

**PLAYING FOOTBALL IN A SOCCER FIELD:
VALUE CHAIN STRUCTURES, INSTITUTIONAL MODULARITY
AND SUCCESS IN FOREIGN EXPANSION**

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(Note: Paper about to be published in *Managerial and Decision Economics*,
Special Issue on Strategy edited by Margie Peteraf & Cathy Maritan, Fall 2006)

The paper is dedicated to the memory of my late friend, colleague and mentor, Sumantra Ghoshal. I would like to thank Adrian Tschoegl for extended comments on earlier drafts, and George Yip, Julian Birkinshaw, Mauro Guillen and Mark Zbaracki for comments. A version of this paper was presented as a keynote session presentation at the 10th DRUID meetings in Copenhagen, June, 2005. Susan Wachter; Joe Beggans, Alan Miyasaki and Mario Ramirez are thanked for providing some of the empirical evidence; and Doug Duncan, Michael Lea and Debbie Erb for discussions on mortgage finance outside the US. Funding from the Levrhulme Trust's Digital Transformation Programme at the London Business School and from the Mortgage Bankers' Association of America are gratefully acknowledged. Part of this research was undertaken when the author was a NATO Science Fellow. The usual disclaimers apply.

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Abstract

When do firms expand abroad? Theory to date suggests that global expansion happens when firm-specific competitive advantages outweigh country-specific difficulties in operating abroad. Differences in culture, in legislation, in administrative practices, and in the overall institutional structure, all of which operate at the level of the country, have been extensively studied as factors affecting global expansion. I suggest that in addition to these country-level factors, a major determinant of the prospects and potential for global expansion is the *structure of the value chain*, which is both country- and sector- specific. Value chain structure, i.e. the way that labor is divided between different types of vertical participants evolves in a path-dependent, *country-specific* way. Differences in vertical structures between countries, then, predict the extent to which firms in any segment can export their competitive advantage. Thus, for globalization to occur, firms must have an “institutionally modular” product or service; that is, a product or service which “fits” in the vertical structure of the sector of the host country. Such “institutional modularity” is not easy to achieve. I illustrate with evidence of globalization efforts in mortgage banking that largely failed because of either lack of compatibility of the globalizing firms’ “vertical module”, or because of the managerial underestimation of the role of vertical co-specialization. Thus, increasing modularization and global convergence of value chain structures (partly motivated by gains from trade and partly motivated by IT standards) may be opening up new venues for globalization, especially in the service sector.

Keywords: Competitive Advantage Transferability; Value Chain Structure; Co-specialization; Global Expansion; Vertical Scope; Institutional Modularity.

What Determines Success in Global Expansion? Background and Motivation

What determines success in global expansion? For some time we have known that a firm expanding in a foreign country faces a potentially hostile environment. Lack of access to local resources, imperfect knowledge of the local operating environment and potential difficulties in establishing a competitive position put the expanding firm at a disadvantage vis-à-vis its local competitors (Buckley and Casson, 1976, Dunning, 1979, Caves, 1981, Rugman, 1981). As Hymer (1960) observed in his seminal contribution, there *have* to exist some firm-specific advantages that outweigh any generic disadvantages of expanding abroad, i.e. the “liability of foreignness” (Zaheer, 1995; Zaheer and Mosakowski, 1997). To put it in Hymer’s words, “there are as many kinds of advantages as there are functions in making and selling a product”, which form the basis of global expansion, because they are superior in absolute or in relative terms (Yip, 2003). Kindleberger (1969) and Dunning (1979) suggested that firms expanding abroad possess “monopolistic advantages” or “ownership-specific advantages” that account for their success; and Vernon (1975) suggested that firms expand their products as a function of their position in the life cycle. Buckley and Casson (1976) argued that comparative advantage, i.e. the superiority in terms of capabilities of firms in developed countries is what accounts for patterns of both trade and FDI activity. From the 1980’s onwards, the development of the field of strategy established the concept of competitive, firm-specific advantages (Nelson, 1995), which has recently been more fully integrated in international economics as well (cf. Markusen, 2002; Henisz, 2003). Thus, one of the major drivers of global expansion is to “export” the competitive advantage of particular firms. Such an “export” could, in principle, be achieved through either some market-based arrangement (e.g. by the licensing or franchising of a superior product or service in a foreign country); or, failing that option, through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), either via Greenfield operations or Merger & Acquisition in a host country.¹

Global expansion, then, requires some advantage a firm should be able to leverage internationally, e.g. in terms of the product or service it produces, potentially on the basis of superior, “leveragable” knowledge (Teece, 1977, 1981; Buckley and Casson, 1976; Kogut and Zander, 1993)². The success in global expansion, though, also depends on the attributes of the host nation – not only in terms of the benefits of locating abroad due to location-specific advantages such as lower costs of labor and resources (Dunning,

¹ The choice of form of global expansion (i.e. globalization through market transactions vs globalization through internalization; and mode of foreign entry) is the central question in much global management research (see Buckley and Casson, 1976; Caves, 1996). We do not expressly address it here; the basic argument holds, whichever the form of the globalization. Still, we do return to both the question of internalization and the question of mode of global expansion, as they relate to the argument in this paper, in the discussion section.

² The structure of global corporations itself could give rise to the very competitive advantage that can be exported, through learning, creating and leveraging knowledge globally (see Kogut and Zander, 1993; Nohria and Ghoshal 1997; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2000; McKeivily, Eisenhardt and Prescott, 2004). There also exist benefits from globalization *per se*, which are based on lower costs of operations through global economies of scale or scope (Dunning, 1979; Teece, 1980; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2000). In addition to having an advantage it can leverage internationally, a firms’ ability to expand globally also depends on how effective it is in the process of globalization itself, and on having the appropriate organization and processes (cf. Perlmutter, 1969; Stopford and Wells, 1972; Ghoshal, 1987; Birkinshaw, 2000; Vermeulen and Barkema, 2002).

