

A Review of IMP Conferences 1998 and 2003 with Special Focus on Dynamics

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe the development of research on dynamics within IMP research by presenting a review of IMP conferences 1998 in Turku and 2003 in Lugano. The findings of this study suggest that IMP researchers increasingly mention the dynamic aspects of actor constellations, resources, and processes in their writings, but studies that are focusing on dynamics *per se* have in fact not increased. This situation could have negative consequences for the theory development of the IMP Group, if it does not pay enough attention to the dynamic aspects of social and economic activities. We suggest that research efforts within the IMP Group focus on the dynamic aspects of actor constellations, resources, or processes rather than to keep utilizing structural research.

Introduction

Research on the dynamic aspects of actor constellations (such as alliances), resources (such as knowledge), or processes (such as relationships) matter. Dynamic aspects matter because we live within a continuously changing environment that is held together by processes rather than by structures. Structures can collapse and disappear, but processes are organisms with a life of their own and always searching for the set of actors that serves them best.

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Halinen and Törnroos (1995) regard dynamics, evolution, and time as explicitly integrated in the ontology of the interaction perspective because it regards business relations as continuously changing exchange relationships. For the past decade, the importance of dynamics for business relationships has been subject to numerous publications within the IMP Group (e.g. Möller and Wilson, 1995a). Möller and Wilson (1995b: 606) complained, “Although the network approach is primarily dynamic, the majority of the studies have focused on structural issues”. Also Halinen and Törnroos (1995) argued that the concept of time has often been neglected in network studies.

Nowadays, it seems that dynamic aspects are more acknowledged among IMP researchers than they used to be as we find them mentioned more often in the discussions and writings of the recent IMP conferences. However, because there has not been a study about the actual state of research on dynamics within the IMP Group, it remains unclear whether the IMP Group indeed focuses on dynamics, or if the majority of studies is still concentrating on structural issues. The main purpose of this article is to describe the amount and kind of attention that is given to the dynamic aspects of relationships and networks in IMP research.

Increasing our knowledge about the state of research on dynamics is especially crucial for the theory development of the IMP Group. Even though there seems to be a widely shared belief among IMP researchers that dynamics are essential for understanding relationships and networks, nobody has investigated what the IMP Group is in fact doing for increasing its knowledge about these crucial issues. Without doubt, dynamic aspects are one of the most essential issues for explaining how social and economic activity is organized. However, if the IMP Group aims at explaining those activities that essentially rest on dynamics, its theories need to be built on research that has in fact been conducted for that very purpose, instead of keep utilizing structural research.

This research is based on the two major reviews of IMP conferences, conducted by Gemünden (1997) and Easton, Zolkiewski and Bettany (2002). Gemünden (1997) presented in his review a quantitative descriptive analysis of IMP research based on

abstracts, work-in-progress papers, and competitive papers published in the IMP conference proceedings 1984-1996. Investigating stereotypes about IMP Group, Gemünden concluded that IMP was mainly theoretical, was losing its international focus, was a forum for holistic frameworks, was focusing on relationships and networks, and was using case studies and statistical analysis. Easton et al. (2002) conducted a qualitative analysis of all abstracts published in the proceedings of the 16th IMP conference⁴ with the goal to present a tentative knowledge structure of the IMP Group. As a preliminary result they suggested four main categories, which are: relationships, networks, management, and contingencies.

This paper is presenting a review of IMP research that focuses on aspects that have been outside the focus of the earlier studies, especially regarding the development of research on dynamics. To accomplish this objective, it was also necessary to provide the reader with a review of IMP research methods, because we believe it is necessary to present the research on dynamics as embedded within a wider context of how research is conducted within the IMP Group. This way, we hope to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of dynamic research within IMP and to find some explanations for the current development.

The paper is structured as follows: First, a novel framework for analyzing IMP research papers is introduced to show how dynamic research is embedded in IMP research. Second, findings relating especially to the methodologies within the IMP Group are presented and it is explained what role the research on dynamics plays within this field. Third, the findings are discussed and finally summed up as conclusions.

⁴ The 16th IMP conference was held in the year 2000 in Bath / UK.

Data Analysis

This paper presents the review of competitive papers of the 14th IMP conference 1998 held in Turku / Finland and the 19th IMP conference 2003 held in Lugano / Switzerland. The year 1998 was chosen because during that conference, the past of the IMP Group was criticized for too much descriptive research which was argued to cause lack of generalizability and lack of practical and management orientation. Therefore, this conference represents some kind of turning point in IMP, which was interesting to start from (Halinen-Kaila and Nummela, 1998). The year 2003 was chosen because it offered the latest data. We chose to analyze competitive papers in favor of abstracts or work-in-progress papers because in order to get sufficient information about a study's focus on dynamics it demanded more information than mere abstracts or work-in-progress papers would have revealed⁵. The content of the papers has been analyzed by using multidimensional coding of key terms and key notions, which were tentatively derived. After the qualitative analysis of each paper's content, the papers were categorized and the results of each year were compared to each other by using a simple quantitative descriptive method with the help of MS Excel.

