



## FRONT AND BACKSTAGES OF THE DIMINISHED ROUTINIZATION OF INNOVATIONS: WHAT INNOVATION RESEARCH MAKES PUBLIC AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH FINDS BEHIND THE SCENES

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*Research on innovation routinization emphasizes public aspects of this process. The issues such research addresses are important, but do not fully describe routinization processes or account for all the characteristics that generate them. Based on a study of an innovative course, we explore organizational factors that affect the diminished routinization of innovations, the loss of core components of the innovation while it is being routinized. We develop a model of how organizational structure and intergroup dynamics affect the diminished routinization of innovations by impacting knowledge sharing and links between the innovation and its core organizational purpose. Copyright © 2008 Strategic Management Society.*

### INTRODUCTION

Sometimes successful innovations become routinized in nonadaptive ways in the setting in which they were originally developed, even while others outside the original setting develop skills in adapting them to different kinds of situations (Teece, 1986). When this occurs, the benefits of the innovation may be lost to the original setting. How is it that successful innovations become routinized in nonadaptive ways in their original settings? What organizational dynamics are at play during such routinization?

Literature on the evolution and diffusion of innovations provides useful insights to address some of these issues. However, this literature leaves out multiple behind-the-scenes dynamics in organizations—normal, daily aspects of organizational life—that affect innovations and their evolution just as they affect other features of organizational life. Organizational literature may provide insights into innovation processes that are often missed by literature focusing on the innovations themselves.

In this article, we study what happened over time to an innovation that was very important to its originator organization, but became routinized in a diminished fashion in that organization, eventually losing its role. Our purpose is to explore how events like these not only correspond to findings from innovation research, but also unveil organizational dynamics that might ordinarily be hidden from view when attention is primarily on the innovation itself.

Key words: innovation; routinization; front- and backstage processes; organizational structure; intergroup dynamics; knowledge sharing; organizational learning

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Our framework for this undertaking comes from Goffman's (1959) description of front and backstages of everyday life. Speaking of individuals and using a dramaturgical metaphor, Goffman described the front stage of any action as what is usually publicly observable, 'that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions . . . to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (1959: 22). He noted that 'a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotypical expectations to which it gives rise' (1959: 27). But he also noted that what an audience sees may give a very different impression from what is taking place backstage that enables the front-stage performance to occur. He described several possible discrepancies between front- and backstage performances, including correcting errors before the performance takes place while hiding all signs of these errors, showing an end product but not the work that went into it, dirty work that may be degrading in some way, or the sacrifice of some standards so other standards can be sustained in public.

We suggest that the scholarly story typically told by innovation researchers is largely a front-stage story. It presents the public face of events that happen in an organization in relation to an unfolding innovation there. It is well known, and as Anderson, de Dreu, and Nijstad (2004) suggest, not a particularly innovative story anymore. What is not so well known is that there is a backstage behind the public front; one where there is a large amount of activity that generates the front-stage appearance. These activities are often explored by those who study organizational behavior, and they may well be, as Goffman (1959) noted, more messy and dirty than the front-stage activities associated with the innovation. Understanding both front- and backstage processes is necessary for more a complete understanding of innovations and their routinization.

Given our focus, this article will use a somewhat unconventional format. We will situate our study by summarizing recent literature on innovation processes, focusing on literature that addresses the evolution and routinization of an innovation in the organization in which it began, even while it might be adopted in other settings. We will analyze what happened to the innovation we studied from the perspective of this literature.

Then we will explore, based on interview and archival data, the backstage organizational events that helped generate routinization and eventual diminishment in the innovation we studied. We

will also flesh out the types of links that may exist between front- and backstage processes. Hopefully, in doing this, we will contribute to more innovative theorizing about innovation processes in organizations (Anderson *et al.*, 2004).

### **Front-stage innovation processes**

An innovation has been defined as a new idea, practice, or artifact (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Slappendel, 1996; Zaltman, Duncan, and Holbek, 1973). There are large literatures that explore several dimensions of innovations, including their creation (Slappendel, 1996; Van de Ven and Rogers, 1988; Wolfe, 1994) and diffusion (Rogers, 1962; Tolbert and Zucker, 1983), predictors of organizational innovativeness (Kim, 1980; Kimberly and Evanisko, 1981; Wolfe, 1994) and stages related to innovation adoption (e.g., Cooper and Zmud, 1989; Ettlie, 1980; Meyer and Goes, 1988; Wolfe, 1994). In this study, we are particularly interested in literature that addresses what happens to innovations over time in the organization in which they were created. Innovation literature addresses dimensions of this topic including first-mover advantages and factors associated with innovation routinization over time.

### **First-mover advantage**

Research addressing the first-mover advantage explores how innovative companies may secure the benefits of their technological innovation as it diffuses (perhaps through competitors) throughout an industry. Teece (1986) argued that the extent to which a company would benefit from a technological innovation and avoid second or third entrants outperforming them would depend on three factors: the appropriability of the innovation, the complementary assets needed to exploit it, and the emergence of a dominant design paradigm.

Gort and Klepper (1982), along with Teece (1986), argued that the probability of entry of competitors to a technological innovation depends on available information on the innovation and whether this information is explicit or tacit. Explicit information increases the likelihood of competitors entering a market, but tacit knowledge held only within the innovating organization creates barriers to entry. In fact, tacit knowledge associated with an innovation is one of the main isolating mechanisms that first movers have to sustain their competitive advantage (Suarez and Lanzolla, 2007).

Teece (1986) also emphasized the importance of complementary assets—the assets needed for successful commercialization of the innovation—such as distribution channels. He argued that firms that control these assets are in a more favorable position to benefit from their innovation.

Finally, Teece noted that the emergence of a dominant design is particularly important in determining what benefits accrue to innovator and follower organizations. ‘The innovator may have been responsible for the fundamental scientific breakthroughs, as well as the basic design of the new product. However, if imitation is relatively easy, imitators may enter the fray, modifying the product in important ways, yet relying on the fundamental designs pioneered by the innovator’ (1986: 288).

### The routinization of innovations

Although innovations are typically very malleable and fluid when they are first developing, they often become routinized over time (Zhu, Kraemer, and Xu, 2006), with routinization referring to ‘automaticity in behavior, typically including unintentionality, uncontrollability, lack of awareness, and efficiency’ (Ohly, Sonnentag, and Pluntke, 2006: 258). As an innovation becomes increasingly routinized, it becomes less malleable (e.g., Tyre and Orlikowski, 1994). It also gets implemented more and more mindlessly (Ashforth and Fried, 1988).