1979, Rugman, 1981), but also in terms of the *drawbacks* of locating in a country which differs from that of the host (Zaheer, 1995, Zaheer and Mosakowski, 1997), e.g. in terms of potential Cultural, Administrative, Geographical and Economic differences between “host” and “receiving” country (Ghemawat, 2001). . Some good progress has been made in understanding these drawbacks, and in unpacking the “problems of going abroad”. As Guilen and Suarez (2004) note in their recent survey article, countries differ in terms of culture (Hofstede, 1980, 1991); comparative authority / business systems (Hamilton and Biggart, 1988; Whitley, 1992; Guillen, 1994; Djelic, 1998); political economy / MNC-friendliness (Gereffi, 1989); legal tradition (La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer & Vishny 1999); and political risk (Henisz & Williamson 1999; Henisz 2000). Yet all this literature points to how particular *countries* differ, and as a result, how difficult it is for one firm to manage to export its advantages from its own onto another national context.

Still, this received wisdom cannot account for the substantial inter-industry differences in patterns of globalization, and especially the lack of global expansion in some service sectors. Pavitt (1991) and Patel (1995), for instance, identify sectors where strengths in one national market did not lead to a successful expansion abroad. So the question becomes, why is it that only *some* industries are global? Or that there would be global competition between specific industries between particular groups of countries and not others, which may be otherwise similar in terms of their institutional environment? Why would it be that *some* types of competitive advantage in *some* types of industries would be potentially “internationally leverageable” (whether through direct operations within a Multi-National Corporation, or through licensing)³ to the very same countries and others would not?

The answer to these questions is partial at best. The question on the extent of globalization has been considered in terms of “drivers of globalization” (Yip and Coundouriotis, 1991), such as globalization of customers, markets, and support of regulators; yet the question still lingers on what drives these drivers; that is, what makes some industries have more global competitors. Our understanding of this question, of when an advantage is “transferable” or “translatable” (Yip, 2003: 66) is still limited. In a rare effort to address this issue, Hu (1995), expanding Hymer’s approach, observed that not all sources of competitive advantage are transferable on the global level. Some advantages are only relevant in specific countries and economies, and some advantages are hardly transferable. Helpful as this observation is, it begs the question of *why* these differences exist.

³ Much progress has been made in terms of our understanding of the conditions under which a firm can “export” its competitive advantage through licensing its assets / types of products or services / technology / superior way of producing, or whether it has to operate in multiple countries in order to capitalize on its advantage. The consensus in the literature is that if the advantage is based on knowledge or technology that can be licensed, a firm would opt for this in order to avoid some of the downsides of the liability of foreignness. When considering the “exportability” of competitive advantage we consider the extent to which a firm can leverage its advantage *regardless* of the mode of global operation. We revisit this issue of internatization (Buckley and Casson, 1976; Teece, 1981; Caves, 1996) in the discussion, after having laid out the theoretical framework.

This paper provides an alternative, complementary approach on the determinants of the prospects of globalizing and exporting competitive advantage. Specifically, I argue that “institutional modularity” at the level of the *sector*- that is, compatibility in terms of the nature, structure and operation of the value chain, i.e. the vertical division of labor,⁴ plays a significant role. I argue that when such value chain structures are similar between different countries, and, more to the point, when particular parts of a production structure are modular, then global expansion may occur. But, more often than not, there are substantial international differences in the way that industries are organized and in the way labor is divided between them.⁵ This happens because the structure of industries is not identical between countries, simply determined by technology alone, but rather is the result of path-dependent processes, as has been noted by the “varieties of capitalism” and “national business systems” literature (Whitley, 1992, 1999; Whitley and Kristensen, 1996; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Morgal et al, 2004) as well as sociological analyses of value chains (Gereffi, 2004; Gereffi et al, 2005). As a result, in different countries, the value chain de-composes onto different “vertical units”, i.e. different ecologies of vertically co-specialized participants; and of course, in each setting, prevailing norms of interaction between firms in general affect the vertical division of labor (cf. Nishiguchi, 1994 and Lane, 1996). Or, to put it in terms of the framework recently developed by Peteraf and Shanley (1997; Shanley and Peteraf, 2004), each industry in each country may be endowed with different, and possibly inconsistent “vertical groups”, through country-specific social generative processes.

To substantiate this argument, I first provide some evidence on the international differences of the structure of the value chain and the role of vertical co-specialization; then provide a framework that explains when firms can or cannot expand their competitive advantage abroad, as a function of their sectors’ vertical structure at home and abroad; and finally turn to an extended example from the mortgage banking industry that further illustrates these dynamics.

The Division of Labor across Vertical Boundaries: Path-dependency of National Contexts

The first part of the argument, then, is that different countries have different ways of “dividing labor” between firms; that is, that the structure of the value chain and the resulting identity and scope of the participating firms is not technologically determined, but rather shaped both by differences in the initial conditions (the historical “starting points”) and by a co-evolutionary process that yields a substantial variety of ways to organize industries. This leads to pronounced differences in the structure of the value chain between countries, even when the final good/ services are not too different. This is particularly

⁴ The term “value chain” and “value chain structure” is used in many different ways in the literature. While “value chain structure” initially referred to the set of primary and support activities a firm undertakes (see Porter, 1985), it has recently come to signify the set of activities that are involved in turning inputs into outputs, and more particularly the degree to which an industry is integrated or consists of vertically co-specialized units (Cacciatori and Jacobides, 2005; Gereffi et al, 2005; Jacobides, 2005). We adopt this latter meaning of “value chain structure” for the purposes of this paper.