The empirical data from year 1998 included 28 competitive papers of which one paper had to be excluded⁶, and therefore 27 papers remained for analysis. Conference 2003 included 57 competitive papers of which four papers had to be excluded⁷, and therefore 53 papers remained for analysis. Because the population size for the conference 1998 (N=27) and conference 2003 (N=53) varies greatly, limitations to validity need to be considered. For data triangulation purposes, the categorization has been subjected to a blind review process by the co-authors, who reviewed and categorized a randomly selected 50 percent of all papers that were included in the analysis.

⁵ Before making the decision to focus on competitive papers only, all competitive papers, work-in-progress papers, and abstracts of conference 1998 had been reviewed. During the review process, we also found that abstracts were often promising some dynamic content of the paper, but the subsequent check of the paper revealed that the text fell short on the promise that was made in the abstract, which demonstrates once again that abstracts often do not represent the actual content of the paper.

⁶ The paper was actually a abstract, and therefore there was insufficient basis for reviewing the content.

⁷ The papers were excluded papers because they were not available for download from the IMP Web site.

Taxonomy

The taxonomy depicted in Figure 1 (please refer to the next page) is a qualitative, nominal taxonomy, with objects being classified according to their characteristics that were empirically derived. The taxonomy also contains a hierarchical element by distinguishing among six levels that were tentatively derived and combine existing taxonomies with new ideas based on our empirical analysis.

The 1st level of the taxonomy is called “general level” and it distinguishes between three categories of papers. The first category is called “theoretical”, meaning that papers within that category contain only a theoretical or conceptual discussion of some phenomena but do not contain empirical data. In the second category, “empirical” papers are those, which report only an empirical study. As third category, “theoretical and empirical” papers report findings from empirical analysis and present either novel theories or concepts, or contain existing ones (often in form of an extensive literature review). This distinction has been made to provide an overview of the general content of IMP papers regarding theory and empirical data.

At the 2nd level, called “interaction level”, papers were analyzed according to their interaction focus. This category was inspired by Easton (1995) who argues that network studies have been carried out using focal organizations, dyads or small nets as samples of a network. The “dyadic” category refers to studies that focus on a dyadic relationship between two firms. The “nexus” category refers to studies about networks from the perspective of one firm only, which represents the “nexus” of the network. “Network” studies focus on the network itself. Also mixed studies occur that somewhat focus on “dyads and nexus”, or “dyads and networks”. The category “all levels” contains papers that do not have a special focus, such as some theoretical papers that could be practically applied to all levels. Further, the category “others” contains a small minority of studies that focus on other issues, such as purely methodological papers. Level 2 is introduced to show that dynamics – as well as any other aspect - can be researched on different levels and from different perspectives.

