



# Roland Calori: A Special Tribute

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Roland Calori received his Ph.D. from the University of Aix en Provence in 1983 and joined EM Lyon later that same year, where he soon became department head. Later, as the director of research he helped transform that school into one of France's top schools of commerce. Roland co-authored 5 books and was involved in the writing of over 50 journal articles. He organized the 2001 EGOS colloquium in Lyon and was preparing to assume the editor-in-chief responsibilities of *Organization Studies* in 2003. Roland was also known for his active interest in companies and for the help he gave to executives in consulting and training sessions. Roland was also a tremendous supporter of *LRP*.

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## The Editor writes:

It was with great sadness that we learned that [Roland Calori](#) died suddenly a year ago, on Bastille Day, 14 July 2002, at the age of 50. He was an active supporter of *LRP* both as board member and contributor of many articles including two in the first two years of my tenure as editor. He also was a wonderful character, friend to many and an intellectual stalwart of the strategy and management community not just in France but world wide.

Roland had so many endearing qualities. Unusual among many academics, he was deeply interested in both business problems and ideas. He was an intellectual, a great consultant, and a man with talent and a capacity for organising. But he was modest, fun loving, and a generous mentor especially to junior faculty.

At the last board meeting it was agreed that we should remember Roland in some special way by printing a short article that consists of a compilation of contributions from individuals close to him who also have an association with *LRP*. These show the serious and playful sides of his character. He was a truly Florentine man, intellectual, scholarly, talented in conversation, respected by those who worked for him, a pillar for people to lean on, and dearly loved by his friends. And he had some artistry too, and so at the end of this piece I reproduce a [cartoon](#) he drew for me one summer after a visit to the desert together with our two Dutch colleagues Henk and Frans.



Roland Calori at his desk in EM Lyon

### Professor Frans A. J. Van den Bosch writes:

I will remember Roland Calori as an example of uncommon scholarship that may inspire us. As I see it, his scholarship was not limited to getting “hits in A-journals” but he also gave his time and energy to people that asked for his advice and friendship. He clearly lacked the “calculative behaviour” we all hate.

I will briefly reflect on one aspect of his scholarship that attracts me in particular: the dynamics of his intellectual curiosity. I will illustrate my observation by applying Mintzberg’s Ten Schools of Thought in Strategy Formation on a selection of Roland’s publications that he wrote in the period 1985–2002. By so doing, it becomes clear how his curiosity changed from a more prescriptive to a more descriptive approach and how Roland moved through the Schools of Thought over time. Each of these Schools of Thought focuses on a particular aspect of the strategy formation process. The first three of the ten Schools are prescriptive, emphasizing how the strategy formation process should be done. The next six Schools are descriptive and emphasize how strategy formation may take place. The last and tenth School is labelled the Configuration School.

One of Roland’s first publications in an international scientific journal was in *LRP* on *Effective Strategies in Emerging Industries*.<sup>1</sup> Together with his other contributions to *LRP*, and in particular the paper on *Designing a Business Scanning System*,<sup>2</sup> these papers can be linked to the prescriptive schools, that is the Design-, Planning-, and Positioning School. In the early nineties, Roland published a paper on *Entrepreneurial High Growth Companies* and a series of papers including a nice book in 1994 on *European Management*.<sup>3</sup> These publications are clearly associated with the Entrepreneurial School and the Cultural School in particular. In the Cultural School strategy formation is conceived as a collective process.

During the nineties Roland shifted his perspective and developed a preference for the Cognitive School in which strategy formation as a mental process is central. He published with various co-authors on the topic of *Managing Mergers Across Borders* and on *Nationally Bound Administrative Heritage*.<sup>4</sup> An early example of his interest in the Cognitive School is his co-authored publication on *CEO’s Cognitive Maps and the Scope of the Organization* in the *Strategic Management Journal*.<sup>5</sup> He developed these ideas further in his paper on *Philosophizing on Strategic Management Models in Organization Studies*.<sup>6</sup> In this contribution he questioned on their own terrain the rational modellers of strategy formation—the Design, Planning and Positioning Schools. In one of his main conclusions he pointed out that: “Philosophizing is questioning, from which managers and

scholars can learn reflectivity which is the ability to be critical or suspicious of one's intellectual assumptions" (Calori, 1998:301). He recommended that we take into account socio-political approaches and the perspective of "strategy as a discourse". By so doing, Roland emphasized the importance of the Power School with its emphasis on negotiated strategy formation and of the Learning School. In the Learning School, strategy formation is conceived of as an emergent process.