⁵ This complements the research undertaken in the emerging “Global Value Chain” tradition (see Gereffi, 1994; Gereffi et al, 2005; Gibbon and Ponte, 2006), which considers the dynamics within globalized value chain structures. That research considers how the international division of labour, often driven by powerful upstream or downstream

important as the firms' capabilities depend on their scope; and if scope differs between national contexts, exporting a superior capability from one setting into another will be a substantial challenge, as it will simply not "fit" the host system, not for lack of broad cultural fit, or compatibility with the legal system or administrative practices, but rather because the nature of the capabilities will be different.

To anchor the theoretical discussion on a specific, easy-to-understand example, let us consider the European construction sector, which, by all accounts, serves a remarkably similar purpose in all European countries, and which has only limited product / service differentiation between countries. Yet despite that, European countries *differ markedly* in how they organize labor within that sector- how the structure of their value chain is set (cf. Winch, 1996, 2000 or Cacciatori and Jacobides, 2005, for a detailed discussion). This international divergence of the value chain structure is best summarized by this quote that explains that even players who, from a distance, seem to cover the same spot in the value chain, are really quite distinct species:

“Although architecte, architect, arkitekt, architetto, and Architekt appear to mean the same thing, they do so only in a limited sense. All are designers of buildings, and all share a common root in the Greek *architekton*, but the historical evolution of the contracting systems means that their social meanings are very diverse, and that even their functional meanings are not coextensive. The French *architecte* has a much more constrained and limited role in the construction process than the British *architect*; the German *Architekt* has a state-derived role in obtaining building permits which the British counterpart does not, and so on. In the case of some actors such as the German *Prufstatiker*, the British quantity surveyor, and the French *bureau de controle*, there is simply no close comparator in other systems.” (Winch, 2000: 90)

Despite the shared contractual and organisational issues involved in procuring buildings, then, different countries have different ways to break-up activities between segments. Architects, for instance, in France, are only involved in the concept and design phase, whereas they are also involved in detailing in the UK (see Winch, 1996:258). This is important not only because architects in different European countries have a different remit; but because their competencies are developed to fit that remit, and as such are only specific to their national context. Note that these differences in the vertical organization of the sector are *not* due to differences in the end-product or end-service- buildings and final customer needs are fairly similar. Likewise, needs do not differ much between these countries. Furthermore, note that the differences in scope and organization in the construction industry are not related to the factors that are most commonly investigated when international differences are examined: property rights, the nature of the labour force, and other country-level impacts did not bring about this remarkable divergence of organization in European construction. Rather, such sector / value chain structure differences reflect a path-dependent, co-evolutionary process of divvying up the value chain.

As Kristensen notes (1996: 17), “national types of firms and their institutional context change, but because the process of change happens through and by nationally patterned relations and interactions, nothing

actors, affects global patterns of development. Instead, here we focus on *inter-national differences* in the way labour is divided, and consider the implications for success in global expansion.

ensures convergence”. The same also seem to hold for the nature and *architecture* of the value chain. Even though there do exist some technological or transactional imperatives in the “construction sector” in developed countries, which will lead to particular “appropriate configurations” in an industry, much of the detail and the way in which an industry will be broken up in distinct vertical units is a function of historical and socially situated processes (Jacobides, 2005.) The extent of these differences, and the strong path-dependencies that they lead, can be seen in recent initiatives of the European Union. Frustrated by the lack of inter-EU internationalization of construction companies, the European Commission has tried to encourage harmonization that would lead to greater international activity. Yet these active efforts to *subsidize* or at least support global expansion have been stymied by the national specificities of the division of labor (Winch 2000: 95).

The nature of this path-dependent process, more fully developed in Jacobides (2005) and Jacobides and Winter (2005), requires a brief description. In summary, the structuring of a sector generally looks as follows: First, the underlying conditions of the industry (i.e., the similarity of the knowledge bases along different parts of the value chain, and the related latent gains from trade from the emergence of vertical specialization) lead to a process of intra-organizational separation and inter-organizational learning which aims to divide the structure of the value chain. The way in which an industry is broken up, the way in which labor is tentatively divided between industry participants, is affected by the nation-wide “business system” (Whitley, 1992, 1999; Guillen, 1994; Djelic, 1998), and the patterns of interaction in the society at large (Whitley and Kristensen, 1996). Then, as the options of dividing the value chain and instituting new intermediate markets becomes clearer, as new potential roles for the set of participants in the industry are being shaped, there is substantial jockeying for the different set of actors who try to ensure that they get an “attractive” part of the value chain. Participants try to support regulation and institutions that support, enhance and entrench a division of labor that protects them (cf. Shell, 2003: Ch 2-3), and as such tend to create a substantial inertial force. It takes either a new technology, or *de novo* entry of a different “system” of organizing the industry (domestically or globally) to make the industry structure shift.

The implication of this analysis is that the specific way in which an industry is divided in vertical segments, the identity of the participant firms and the nature of capabilities of the firms in each segment (and the resulting per-segment profitability) is not determined exogenously, or *ex ante*. Rather, it is the result of an active effort of industry participants to shape their own industry’s structure. As these “contests” for divvying up the industry happen at the level of a nation, and the supporting institutions and regulations, as well as the other participants of the business ecosystem are largely in the same country, international differences will persevere. Furthermore, after a particular way to organize the different sets of industry participants (in terms of scope, definition of their role etc) is set, the nation-wide institutional context begins to solidify, largely affected by the interests of those who stand to gain the most out of this structure, thus solidifying the structure of the industry and creating inertial forces to keep the industry structure set. In the construction example, it was the Architects who “won” the battle for the division of labor in

construction in the UK (Ball, 1988); they managed to set the architect role and scope in a way that allowed them, at least until recently, to have the highest share of value added. In France, by contrast, the engineers managed to carve out a better position in the industry. The success of architects in the UK is at least partly due to their connections with the landed gentry, and their ability (through the gentry and the House of Lords) to promulgate regulations supporting their role; while in France the tradition of engineering evident from the time of the French revolution, and the prominence of the engineering-dominated *Grandes Ecoles* helped the engineers, and created the context for the institutionalization of this role. Both in the UK and in France, the outcome was not pre-ordained, but rather the result of a path-dependent process. Thus, a combination of local historical factors, and the relative success of different groups in shaping their industry's structure led to markedly different ways of dividing the labor in an industry, to different scope, and, as a result of this different scope, to different capabilities as well (Cacciatori and Jacobides, 2005).

