

THE FRAMING OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL IMITATION

Ralitza Nikolaeva, ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal

ABSTRACT

The cognitive ability to learn from others through imitation is one of the most important ones for human evolution. Because of its adaptive properties, imitation is a widespread heuristic at all societal levels. However, the diverse streams on organizational copy behavior have developed almost entirely disregarding the cognitive aspect of imitation. The current essay brings back cognition to the study of interorganizational imitation. It provides a unified framework of different models on mimetic behavior by putting a cognitive lens on the imitation decision. The realistic model of organizational learning describes the interaction of the interpretation of others' experience and the organization's own evaluation and framing of an innovation. Its major claim is that the interaction of threat and opportunity categorizations ultimately shapes the organization's adoption decision. In this aspect, the speed of the diffusion process depends on the dynamics of the interactions of organizations' cognitive framings of the novelty and the imitation decision. Because the interactions can result in various types of responses, generalizations about the adoption motivation based on its timing are bound to be unrealistic. Thus, the study adds a fourth source of organizational learning – the interpretation of the experience of others.

References available upon request