It is normal for routinization to occur over time; a type of routinization, in the form of mass production, is often the objective of innovations. However, with routinization comes a risk of calcification, an inability to change the innovation if necessary. For example, Lavie and Rosenkopf (2006), among others, have described how firms’ accumulated experience with some types of action leads to path dependencies—the tendency to reinforce already-established routines. Miller’s (1992, 1994) research made evident that after long periods of sustained success, companies tend to exhibit inertia (i.e., adhering more closely to orientations from the past), immoderation (i.e., taking previous strategies to the extreme), inattention (i.e., reducing information processing), and insularity (i.e., ceasing to adapt to changes in the environment). This can sometimes lead organizations to fall into competency traps, when ‘favorable performance with an inferior procedure leads an organization to accumulate more experience with it’ (Levitt and March, 1988: 322).

What is implicit, if not always explicit, in this literature is that in some cases what becomes routinized about an innovation leaves out one or more core, though perhaps subtle, features of the original innovation; the routinized version is not fully faithful to all of its components. This is likely to happen over time with the loss of organizational memory (Bartunek, 2003; Walsh and Ungson, 1991) of the complete original idea. It may also be likely when the innovation includes tacit elements that are not known by all who are involved in activities that affect implementation. When one or more core features are not included in implementation, what becomes routinized is a diminished version of the original innovation. Our attention in this paper is on such diminished routinization.

Limits on managerial cognition are often given as the primary reason that innovations are routinized in a diminished fashion. Incorporating risk theory (Kahneman and Tversky 1979), Greve’s (2003) performance feedback theory suggests that the likelihood and type of organizational change depends on managers’ risk preferences. Managers are risk seeking when considering options while in the loss domain (i.e., when performance is below aspirations), but risk averse when considering options while in the gain domain. Consequently, after a successful innovation is implemented, managers are likely to be reluctant to further engage in exploratory activities. In addition, previous research suggests that success discourages information processing (e.g., Huber, 1991; Lant and Montgomery, 1987; Miller, 1994). As successful performance persists, managers make attributions that support their decisions and courses of action, and pay less attention to signals that might indicate otherwise. Finally, Reger and Palmer (1996) and Hodgkinson (1997), among others, suggest that managers often develop cognitive inertia, the inability of their mental models to keep pace with the changes required for innovations to succeed.

The impact of diminished routinization that often follows successful innovations is that organizations become less able to adapt to changing environments (Suarez and Lanzolla, 2007). For example, Collinson and Wilson (2006) showed how features of two Japanese companies that were originally the source of their competitive advantage ended up being barriers to change as the environment suddenly became more turbulent.

In sum, a front-stage story of what happens to innovations over time suggests several hypotheses regarding their evolution:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1): A first-mover advantage is determined, in part, on how easy it is for knowledge about the innovation to be gained, how much the innovator organization controls its distribution channels, and how much tacit knowledge is involved in successful implementation.*

*Hypothesis 2 (H2): In organizations in which an innovation is very successful at first, the innovation is likely to become routinized in a diminished manner over time.*

*Hypothesis 3 (H3): Diminished routinization likely arises from managers' cognitive limitations.*

To explore these issues, we studied what happened in a core competencies course developed originally by the Center for Organizational Learning (OLC) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and taught there and at its successor organization, the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL), for several years. The course was designed to build the capacity of participants in the five disciplines of organizational learning as described in Peter Senge's (1990) book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Science of the Learning Organization*. The course was an important innovation for the OLC. It was developed in conjunction with, and entirely integrated around, initial skill building in the five disciplines described in the book, and it took place as an integral part of a large set of activities on the part of its participants. It was by no means a one-time training course.

This course was very popular at the OLC and SoL for several years. It was successful in helping groups within member organizations acquire language and tools they could use together to work and learn effectively. It became so prominent that it was identified with capacity building at SoL for a time. However, it later declined considerably in popularity, even while elements of it were successfully adopted in other organizations.

## METHOD

### Research approach

Between 2003 and 2005, the four authors were involved in an action research project whose initial purpose was to reinvigorate the core competencies course at SoL. We used a joint insider/

outsider approach (Bartunek and Louis, 1996) to conduct this research. Two of us, Jean Bartunek and Jordi Trullen, both affiliated with a university, were outside researchers; Jean is also a research member of SoL. Sherry Immediato is the President and Managing Director of SoL. Frank Schneider, also a staff member at SoL, works in Partnership Development with current and potential SoL organization members.

The action research project did not succeed in reinvigorating the course. It did, however, enable both insider and outsider researchers to understand more fully some of the dynamics associated with the problems the course encountered. It also stimulated more attention to the overall process of product innovation at SoL, contributing to the creation of a consulting business there as well as the September 2007 launch of the SoL Academy on Wheels ([http://www.solonline.org/announcements/item?item\\_id=10710148](http://www.solonline.org/announcements/item?item_id=10710148)), and other new products.

As part of the action research project, we collected data regarding the course and its history, as well as data reflecting various constituencies' perceptions of the course. We use those data here first to explore the front-stage processes associated with the course over time, and then to understand the dynamics that helped generate the front-stage processes.

### Data sources

There were three types of data sources: interviews, participant observation, and archival data. A summary of these data sources is presented in Table 1. First, we interviewed the different SoL constituencies about the course, and had meetings where we discussed it among ourselves. Second, we employed participant observation. Third, we collected considerable archival data regarding the course.

*Formal Interviews.* In order to gain multiple perspectives on the core competencies course, the outside researchers conducted interviews with multiple SoL constituencies who were involved in some way with the core competencies course. These included course facilitators, SoL staff members, company liaison officers (individuals in SoL member organizations who were the primary link between their companies and SoL), capacity-building committee members (who were charged with developing an understanding of what *capacity building* at SoL should mean), and members of SoL's governing council. The two SoL researchers suggested representatives of each

Table 1. Data sources

*Interviews*

- 8 present and past facilitators of the core competencies course (including all of those involved in its original design)
- 12 present and past corporate liaison officers
- 8 SoL staff members
- 2 SoL council members
- 6 SoL capacity-building members

*Participant Observation*

- Two inside researchers kept records of their experiences with the core competencies course
- One outside researcher participated in the core competencies course and a meeting led by the capacity-building committee; the other outside researcher participated in a meeting of the SoL Council

*Archival Materials*

Materials from the MIT Center for Organizational Learning

- Schema for describing the capacities of learning organization practitioners, April 1995 (MIT OLC)
- A method for developing the capacities of learning organization practitioners, May 1995 (MIT OLC)