Thus, each country has a distinct evolutionary trajectory in each industry where capabilities, scope, and the institutional context interact and shape the nature of the participants, leading to the creation of fairly distinct "vertical groups" (Shanley and Peteraf, 2004) along the way. It is exactly these inter-national differences in the nature of these "vertical groups" in otherwise identical industries that hamper the exportability of competitive advantage. And it is these differences at *the industry and value chain structure* which have not received any real attention to date, and which are the basis of this paper's contribution to the literature.

Capabilities, Transaction Costs and Institutional Modularity: Shaping Globalization Prospects

Let us recapitulate. So far, the argument is that the way labor is divided in national contexts is not only determined by technological imperatives. Differences in the managerial structures along different parts of the value chain do provide the basic blueprint in terms of the scope of the industry's boundaries; that is, differences or similarities along the industry's value chain, or set of activities do provide a set of likely boundaries which "make sense" in terms of effective management and effective competency development (Jacobides and Winter, 2005; Jacobides, 2006; also, see Shanley and Peteraf, 2004). For instance, the existence of an artistic component, a measurement component, an engineering component, and an economic study/ feasibility and follow up component suggest that the construction industry would benefit from the existence of different firms along the value chain. Yet the exact nature of these firms, the places where the "dotted lines" that will cut the industry into inter-connected pieces, are not given exogenously (Baldwin and Clark, 2003). These emerge as a part of an endogenous process, which, on the basis of the local conditions, leads to the creation of particular intermediate markets and vertical segments which are vertically co-specialized (Jacobides, 2005). This process happens by trying to reduce the potential transaction costs (Williamson, 1985), through a learning process (Argyres and Liebeskind, 1999; Mayer and Argyres, 2004), in a way that supports a particular industry structure. These processes happen most often at the national level, with firms trying to co-specialize and take advantage of each others' productive

capabilities (Jacobides and Hitt, 2005); they thus create templates, reinforced and sanctioned by regulators, that lead to the country-specific division of labor.

On the basis of the existing vertical segments and co-specialized participants in the industry, firms develop their own capabilities.⁶ These capabilities, though, are critically dependent on this context, in two ways. First, scope prescribes organization and also the nature of capabilities. Take the architect example. In the UK, where architects are active in detailing (i.e. translating designs into specific guidance for buildings) in addition to concept and design, their capabilities develop in different ways than those in France, where architects focus on concept and design only; and it may be the case that UK architects cannot work well in the French system because their competencies in concept and design are inseparable from the ones in detailing. So it is not even the case that a firm with a wider scope will be able to fare well in a country where its remit will be more limited; as in the other country the demands will be *qualitatively different*⁷. So the scope of particular types of firms may make them implausible candidates for global expansion, given the strong correlation between capabilities and scope. Otherwise put, if the capabilities along the value chain are not *modular*, if they are integral, then there will be a substantial compatibility problem. Only if the capabilities in the value chain are truly modular, will an architectural practice in the UK be able to expand in France, by virtue of its mastering the relevant sub-part of the value-adding activities.

In addition to the modularity in terms of the productive capabilities along the value chain, another major issue is co-specialization along the value chain, and the fact that often the capabilities that firms have in one part of the value chain critically depends on the capabilities developed by the other, vertically co-specialized firms in the same sector and the same country. This point has received a fair share of research, albeit in the particular context of Japanese firms (mostly, automotive assemblers) expanding to the US. As Pil and MacDuffie (1999: 60) note, “suffice it to say that the capabilities of a plant reside to some degree in the strengths of its relationships with the suppliers and in the abilities of those suppliers.” Kenney and

⁶ The structure of the value chain affects both the immediate exportability of competitive advantage (that is, the extent to which specific firms can leverage their advantages from one setting onto the next); and it drives *productive capabilities* along an industry themselves. As Jacobides and Winter (2005) recently suggested, the way labor is divided in a sector affects the processes of knowledge accumulation; the identity, references, and comparison points, as well as capability development process of the participating firms. So international differences in both the way labor is divided and in the connections between the firms along the industry’s value chain affects the patterns of exportability of advantage as it also shapes the *magnitude and type* of the capability advantage over time, in addition to shaping the degree to which it is institutionally modular.

⁷ It is obvious that French architects would find it very hard to expand in the UK, as they lack the capability of detailing. Yet, if the capabilities were modular, i.e. if the capabilities along this value chain were not intrinsically linked, then this problem might be resolved if there existed a vertical specialist capable in detailing. Likewise, if capabilities were modular, then the UK architects would be able to expand in France by selectively “exporting” *only* their capabilities in design. So if capabilities are modular, then the “fit” in terms of vertical scope can be resolved inasmuch as (a) the “exporting” company goes to a country which requires a span as large or narrower than its own scope; or (b) if the “exporting” company goes to a country which requires a broader span, which can be partly covered by itself and partly covered by another vertical specialist. Of course, case (b) (e.g. the French’s entry in UK architecture) would be more difficult, as it may be easier to drop a capability than find someone else to “cover” for a capability that does not exist. Yet if capabilities are integral, non-modular along the value chain, that is, if firms can only transfer their superiority in an “all or nothing” package, *neither* the firm with a narrower scope *nor* the firm with

Florida (1993), who carefully documented the expansion of Japanese firms to the US, noted that successful expansion abroad

“combines the transfer of work and production organization within the plant with the simultaneous transfer of broader *interorganizational relationships* between plants and their parts suppliers. This is having a powerful effect in the broader environment and is creating a whole new and supportive environment for the Japanese system of production.”

