

**GOVERNING KNOWLEDGE:  
THE STRATEGIC HUMAN  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT  
DIMENSION**

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***“While preparing your presentations,  
think about two questions:***

- 1. What drew your attention to the need for (micro) foundations research in SHRM?***
- 2. What is the (micro)foundations of SHRM ‘gap’ that your research addresses? “***



# ”Micro-foundations”?

## Notions of MF

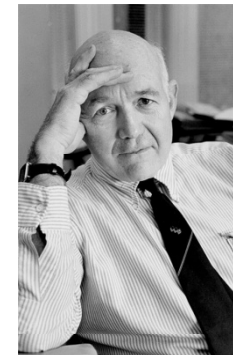
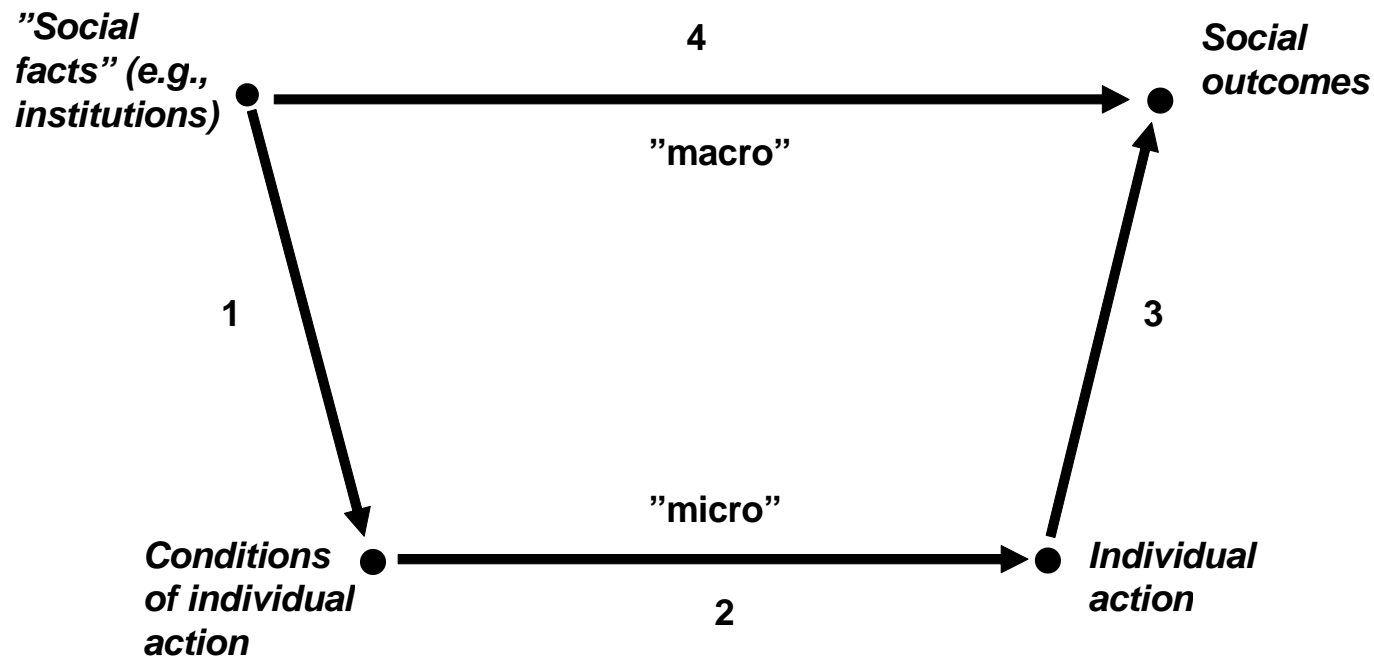
- **Reductionist** -- explaining phenomena at level  $n$  in terms of phenomena at level  $n-1$  (e.g., explaining industry phenomena in terms of interaction between firms).
- **Meth. individualist** – all macro-phenomena should be explained in terms of the actions and interactions of individuals.
  - Always? Or rather an ultimate ambition for research?

## Justifications of MF

- **Ontological** -- only individuals can act; collective notions are at best shorthand for complex micro-behaviors.
- **Explanatory** – uncovering explanatory mechanisms.
- **Pragmatic** – changing something at a macro-level requires influencing entities at the micro-level.

# One take at micro-foundations ...

Figure 1: A General Model of Social Science Explanation



Source: James S Coleman.  
1990. *Foundations of Social Theory*.

Explaining outcomes in terms of the mechanisms implied by arrows [1], [1,2] or [1,2,3] – and avoiding explanation that proceeds in terms of arrow [4] (except as short-hand).

# Why micro-foundations (i.e., Dana's Q1)?

- The **”knowledge movement”** (Eisenhart & Santos, 2003) in strategic management.
  - Abundance of **macro concepts** with no micro-foundations (Felin & Hesterly, 2007)
  - Arrow 1-2-3 reduction **seldom performed** (Abell, Felin & Foss, 2008).