Materials from SoL

- Assessment of the core competencies course by a SoL member organization, 1997
- The virtual institute: the concept. Internal SoL document, September 1997
- MIT-OLC core competencies course data analysis. Internal SoL document, July 8, 1998
- A synthesis of expressed capacity-building needs of the SoL community. Internal SoL document, October 1998
- Two learning histories of SoL compiled in the late 1990s (Bradbury, 1999; Clanon, 1999)
- Constitution for the Society for Organizational Learning, Inc. Updated May 9, 2002
- Draft guidelines for the SoL applied learning process. Internal SoL document, November 2003
- Web description of SoL core competencies course, [www.solonline.org/courses/corecompetenciescourse/](http://www.solonline.org/courses/corecompetenciescourse/). Fall 2003
- Web descriptions of accelerated organizational learning for business results: core competencies in action, [www.solonline.org/announcements/item?item\\_id=883319](http://www.solonline.org/announcements/item?item_id=883319). Spring 2005

Materials compiled by the SoL capacity-building committee

- The evolution of capacity building at SoL, 2002
- Capacity-building committee meeting notes, May 27, 2003
- SoL capacity-building draft system map, July 1, 2003
- Planning the future of SoL capacity-building with key community stakeholders, Spring 2004
- SoL as network/membership as source. SoL capacity building meeting, May 10–11, 2004
- Headline in HBR May 2010 issue reads: SoL revolutionizes world's organizations with powerful capacity-building techniques, May 2004
- SoL capacity building changing realities—new strategies required. Planning the future of SoL capacity building with key community stakeholders, Spring 2004
- SoL capacity building strategic plan (draft version 2), November 3, 2004

constituency that they thought could provide useful information, and the external researchers interviewed as many people from this list as they were able to contact. All in all, they conducted interviews with eight present and past facilitators of the core competencies course (all but one of those who had facilitated the course since its inception), 12 present and past liaison officers, eight SoL staff members, two SoL council members, and six SoL capacity-building committee members. We recorded all these interviews and had them transcribed. We then checked

the transcribed interviews for accuracy and corrected them when necessary.

We described the purpose of these interviews to our interviewees as 'to explore how the core competencies course offered first at OLC and then at SoL since 1992 has evolved.' A list of the questions we asked each of our interviewees is presented in Appendix A. The questions asked for information about the interviewees' connection to the course, their perceptions of what *capacity building* meant at SoL, their sense of how (if at all) the core

competencies course had evolved over the past several years, what (if anything) differentiated the SoL core competencies course from training provided by other organizations, and how effective the course was. We also asked how the clientele for the course had changed over time.

In addition, we asked the facilitators how they implemented capacity building in the core competencies course and about the expectations SoL had of them. We asked liaison officers about their companies' involvement with the course and how this had evolved over time, as well as about the liaison role and its possible evolution.

*Informal conversations.* During the course of the project, the four authors had regular meetings in which they discussed issues related to the history of SoL and the core competencies course. Notes taken at the meetings were used in reconstructing issues pertinent to this study.

*Participant observation.* Two of the authors are full-time employees of SoL who participate in its daily activities. Their contributions to this article were based, in part, on their ongoing experiences in the organization. In addition, one of the outside researchers participated in one of the offerings of the core competencies course and a meeting sponsored by SoL's capacity-building committee, and took notes on both. The other outside researcher participated in a SoL council meeting that focused on capacity building, and took notes on that gathering.

*Archival documents.* As indicated in Table 1, we also had access to considerable archival material relevant to the core competencies course. We had access to two learning histories of SoL and its predecessor, the OLC (Bradbury, 1999; Clanon, 1999). We also had access to several documents related to the core competencies course, such as an assessment of capacity-building needs, a document that described some of the early planning for SoL, an assessment of the core competencies course that had taken place at one of SoL's member organizations, and several documents compiled by the capacity-building committee as they sought to consider the course's relationship to capacity building at SoL.

We used the information from these data sources to construct a history of the core competencies course, the OLC, SoL, and capacity building pertinent to the course. A time line that summarizes this history is presented in Table 2. We will first use this information to discuss the *front-stage* story—the public version of what happened in the core competencies

course over time. Then we will discuss some of the group and organizational dynamics that generated the public face of the course's evolution.

## THE FRONT-STAGE STORY

### The OLC, SoL, the core competencies course, and capacity building

The OLC was founded in 1991 as a sponsored research center at MIT by a group of colleagues that included Peter Senge, Daniel Kim, Janet Gould, and Bill Isaacs. The Center was a partnership between MIT researchers and several member corporations to undertake experiments in applying the disciplines of organizational learning to business units and organizational projects. The Center's work included regular meetings among representatives of the member companies and the researchers. 'The initial focus was on *developing new learning capabilities* (emphases added) in the areas of systems thinking, collaborative inquiry into tacit mental models, and nurturing personal and shared vision, and applying these skills in practical business settings' (Clanon, 1999: 2). The focus on developing capacity for learning, referred to as *capacity building*, has remained central to the OLC and SoL.

In 1992, the OLC started experimenting with offering a course for its member companies. The offering was originally in five separate weekend segments and then, as that arrangement proved unworkable, in one five-day course on *core competencies* of organizational learning. This course was based largely on Peter Senge's book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), which was itself based on work conducted during the 1980s by many of those who became involved in the OLC (Bradbury, 1999). It incorporated learning and capacity building regarding all five disciplines described in that book (systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning), and was aimed at helping OLC member companies develop skills and capacities that would make them learning organizations. Corporate membership in the OLC bought several seats in the core competencies course, and member organizations (most of which were multinational corporations) would send several employees who were working on particular projects to participate in the course together (Clanon, 1999). The course could accommodate up to 100 people, and enrollment was typically high, especially when Peter Senge—who

Table 2. Timeline of events associated with the OLC/SoL, capacity building, and the core competencies course

Year	OLC/SOL event	Capacity building and accompanying events	Core competencies course and related initiatives aimed at fostering capacity building
1990	Publication of <i>The Fifth Discipline</i>		
1991	OLC begins	Developing capacity for learning identified as the key value of the OLC	
1992			First offering of core competencies course (it continued being offered 2–3 times per year through 2004)
1994	Publication of the <i>Fifth Discipline Fieldbook</i>		Many exercises in the course are now in the public domain
1997	SoL begins, with new membership model (corporations, consultants, researchers)	One of SoL’s core principles is developing learning capabilities	Additional courses that complement the core capacities course are introduced. Membership in SoL brings ‘seats’ in the courses
1998			SoL report indicates that companies tend to send members to the core competencies course for a limited period of time; participation in the course decreases
1998–1999			Attempts are made to begin a ‘virtual institute’ that would enable other ways of fostering capabilities for learning, but this does not happen
2001	Change in membership model		Membership benefits are extended to include options other than seats in courses
2002		Creation of SoL capacity-building committee because current courses were relatively unchanged after many years, while members’ capabilities were improved	
			Beginning development of an applied learning process at SoL that focuses on corporations reflecting on and learning from their experiences.
2003		Capacity building committee discusses capacity building as a process rather than an event	
2003–2004		SoL Web site identifies capacity building with its courses	