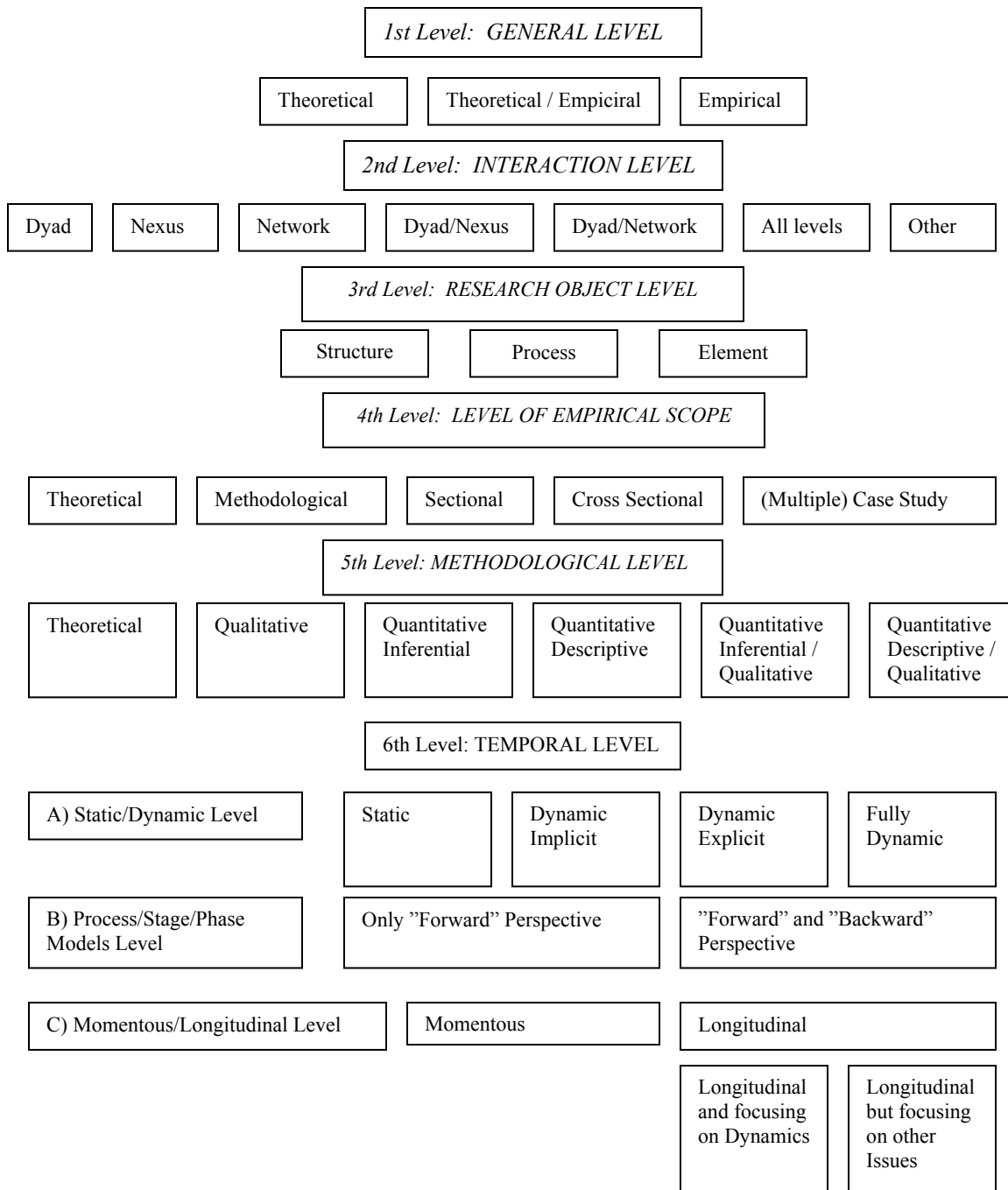


Figure 1: A Taxonomy for Analyzing IMP Competitive Papers

The 3rd level is called “research object level”. It has been created because some IMP studies claim to have a certain actor constellation as their focus, but it is in fact an element or resource (such as trust or knowledge) that is the focus of analysis. Therefore, the third level of this taxonomy distinguishes between studies that focus mainly on the “structure” or a constellation of actors, or a “process” that is happening between a constellation of actors, or the properties of some “element” within a certain structure or process.

At the 4th level, called “level of empirical scope”, papers were categorized according to their approach towards data. The categories are “case study”, “cross sectional”, “sectional”, “theoretical” and “methodological”. We would like to point out that this level should not be confused with the methodological level (level five) as it presents approaches to the empirical scope of horizontal data intake. For example, a single case study about an organization represents the horizontally narrowest scope of research objects (but is the vertically deepest investigation), while a cross-sectional study of several dozens of organizations represents the widest scope of research objects (intake of numerous research objects, but rather superficially, and often deploying quantitative methods). One of the main reasons for introducing the 4th level has been to show that case studies need not to be confused with being a research method, which has happened in quite many conference papers of IMP researchers. We disagree with the perspective of many IMP researchers, who seem to believe that “case study” automatically means “qualitative interviews”, and that case study is some kind of methodology itself.

The category “case studies” usually includes qualitative methods, but sometimes even quantitative methods, and therefore case studies are regarded as an “approach” rather than a methodological choice *per se*. This category also includes case studies that are using multiple cases⁸.

⁸ Our investigation we found a small number of multiple case studies, of which most used three cases.

“Cross sectional” studies, are often referred to as the opposite of longitudinal studies and described as a methodology that is using exclusively quantitative methods. However, this paper regards “cross sectional” studies not as methodology but rather as an empirical focus that refers to studies, which make investigate several dozens of research objects across industrial sections. This approach therefore has the widest empirical scope among all approaches of this categories and the review of papers with a cross sectional approach showed that they can include quantitative as well as qualitative methods.

The “sectional” approach is a new category, and represents studies that focus on one industrial section only, such as for example the architectural industry. This approach can deploy either qualitative or quantitative studies. We have created this category because it represents valuable opportunities to investigate phenomena within industries by acknowledging the unique properties of some industries, and therefore the differences between industries.

The “theoretical” approach refers to studies that contain only literature reviews and therefore their scope only exists in the sense that they draw from a population of different studies in order to discuss or create theories and concepts without using empirical data.

“Methodological” refers to studies that aim to contribute to the development of methodology in the field of science. Their scope is often rather abstract, and the data includes sources of text for example by deploying discourse analysis of published research texts.

At the 5th level, labeled as “methodological” level, papers are classified according to their methodology. The categories within this level are: theoretical papers with literature review; qualitative papers; quantitative inferential; quantitative descriptive, and quantitative descriptive plus qualitative.

The category of “theoretical papers with literature review” includes papers that either propose new theories and concepts or extensively review existing ones. This category has

been created because of the large amount of papers we found with these features. Even though the literature review is a technique that belongs to qualitative methods, we did not include these papers in the “qualitative” category in order to provide a clearer picture of the distribution of the major research methods that are applied in the IMP Group.

The “Qualitative” category refers to papers that deploy the usual qualitative methods such as interviews, text analysis (e.g. discourse analysis), observations or experiments. Literature reviews are excluded from this category for the reasons mentioned above.

