Microfoundations of Foresight
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Introduction
The ability to envision and explore opportunities for future value creation and appropriation is an important aspect of organizational learning (March, 1991). John Stuart Mill (1865) notes that the foresight of phenomena depends on the knowledge of their sequences. This causal view of foresight based on phenomena also indicates that mechanisms of foresight capability maybe "unknown and inscrutable" (Mill, 1865). In trying to understand foresight as a conscious capability, rather than a serendipitous event or thought, requires researchers to understand the microfoundations of foresight capability.

Microfoundations refers to the understanding and unpacking at various levels the individual-level factors that impact organizations, how individual interactions lead to emergent higher-level outcomes and performance, and the role of macro variables that mediated micro and meso-level interactions (Felin, Foss, and Ployhart, 2015). From a microfoundational view, actors, processes, and/or structures at lower levels also "may moderate or mediate influences of phenomena" located at higher levels (Felin et al., 2012). In the context of foresight, the recognition of interaction of factors that led to aggregating foresight capability at the higher levels will help in creating preferred futures for organizations and societies. What is Foresight can be considered a higher order dynamic capability that entails the creation of new opportunities by observing the environment, synthesizing what has been observed, and analyzing the information with a future orientation (Balaraman and Sundarraj, 2019). While foresight and forecasting deal with futures, forecasting assumes a future related to the present and "tomorrow's world will be much like today" (Wack, 1985), and the research question to be known (Cuhls, 2003). Foresight goes beyond by attempting to see multiple possibilities for the future without premature closure (Balaraman and Sundarraj, 2019).

Foresight can also be considered at various levels - national (Paliokaitė et al., 2015), industry (Ruff, 2015), firm (Boe-Lillegraven and Monterde, 2015), managerial (Amsteus, 2011), and individual (Balaraman and Sundarraj, 2019).

As an organizational construct Slaughter (1998) considers strategic foresight as the "ability to create and maintain a high-quality, coherent and functional forward view, and to use the insights arising in useful organizational ways." At the individual level, foresight can be considered as the ability of an individual "to envision alternate futures based on acquiring and analyzing information with a future orientation." (Balaraman and Sundarraj, 2019). In the context of an organization this is called employee foresight.

Employee Foresight
From a microfoundational perspective, individuals in organizations learn through a process of discovering and disseminating information and this assists an employee in developing foresight. The dimensions that form components of foresight and act as characteristics of employees are Information Acquisition (consisting of source and scope of information), Future Orientation (consisting of future conditions, objectives, and plans), and Information Analysis (consisting of analysis of future plans and goals, in relation to the past) (Balaraman and Sundarraj, 2019).

Based on concepts of cognition, learning, and temporal orientation, employee foresight brings into focus the individual capability aspect of foresight microfoundational studies. This introduces a reflective-formative construct in understanding foresight capability better and contributes towards explicating the role of an individual in the formation of organizational level foresight.

Aggregation of foresight at the organizational level
Research has established the mediating role of organizational integration processes on the exploration and exploitation aspects of organization (Jansen et al., 2009), and emphasizes the role of organizational mechanisms in coordinating and integrating capabilities developed. Therefore, the aggregation of individual foresight capability at higher levels as organizational foresight capability relies on integrative mechanisms in organizations.
Communication has been a strong mediator in increasing organizational performance when the organization is mission-oriented (Garnett, Marlowe, and Pandey, 2008) and one of the important dimensions of organization integrative mechanisms. Further, cross-functional interfaces facilitate organizational members to share understanding (Jansen et. al., 2009), which contributes to forming foresight. In the context of foresight, the capability of an organization to focus on aggregating information from various domains (Gavetti, 2005) such as technology (Rohrbeck, 2011) and strategy (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004) is important. This indicates that an organization’s ability to implement technology focus and strategic focus are important dimensions of integrating individual foresight at the organizational level.

The ability to harmonize individual capabilities can also be seen from a motivational perspective (Foss and Lindenberg, 2013). Rewards and incentives encourage information sharing by individuals in a cooperative environment, (Ferrin and Dirks, 2003; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). Thus, the ability of an organization in developing organizational foresight from individual cognition and foresight is influenced by organizational incentives (Kaplan, 2008). Taken together, communication focus, strategic focus, technological focus, and incentive focus, form the dimensions of integrative mechanism that mediate the formation for foresight at higher levels (Balaraman, 2018).

**Conclusion**

The highlighted research contributes towards the microfoundations of foresight capability by expounding the critical influencers of individual foresight capability building that organizations need to concentrate on. Further, the mediating role of integrative mechanisms taken together (focusing on communication, strategy, technology, and incentives) in aggregating individual level foresight highlights that foresight capability development in organizations requires a multi-level focus. Employee foresight is the basis of an organization’s foresight capability, and its needs to be actively developed and practiced for its long-term relevance.

**References**


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