Table 2. *Continued*

Year	OLC/SOL event	Capacity building and accompanying events	Core competencies course and related initiatives aimed at fostering capacity building
2004		Capacity building committee convenes meeting of representatives of multiple SoL constituencies to reach agreement on capacity building as a process rather than an event and an expanded understanding of it	
2004		Capacity building committee develops a strategic plan for capacity building at SoL in which courses play a minor role	
2005			Core competencies course no longer offered. One time offering of 'Accelerated Learning for Business Results'

has been a charismatic figure throughout the history of the OLC and SoL—was one of the course facilitators.

During the course, time was allotted for members of the individual organizations to work together on their projects in light of the learning materials. There was an expectation that the member companies would continue work on their projects outside the course time, and then report to each other on their progress during regular meetings of OLC member companies.

While the course was expected to introduce capacity building, it was not expected to give complete training in it. As one of the facilitators who originally designed the course stated in an interview, 'It was an introduction, so that the *real* capacity building . . . had to take place *in contextually realistic settings*, in projects, people working together over months and years, in their organization with all the political organizational realities they had to deal with . . . the course was an introduction to a set of basic core competencies.'

*The creation of SoL.* The OLC grew rapidly; by the mid-1990s, it included 19 corporate partners. By 1995, the OLC no longer fit the expectations of an MIT research center. Its major stakeholders decided to redesign the Center as an independent

organization that would include three types of members—consultants, organizations, and researchers. After much creative design work, a new, independent membership organization named SoL, the Society for Organizational Learning, formally began two years later. SoL's constitution (Society for Organizational Learning, 2002: 3) defined organizational learning as 'the enhanced capacity of people, individually and collectively, to create results consistent with their deepest aspirations, leading to institutions that can continually adapt and evolve.' When SoL began, the core competencies course was one of its flagship offerings for helping accomplish this increased capacity.

After some evolution during its first few years in the OLC, the content of the core competencies course had largely stabilized. The great majority of our interviewees said the course had stayed fundamentally the same the past several years, although there had been some individual facilitator variation in how the course was taught. One of the facilitators commented that 'If I look at the pattern of the basic content, I think it has stayed the same.' Another said, 'It's like a 20–30 percent variation depending on who's teaching it.' What led to the similarity? All but one of its eight facilitators had been teaching the course since the early to mid-1990s, and

some of them had designed the course during the early 1990s.

Starting prior to 2003, anyone who clicked on *capacity building* on the SoL Web site was taken directly to the core competencies course along with similar courses being offered at SoL. Thus, this course was explicitly communicated as an integral part of SoL's identity.

*The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (Senge *et al.*, 1994) was published in 1994. This *Fieldbook* included several exercises that were used in the core competencies course, as well as exercises used in other OLC offerings. As they were readily available, the exercises began to be used in a variety of training sessions outside of SoL. In addition, some of the member organizations started creating their own internal core competencies courses, integrating many of the public course's core concepts and adjusting some of its specific tools and exercises to fit their own circumstances. Sometimes under the auspices of SoL, the same facilitators who taught the core competencies course at SoL taught an individualized and customized offering for a member organization—an intended diffusion of the innovation.

As course offerings in individual companies took place more frequently, participation of member companies in the publicly offered core competencies course decreased. An internal SoL study in 1998 indicated that companies tended to send their members to the public core competencies course for approximately two years, but would then offer their own internal course (typically facilitated by SoL consultants) and cut back substantially on the number of people they sent to the public course.

In the late 1990s, partly in response to this awareness, a group of SoL members designed a *virtual institute*, an attempt to foster capacity building through various virtual media, rather than just by means of face-to-face courses. However, this idea was not successfully implemented.

By the early 2000s, participants in the public offering of the core competencies course had often participated in one or more of the course exercises already. For example, one of the outside researchers found that the facilitators sometimes made statements such as 'You may have already done this . . .' or 'How many of you have done this?' with regard to the various exercises.

In order to maintain the attractiveness of membership in SoL, the structure of organizational membership changed in 2001. Members could continue to send employees to public courses, or they

could receive other services of equivalent economic value, such as participation in research projects or offering courses internally for their own employees. This change stabilized membership levels. It may have also lessened the interest of members in participating in SoL public programs.

As time went by, some SoL member organizations started using the course primarily as a developmental opportunity for individual employees, but with no follow-up afterwards or linkage to particular projects. In addition, as member companies' participation decreased, SoL started advertising the course outside its own membership. By 2003, individuals and smaller non-profit, educational, and governmental organizations made up the majority of the participants. Moreover, the number of participants in each course offering (two times a year, less frequently than before) had decreased considerably. This was cause for concern because the course not only offered potential SoL members an introduction to SoL's activities, but also provided some funding for other SoL initiatives.

In the Fall of 2004, while they were developing the budget for the coming year, the SoL staff contacted the liaison officers to see how many people from member companies could be expected to participate in the core competencies course the following year. When they learned that relatively few organizational members would commit to participate, they decided to offer a different type of public core competencies course, one altered to incorporate the feedback they had received from the action research study. In addition, the staff drafted a budget which shifted emphasis from public courses to consulting and project work conducted directly with members. SoL's governing council approved this budget and change in focus.

Thus, in early 2005, SoL offered a version of the course, called 'Accelerated learning for business results', that explicitly linked attendance with corporate projects in a way that was largely consistent with the original OLC model. While the course was seen as very effective by its participants, offering this course regularly was not feasible, because it was too difficult to find a sufficient number of corporate teams that would be working on projects pertinent to participation in the course at the same time. Rather, the SoL staff decided to focus on other training and consulting within SoL member companies, and to offer parts of the course in different forms, such as in modularized sessions and through other new media. Making the content available to members this way

ended up being more successful than continuing to offer the course.

In March 2004, SoL published *Presence* by Senge *et al.* Following the prior pattern of innovation, SoL began offering courses on presencing in late 2005, and has recently expanded its offerings on sustainability and other topics.