For quantitative methods, the taxonomy distinguishes between “quantitative inferential” studies (using more or less advanced statistical analysis to find out about correlations and effects that can be generalized to a population level) and “quantitative descriptive” studies (studies which do not intend to be generalized to a population level). Quantitative descriptive should be understood within IMP context as interpretation and summary of the frequency or occurrence of an object or phenomenon by using rather simple data presentation techniques such as univariate frequency distributions or percentage distributions (Rose, 1996; Hardy and Jarausch, 1991).

The remaining two categories, “quantitative inferential plus qualitative” and “quantitative descriptive plus qualitative” refer to studies that use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

On the 6th level, we have finally arrived at the level, which presents the dynamic dimension. It is distinguished between sublevels A, B, and C. Sublevel A) investigates the static/dynamic content of the paper, sublevel B) looks at how dynamic aspects are presented in process-related publications, and sublevel C) investigates whether the papers use longitudinal analysis or a more “momentous” research approach.

Referring to sublevel A), it shows the dynamic aspect in competitive papers on a spectrum of “static” (the least dynamic category), “dynamic implicit”, “dynamic explicit”, and “fully dynamic” (the most dynamic category). The categories “static” and

“fully dynamic” are opposites of each other. In “static” papers, neither the objective nor within the text we can find any reference to dynamics of either structures, processes, or elements of them, such as “knowledge”. In the “fully dynamic” group, the author clearly expresses awareness to the dynamic aspects of the object of study, and the paper has a clear objective to find out something about the dynamic nature of the phenomena at hand. Distinguishing between those two categories is rather unproblematic, we suppose.

However, creating the two categories of “dynamic implicit” and “dynamic explicit” was somewhat more problematic since it was the researchers' perceptions that were needed here to distinguish between papers that contain some dynamic aspect “implicitly” (can be read between the lines) and explicitly (it is somewhat expressed, but no sincere effort is taken to describe or find out anything about dynamics). Therefore, those two categories are somewhat opposites as well. Both of these categories do not have any objective of finding out something about the changing or dynamic nature of something. However, these papers express either implicitly or explicitly their research objects to be embedded in an environment that is of dynamic nature. The categories of “static”, “dynamic implicit”, “dynamic explicit” and “fully dynamic” can also be described as forming a continuum of increasing dynamic content with the highest level, the “fully dynamic” category. Papers with the lowest dynamic content perceived were put into the “static” group, while papers with a bit higher dynamic content perceived were put to the “dynamic implicit” group, and so on.

At the second level B) we evaluate the development of papers that focus on some kind of process, stage or phase model. It is distinguished between papers that assume processes only to move “forward” and papers that allow also the processes to move “backward”, for example when relationships become reactivated after they have become weaker during the process.

On the third level C) we distinguish between longitudinal analysis and “momentous” studies. Longitudinal studies are a general approach because they can give almost any methodology a new dimension (Easton, 1995). Within the category of longitudinal

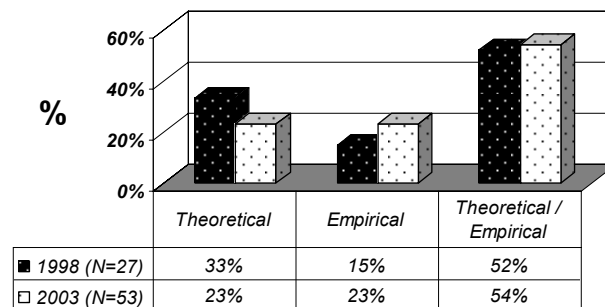
studies, we have distinguished between those, which focus on processes or dynamics, and those, which focus on issues that do not contribute in any way to our understanding of the dynamics of social and economic phenomena. Studies that belong to the longitudinal group have occurred very rarely, and have focused on such issues as counting citations of IMP researchers over several years. “Momentous” studies are opposed to longitudinal studies and apply a certain research method either only once. These studies do not intend to say anything about a longitudinal development, and do not deploy the same method twice.

Results of the Study

1st Level: General Level

On the first level, which is the general level of theoretical/empirical content of competitive papers, the share of purely empirical papers has increased from 15% in 1998 to 23% in 2003, largely at the expense of theoretical papers, which decreased from 33% in 1998 to 23% in 2003 as depicted in Table 1. The share of papers that include theoretical as well as empirical aspects has remained rather stable with 52% in 1998 and 54% in 2003.

Table 1. Theoretical and Empirical Papers in IMP Conferences 1998 and 2003



By taking together both categories of empirical and empirical/theoretical papers, 77% contain empirical data. Earlier, Gemünden (1997) found that 45% of papers include empirical data and in Easton et al. (2002) the share was roughly 50%. Those numbers are significantly lower than in this study, but taking into account that this paper reviewed only competitive papers whose content is theoretically and empirically more mature than the one of abstracts or work-in-progress papers, the results seem to be in line with the earlier findings.