Toyota, broadly hailed as the most successful example of global expansion of a Japanese firm, spent a fair amount of time training its suppliers to interact with it in the same way that the suppliers it had at home did. This, in effect, suggests that even when the division of labor in a sector does not differ that markedly between countries (as is the case in automobiles), a fair amount of the competitive advantage a firm has resides in the way in which it interfaces with other participants in a sector, and also possibly with the exact nature and capabilities of the participants in that sector. Therefore, for global expansion to be successful a firm must either occupy an *institutionally modular* position in a specific sector's value chain, i.e. it must be neatly separated from the other industry participants in easy-to-replicate relations; *or*, alternatively, it must be able to reproduce the same (or substitute) structures along the host country's value chain, inasmuch as these structures drive its advantage.

These two simple but fundamental observations constitute the heart of the argument and the value-added of this paper. Figure 1 provides a 2 x 2 matrix that examines the implications of modularity in terms of capabilities / areas along the value chain, and institutional modularity. More formally defined, modular capabilities exist whenever firms in an industry that span more than one stage of the production process can neatly separate the capabilities in each of the constituent parts of the production process. To return to the example of architects in the UK, modular capabilities would mean that the capabilities in design are separable from the capabilities of detailing, in that a firm with strong capabilities in both detailing and design can replicate its advantage even if it focuses only in design or only in retailing. This is important, as it may well need to restrict its scope to, say, expand to France, and the question is whether its superiority is dependent on its entire system, or, in contrast, if it can pick and choose a segment, and replicate its capability in a stand-alone, more focused (and appropriately calibrated) unit. Institutional modularity, on the other hand, examines the way in which a firm fits in the value chain / sector of the country where it operates.⁸ The question here becomes, can a firm expand into a different setting, or is its success so dependent on local, non-modular, non-substitutable connections that it needs to either replicate the entire system or change the host structure to make it mirror its own home structure? As we saw in the example of the Japanese automobile assemblers, their advantage was non-modular, in that to succeed, they needed to

a broader scope will be able to expand globally with success. Thus, it is the lack modularity of capabilities that shapes prospects of global expansion, and makes the problem of “fit” in terms of scope to become binding.

⁸ Note that the term “institutional” in the context of “institutional modularity” is not used to denote non-firm institutions and their nature in an economy. Rather, we use the term “institutional” in the sense used by Coase (1937; 1992), who, in his analysis of the “institutional structure of production”, considers the division of labour between different types of firms in an industry. For a detailed discussion, see Madhok (2002) or Jacobides and Winter (2005).

replicate the same tight linkages with other parts of the value chain, linkages which may well not be the norm, or perhaps require complementary inputs and services that are not available in the host country.

Include Figure 1 about here

On the basis of these two factors, then, we can examine the impacts of modularity (in terms of institutional / vertical structure of the value chain, and in terms of different capabilities along that chain). In the top right-hand corner, both capabilities and institutional structure are modular: In this case, global expansion would be most easy. For this particular quadrant, the analysis of the extant literature applies full-force: Success in global expansion is determined by the balance between the competencies / competitive advantage of the firm that wants to expand, as judged against the difficulties for adapting in the host country (in terms of the overall institutional environment.)

In the upper left hand quadrant, firms do not critically depend on their local institutional environment, but their own capabilities are systemic. This is a problem inasmuch as the scope of the activities in the firm with an advantage is broader than the relevant segment in the recipient / host country. For instance, if the design advantage of UK architects were to be dependent on their detailing skills, and if detailing is undertaken there by construction firms, there would be a problem, as this would rule out the expansion on only the design segment- if design is integrally linked to detailing. The answer might be to expand on *all* of the integrally related, non-modular parts of the sector; but this poses a fresh set of problems. For instance a UK practice might try to expand on design *and* detailing, but it would face the problems of creating a new, more integrated offering. This would not find a ready set of co-specialized construction firms that would willingly give up part of the production process, nor of buyers who would change their ascribed role for architects in the building process (cf. Cacciatori and Jacobides, 2005). This is not an insurmountable problem, but success in global expansion in that case requires the re-organization in the local industry structure and the creation of the appropriate and appropriately qualified (and willing) co-specialized partners. So in this quadrant, success in global expansion is more difficult, and critically relies on securing support from the vertically related segments, as well as educating the local firms or buyers in applying this new “business model”.

The lower right-hand quadrant represents the inverse problem- namely, the situation whereby firms do have modular structures, but where they are not modular in terms of their relationships along the value chain, or on their reliance of particular, country-specific inputs or services. This is the situation of the Japanese automobile manufacturers, who require a particular way of organizing their relationships along the value chain to succeed, and also critically rely on the capabilities of their key suppliers. This means that in order to succeed in global expansion under these constraints, a firm must work to ensure it can get the same type of interactions along the value chain (as Toyota did), or bring in the requisite complementary

goods and services;⁹ or, alternatively, a firm can try to modularize its position (Baldwin and Clark, 2000, 2003), effectively moving to the upper right hand-side quadrant, by safeguarding as much of its advantage as possible.

Finally, the lower left hand-side corner represents the difficulties of both the previous cases, and is a good example of a very tightly embedded organization of production, which will be difficult to expand – except if there can be a full, wholesale replication of the structure.