# Why micro-foundations (i.e., Dana's Q1)?

## ■ Knowledge stuff **strong influence** on SHRM

- e.g. Lado & Wilson, 1994; Boxall, 1996; Wright et al., 2001; Lepak & Snell, 2002; Kang, Morris & Snell, 2007; etc..
- Human resource architectures, HRM practices, configurations of practices, etc. etc. (macro notions).
- HRM practices, etc. argued to impact organizational performance, including "knowledge performance."
- All levels of analysis in SHRM are **supra-individual** – Arrow 1-2-3 reduction never performed.

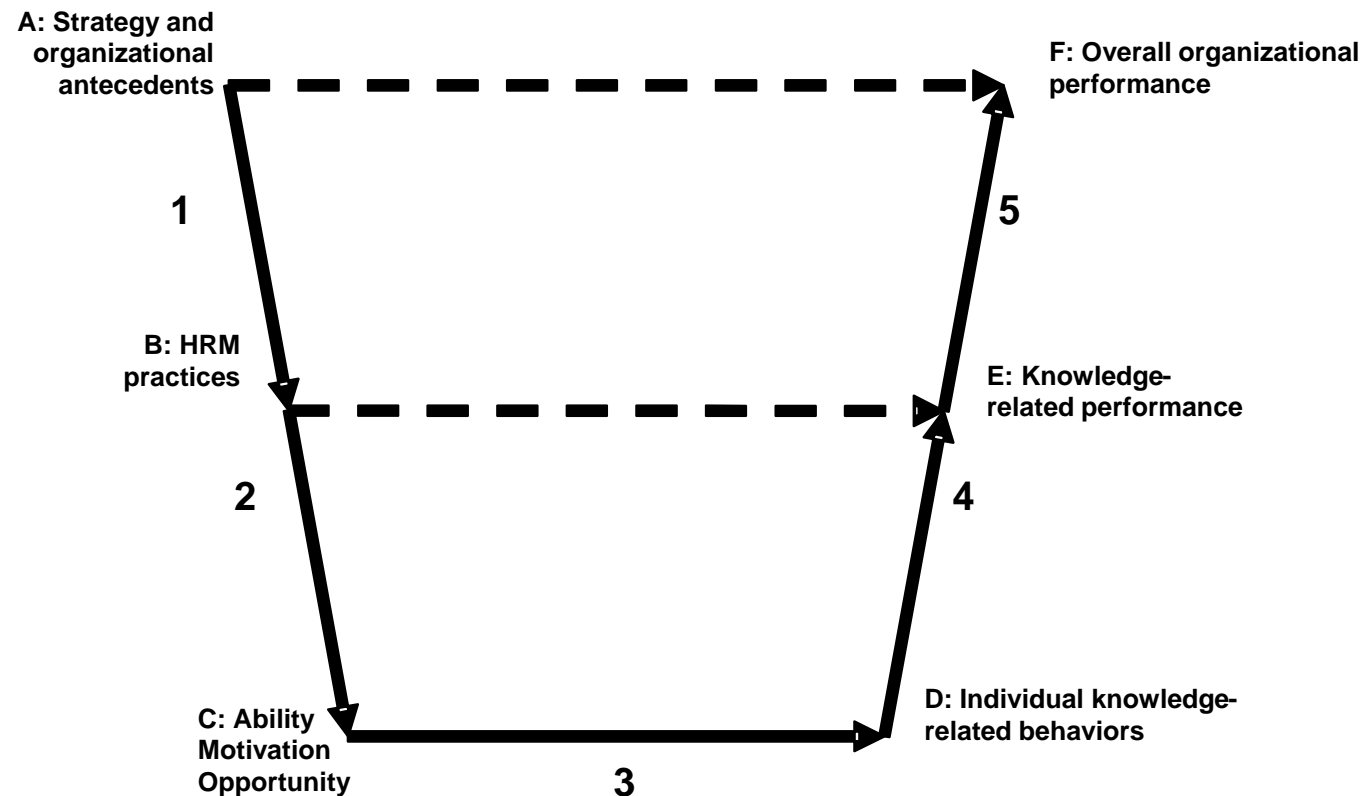


# The Bathtub as a Diagnostic Tool (i.e., Dana's Q2)

Systematizing important SHRM **research challenges**

Which **variables** are represented by the 6 **nodes**?

Which **theoretical mechanisms** can we associate with the 5 **arrows**?



# Some recommendations for SHRM Research

- Examine the **relative contribution of alternative HRM practices** to knowledge outcomes (as mediated by such individual-level variables as ability, motivation and opportunity).
- Identify **bundles of HRM practices** that matter for knowledge outcomes.
- Clarify how **differences in individual abilities, motivation, and use of interaction opportunities** provided by the organization explain part of the variation found in individual-level knowledge creation, acquisition, use, integration, and transfer.
- Examine how individual knowledge related actions (i.e., individual employees' creation, acquisition, use, integration, and transfer) **aggregate to organizational level outcomes** and how this is dependent upon the use of HRM practices (such as job design).



# Shouting "micro-foundations" is easy ... but



- Serious **challenges** in implementing large-N multi-level research.
- Where are the **models** of individuals that we can start from? Cognition? Motivation? Feeding OB into SHRM? Behavioral models?
- Will we ever **agree**? (e.g., goal setting theory – little agreement on a rather specific issue in spite of 1000s of papers).