In one of his last publications, in *Organization on Organizational Development and the Ontology of Creative Dialectical Evolution*, Roland invited us to stretch towards both philosophy and practitioners lay theories.<sup>7</sup> Roland emphasized that if executives consider reality as a continuous development—a creative "dialectical evolution"—they create the conditions for organizational development. In such a perspective, executives do not consider organizational development as something to be planned or to be designed. He pointed out that "managers who have internalized the principles of creative dialectical evolution will design organizational forms and conduct strategy debates in a way that enhances knowledge integration and consequently organizational development. In so doing, they will create the conditions of meta flexibility." (Calori, 2002:147)

In this sequence of Schools of Thought in Strategy Formation what is missing up till now is the Environmental School and the Configurational School. I personally think Roland implicitly disliked the Environmental School in which strategy formation is considered to be a reactive process: his temperament and view on life contradicted such a passive approach. Looking back on Roland's Odyssey through the various Schools of Thought in Strategy Formation, I think I would like to characterize and remember him as a fine example of a supporter of a "Configuration School" in which strategy formation is considered as a process of transformation, encompassing all the other Schools but each School taking in its own philosophical context. Having achieved such a reflectivity is an important attribute of real scholarship, which at present is still uncommon. Roland, thanks for your contributions.

### **Mike Lubatkin, University of Connecticut writes:**

Professor Roland Calori died July 14th last year, ironically the day marking Independence in France. He was only a few days shy of his 51st birthday. Roland was a world-renowned management scholar.

Roland, Philippe Very, Jack Veiga and I teamed up to write some very good papers. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to work with a scholar with such boundless energy, penetrating insights, and deserved reputation. I smile when I think about the epic battles that we had, many over the trans-Atlantic phone lines, as he stubbornly held fast to his views about the direction of our research, and I, of course, held fast to my views. And, I smile when I think about seeing him one morning at 5am, standing outside my locked office door, with a donut in each hand, anxiously waiting to access my computer. He wanted to try a particular statistical model that he had thought of a few hours before, which had kept him awake, and which ended up serving as the breakthrough model that made sense of all of our data.

Roland Calori was one of my dearest and closest friends. He and Marjia welcomed my wife and I when we first arrived in France on the 28th of December in 1991, and treated us to a New Year's dinner 3 days later. Each summer when I returned to EM Lyon to teach my course, Roland would drive me to his country home in Pollionnay where we would spend the weekends together. We'd talk for hours about papers, children, parenting, and about life. We'd tell jokes and laugh—and for those of you who knew Roland, you knew that he loved to laugh. We'd go for long walks, get lost, and return back to his home just in time to enjoy the delicious dinner that Marjia had spent the morning preparing. I will miss those times, and I will miss my friend. He was the good, nurturing father of his two sons, Marc and Paul, and the committed husband of his wife, Marjia. He was a man who celebrated life and welcomed those around him to join in his celebration.

**Gerry Johnson, University of Strathclyde writes:**

Roland was Renaissance man. His contributions varied from the hard end of strategy to insightful philosophy; and in whichever mode he delivered penetrative insight. He was also determined. When he had a goal in mind he did not let it go. One of my early collaborations with Roland was on a paper for the Strategic Management Journal. The reviewers' comments for the first draft were discouraging but Roland was for seeing it through. He persuaded me to meet in Paris to "give it a go" which is what we did for three days, working and reworking the arguments. The paper was published.

He was also supportive. Colleagues could rely on his reliable and enthusiastic support when they needed it. And not just established academics. At the first conference one of my past PhD students attended she found herself sitting at dinner with a group of senior professors. The unfamiliarity of the situation was compounded by the jockeying amongst the professors for the high ground, which left her with nothing to say and no-one noticing her discomfort. Unlike the other professors, Roland did notice. "He talked of how he had always thought it best that PhD students sit under trees in their university grounds in summer and play with ideas. Somehow this moved on to talking about my research. This left me with an imprint of the joy of academic life I always like to recall."