Imperfect as any simple categorization scheme might be, this 2 x 2 matrix has the benefit of shifting attention to the structure of the industry / sector, and of how this affects the prospects of global expansion. Casual empiricism would suggest that there are substantial differences in the degree of globalization in different sectors, and the extent of modularity as well as the international consistency (or lack thereof) on the structure of these industries may well account for a big part of this. Otherwise put, whereas there are some sectors which are organized in a similar way in different countries, and sectors where both capabilities and the institutional structure is more modular, this is not the norm. And the extent to which such modularity and inter-national value chain consistency prevails may be a robust predictor of globalization. This may indeed be the reason why services, which can be “sliced and diced” in many different country-specific ways, have been conspicuously slower to globalize than product-based industries (or even service-based but asset-intensive services like telecommunications and energy).

The last part of the argument is that managers tend to under-estimate systematically the impact of the institutional and capability modularity. It appears that compatibility and “fit” with the host country’s own value chain is hard to detect ex ante, and this leads to unexpected adaptation costs. I illustrate such problems caused by managerial myopia, as well as the problems caused by differing vertical / value chain structures by considering an important service industry, mortgage banking, and by examining the challenges in global expansion in this sector.

Co-Specialization, Fit and Modularity: Global Expansion of US Mortgage Finance Firms

Mortgage banking provides a convenient setting in which to study global expansion. In the context of a much broader analysis of the US mortgage banking, which focused on understanding the dynamics of value chain evolution and market creation (Jacobides, 2005), I also examined the challenges that US firms faced in expanding abroad. This allowed us to engage in the in-depth qualitative research that inspired the framework discussed in this paper.

The selection of the industry was predicated upon its importance, and the recent interest in of industry participants and regulators in globalization trends. Mortgage-related instruments represent one of the most important classes of financial assets in the world. In the US, outstanding mortgage loan pools exceeded

⁹ Indeed, Japanese transplants in the US tried to maintain same type of interactions along the value chain by spending substantial amounts of time, energy and funds in the almost altruistic effort to train their suppliers in JIT and lean techniques; see MacDuffie and Helper (1999) for a detailed discussion.

\$4.6 trillion 1997, which was almost equal to the value of all US Government debentures (i.e. Treasury Bonds and Bills – cf. MBA / OFHEO, 1998; Federal Board of Reserves, 1998). The Mortgage Banking (MB) sector has also seen significant change in the last few years, and, more importantly perhaps, international expansion of much acclaimed US-based firms has started becoming a trend (MBA, 1997, Erb, 1998).

Specifically, I entered into a two-level empirical analysis, in order to understand the particularities of global strategies and opportunities for expansion of US-based firms. The first level was a comparative international assessment of the structure of the industry, done in association with the Mortgage Bankers Association of America, which supported this work. The second level consisted of taking a sample of highly visible moves of US mortgage banking firms that were investing abroad, including HomeSide, Irwin Finance, Residential Finance Corporation (owned by GM), EDS, and Fannie Mae. I then proceeded to an in-depth investigation: To establish the challenges and problems involved in successful global expansion in that industry, three Research Assistants interviewed executives from five ventures, and collected semi-structured notes. These were then reviewed by the author, who made further contacts with executives involved in these ventures. A thorough discussion of the sector and the evidence can be found in Jacobides (2005); here I selectively use some data for illustration and not for support or proof of the theoretical argument.

So let us consider this setting- mortgage finance, as it evolved in the US, and the resulting institutional structure of the sector. To begin with, the final product / service: A mortgage is a loan collateralized by real estate. To make such a loan possible, a lender must be able to find a borrower who needs a mortgage. Roughly speaking, to make a mortgage possible, either one integrated firm or a series of vertically co-specialized firms linked though the market must ensure that the following happens: (1) lenders with excess funds are found; (2) borrowers willing to take a loan are found and steered to the appropriate loan type; (3) borrowers are analyzed for their credit-worthiness, the value of their collateral, etc., and are guided through the paperwork associated with the mortgage--ensuring titles, deeds, and all other legal requirements are taken care of; (4) the loan is closed, and the transaction consummated and recorded; (5) the loan is serviced for the duration of its length, which means receiving payments from the borrower and managing the account until it is paid off or, alternatively, engaging in foreclosure if necessary; and (6) payments are made to the lenders or other providers of capital.

These six different functions were originally performed in integrated institutions, in particular, in retail banks, which maintained mortgage loans, or savings and loan associations (S&Ls), which focused more on mortgages. For both of these integrated types of firms, liquidity was largely provided by the short-term deposits of retail customers. On the basis of the liquidity created by deposits or through the corporate lending these institutions would engage in, the loans would be funded (Fabozzi & Modigliani, 1992; Lederman, 1985). Banks and S&Ls also sought out the mortgage loan applicants; they would prepare and

process applications, and they would service the loans until they expired. This was the earlier, integrated version of the industry.

Mortgage banking, though, started vertically dis-integrating, creating new markets, from the early 1970's onwards. The same functions noted above started being performed by specialized institutions, each with a narrow vertical scope. While the functions and the basic steps in the production process of a loan did not change, the vertical structure of the industry did. With it, the types of industry participants and the nature of competition also changed. By the mid-1990's, each function could be performed by a vertical specialist: finding mortgage borrowers and steering them to the appropriate loan was done by new specialists, called mortgage brokers. Mortgage banks, in turn, would focus on closing (finalizing) loans, funding them, and then servicing them. They held no deposits, nor did they seek funding for the loans through the capital markets. Instead, they would "warehouse" the loan until they could sell the underlying asset (the mortgage loan itself) to new specialists, the "securitizers," who would then take it upon themselves to find the lenders to fund these loans. To fund the loans, mortgage banks used lines of credit, i.e. working capital that they obtained from commercial banks so as to enable them to warehouse the loans until they were sold to securitizers. Then, securitizers, having purchased individual loans from several different mortgage banks, would bundle loans together and then turn them into securities (unbeknownst to the borrowers whose loans were being securitized) and sell these Mortgage-Backed Securities to the capital markets, earning fees on the securities they produced (Fabozzi & Modigliani, 1992). Later, some specialized mortgage banks focused more on servicing, others on originating loans. This breakup of the value chain was specific to the US, and led to the creation of particular boundaries, and particular type of capabilities in the industry. Figure 2 provides a view of the US sector.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Whereas there might have been some drivers that can help explain why the industry dis-integrated (see Jacobides, 2005), it is important to note that there was no inevitability as to the shape and structure of the industry. The evolutionary process that led to the current structure through the endogenous reduction of transaction costs and the related inter-firm vertical co-specialization could have led to a different way of organizing labor in this sector. Indeed, by comparing the US structure to that of other countries in a similar level of development, it appears that this is a very particular and unusual structure of the industry. Even in the UK, which is similar to the US in many dimensions, especially in its financial system, mortgages are still provided in a much more integrated way.¹⁰ Finally, I should note that the structure of the sector also has a strong bearing on the capabilities that were developed in different parts of the industry; and that