The fact that empirical papers gained at the expense of theoretical papers can be interpreted as IMP researchers increasingly applying and testing concepts and theories that were developed in previous years. The high share of theoretical/empirical papers shows that IMP researchers tend to support their theoretical or conceptual ideas with their own empirical findings, or vice versa by drawing parallels from their empirical findings to existing concepts and theories. However, deeper analysis shows that despite the healthy share of empirical papers, IMP researchers have been focusing mostly on issues other than dynamics. Before we go into this issue, we will evaluate the level of interaction.

2nd Level: Interaction Level

At the interaction level, dyadic relationship studies, which have previously been the most popular perspective, lost their top place and decreased from 37% in 1998 to 28% in 2003 (see Table 2). In the same period, studies that take a perspective of the firm as “nexus that is embedded in a network” increased from 26% to 37%. Papers that focused on the network itself increased from 11% to 19% and studies that focused on all levels decreased from 15% in 1998 to 6% in 2003.

A closer analysis of the increase in "nexus" studies finds that it is largely explained by the increase of case studies. In addition, the decrease of papers focusing on “all levels” was mainly caused by the decrease in purely theoretical papers (because in many cases they used to have implications for all levels).

Table 2. Interaction Levels in Competitive Papers 1998 and 2003

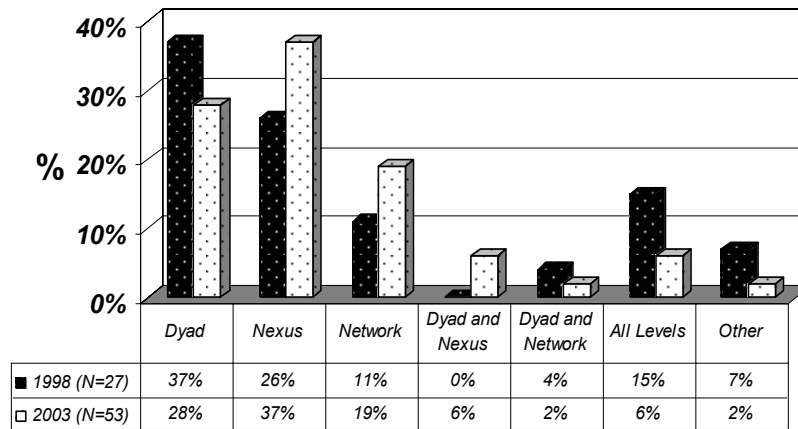


Table 2 also clearly shows that the dyad, nexus, and network perspectives are the most popular ones, and that in the year 2003 researchers were increasingly focusing on these three categories. The question remains, whether there would be other ways to think about the organization of social and economic activities than in such a highly structural way. We can also assume that the IMP Group has created a dominant structural paradigm (imported from social anthropology and social network research) that has no place for a process – oriented framework other than as declassifying it as a sub phenomenon.

The consequences of this structural thinking can be demonstrated by looking at the analysis of lower levels where we find a rather unhealthy concentration of case studies, which would not be anything bad, if they would also have something to say about dynamics.

3rd Level: Empirical Scope Level

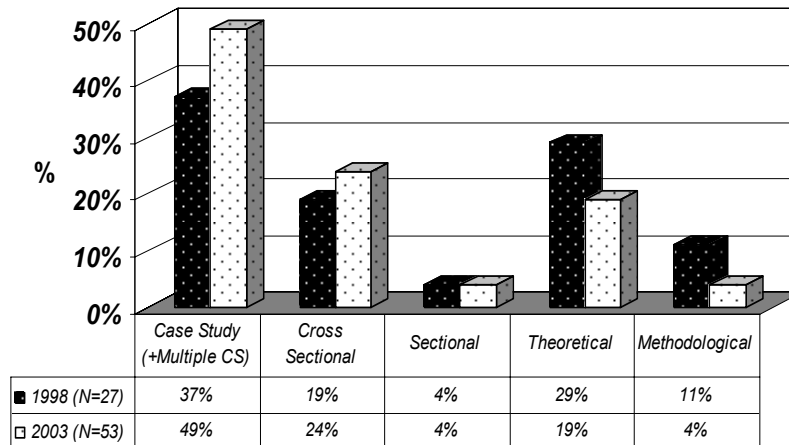
Case studies are clearly the single largest approach in IMP research and their share has even increased from 37% in 1998 to 49% in 2003 (see Table 3). This category also includes studies that contain multiple cases, which occurred in 2003 five times (usually four cases, but also once eight cases and once 11 cases). However, the vast majority of case studies is focusing on one single case, which can of course include several

companies, depending on whether the researcher takes a dyadic relationship perspective or for example a nexus perspective, in which the case could include several companies, or sub cases, depending on the depth of vertical analysis.

Cross sectional studies, which focus on a wider scope than just one industry (and deploy qualitative and/or quantitative methods), have increased as well, from 19% to 24%.

Amongst cross sectional studies, in 2003 roughly one third of papers used (usually in addition to a quantitative method) a qualitative method, such as interviews with managers from firms across a number of industries and therefore this category should not be taken as purely quantitative, as it has been considered in the past.