Working with Roland usually meant that you came away with some new insight or new perspective, not just because of the discussions themselves, but the way they occurred. In the mid nineties Roland prompted, sometimes organised and always attended, a small group of academics, formed as the antidote to large and formal management conferences. This was just a few of us who met to discuss academic matters from very different points of view, without papers, without scripts, relying on intellects, friendship and, of course, good food, good wine and the occasional amble through the countryside. We took lessons from Roland on how to listen to others. He occupied the position that more often than not people had something interesting to say and that, by allowing them the space to say it, their contributions would emerge. This required patience, good humour and absence of academic posturing which we all know are the rare qualities which Roland had and so many of us do not.

Roland also saw the good in people, rather than assume the worst or focus on their weakness. He therefore drew out the best in people. Again this could be academics, but it might be anyone else he met. At the Academy of Management Conference in 1993 Roland's hotel was in downtown Atlanta. He arrived late in the evening, but jetlagged as he was, wanted some air and went for a walk—not the most advisable thing to do in downtown Atlanta. On his way back to the hotel a large and dishevelled hustler jumped out of an alleyway and demanded Roland give him \$10. Roland had only just arrived from the airport where he had changed his francs. He only had large denomination notes. Placing his cigarette in the corner of his mouth Roland pulled out a roll of notes, and asked the guy if he had change for a \$100 bill. Out of sheer shock, and hearing Roland's accent, the hustler asked Roland where he was from. In his broadest French, Roland explained he was from Lyon. "But that's where my family is from" replied the hustler. "Really" replies Roland and they strike up a conversation. A few minutes later Roland is to be found buying the guy a beer and chatting about France. This is Roland. I doubt it would happen to many others.

Roland took sheer joy in all that he did and was a joy to be with. I, like others, wanted to work with Roland, not just because he was a good academic and a good colleague, but because it was a joy to do so. It was not just because he knew how to mix work and pleasure—and he did. It was because working and being with Roland made you feel good. I have also come to realize that in this academic world, which can be so vain and shallow, it is also possible to meet real friendship. I will miss Roland as an academic colleague but most of all as a dear, dear friend.

**Leif Melin, Jönköping International Business School, writes:**

Roland Calori was a true strategic management scholar. In all his outstanding research he contributed with new empirical accounts, theoretical perspectives and conclusions that helped establish

a European school of strategy. Some would say that during the last five years he left the strategy field moving into pure organization theory studies. I think this interpretation is too limited, rather, Roland Calori opened up totally new perspectives for understanding strategic development, renewal and leadership.

In his most recent articles and papers, Roland Calori developed an innovative framework on organizational learning and knowledge creation through taking in and translating concepts from philosophy and social theory. His ambition was to increase our understanding of becoming and the role of dialogue in strategic renewal processes. He introduced new concepts such as “creative dialectic evolution”, combining work of two philosophers, Bergson on creative evolution and Merleau-Ponty on hyperdialectics, thereby opening up a new agenda for innovative strategizing. In what became his last, unfinished work, he further developed his new framework through emphasizing the organizations capacity for explorative learning, especially in conditions of diversity. Here he extended the meaning of March’s exploration concept through focusing on why and how to engage organizational members on many levels in explorative dialogues, based on Habermas “communicative action” and Aristotle’s “deliberation” and “open argumentation”.

I had the advantage of working closely with Roland in different research endeavours over the last 15 years, which gave me the great experience of participating with him in many challenging, intellectual journeys. Collaboration with Roland meant benefiting from his constructive, demanding and rigorous input in our research dialogues. At the same time, the hard, energetic and professional work was always combined with the importance of having a good time. He enjoyed the hedonistic aspects of modern life such as excellent food and wine, followed by classic blues music, at blues bars at different conference venues around the world. In whatever context you met Roland you always experienced his warmth, his humour, his humility and his empathy.

Roland, you left us much too early. But we will continue to “interact” with you, feeling your complex and human personality both when reading your texts and when listening to the blues you liked!