¹⁰ Recently (2003/4), Gordon Brown, the UK's Chancellor to the Exchequer, initiated a large-scale study to consider emulating the US model; but as the report suggested, this would not lead to much benefit to the UK right now, as its mortgage system, even with a very different and less dis-integrated structure, with minimal securitization, is also efficient. It has simply developed along different lines, yielding institutions that differ markedly from the ones in the UK. And it cannot be made more efficient by the institution of one or two innovations; it would require a more substantial re-organization that would not fit the structure of the sector. This strongly supports the thesis that industry structures are idiosyncratic, path-dependent, and not only technologically determined.

while the sector consisted of different vertical segments, there the sector was not institutionally modular: Rather, these vertical specialists were co-dependent and co-specialized.

One last piece of evidence of the path-dependency of the value chain structure at the national level, both with regards to firm scope and with regards to the related capabilities in the industry comes from the comparison of the US with other systems that have taken the path of securitization. While space precludes going into the technical details, I should note that in Denmark and Argentina, where secondary mortgage markets have been (more or less recently) instituted, practices, the structure of the value chain and the nature of the players do not neatly map onto those in the US (MBA, 1997). Whereas the financial products –mortgage-backed securities and collateralized mortgage obligations on the secondary market, and mortgage products on the primary market - are similar, the division of labor between different firms and the relations between them are not (Diamond and Lea, 1992; MBA, 1997; Erb, 1998).

Be that as it may, by the late 1990's it has become clear that the US mortgage system was very competitive, and that the vertically dis-integrated system has produced substantial efficiencies. More to the point, US based mortgage banks measured themselves against the equivalent integrated firms in other countries and they became convinced they were superior in several parts of the mortgage process. Mortgage executives I met echoed the industry press by noting that: they were considerably faster; could make profits with much smaller spreads between cost of funds and interest received; had lower fees for both origination and servicing; and that even if one was to factor in the inefficiencies related to infrastructure or regulatory barriers in other countries, they did expect to be more efficient and more profitable than local firms, which they considered “inefficient”. As such, several participants in the industry predicted that global expansion would happen as soon as the regulation in potential host countries would enable the function of such types of organizations (Erb, 1998; Diamond and Lea, 1992). Simply put, industry participants as well as analysts expected that US companies would be leveraging their competence, which was developed both as a result of the highly competitive market, and the vertical breakup of the sector, on an international basis (Lasko, 1998). However, despite some expansion, no dramatic changes have been witnessed yet (Erb, 1998); more to the point, firms that have tried have largely failed. What is more intriguing is that they did not expect to fail quite as badly.

Problems in Global Expansion, Illustrated: Value Chain Fit, Modularity and Managerial Myopia

From this analysis of both some (few) relatively successful moves of US firms abroad, and of the more frequent horror stories (re-cast as stories of strategic re-deployment or bad luck from some of the managers I spoke to) a few general themes emerged, which largely support (and partly inspired) the framework developed in the previous section. In addition to showing the role of co-specialization and lack of institutional modularity, it also enabled us to refine our understanding of the challenges of expanding abroad when value chain structures do not neatly fit.

One of the most important predictors of failure in efforts to expand globally was the role of co-specialized industry participants in the host value chains; in other words, it was the fact that, despite the substantial degree of vertical specialization, the US mortgage banking industry is not institutionally modular. Rather, it consists of a tightly inter-dependent system of different types of institutions, whose advantage is dependent on the function of the system as a whole. What is even more interesting, is that managers seemed to have been surprised and taken aback by the role that this co-specialization played; it was so deeply engrained in their normal, home environment, that it generally did not occur to them to wonder in advance which of these co-specialized players would exist; and also they did not expect that their advantage could so easily be eroded by the problems in linking with other parts of the value chain. Two examples --the expansion of Irwin Mortgage in Mexico in the mid-1990's and the acquisition of HomeSide by National Australia Bank-- illustrate these dynamics.

By the early 1990's, Irwin, a major mortgage bank, was in a solid growth path and decided to try its hand at global expansion. It also thought it had identified the major difficulty in terms of global expansion vis-à-vis its local competitors, which was the risks in identifying the credit-worthiness of the potential borrowers. Its solution was simple: It decided it would follow, as it were, the US and Canadian customers who wanted to get loans for properties in Mexico. In this way, it could operate even in an environment with strong, non-modular links between the final customers and the providers of a service.¹¹ However, some additional links in assessing properties were not established; there was no firm that could provide adequate information in terms of the properties that were mortgaged. For instance, Irwin drastically limited the market as it had to accept only the customers that did not substantially under-report property value to tax authorities. Given that in the Mexican tax system, heavy taxes (as high as 10%) are levied at the time of property transfer, it has become common practice to mis-report property values during transactions. As Irwin calculates its Loan-To-Value ratio on the basis of that information, its loans become less than competitive for those engaging in value / cost misrepresentation.¹² When Irwin asked its clients to disclose the property value in order for them to qualify for their loan, it found out that few in Mexico would state the actual transaction price for the purchase. A host of other difficulties in terms of the use of brokers also plagued Irwin, who realized that operating in a different industry structure meant that it would be very hard to reap any of the efficiencies it could reap at home. There were no other vertical specialists (e.g. appraisers) to support its operation, as there would be in the US. The co-specialized providers that might otherwise be relied on were not there, and neither could Irwin link to customers in quite the way it was