Table 3. Empirical Scope in Competitive Papers 1998 and 2003



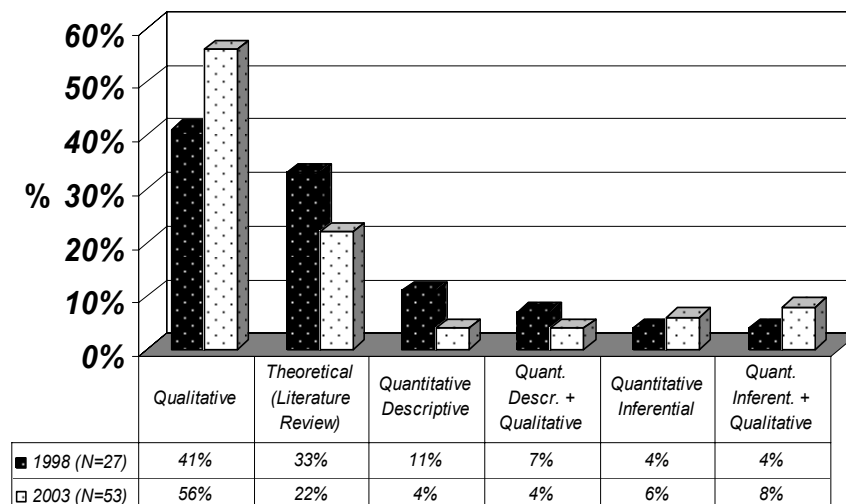
The category of sectional papers remained stable and rather insignificant at 4%. This category contains half qualitative and half quantitative studies that focus on one industry but are too broad to be categorized as case studies. This category has also been created because we believe there is more need for studies that are focusing on a particular industry, whether using quantitative or qualitative methods.

Our analysis further shows that theoretical papers decreased from 29% to 19% and methodological papers decreased from 11% to 4%⁹. This development is largely explained with the general decline of non-empirical papers and theoretical papers as shown earlier in the presentation of results about level one (the theoretical/empirical level).

4th Level: Methodological Level

Looking closer at the methodologies that were used in competitive papers (see Table 4), the increase of case studies has caused an increase of qualitative methods from 41% in 1998 to 57% in 2003, whereby qualitative interviews have become the most popular research method for case studies. However, other methods are occasionally applied as well, such as quantitative descriptive methods, archival research, text analysis, and literature reviews and we found the variety of qualitative methods to have slightly increased since 1998.

Table 4. Research Methods in Competitive Papers 1998 and 2003



⁹ These two categories have been included in this level as well, even though now theoretical and methodological papers appear on more than one level of the taxonomy. This happened because the nature of a theoretical paper is much different from a paper that has empirical contents as well.

Papers that use only quantitative descriptive methods have decreased from 11% to 4% and papers using a combination of qualitative and quantitative descriptive methods decreased from 7% to 4%. Therefore, we find the studies that use simpler quantitative analysis in decline.

Contrasting to the decline of quantitative descriptive methods, the statistically more advanced quantitative inferential methods have slightly gained. Studies that use only quantitative inferential methods have increased from 4% to 6% and studies that contain a mixture of quantitative inferential methods and qualitative methods increased from 4% to 8%. Therefore, in 2003 a total percentage of papers using quantitative inferential methods increased from 8% in 1998 to 14% in 2004. The increase in quantitative inferential methods can be interpreted as IMP researchers trying to achieve higher generalizability of their findings, which has positive effects on theory testing.

Considering the total amount of qualitative studies by adding to the qualitative papers also the theoretical papers that have been written by using literature reviews, the share of qualitative papers has increased from 74% in 1998 to 78% in 2003. Therefore, the share of mainly quantitative studies has decreased from 26% in 1998 to 22% in 2003, whereby the quantitative methods have become slightly more sophisticated. The increase of quantitative more sophisticated methods on the expense of simpler quantitative methods improves the generalizability of findings and capabilities for hypothesis testing but we conclude that IMP researchers clearly favor qualitative methods.

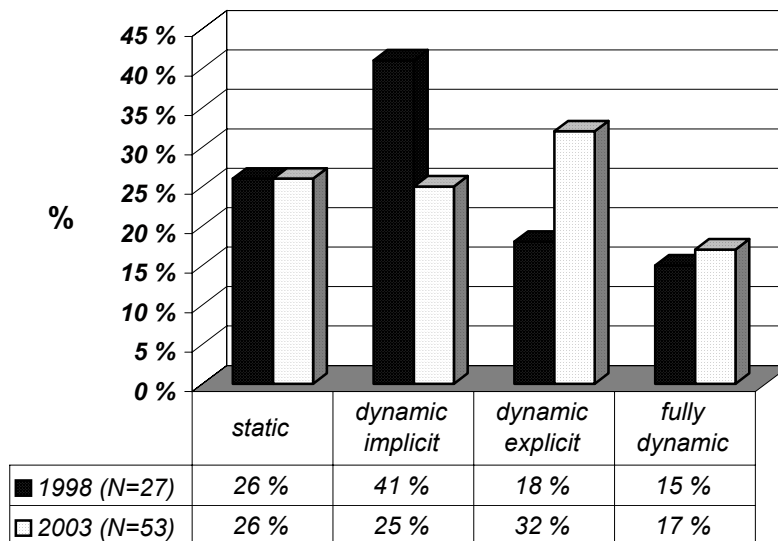
5th Level: Temporal Level

Sublevel A) Static/Dynamic Level

The categories of “static”, “dynamic implicit”, “dynamic explicit” and “fully dynamic” are forming a continuum in which the dynamic content increases as we move forward