## ANALYSIS BASED ON THE FRONT-STAGE STORY

What happened to the core competencies course was similar to what happens to many innovations. The course, at least in terms of its popularity, went through cycles of development—growth, maturity, and decline (c.f. Bass, 1969; Gort and Klepper, 1982; Mahajan, Muller, and Bass, 1990; Rogers, 1962)—that are described in standard innovation literature. After its initial introduction, the course experienced a sustained growth, and there was an increase in OLC membership, which made it difficult to manage within the MIT structure. In the mid- to late 1990s, OLC stakeholders created a new organization (SoL) to accommodate the growth OLC experienced. During this time period, the core competencies course started to be adapted by other consultants and organizations as in-house training. The public course also became increasingly codified and routinized, changing little over time, and eventually declining.

SoL did not maintain a first-mover advantage (H1). Consistent with innovation literature, this was the case, at least in part, because the isolating mechanisms available to SoL were very weak; some of the course exercises were publicly available, and the facilitators for the course did work on their own as well as for SoL.

In addition, the course became routinized over time (H2), again supporting innovation literature. This happened, in part, because the same small group of facilitators continued to teach the course. Routinization and codification of the core competencies course was also facilitated by the fact that the course was a primary way SoL expressed a basic value—building capacity for learning—on its Web site.

Thus, there is a good deal in the story of the core competencies course to support the front-stage story presented by the literature on innovations and their evolution. However, attributing problems with the course to limits of managers' cognitive capacities

(H3)—a typical focus of innovation literature—was not appropriate at SoL, especially since the course content was determined only by the facilitators, who did not have an overview of the entire organization. SoL staff had no strategic say and very little operational say in it.

## THE BACKSTAGE STORY

There were important organizational conditions and processes that contributed to the diminished routinization of the course at SoL. These came into play independently of the core competencies course, and they affected multiple aspects of the organization in addition to the course. Nevertheless, they also played an important role in the course. We will discuss two organizational conditions, structural characteristics and differences in the perspectives of the facilitators and others, as well as two organizational processes, knowledge sharing, and the relationship between the core competencies course and capacity building, its fundamental purpose, through which the conditions affected the course over time. These conditions and processes and their impacts, as well as evidence for each, are summarized in Table 3.

### Organizational structure

There were two structural changes at SoL that contributed to dynamics associated with the routinization of the core competencies course. The primary one was the change in structure when SoL was created in 1997. A lesser effect occurred due to a change in membership structure in 2001.

*The creation of SoL.* The OLC was comparatively small and informally organized as corporation representatives working with a small group of MIT researchers and their associates (Bradbury, 1999; Clanon, 1999). The structure for SoL, though it had similarities to the structure of the OLC, differs in some important ways. SoL is an incorporated non-profit, self-governing, globally dispersed membership organization that includes corporations, researchers, and consultants, all linked together as a network of colleagues (Clanon, 1999). The managing director of SoL is a member of (and accountable to) the governing council. This role does not have strategic authority. Rather, the managing director, with the SoL staff, provides 'a range of community building, capacity building, communication and coordination services aimed at integrating the

Table 3. Evidence for backstage constructs and their impacts

Characteristics	Backstage dimensions/ events	Description	Impacts	Evidence
Organizational condition: structural features	Structural changes at SoL that had unanticipated impacts	1997 change in structure and membership when the OLC became SoL	New members (consultants, researchers) did not understand nuances of the relationship between the core competencies course and organization projects	SoL constitution Bradbury (1999); Clanon (1999)
		2001 change in SoL membership model	Partnership plans often did not include the course	Discussion and interviews with SoL staff members
	Authority of managing director and SoL staff	SoL was defined as a membership organization/ managing director and staff had operational, but not strategic authority	Staff were limited in the types of initiatives they could take	Discussions and interviews with SoL staff members
Organizational condition: intergroup differences	Differences in the perspectives of various constituencies regarding the core competencies course	The facilitators had a different perspective on the course than other SoL constituencies	Implementation of the course was based primarily on facilitators' work	Interviews with all constituencies
		Facilitators did not conduct evaluations of the course	Differences of opinion regarding the value of the course	Interviews with all constituencies
Organizational process: knowledge sharing	Who had knowledge necessary for faithful implementation of the course	Course facilitators designed individual course offerings themselves	SoL staff felt unable to affect the course in significant ways	Interviews with all constituencies
	Who had knowledge about course evaluation	Some companies conducted assessments, but these were not always successfully conveyed to SoL staff	Some liaison officers felt their perspective was not heard	Interviews with liaison officers
Organizational process: the underlying basis for the course	What capacity building meant and implied, and the work of the capacity-building committee	Agreement that the course <i>introduced</i> participants to capacity building	Agreement among groups about this	Interviews with all constituencies

Table 3. *Continued*

Characteristics	Backstage dimensions/ events	Description	Impacts	Evidence
		Awareness that, over time, the relationship between the core competencies course and projects had been lost	Perception that this might have been part of the reason for the courses' diminishment in popularity	Interviews with all constituencies
		Capacity-building committee changed the definition of how to accomplish capacity building	Core competencies course became much less central	Capacity-building committee documents, meeting notes

diverse members of the community' (Clanon, 1999: 153)—functions that are more operational. There were three managing directors between 1997 (when SoL formed) and 2002, when Sherry Immediato was named managing director (she was acting managing director in 2001).

An implication of the new SoL structure for the core competencies course was that the facilitators, who had all been part of the OLC, had much more knowledge of and control over the course than any other SoL members, including the managing director or other SoL staff. Thus, it would be very difficult for a SoL constituency other than the facilitators to accomplish change.

*Change in membership model in 2001.* As noted earlier, membership dues for companies originally bought several reserved places in the core competencies course, and it was to member companies' advantage to fill these places as a way of fostering organizational learning in their projects and activities. But by the late 1990s, organizational use of seats in the core competencies course had begun to decline. Thus, SoL changed its membership model. Starting in 2001, instead of reserving course seats, the SoL staff asked member organizations to have a partnership plan that would enable SoL staff and the member organizations (through their liaison officers) to flesh out issues they wanted to address. This might be through the core competencies course or other means. In addition, as noted earlier, SoL facilitators sometimes offered a version of the core competencies course at individual companies.

The change in the membership model led to member companies collaborating with SoL staff

on an array of organization issues, not only those related to the course. It had a substantial negative impact on course enrollment, because the staff's attention shifted to retaining current members who no longer needed the public courses. They spent less time recruiting new members who may have had more interest in the public courses. This was problematic, because in SoL's business model, the core competencies course was expected to be a significant source of revenue to support other work.

### Intergroup differences

Different SoL constituencies had differing perceptions of the core competencies course and its value. However, with the exception of the facilitators, the constituencies often felt they could not have an impact on the course.

