

Organization Studies



Call for Papers Special Issue on

The hidden life of categories: emergence, maintenance and change in organizations, markets and society

Guest Editors for the Special Issue

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The study of categories or “conceptual boundaries that cluster easily substitutable models...and distinguish them from less substitutable groupings” (Rosa, et al, 1999: 64) has grown in interest as a concept within the organizations literature. Since the formulations by authors such as Douglas (1987), Zuckerman (1999), Rosa, Porac, Runser-Spanjol, Saxon (1999), Lounsbury and Rao (2004), and Hannan Polos and Carroll (2007), the study of social categories has become a central concern in organization theory. Social categories are the building blocks of societies, fields, markets, professions and organizations. They are part of the taken for granted structures of everyday life. Anchored in language, visual symbols and also artifacts, categories allow society in its different domains to exist. For instance, market categories permit producers and consumers to interact with each other. Professional categories permit the distribution of substantive knowledge and associated practices to different jurisdictions. Organizational categories allow for the legitimate orchestration of resources. Societies themselves are constituted along different categorical dimensions depending on how corporate and statist the polity historically developed (e.g., in statist and corporatist polities ‘hospitals’ tend to be constituted as local strongholds of the professions or the state, and not as firms).

Category studies, while “being around” a long time in various disciplines, from philosophy to linguistics to cognitive science, have burgeoned in organization studies only recently. Organizational ecologists for instance have emphasized the impact of the cognitive structure of a market on the behaviour of incumbents, on the evaluations of consumers, and on the decisions of entrepreneurs (see Hannan et al., 2007). Our understanding of the cognitive structuring of markets and of differences among producers has been radically improved by the development of concepts like category contrast and grade of membership (Hannan, 2010).

However, a dynamic view on *how* categories emerge, change, dissolve, are combined, or contested has only recently been identified as a necessary step in the development of category studies both by ecologists and institutionalists. Organizational institutionalists in particular have given primacy to the

processes of categorization and studied the emergence and institutionalization of market categories (Navis and Glynn, 2010; Delacour and Leca, 2016), the institutional maintenance work of categories (e.g., Micelotta and Washington, 2013), and connected market categories to broader social and political structures (Jones, Maoret, Massa, and Svejenova, 2012). Both streams have recently converged in the attention devoted to category status as an independent (Sharkey, 2014), moderating (Montauti and Wezel, 2016) and dependent variable (Delmestri and Greenwood, 2016).

In this special issue, we are particularly interested in research that integrates different approaches to categories to understand the opportunities, threats, and processes embodied in *category dynamics*. In particular we envisage to spur research on the dynamics of categories, particularly on the ensuing conflicts and struggles over their meanings, status and morality and to develop a deeper theoretical understanding of how organizations navigate category change, successfully overcoming its challenges and, sometimes, strategically using it. We expect this special issue to support the still adolescent field of category studies within organization theory, and welcome papers that draw from various academic traditions.

Themes and topics needing to be more fully addressed by category scholars include:

- ***Long-term longitudinal and historical developments.*** Tracking the change in meaning and/or labels of categories in time is an understudied phenomenon that needs further investigation (Karthikeyan, Jonsson and Wezel, 2016). Long-term quantitative or historical studies on the changes in the meanings associated with categories would be fruitful to enrich our understanding of category dynamics.
- ***International translation processes.*** The study of how category change may be facilitated by labels and practices developed elsewhere, edited and translated to new national contexts has received initial recognition (Cattani and Fliescher, 2013). These processes need, however, much more elaboration, as category labels tend to travel across borders carried by ideologies (Czarniawska and Sévon, 2005).
- ***Recombination and category change.*** Categories do not exist in a vacuum but are embedded in relationships of mutuality and competition. Processes of recombination may damage firms but may also lead to the extension of a category's meaning through sustained experimentation (Phillips, 2013; Negro et al., 2011). The study of how the sustained recombination of existing categories may lead to the change in the category schema and even to the development of novel categories remains understudied.
- ***The symbolic and the material in categorization.*** While the main attention of category scholars has been on labels and symbols, studies are starting to point to the importance of physical exemplars in sustaining recategorization processes (Jones et al. 2012; Delmestri and Greenwood, 2016). Further work on the role of visuals and material objects in categorization would allow for more generalizability of the theory.
- ***Category struggles, emotions, and morality.*** While social movements engage in re-categorization efforts when attempting to change meaning and practices associated with social categories, these efforts can be thwarted by defensive reactions of incumbent elites, activating emotional reactions and denial (Delmestri and Goodrick, 2016). Such categorization processes have also been understood as moral struggles. Studying the sequences of moves and countermoves of these kinds of struggles, and their outcomes, constitutes an important ground for advancing category studies.

More specifically, we welcome papers that give answers to the following questions:

1. How does the embeddedness of social and market categories within broader society promote or hinder category change?
2. How do new categories emerge and become legitimately established?
3. How does category change unfold? What organizational challenges are linked to category change?
4. How does category change affect the diversity of organizations in fields?
5. What is the role of emotions, their arousal or denial in effecting category change?
6. How are categories affected by technological and social challenges?
7. How do social movement engage in category work which changes the status or meaning of categories?

8. How does work aimed at elevating the status of a category differ from the work aimed at de-stigmatizing a category?
9. What are the dynamics of categorization and counter-categorization?
10. How do category dynamics improve our understanding of markets beyond economics?

While the above list of topics and questions describes areas that could benefit from additional research, our list is not exhaustive. We seek articles that push our understanding of categories and category dynamics more broadly. The aim of this SI is to create a platform to cross-fertilize the various research camps that are involved in the study of categories with a particular focus on category dynamics. We welcome contributions from multiple theoretical perspectives, whether inspired by organization theory, organizational sociology, or economics. Studies that incorporate insights from related disciplines, including sociology, business history, political science, linguistics and semiotics, psychology and philosophy, could also find a home in this special issue.

Submissions

Please submit papers through the journal's online submission system, SAGE track at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgstudies>, create your user account (if you have not done so already), and for "Manuscript Type" please choose the corresponding Special Issue. All papers that enter the reviewing process will be double-blind reviewed following the journal's normal review process and criteria. You will be able to submit your paper for this Special Issue **between the 15th and 30th of September 2017**.

Administrative support and general queries

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