review process. Potential reviewers are invited to contact any of the guest editors. Papers will be reviewed through the normal *Organization Science* double-blind review process. After the first round of reviews, the authors of the most promising submissions will be invited to a Special Issue Conference on “Network Dynamics,” to be held in Northern Italy in June 2009.

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