*The design of individual course offerings.* Most of the facilitators had taught the course often enough that they did not communicate very much with the SoL staff (or even with each other) before offering any particular course. For example, when asked in the interviews how many different people were involved in the design of these courses, one facilitator responded that 'When [two facilitators] get together to lead the course? We'll have a phone call and say '... how do we want to do the course this time?' [Laughs.] And we kind of say, '... well, what do we think has worked or not worked, and what would you change?' But, it's not a whole group of faculty. It's just those two faculty talking.' Another, when asked about whether the SoL staff members were involved in the design of the course, said, 'It

doesn't happen—[course design] happens more with the instructors.'

SoL staff communication with the facilitators was largely perfunctory and primarily about course logistics. One SoL staff member said 'I pretty much plan the logistics . . . But I'd say, for content, it's the facilitators.' This was sometimes frustrating for SoL staff members who would hear feedback pertinent to the course and would have liked to discuss possible changes to the course design with the facilitators, but did not have the chance to do so.

*How engaging the course was.* Our interviews revealed that the various SoL constituencies differed in their perception of how engaging the course was. For example, in answer to a question about how engaging the course had been and whether it still evoked the same level of engagement it did in the past, interviewees from all the SoL constituencies said the course was very engaging. But staff, liaison officers, and capacity-building committee members offered a caveat—that the course was more engaging for some participants than others, and how engaging it was depended, in part, on participants' expectations for the course and the extent to which their organizations were supporting them. A staff member, for example, commented that 'I *don't* have the impression that the engagement, inspiration that's created in the course itself, sustains easily for most of the participants.' A liaison officer noted that how engaging the course was depended on the environment from which the person came: 'People have gone off and always come back excited about what they learned, and it seems to evoke the same level of sort of engagement, or whatever, in the organization. I'll put one caveat with that, which is [this only happens] if the organization also has other things going on that support this in the environment.'

Facilitators, on the other hand, focused solely on the participants' experience of the course itself. They gave answers like 'I think it's great. I love the course. I mean, both as a participant and as a facilitator, I've just really enjoyed it. And it's got a quality to it that's timeless. So, you can keep taking it, and you keep learning new things. It's like a practice or a discipline that you can go back to and keep learning from.'

*Course evaluations.* There was little in the way of formal course evaluations. The facilitators were not certain they needed formal evaluations; they were able to determine how the course was going themselves. One commented, for example, 'I know that for me, there's a couple of things [that indicate

how the course is going]. One is, by the level of engagement I have . . . like are they really staying the whole time or are they running off for breaks, or when we get into conversations, are they really engaging? And frankly, I can feel energy in the room. Second, the quality of dialogue and conversation—the willingness to surface some real issues and questions—*really* makes a difference.' Staff and capacity-building committee members remembered that some type of evaluation data had been collected in the past, but didn't know what was happening now. Informally, the criteria SoL used to assess the effectiveness of the course centered primarily on whether companies kept sending participants to it.

Some of the liaison officers reported that their companies had undertaken some type of informal assessment of the course, but this had not always been systematic. A liaison officer from one company that had conducted a formal evaluation was not impressed with how SoL staff made use of the information. This person commented, '(I did an evaluation of the course). I gave it to SoL and thought I was making a contribution, but there wasn't very good receptivity to it there. It went into a black hole.'

### Knowledge sharing

As the material presented so far indicates, there was comparatively little systematic knowledge sharing among the different SoL constituencies. Rather, different constituencies held different pieces of knowledge about the course and what it meant in the larger setting of SoL and its member companies. The facilitators knew what went on in the course, and rated its success based on the course itself. Other SoL constituencies used other criteria. But the groups did not always feel heard by each other with regard to the course and its assessment.

### Relationship between the core competencies course and its purpose

All the interviewees recognized capacity building for organizational learning as a core principle of SoL. They also recognized that the course could not be expected to fully accomplish capacity building; that would require additional work in the home organization. One capacity-building committee member stated, for example, that 'Capacity building is more than putting a course in front of somebody.' One facilitator noted that 'As a five-day course it's very effective in introducing people [to capacity

building]. It definitely adds value. It's just not accurate to call it *capacity building*.'

*Links between the course and organizational practice.* Because the course was designed as one component of a larger program of organizational learning with participating companies in the early 1990s, the companies determined ways to link the core competencies course with their back-home organizational practice, and, in fact, the course was more company focused than individual participant focused. But this had evolved over time. As one of the facilitators put it, 'The role of the courses has changed. Early on, the role of the courses, if I understand right, was to prepare teams for the projects . . . And the role of the course was to facilitate the launch of those projects.' But, the relationship between the projects and the course had loosened considerably over time.

One longtime staff member summarized the shift very comprehensively:

*'At the beginning, in the 1990s, when we thought of capacity building, it was very much related to project work that people were doing. And actually, the project work was in the foreground and capacity building only developed through the project work that we did with organizations together as a support for making the project more effective, more successful. And over time, I think that the capacity building moved into the foreground and the projects moved into the background—which created a larger shift of opening our courses beyond our organizational membership, or beyond the people who are directly connected to projects, so we allowed more external people, nonmembers of SoL, coming into the courses.'*

*The SoL capacity-building committee.* In 2002, the SoL council approved the formation of a capacity-building committee to make recommendations regarding SoL's capacity-building strategy. They did this because the Council members had observed that the courses being offered (including the core competencies course) were relatively unchanged after many years of delivery, even though SoL members' knowledge and capacity for learning had greatly improved. The Council also noted declining SoL membership attendance at the courses. Further, they wanted to take a more entrepreneurial approach to engaging members in creating capacity-building activities at SoL using an applied learning process.

The capacity-building committee met over two years to flesh out a new understanding of what capacity building might mean at SoL. They eventually came to emphasize it as a *process* with a long-term relational focus, as opposed to an *event* (such as a discrete course). Their work included a two-day meeting in May 2004 that involved SoL staff, the core competencies course facilitators, several consultant members, and a few organization members. After considerable discussion and debate, the meeting participants reached agreement that SoL should think of capacity building more as a process that could be implemented in many ways than as an event, such as an individual course offering.

Later in 2004, the capacity-building committee developed a strategic plan that fleshed out this new vision, and that included multiple approaches to capacity building, including applied learning processes and coaching to provide just-in-time support directly to organization members' work. One of the implications of this new approach was that capacity building no longer was seen as synonymous with any particular course offering, including the core competencies course. Thus, the new strategy considerably decreased the importance of the core competencies course at SoL, and helped lead to the staff decision to discontinue the course.

