Relational Coordination Theory: 
A Systematic Review of Evidence Across Countries and Industries

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January 30, 2018

In this paper we review a relatively new theory of organizations and assess the evidence for it to date. Relational coordination theory (RCT) holds that relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect between workgroups or organizations promote frequent, timely, accurate, problem-solving communication and vice versa, allowing them to effectively coordinate their work. RCT hypothesizes that organizations can redesign their structures - human resource practices and coordinating mechanisms - to support relational coordination between workgroups or organizations by reducing subgoal optimization and increasing systems thinking. Second, RCT hypothesizes that these relational networks result in beneficial outcomes for multiple stakeholders when they are strong, and harmful outcomes when they are weak. By bridging across country and industry contexts, levels of analysis, and the research/practice divide, RCT has the potential for real world impact. Our systematic review of empirical findings identifies moderately strong support for the theory in its current form; 89% of 128 findings support expected performance outcomes, while 89% of 61 findings support expected predictors. Our review also reveals the need for further theoretical development. We leverage unexpected findings to extend the theory in new directions, including 1) a dynamic understanding of how relational coordination is shaped by organizational structures and vice versa, and how change agents can break that self-reinforcing cycle, 2) attention to the interplay between gender and other disparities and relational coordination, and 3) attention to the distributional consequences of relational coordination.