from static to dynamic implicit, to dynamic explicit, and to fully dynamic¹⁰. Within that level, the share of static and fully dynamic papers remained almost stable. As depicted in Table 5, in 1998 static papers amounted for 26% and mainly dynamic papers for 15%, while in 2003 static papers were also at 26%, dynamic papers were slightly higher than before, with 17%. One interesting development happened in the two middle categories. Dynamic explicit papers gained on the expense of dynamic implicit papers, with implicit papers decreasing by 16% and explicit papers increasing by 14% in the same period.

Table 5. Strength of Dynamic Perspective in Competitive Papers 1998 and 2003



The significant decrease of dynamic implicit papers, which are papers that contain dynamic aspects only “between the lines” and the significant increase of papers where dynamics are clearly mentioned (but no sincere effort to find anything out about them) shows that IMP researchers are somewhat more aware of the general importance of

¹⁰ Static papers = neither the objective nor within the text we can find any reference to dynamics of either structures, processes, or elements of them, such as “knowledge”.
Dynamic implicit papers = contain some dynamic aspect “implicitly” (can only be read between the lines)
Dynamic explicit papers = author refers to the dynamic aspects of phenomena but makes no sincere attempt (whether conscious nor subconscious) to find out something about them.
Fully dynamic papers = author clearly expresses awareness to the dynamic aspects of the object of study, and the paper has a clear objective to find out something about the dynamic nature of the phenomena at hand.

dynamic aspects. However, this development had no effects on the amount of studies that make a sincere effort to find something out about dynamics, because those papers increased only by 2% within the period of 1998 to 2003.

Sublevel B) Process/Stage/Phase Models Level

Within the dynamic dimension, a closer look needs to be taken into papers that focus on processes, phases or stages of some kind, for example internationalization process (or “stage” models) or relationship commitment phases. Halinen and Törnroos (1995) criticize phase or stage models because they usually assume relationships to develop along the same path or only in “forward” directions, which in reality they not always do. Halinen and Törnroos (1995) therefore call for models that show the evolution of relationships without a deterministic view of development. In order to construct such a model, more attention should be paid to the notion of time as well as to the use of longitudinal studies.

Our empirical investigation found that the share of competitive papers containing process studies declined from 48% in 1998 to 32% in 2003. Unfortunately, within those studies, the share of papers based on “forward” process models and therefore containing a deterministic perspective on development has only slightly decreased. While in 1998 77% of process papers were based on a “forward” perspective, and only 23% assumed “forward and backward” developments, in 2003 this share only slightly declined to 71% and therefore 29% of process papers acknowledged processes, (including stages or phases) not only to develop “forward”.

C) Momentous/Longitudinal Level

Easton (1995) argues that longitudinal research is general in nature because it gives a new dimension to almost any methodology. For studying interactions he suggests several methods of longitudinal analysis, for example historical research, repeated studies (studies that focus on the same subject but different object), and retrospective studies (using post hoc data and researching the phenomena back into time).

Both Easton (1995) and Halinen and Törnroos (1995) argue longitudinal analysis to be especially suitable for researching processes (see e.g. their table of longitudinal methods 1995:521). However, based on this paper's analysis, the majority of longitudinal studies is not focusing on processes, but contains a variety of topics of which only few are related to dynamics. In the competitive papers of this analysis, longitudinal papers included methodological papers (longitudinal citation analysis) or research on network structure (emergence of networks). The amount of competitive papers that used longitudinal analysis has in fact decreased from 19% in 1998 to 15% in 2003. This also indicates that - considering the increased explicit mentioning of dynamics but actually unchanged amount of dynamic studies the IMP Group has not increased its annual output on dynamic studies at all.

Each of the few studies that focused on process and used a longitudinal approach have acknowledged the dynamic nature of exchange relationships and allowed processes to move forward and backward¹¹.

The low share of longitudinal studies¹² within IMP Group could be partly explained by Easton (1995:483), who argues "industrial network studies already carry the burden of having to cope with connectedness and complexity which renders even cross-sectional data collection difficult. Add to this the problem of time-based research methods, and it would not be surprising to find that the ideal research design would cost more than the average or perhaps any research group or sponsor could afford. However, this problem should not lead to despair but to ingenuity".

¹¹ However, the low amount of longitudinal studies in general, and specifically among process studies questions the generalizability of these findings and other studies might of course come to a different conclusion than the one presented here.