By this time, the course had drifted considerably from its original intent. It was being offered more for individuals who might or might not be SoL members, and had a much smaller link to SoL's member corporations and their projects than had originally been the case.

## ANALYSIS BASED ON THE BACKSTAGE STORY

The front-stage story of innovation routinization, while correct, left out many of the organizational characteristics that gave rise to the public events. These included organizational structure and intergroup differences, both of which, by affecting knowledge sharing and links between the course and its larger organizational purpose, affected diminished routinization of the course. Figure 1 depicts the relationships among these concepts.

### Organizational processes contributing to diminished routinization

As Figure 1 indicates, this study suggests that two organizational processes lead directly to the

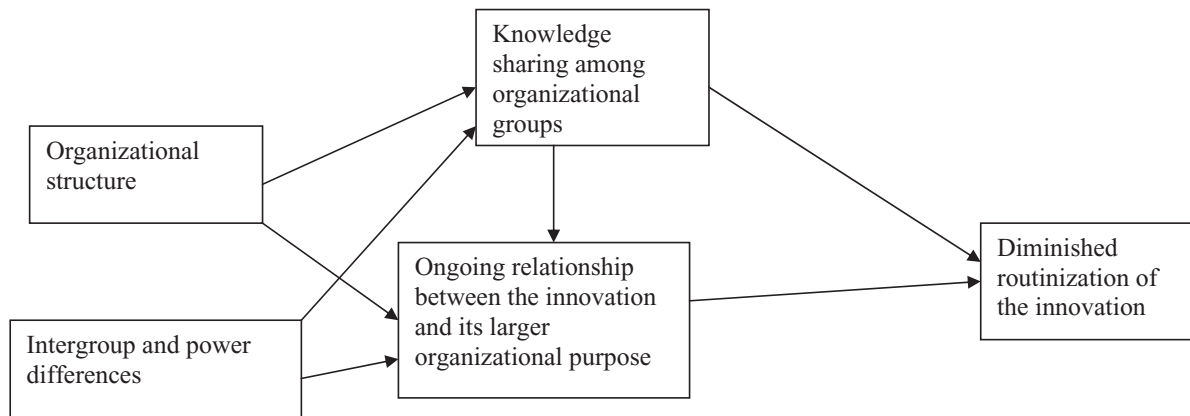


Figure 1. Relationship between backstage events and diminished routinization of the core competencies course

diminished routinization of innovations. One is knowledge sharing among relevant organizational groups. The other is the relationship between the innovation and its core purpose.

*Knowledge sharing.* The degree to which an innovation becomes routinized in a diminished fashion depends, in part, on constituents' ongoing knowledge exchange pertinent to it. When knowledge is shared, it is likely that there will be some cognitive convergence that incorporates diverse perspectives (Lazer and Friedman, forthcoming), leading to ongoing effective organizational action (Baba *et al.*, 2004). However, when knowledge is not shared—when different important pieces of knowledge reside in separate parts of the organization—there is more likely to be diminished routinization centered around the parts of the innovation known best to those most active in implementing it. For example, the course facilitators were particularly conscious of participants' experiences within the course itself, while other SoL constituencies were much more aware of links between these experiences and their organizational work.

*The course and its underlying purpose.* The capacity-building committee was initiated because of concerns that even though SoL members had been developing capacity, the course offerings had not changed over time. Our study participants confirmed that the content of the course had changed relatively little; the major change had been some drift away from the course's explicit links with ongoing organizational projects, especially after SoL was created and fewer organizational teams attended the program. That separation had the impact (not

originally noticed) of diluting the capacity of the core competencies course to do something more than link capacity building to an individual skill.

It is likely that in a large number of organizational innovations an original vision includes explicit links between vision and action that are forgotten over time (Bartunek, 2003). That is, there may be, especially among tacit elements, a loss of organizational memory—the 'shared information from an organization's history that can be brought to bear on present decisions' (Walsh and Ungson, 1991: 61). Thus, what is routinized over time is not the entire initial innovation, but a diminished part of it that is missing tacit, but key, components.

### Organizational conditions affecting core processes

Two organizational conditions contributed to diminished routinization by affecting the organizational processes described just above. These were organizational structure and intergroup relationships at SoL.

*Organizational structure.* It is not unusual for organizations to make structural changes, such as the OLC transitioning into SoL. It also is not unusual for such changes to be oriented towards accomplishing particular goals without attention being paid to other possible impacts. However, as Bartunek, Walsh, and Lacey (2000) have shown, creating a structure that is seen as fully reflecting an organization's ideals can have negative impacts later. This happens, in part, because members tend to be so convinced about the value of the structure that they stop attending to its possible unintended consequences.

SoL's organizational structure was carefully designed to reflect its status as a membership organization that was considerably expanded beyond the OLC. In service of this status, the managing director and other SoL staff were to coordinate the various constituencies. They did not have very much authority, especially with regard to strategy.

The shift to SoL and its authority structure had somewhat unanticipated impacts on the core competencies course. Links between member companies' ongoing work and the course and links between facilitating the core course and formal administrative authority at SoL were reduced without great awareness that this was taking place. For example, when limits of the course surfaced in the late 1990s and a group began developing a virtual institute, there was no clear authority to implement it, and nothing enduring came of their efforts. At the same time, the course became somewhat separated from other initiatives; the change in membership structure that occurred in 2001 took place *around* the core competencies course, rather than in dialogue with it.

*Intergroup differences and their associated power dynamics.* There is almost no literature that addresses links between intergroup relationships in organizations and innovation processes. For example, in their extensive review of innovation research and the levels of analysis at which it has been studied, Anderson *et al.* (2004) do not even include an intergroup level. Lewis and Seibold (1993) address intraorganizational processes in the adoption of innovations, but their focus is on hierarchical levels more than different types of more or less equivalent organizational subgroups.

However, our study shows that intergroup relationships play an important role in the routinization of innovations. More specifically, different SoL constituencies often had only partially overlapping, perspectives on issues associated with the core competencies course. This was the case with regard to the course content, perceptions of the course's effectiveness, and what kind of evaluation of it (if any) should be undertaken. When there were differences, it was difficult for one group to be heard by others.

Some recent literature has explored the relationship between organizational structure and the generation (Argyres and Silverman, 2004) and adoption (Damanpour and Gopalakrishnan, 1998; DeCanio, Dibble, and Amir-Atefi, 2000) of innovations. Other literature has explored relationships between organizational structure and search behaviors—attempts to try something new, as opposed to falling into

competency traps or unproductive routines (Jacobides, 2007; Siggelkow and Levinthal, 2005). This literature does not speak directly to ways of avoiding diminished routinization of innovations. However, it does imply that how authority is distributed in an organization in relation to multiple organizational groups whose perspectives and desires may differ has a substantial impact on innovation processes.

