University of Groningen

An Introduction to the Special Issue on Managing Complexity within and Across Organizational Boundaries

Dick, Penny; Faems, Dries; Harley, Bill

Published in:
Journal of Management Studies

DOI:
[10.1111/joms.12261](https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12261)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2017

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Dick, P., Faems, D., & Harley, B. (2017). An Introduction to the Special Issue on Managing Complexity within and Across Organizational Boundaries. *Journal of Management Studies*, 54(2), 129-131.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12261>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

An Introduction to the Special Issue on Managing Complexity within and Across Organizational Boundaries

The Editors

Penny Dick, Dries Faems and Bill Harley

University of Sheffield; University of Groningen; University of Melbourne

Claims that we are living through a period of unprecedented volatility, complexity and even chaos are not new. Consultants and business gurus routinely pronounce epochal shifts and put forward prescriptions for managing in a complex age. Social scientists have produced a variety of labels in attempts to capture what they see as the essence of changes such as the network society, risk society and audit society.

Numerous changes appear to contribute to greater complexity within and outside organizations. We see how the emergence of economic and political disruptions question traditional governance structures and management practices. Moreover, responding to such changes often requires engaging in complex interactions with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders. At the same time, organizations face increasingly complex regulatory frameworks, with a plethora of regulatory institutions at local, provincial, national, regional and global levels. Such increased scrutiny of organizational actions renders ceremonial responses to complexity ever more problematic. Whereas new technologies might help organizations to deal with increased demands from different institutions, their implementation often entails new modes of complexity, which jeopardize their actual success. All of this has massive implications for how organizational actors respond to and manage complexity as both an environmental condition and as the generator of different types of internal, external and inter-organizational demands.

This special issue brings together a set of articles that theorize on the management of complexity within and across organizational boundaries from different conceptual and methodological perspectives. In his conceptual paper, Tsoukas emphasizes that theoretical complexity is needed to account for organizational complexity. This implies that,

Address for reprints: Dries Faems, University of Groningen (D.L.M.Faems@rug.nl).

instead of simplifying complex organizational phenomena, scholars should aim at complexifying theories. To do so, Tsoukas points to the relevance of moving from a disjunctive to a conjunctive mode of theorizing in organization and management studies. In this way, Tsoukas formulates an alternative theoretical approach that, instead of simplifying complexity, embraces the complexity of complexity.

The second paper in this special issue, by Palermo, Power, and Ashby, explores complexity in the context of responses by UK finance sector organizations to the global financial crisis. It focuses specifically on attempts to improve 'risk culture' in the finance sector. The authors argue that in the wake of the crisis, organizations were increasingly under pressure to rebalance their risk cultures in terms of two competing logics, a 'logic of opportunity' (which was dominant before the crisis) and a 'logic of precaution' (dominant after the crisis). The apparent incompatibility of the two logics generated a situation of institutional complexity and the paper examines the ways that actors within and around the finance sector sought to navigate this complexity. In developing a process model based on their empirical study of the UK finance sector, the authors contribute to literatures on institutional complexity and means-ends decoupling.

The third paper is a conceptual piece. In it, Schneider, Wickert, and Marti rely on insights from social systems theory to develop a conceptual model that explains how firms respond to environmental complexity and how such responses can change the environmental complexity of other firms. The core contribution of this paper is the conceptual distinction between internal complexity and collaborative complexity. The authors develop specific propositions on why organizations sometimes address environmental complexity on their own by means of internal complexity, while in other circumstances they do so in collaboration with other organizations by means of creating collaborative complexity. They also reflect on the implications of such choices on the environmental uncertainty of other firms. Finally, they apply their conceptual insights in the particular setting of CSR, illustrating different constellations of environmental uncertainty, internal complexity and collaborative complexity.

The fourth paper moves inside the organization to consider the micro-level consequences of complexity. Ahmadi, Berchiccia, and Jansen's empirical study focuses on how decision-making complexity, which they conceptualize as involving multiplicity (large number of factors), interdependence, and diversity (heterogeneity among factors), influences the extent to which actors engage in exploratory behaviours within organizations. Using regulatory focus theory and an experimental vignette design, Ahmadi et al. show that individuals who report the propensity to focus on opportunities for growth and advancement and who emphasize gains (thus exhibiting a 'promotion' regulatory focus) are those most likely to engage in exploratory behaviours, especially when their focus fits or is matched with the regulatory focus that characterizes the organization as a whole and where decision-making is highly complex. This micro-level analysis of the factors that influence an individual's propensity to engage in exploration provides insights into the types of antecedents, barriers and boundary conditions that might be important for understanding the variation in exploratory behaviour exhibited by actors confronted with similar organizational conditions.

The papers which make up this special issue are diverse, both theoretically and methodologically. Individually, they make significant contributions to the body of knowledge

on complexity within and across organizations. Collectively, they illustrate the variety of approaches which are currently being taken to investigating complexity and we believe that the special issue will stimulate debate and further research in this field.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Editors would like to thank the following reviewers who contributed time, energy and expertise to this Special Issue.

Alejandro Agafonow, Julia Balogun, Rebecca Bednarek, Julian Birkinshaw, Mehdi Boussebaa, Anna Brattstrom, Jack Cadeaux, Bert Cannella, Laura Cardinal, Gary Castrogiovanni, Bart Clarysse, Elena Dapiaz, Frank de Bakker, Ludovic Dibiaggio, Katharina Dittrich, Stefano Elia, James Faulconbridge, Koen Frenken, Peter Gahan, Daniel Gamache, Damian Grimshaw, Cynthia Hardy, Manuel Hensmans, Ivan Hilliard, Dennis Jancsary, Tine Koehler, Marcus Larsen, Tom Lawrence, Michael Lounsbury, Rainer Lueg, Laura Madden, Sebastien Mena, Louise Metcalf, Snejjina Michailova, Doug Miller, Laurent Mirabeau, Joeri Mol, Tim Morris, Vincent O'Connell, Krsto Pandza, John Parnell, Sotirios Paroutis, Pankaj Patel, Andreas Pekarek, Markus Perkmann, Konstantinos Pitsakis, Bertrand Quelin, Mia Raynard, Mat Robson, Trish Ruebottom, Jane Salk, Martin Schaffernicht, Carsten Schultz, Bart Sharp, George Shinkle, Paul Spee, Ute Stephan, Veselina Stoyanova, Roy Suddaby, Susanne Tietze, Mary Uhl-Bien, Behlul Usdiken, Kim van Oorschot, Will Venters, Steven Vincent, Maxim Voronov, Josh Whitford, Christopher Wickert, Mike Wright, Alessandro Zattoni, Jonathan Zeitlin.