Chapter 12
Towards a Sociocognitive Perspective on Ecosystem Leadership:
A Review of the Literature and an Agenda for Future Research

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ABSTRACT

This chapter advances the sociocognitive perspective on ecosystem leadership, emphasizing the critical roles of managers, their cognitions, and their social interactions in shaping a shared ecosystem vision (sensing), achieving ecosystem-specific commitment (seizing) and maintaining ecosystem stability (reconfiguring). We explore which sociocognitive processes and capabilities likely underpin dynamic managerial capabilities. Towards this aim, we review the literature on ecosystem leadership, focusing on insights into sociocognitive dynamics to open new avenues for future research into the sociocognitive microfoundations of ecosystem leadership. We contribute to the literatures on ecosystem leadership and dynamic capabilities as well as to the sociocognitive perspective in management.

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INTRODUCTION

The recent management and organization research into ecosystems has emphasized the critical so-called 'leadership' role that firms have in ecosystems (Altman, Cox, et al., 2023; Foss et al., 2023), particularly the three dynamic capabilities of "facilitating the formation of an ecosystem's shared vision (sensing), inducing others to make ecosystem-specific investments (seizing), and engaging in ad hoc problem-solving to create and maintain stability (reconfiguring)" (Foss et al., 2023: 5; see also Altman et al., 2022; Autio, 2022; Möller, 2010). Accordingly, ecosystem leaders need to form a mutual understanding of the potential joint value proposition, to achieve a sufficient level of commitment to support the value proposition, and to establish routines to handle emerging problems. The key task of the ecosystem leader is to guide this process towards higher joint value creation.

Although some studies have hinted at the managerial-level sociocognitive aspects that underpin these ecosystem leadership tasks (Altman, Kiron, et al., 2023; Autio, 2022; Autio & Thomas, 2020; Dattée et al., 2018; Foss et al., 2023; Reuter & Floyd, 2024), we still lack a refined conceptualization of the sociocognitive processes and capabilities that can illuminate the microfoundations of the three dynamic capabilities of sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring of ecosystem leadership. The sociocognitive perspective focuses on the roles of managers' meaning-making and social interactions for construing the joint value creation potentials among ecosystem actors. In turn, these sociocognitive processes and capabilities likely provoke heterogeneity in dynamic managerial capabilities, which may help explain variations in ecosystem emergence, transformation, and stability maintenance as well as whether or not the joint value creation potentials are effectively materialized.

To address this critical shortcoming in the literature, we will review the ecosystem leadership literature (see Altman & Tushman, 2017; Foss et al., 2023) and the related literatures, including those on ecosystem orchestration (see Linde et al., 2021; Parida et al., 2019), ecosystem management (see Gomes et al., 2018; Pera et al., 2016), network orchestration (see Dhanasai & Parkhe, 2006; Nambisan & Sawhney, 2011), and interorganizational network management (see Aarikka-Stenroos & Ritala, 2017; Möller & Halinen, 1999), with a particular focus on the underlying sociocognitive dynamics.

This chapter seeks to make key contributions. First, by advancing a refined conceptualization of the (sociocognitive) microfoundations of ecosystem leadership, as derived from our review of the literature, we seek to contribute the very first step towards a sociocognitive perspective on ecosystem leadership, which may help shed light on ecosystem emergence, transformation, and stability maintenance processes (Altman et al., 2023; Autio, 2022; Autio & Thomas, 2020; Dattée et al., 2018; Foss et al., 2023). Second, by illuminating specific sociocognitive process and capability