¹² Considering the few longitudinal studies and their high impact for example on what we know about the dynamics of relationships, a concentrated effort to conduct more of those studies would be more than useful. Halinen and Törnroos, argue "in developing a theoretical approach, its ontology, like the processual assumption of the interaction approach, should be in congruence with the type of theory constructed and also with the methods used. If we are to study processes, and if our aim is to construct scientifically and practically strong process theories, we should also use longitudinal methods in empirical research."(1995:521).

To summarize the results of our study, our findings suggest the following:

- Empirical data is becoming more important and gaining slightly on the expense of purely theoretical papers.
- An ever-increasing majority of IMP researchers uses case studies (49%), which increase the share of the nexus perspective (37%) and the share of qualitative research methods (56%), so that this constellation can be regarded as the dominant knowledge perspective within IMP. However, a slight increasing tendency for more quantitative inferential analysis is visible (+6%), which seems to gain on the expense of quantitative descriptive methods (-9%) but not on qualitative methods (+15%). This could also mean that IMP is drifting apart into a large group of researchers that apply qualitative methods (or “soft” methods) and a small group using quantitative inferential methods (or “hard” methods).
- An increasing amount of papers is mentioning dynamic aspects as their topic. However, the actual amount of studies which focus mainly on the dynamics of some phenomena has remained almost unchanged (+2%) which indicates that IMP Group has not been able to escape its structuralist tradition and to increase research that is investigating the dynamic aspects of either structure, processes, or elements of them (such as “trust” or “knowledge”).
- Concerning the state of process research, the total amount of papers that focus on processes has decreased (-16) to 32%. The amount of papers that acknowledge “forward” and “backward” steps (of processes) is slightly increasing (+6%), which is mainly a contribution made by researchers that deploy longitudinal analysis. However, considering numerous calls of IMP scholars for more longitudinal research (e.g. Easton, 1995; Halinen and Törnroos, 1995), it was surprising that the share of longitudinal studies has in fact decreased from 19% to 15%, of which only half is applied to investigate dynamic aspects of interactions.

Conclusions

There seems to be methodological confusion among IMP researchers. Many seem to believe that “case study” is a research method in itself, such as “qualitative interviews”, or some quantitative method. It needs to be stressed that “case study” is an approach that can deploy a range of different research methods. Because the case study approach has become so dominant in IMP research and most researchers believe the best (or only) method is qualitative interviews, many authors feel it is not necessary to describe their research methods anymore and that by saying “case study”, a particular choice of research methods goes with it automatically. This situation has become worse over the years, thanks to the dominance of case studies¹³. We assume that within IMP it is a tradition to concentrate on discussing per se rather than describing how something should be discussed, which is of course a pleasant feature of the IMP Group’s open and rather non-hierarchical spirit. However, if we want others to read our research, we need to briefly explain the sources of our data and how we have made sense of it. Within IMP it is a well-argued point that we write also for practitioners, and therefore researchers should provide them with the necessary information about how the data was created, which has significant influence on generalizability and validity of what we write.

The second issue we have recognized is that even though numerous accounts for deploying case studies for dynamic research exist, case studies rather focus on structural aspects of processes or elements, instead of focusing on dynamics. Harrison and Easton (1998) provided a framework for analysis that should capture dynamic aspects of relationships and network by using temporally embedded case comparison.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence that their voices have been heard. In fact, even though IMP is mostly deploying approaches and qualitative research methods that are rather suitable for researching dynamics, - compared to cross sectional and quantitative

¹³ In 1998 four out of ten case studies did not sufficiently explain their research methods (three of them did not explain them at all), and amongst other studies (cross sectional and sectional), three did not sufficiently explain their methods. By 2003, the situation has significantly worsened and out of 25 case studies, nearly half of them did not specify their methods sufficiently or not at all, leaving their readers in the darkness about the source of their data, while among other studies (sectional, cross sectional) this did not occur even once.

studies - qualitative IMP researchers seem negligent of this opportunity and in some cases it has been in fact the quantitative studies that were focusing on dynamics.

The shift from dynamic implicit to dynamic explicit papers is largely caused by an increasing share of prescriptive papers in IMP, some of them deploying managerial language we know from the journals that are produced by large consultant firms. Whether the IMP Group welcomes this development of increasing prescriptive content and extreme managerial language or whether it rejects it, the impact of these publications by their superficial use of terms such as “dynamics” has already contributed to a managerialization of IMP conferences.

Some reasons for the neglect of researching dynamic aspects can be found in Lowe's (2001) argument, which describes the IMP approach as having its roots in social anthropology, which has an underlying predisposition to structural-functional, structuralist and foundationalist principles and therefore IMP has a predilection for structural explanations of social phenomena. The findings of our study support this argument, and suggest that the structuralist tradition within IMP has serious effects on the IMP Group's capability to create dynamic theories in the future. If despite all publications by well-known IMP scholars about the need for more dynamic research, the output of dynamic studies has not increased, one needs to question in which direction the IMP Group is moving, or if it is moving at all.

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