

Research statement

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Research philosophy

My program of research explores the relationship between formal organization and informal social networks, the influence of that relationship on organizational performance, and the resulting evolution of the intra-organizational network. I use computational models for formal theory development in order to design empirical research to investigate previously unanswered questions of interest to organizational and strategy research. As a primary example, my dissertation asked very broadly: *How do organizational social networks evolve in response to, and in support of, strategic change?* It specifically examined the interplay between formal organization and informal social networks, and the extent to which that interplay matters for an organization's ability to successfully implement a strategic change. Critically, the interplay of formal organization and informal social networks reveals a central tension for navigating strategic change — namely, that preferences for strategic choice may, and often do, vary between the leaders who make strategic decisions and the individual organizational members charged with executing those decisions. My dissertation chapters argued that the success of strategic change is dependent upon the extent to which the leaders and individual members of an organization arrive at a mutual understanding and synthesis of their respective preferences for strategic change. The three dissertation papers form the foundation of my program of research several facets of this mutual understanding in order to derive novel theoretical claims, and to empirically validate those claims.

In addition, the dynamic agent-based simulation provides a wealth of future research opportunities. For example, the code has already been created to: (1) endow individuals with demographic characteristics to explore the interaction between preferences for strategic choice and preferences for demographic characteristics for network evolution; and (2) incorporate hierarchy and mandatory reporting relationships to investigate the influence of formal structure on the network evolution at (1). Similarly, the variation in individual performance outcomes evident in the first two dissertation papers suggests a means to explore: (3) the idea of imprinting as a driver of network evolution; and (4) the notion that brokerage opportunities are most prevalent in the initial stages of a network's existence. In terms of organizational learning, the simulation model contains code that will allow individuals to compare their performance in order to learn from one another.

Two papers from my dissertation (see the summary below) are currently under review; another set of papers is nearing completion (with one of those papers in press), and a second set of papers are in early development. I have made a concerted effort to engage colleagues at the Rowe School of Business to develop research projects that will investigate the formal organization and informal social network phenomenon through a variety of lenses (family business, business ethics, etc.). My dissertation committee dissuaded the publication of research papers while I was a PhD candidate — the focus was my dissertation. My appointment to the Rowe School of Business began 1 July 2015 without any publications to my name. I submitted the corrected final version of my dissertation at the end of July 2015, moved my family, and began expanding my program of research.

Summary of tenure-track probationary research (July 2015 - August 2017)

(1) Published papers

- (a) *Networks of complicity: Social networks and sex harassment* — in press at *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* (with Peggy Cunningham and Meme Drumwright)

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the question of why sex harassment persists in organizations for prolonged periods – often as an open secret.

Design/methodology/approach – In-depth interviews were conducted with 28 people in diverse organizations experiencing persistent sex harassment. Data were analyzed using standard qualitative methods.

Findings – The overarching finding was that perpetrators were embedded in networks of complicity that were central to explaining the persistence of sex harassment in organizations. By using power and manipulating information, perpetrators built networks that protected them from sanction and enabled their behaviour to continue unchecked. Networks of complicity metastasized and caused lasting harm to victims, other employees and the organization as a whole.

Research limitations/implications – The authors used broad, open-ended questions and guided introspection to guard against the tendency to ask for information to confirm their assumptions, and the authors analyzed the data independently to mitigate subjectivity and establish reliability.

Practical implications – To stop persistent sex harassment, not only must perpetrators be removed, but formal and informal ties among network of complicity members must also be weakened or broken, and victims must be integrated into networks of support. Bystanders must be trained and activated to take positive action, and power must be diffused through egalitarian leadership.

Social implications – Understanding the power of networks in enabling perpetrators to persist in their destructive behaviour is another step in countering sex harassment.

Originality/value – Social network theory has rarely been used to understand sex harassment or why it persists.

