The search environment is not benign: Reassessing the social risks of intra-organizational search

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Abstract
The behavioral search process is central to explaining how organizational capabilities evolve through learning. However, issues of individual agency and process have tended to reside backstage in this literature. As a result, the agency of individuals involved in the search process has typically been blackboxed and micro-foundational assumptions associated with individual search have therefore been difficult to challenge. We take a different approach in this paper and use data gathered through in-depth fieldwork to challenge March and Simon’s (1958:50) foundational assumption that actors perceive the search environment to be benign. This assumption has become taken for granted in subsequent
research into intra-organizational search. In-depth qualitative research, produced through two years of ethnographic interviews and non-participant observation at a large mining conglomerate, enables us to identify how social risk complicates the individual search process associated with intra-organizational learning and generates a search environment within capabilities that actors perceive to be non-benign. In revising the ?benign search environment? assumption we introduce an important boundary condition for predictions of local search bias and highlight a new causal path connecting patterns of individual search to the evolution of higher-order trajectories of capability evolution.
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Comments Welcome.

Abstract

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In revising the ‘benign search environment’ assumption we introduce an important boundary condition for predictions of local search bias and highlight a new causal path connecting patterns of individual search to the evolution of higher-order trajectories of capability evolution.

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