In particular, this literature suggests the importance in settings consisting of diverse units of some type of centralized authority for facilitating innovative behavior. For example, Argyres and Silverman (2004) showed how organizations in which R&D activities are centralized are likely to pursue R&D activities that have a bigger impact than are organizations in which R&D activities are decentralized. Jacobides (2007), in an analysis of a near war between Greece and Turkey, found that when units are separated structurally, top management has a much more difficult time creating coordination between them. On the basis of his study, Jacobides argued that it is crucial for there to be hierarchical arrangements that enable overarching control and coordination if organizations are to respond well to exceptions and crises.

There is no question that centralized authority would be more complex in an organization like SoL than in most business organizations, since most of SoL's members are outside of the formal control of the organization. Nevertheless, the lack of authority—especially authority that included a strategic component—impinged on the SoL staff's ability to coordinate across groups in a way that would benefit the core competencies course in relation to the larger work of SoL and to maintain its links with its original core purpose.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The routinization that occurred in the setting we studied was consistent with predictions of the innovation literature, and may have been partly associated with the kinds of cognitive limits on the part of managers discussed by innovation theorists. But, if so, these limits played comparatively small parts. Issues associated with the larger organization, its structure and intergroup dynamics, and how these constrained knowledge sharing and links between the course and its core purpose, contributed

considerably to a diminished routinization of the innovation in which key elements were lost.

### Limitations and implications for research and theory

Of course, this study has multiple limitations. It was conducted in one organization and on one type of product innovation. It took place initially as part of an action research project, not solely to explore the history of an innovation. Its findings are likely to be less applicable to an innovation that does not rely on tacit knowledge associated with original intent.

Nevertheless, the research has important implications for research and theory that address routinization of innovations. In particular, it suggests that much innovation research, while correct in what it portrays, has not paid adequate attention to the backstage organizational processes that enable the public face of innovation routinization to look as it does. Thus, innovation research is limited in its ability to contribute to theorizing about innovation (Anderson *et al.*, 2004). An innovation and its routinization does not happen independent of ongoing, daily life in an organization. There are multiple complex organizational dynamics that, among other effects in their organizations, help generate and sustain innovations, and, perhaps, routinize them in ways that lead to their diminishment.

Thus, it is important to study these dynamics and their relationship to the public face of innovations. Our study suggests several research questions that are important to pursue in exploring this larger context. These questions include: In what types of settings do structure and intergroup dynamics affect routinization in a way that diminishes the original innovation? What other organizational characteristics affect such routinization? Under what conditions do such characteristics have this impact, and when is their impact more benign? When does routinization take place in a way that enhances, rather than diminishes, the potential of the original innovation? Exploring issues like these may open researchers' eyes to many organizational phenomena that lurk behind and affect innovation over time.

### Implications for practitioners

As innovation research suggests, and as we have confirmed, it is not unusual for innovations to become

routinized in such a way that their contribution is diminished. This is particularly likely when there is a lack of structural mechanisms to foster ongoing important knowledge sharing across organizational groups. Thus, consistent with Jacobidis (2007) and Argyres and Silverman (2004), we emphasize the importance of senior managers' oversight of innovations in organizations. Our study indicates the value of senior managers' thinking in terms of, and having authority in relation to, the innovation process and innovating itself, beyond any particular innovation *per se*. Organizations might consider, for example, having a process in place for *retiring* particular innovations—just as car companies retire certain models of cars as they introduce new ones. It is reasonable to expect from a larger business process point of view that any innovation (especially one that addresses organizational processes) has a finite life. It may be appropriate to have in place the kinds of organizational structures and processes that take for granted that particular innovations will have served their purpose over time, and that enable having new potential innovations in the pipeline when individual innovations seem to have lost their original spirit.

In this article, we have studied an organization, the Society for Organizational Learning, whose purpose is to foster organizational learning. Some of the processes we have described may not appear totally consistent with such an emphasis. It is appropriate, however, to see these processes as illustrating how difficult it is for an organization—even a very sophisticated one—to continue to innovate over time in a way that does not lose key elements during the routinization process. It is to the credit of SoL that two of its senior staff members were willing to discuss the organization's experience openly in a forum like this, and to learn from the experience in a way that fosters new ways of thinking about innovations.

In sum, based on our study at SoL, we suggest that there may be several types of dynamics present *behind the scenes* of an apparently successful innovation that lead it to become routinized in a diminished fashion in its original setting, causing it to lose key elements. These include structural changes, differences in perspective among organizational subgroups, lack of knowledge sharing, and loss of links between an innovation and its larger purpose. Attention to these processes can open up new and important understandings of innovations within their larger organizational context.

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## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS ASKED OF ALL INTERVIEWEES

1. Just as background, could you tell me a little about how long you've been connected with SoL and/or the original Center for Organizational Learning at MIT and in what capacities?
2. My questions are all going to be about the core competencies course. Could you tell me a little about how you connect with that course?
3. On its Web site, SoL links the core competencies course with capacity building. If you go to the Web site, for example, and click on *capacity building*, you get taken to the core competencies course. Could you tell me, based on your experience, what capacity building means at SoL?
4. Could you tell me how capacity building is implemented in the core competencies course? As far as you can tell, has the meaning of capacity building evolved over the past several years?
5. Based on specific offerings of the core competencies course with which you're familiar, what would you say are the central features that differentiate the SoL core competencies course from other training offered by different groups and organizations? Have these features evolved over the years?
6. Again, based on specific offerings of the core competencies course with which you're familiar, has the content of the course evolved in any significant way since it was created? Have the activities related to capacity building changed?
7. How many different people are involved in the design of these courses? Have these people changed through the years?
8. How has the course been marketed? Have there been any significant changes in this over the years?
9. How has the course been evaluated? Have there been any significant changes in this over the years?
10. Again, based on specific offerings of the core competencies course with which you're familiar, what kinds of people and organizations participate in the core competencies course (as clients or in any other ways)? How have these changed over time?
11. What is the role of the corporate liaison officers? How have these relationships evolved?
12. What kinds of differences among companies that send their employees to the core competencies course are there? Have these evolved over time? Have the reactions companies have had to the course changed over time?
13. Again, based on specific offerings of the core competencies course with which you're familiar, how lively and life giving do you get the impression that the course has been? Do you think that the course currently evokes more, less or the same level of engagement on the part of interested parties as it did in the past? Why?
14. Does anything else come to mind that you'd like to say about the core competencies course?

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