### **Tugrul Atamer, Strategic Management Department EM-Lyon writes:**

I wrote three books and numerous articles with Roland after he recruited me in 1986 at EM Lyon. We shared a common passion for our profession sometimes through consultant projects, sometimes through research projects and finally for building up an international strategic management team at EM Lyon. He became my close friend, almost my brother. Roland will not only be remembered for his deep human warmth and friendship, for the extraordinary contact he established with students in his classes, but also for the wealth and variety of intellectual excellence that he brought to his teaching and research. Although rooted in his native Mediterranean land, Roland was open to other cultures. I remember the day when we flew to Milan to visit Bocconi in 1989, with the idea of building up a research community in Europe. This was the starting point of the Modem Group that teamed up 16 people from 8 countries and led to the creation of the book about the specificity of European Management.

Roland had a special ability to orchestrate a network of people coming from different countries. Sometimes the personality of all these international network members was so different, misunderstandings and miscommunications created so much tensions that I still wonder how they survived. The magic was Roland’s diplomacy. At the hottest moment of the meeting he knew when exactly to call a coffee break. Over the coffee break he knew how to fix problems and reduce tensions by diplomacy.

Roland rejected extremism both in research and in everyday life, because he felt that reality could be built around a movement of perpetual dialectic. An open ear to all the vagaries of opinion was better than a hermetic fixed view. For Roland, strategic management was all about managing this dialectic and integrating these subtleties. Roland believed that excellence was the fusion of passion and pleasure. The true value of his legacy lies in this ability to have been perpetually innovative in his ideas, guided by a unique and very strong principle of humanism.



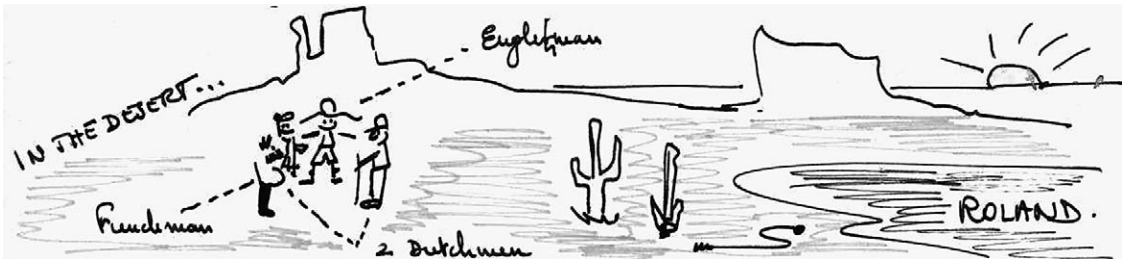
## Philippe Very, Professor of Edhec Business School, France writes:

Roland you were surely the one of the best-known French professors in strategic management in the world, well known for your research and human qualities. You recruited me at EM Lyon when I was a doctoral student and quickly involved me in ambitious research projects. In many circumstances, you generated such a momentum that I was obliged to make progress. In the first years that I followed you, I tried to avoid being outrun. You gave me ten days to create a list of company CEOs to interview and asked me to write a consulting report late in the evening for the next day's meeting with the company executives! I helped you organise a conference where you decided we should do everything ourselves. I remember running behind you on Stockholm's side-walks on a dark and rainy night where you endlessly searched for a good Blues Band concert. It was a learning race. Learn about the job, the blues bands and so many other things... I never succeeded in catching you up.

We conducted twelve years of research together, forged by close friendship between us and with our offices separated only by a simple glass wall. You inspired respect as one deeply appreciated by your peers. You proposed to read articles before others such as I sent them to journals. You encouraged and gave advice over teaching. You always gave your best to the Business School, meeting partners, organising big events and preparing reports.

You loved being with your friends, discovering new people and new cultures. You welcomed visiting professors, exploring and discussing new ideas. I hope you get some rest now. Recently, after a French colloquium, we were lying back in comfortable desk-chairs, a glass of Pastis in one hand, speaking of our families, telling jokes in Marseille slang. We both loved your native town. It was a lot of fun. Laughing like two young teenagers. I appreciated these moments as I think you did.

Then you suddenly ran to take a taxi for the train station. No surprise. You left us at the dawn of your 51st year. Is this your last joke? Because "51" is the brand name of the Pastis we used to sip together.



Reflections on a trip to the desert with friends by Roland Calori

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