(2) Working papers

- (a) *Organizational social networks and interdependence* — under review

Presented: August 2015 — Academy of Management 75th Annual Meeting, Vancouver, BC
(as *A network-learning model of strategic change*)

October 2016 — Atlantic Schools of Business Conference, Halifax, NS

August 2017 — Academy of Management 77th Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA
(in conjunction with *An NK-landscape model of network search*)

This is the first paper from my dissertation (and job market paper). It is principally concerned with exploring the extent to which the success of strategic change depends upon the evolution of informal social networks; concomitantly it looks at the degree to which leaders may influence that evolution, and whether or not that influence enhances or detracts from the success of strategic change. To formalize these ideas and to derive specific theoretical claims, I developed a dynamic agent-based learning and network evolution simulation in which learning and adaptation are modelled on the genetic algorithm (Holland, 1975). Counter-intuitively, the simulation provides evidence of decreasing organizational performance (measured as rate of change) with an increase in leader influence.

An earlier draft of this paper entitled “A network-learning model of strategic change” has earned one citation:

Clement, J & Puranam, P. Searching for structure: Formal organization design as a guide to network evolution. *Management Science* (forthcoming).

- (b) *Shades of organization past: The influence of organizational membership on new network formation — under review*

This is the final paper of my dissertation. It is an empirical test of assumptions that underpin the key theoretical claims in the first two essays, and consists of a field study of tie formation in a knowledge-intensive organization using survey and archival data sources. The paper makes use of instrumental variables to account for selection bias and reverse causality. It provides evidence that the strength of informal social ties is positively related to the strength of mutual understanding of the organizational identity. The evolution of networks has not previously been understood in the context of organizational strategic change, but is most often understood through research into homophily and brokerage. The former demonstrates that individuals find it easier to communicate with those who share demographic, educational, and work-related attributes (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Reagans, 2011); whereas the latter indicates that individuals have preferences for network position and the benefits they confer (Burt, 1992). Empirical findings in this literature suggest that brokerage is driven by individual agency; however, scholars are only just beginning to consider the way in which the organization constrains individual discretionary choice (Kleinbaum, Stuart & Tushman, 2013; Lomi, Lusher, Pattison & Robins, 2014). There is an important contribution to be made by studying the dynamic relationship between organizational strategic choice, organizational performance, and individual networking preferences — that the formal organization (strategy and structure) has an influence (partially through identity) on the formation and adaptation of the informal social network, which in turn affects organizational performance.

- (c) *Social capital and the family business: A typology of transgenerational succession — Family Business Review (target journal)*

Presented: October 2016 — Atlantic Schools of Business Conference, Halifax, NS
 August 2017 — Academy of Management 77th Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA

Supported: KPMG - Family Business Grant awarded 2017

This is a theory and empirical paper in collaboration with Albert James and Binod Sundararajan. Our paper seeks to explicate the role of a family firm’s social capital in the entrepreneurial pathways and longevity of the family firm. By using historical network analysis methods we track the social capital and networks of five Atlantic Canadian family firms established since the early 1800s, and draw conclusions about how social capital, embedded in these family networks, specifically the roles and positions occupied by family and non-family members involved in the firms, influenced the pathways families and their firms took. We identify that beyond firms surviving succession or not, there are at least 4 other possible pathways: diversification around the original business, moving on to unrelated businesses, public service, and serial entrepreneurship, or dissolution of the family business.

- (d) *Live cases and the integration of theory and practice in strategy education* — *Academy of Management Learning and Education* (target journal)

Presented: March 2017 — International Multidisciplinary Academic Conference, Orlando, FL

