

AOM 2021

OPTIMAL DISTINCTIVENESS

rudy durand

HEC Paris

OD, D or O?

What is Optimal about OD?

TAKING STOCK: D AT MACRO LEVEL

Calculative positioning

- Relative to a field/industry ie a category system
- Unclearly agentic
- Constantly changing

Focus on materiality/comparability

Necessitates substantive (complementary) theorization

- Mostly associated with categories/category systems (Zhao et al, 18; Haans, 19; Barlow et al, 19; ...)
- Psycho/sociologized mechanisms relative to a norm/an obligation: why conforming? Why not? Where does come the 'optimal' nature of distinctiveness?

QUESTIONING OPTIMALITY

A piece on *Organization Theory* with Richard Haans to:

- i) better understanding the extent to which organizations actually optimize their distinctiveness; and
- ii) investigating the conditions that enable and prevent organizations to optimize their distinctiveness.

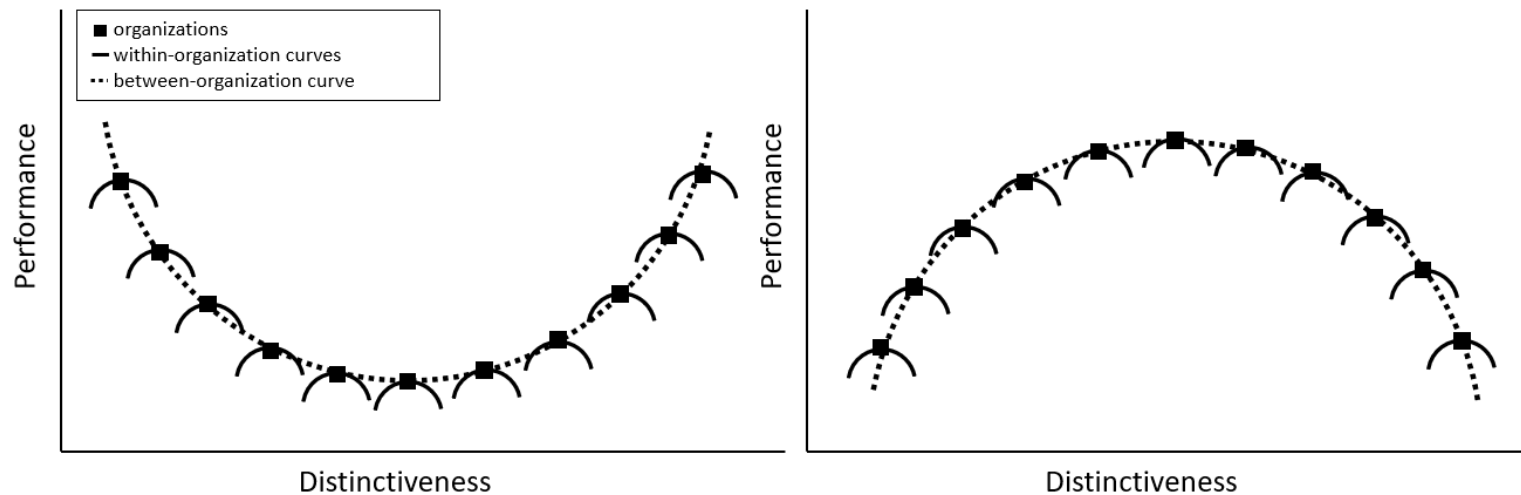
DO ORGANIZATIONS *ACTIVELY* OPTIMIZE THEIR DISTINCTIVENESS?

We may ascribe too high levels of intention in suboptimal firms and falsely attribute low performance to improper distinctiveness even if the organization has no desire to be distinctive.

Likewise, if suboptimal distinctiveness boils down to a lack of ability, then the practical recommendations emerging from our research may be especially limited—ultimately being concerned with an unattainable strategy for most organizations.

Finally, if we conceptualize organizations as being both willing and able to pursue optimal distinctiveness, but constrained due to local conditions, then whether one theorizes about developments in distinctiveness within a given organization over time, or about differences between organizations occupying differently distinctive positions, fundamentally changes what it means to be “optimally distinctive”

CONTRASTING BETWEEN- AND WITHIN-ORGANIZATION OPTIMIZATION CURVES.



From: Rodolphe Durand & Richard Haans (2021) What is “optimal” about distinctiveness? Unanswered questions—theoretical and methodological hints, *Organization Theory*, under final revision

WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS THAT ALTER ORGANIZATIONS' MOTIVATION AND ABILITY TO OPTIMIZE OF THEIR DISTINCTIVENESS?

What to optimize: performance? Others?

Where to optimize distinctiveness? Category systems?
Others?

How to optimize distinctiveness? Alignment?
Conventionality? (Haans, 19; Kremp and Durand, 16)

Optimal for whom? Analyst? Buyer? Owner? Employee?

DISAGGREGATING AUDIENCES

Contextualizing audiences, their capacities, ...

Accounting for more heterogeneity within audiences

Giving them back their agency and situatedness (e.g. conflict of interests A. Fleischer, 2009, ...)

THANK
YOU
FOR YOUR
ATTENTION