This is a theory and empirical paper that will make use of data and teaching experience from the COMM 4351/COMM 4352 group projects and build upon ideas from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning course at the Dalhousie University, Centre for Learning and Teaching. Strategy or strategic management has long been part of the core of a business degree at the graduate and undergraduate level. It's positioning within business school curricula is typically as a capstone or integrative course drawing on the knowledge that students have previously gained in the various functional areas of business (such as marketing, finance, accounting, operations, information systems, and management). Armed with knowledge of these functional areas of business and key strategic management frameworks and models, students are asked to identify, analyze and pose solutions to strategic issues through the case study method. We describe an approach to strategy education that is based on both: developing students' understanding of strategy and strategic management theory (concepts, frameworks and models); and the practice of applying strategy and strategic management to live cases by working closely with organizations within the local and regional business community. We find the approach to be beneficial to students in revealing the value and limitations of strategy and strategic management theory. The approach requires the commitment of faculty, staff, students, and managers in participating organizations. It places unique demands (or costs) on each of these actors but returns benefits as well. These are discussed as the key success factors for this approach to strategy education.

(3) Work in progress

- (a) *Network search and optimization of leaders and followers* — *Management Science* (target journal)

Presented: November 2017 — Rowe School of Business Research Seminar

Supported: Rowe School of Business Research Grant awarded 2016

This paper builds upon the computational model developed in my dissertation to make us of the triad (groups of three), one of the foundational elements of social networks, to investigate the phenomenon of brokerage. The model is being revised using a Rowe School of Business Research Grant (2016). It is a joint project with Bill McEvily and Michael Ryall (Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto).

- (b) *The role of identity in leadership emergence in innovative collectives* — *Leadership Quarterly* (target journal)

Accepted: May 2017 — 2nd Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Leadership Symposium,
Mikonos, GR
(unable to attend)

This paper uses empirical data collected during work on my dissertation with Kristin Cullen (Bauer College of Business, University of Houston). Our study examines leadership emergence

in a self-directed, cross-boundary collective charged with producing innovative solutions. Understanding the factors that influence the emergence of leadership relationships are critical for advancing our understanding of how these collectives function and how the efforts of such collectives may be improved. These findings also extend research on leader emergence which has largely examined individual personality and ability to explain emergence (Paunova, 2015).

(c) *An NK-landscape model of network search*

Presented: November 2016 — Rowe School of Business Research Seminar
October 2017 — Atlantic Schools of Business Conference, Wolfville, NS

Supported: Rowe School of Business Research Grant awarded 2016

Based upon the second paper of my dissertation, this paper delves deeper into the notion of mutual understanding of strategic choice by embedding the concept of organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985) into informal social networks as a mechanism of formation and evolution. Recent research has demonstrated that organizations present identity targets (see the social foci of Feld, 1982) that have a strong influence on networking behavior; specifically that leaders are less likely to seek information from individuals in groups who do not share a common identity focus (Lomi, Lusher, Pattison & Robins, 2013). I use a dynamic agent-based simulation of individual learning and network evolution; however, I extend the model such that payoffs to performance are determined by a random-neighbour implementation of the NK-landscape model (Kauffman, 1993). This allows the intra-organizational network to evolve based upon preferences for strategic choice without imposing an overarching structure. The payoffs to interactions between individuals are related to the degree of similarity of preferences throughout the individual's whole network (not simply to the similarity to each individual partner as in the earlier paper).

Other activities

(1) Grants

(a) Rowe School of Business Research Grant

Awarded: August 2016

(b) KPMG - Family Business Research Grant

Awarded: September 2016

(c) *SSHRC Insight Development Grant (IDG)*

Awarded: June 2017

(2) Professional Development Workshops

(a) *Computational modelling for management research*

Anticipated: August 2021 — Academy of Management 81st Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA

As the importance of social networks research has increased, so has the desire of scholars to understand the influence of interdependence (broadly defined). A corresponding increase in computing power and systems representation has supported a growth in agent-based modelling and the simulation of theoretical models. This organized session will bring together scholars from across the management spectrum to reflect upon common assumptions and appreciate the differences, and to cross-pollinate implications for future research. It will boast original research from emerging and recognized scholars that leverage formal models and simulation to better understand interdependencies in social network relations and their implications for organizations. The papers will be based in the fields of economics, organizational behavior, organization theory, sociology, and strategic management.