¹¹ Note that the embeddedness of service firms in networks of buyers (cf. Stuart and Podolny 1996), which cannot be transferred from one setting onto the next, is an important impediment to globalization, especially in services. This may explain why in the construction sector, the few firms that have globalized, are engineering, architectural or cost consultancies who have globalized by *following their clients*, as such ensuring the maintain some of their institutional links and embeddedness. See Baark (1999) for an extended discussion of how globalization is driven by customers who globalize, thus enabling service providers to globalize as well.

¹² The Loan-To-Value ratio (LTV) is the ratio of the mortgage amount divided by the value of the collateralized property. Obviously, MB firms want a reasonably modest LTV (US practice is to have an LTV of roughly 80%, even though under-collateralized loans of 125% LTV do exist) whereas customers prefer high LTV's. Not being able to offer an adequately high LTV may be a significant competitive drawback.

used to.¹³ Finally, it is important to note that these were painful observations, and that experienced mortgage bankers had not fully anticipated such issues *ex ante*.

Another example comes from the acquisition of HomeSide, a very successful US mortgage bank, particularly capable on the servicing side of the business, by the National Australia Bank (NAB), which thus wanted to import HomeSide's capabilities and improve the efficiency of the mortgage operations of the bank. When NAB tried to leverage HomeSide's competencies, capabilities and systems in Australia, one of the key problems was that credit reporting there was vastly different from that in the US. In the US, credit rating companies have developed jointly with the users of these data; credit scoring agencies such as Fair Isaac have emerged that allow for a seamless use and evaluation of credit information. In Australia, on the other hand, credit reporting was only used for tracking down those who default; so there may be good information for potential buyers of "C" or "D" mortgage / paper, but almost nothing on the "A's", or "A+'s", "A-'s" or marginal "B's". Hence the infrastructure that US companies have come to depend on, all the specialized means they have for interpreting credit information as a key criterion for deciding their lending policies, were close to irrelevant. Thus, the plan fell prey to the co-specialization of HomeSide to the US system, and the lack of an effective local institutional substitute.

Furthermore, there were concerns with the structure of the productive capabilities of HomeSide. Ironically enough, the very dissociation of the origination / evaluation and underwriting process, so commonplace in the US, is problematic in the absence of reliable information about underlying risks, since it does not allow for the good relaying of information on customer creditworthiness on the basis of servicing experience. This also made the systems used by HomeSide hard to apply to Australia; the neat separation of the mortgage process in the US was partly predicated on the existence of good credit rating information. Thus, the US-type modular productive capabilities in servicing and in origination did not apply to the Australian market; they were not appropriate in the Australian context which was still in need of a more integrated system that could transmit information internally from servicing to origination and vice-versa. Again, management had not anticipated the problems caused by the fact that the modular capabilities of HomeSide did not map onto the integral system required in Australia, and this surprise was one of the reasons for

¹³ Note that these findings are partly consistent with, yet clearly distinct, from recent research of Khanna and Palepu (1997, 1999, 2000). Khanna and Palepu argue that in less developed countries, the lack of institutional development in general (in terms of capital markets, or even in terms of intermediate markets) leads to greater integration. To corollary is that such integration will give way to specialization as the level of institutional infrastructure improves. This would also suggest that the expansion of a vertical specialist in a country which has only integrated providers may be fraught with problems; with this we agree. On the other hand, though, we argue that there is no "ordinal ranking" of better or worse / sophisticated vs non-sophisticated countries in terms of their vertical structure. What matters is the existence of *exact* vertical complements for a firm expanding abroad; it's a question of *fit*, rather than a question of "institutional maturity" or sophistication. So even expansion in a developed country might face the same problems of lack of vertically co-specialized providers, if that country's vertical modules do not fit those of the expanding firm. So rather than consider the problems of expansion of Irwin to Mexico as an illustration of the generic problems caused by the lack of institutional development, we would argue that it is equally plausible to suggest that the failings were due to "poor fit". The fact that US firms have faced remarkably similar problems when expanding to the UK (CountryWide CCR being the best example) lends credence to this interpretation.

which this very sizable acquisition was eventually deemed a failure (see Tschoegl, 2000, on why NAB eventually sold HomeSide).

Generalizing across cases, we observe that co-specialization in the value chain is important particularly *because* we take it for granted; business executives could not even conceive of the nature of the problems they encountered. They do not look at either the institutional modularity (as in the case of Irwin); nor at the nature, scope, or modularity of competencies (as in the case of HomeSide / NAB). The business model in the US runs so smoothly that executives didn't quite realize the impressive interweaving of services, infrastructure and regulations that allows the industry to be effective. Neither can they see the impact of different capability structures; they just assume that "superior capabilities" is all that matters.

This problem is further accentuated by the fact that the costs (in real terms) for under-estimating institutional or capability modularity, or lack of fit between home and host value chain structure, dramatic as they may be, are very hard to quantify, whereas the potential gains or efficiency differential between one country and another may be misleadingly easy to measure. So executives seemed to be lured by the prospects of real gains, into countries they *did* know, culturally and administratively. Yet, importantly, managers seem to underestimate the role of institutional differences, as they unwittingly carry the conceptions of their own countries and settings. And the more superficially similar the settings appear, and as such the greater the presumed benefits, the bigger the surprise of the managers who try to adapt.

In a practical sense, then, looking at the nature of the value chain takes us away from the generalist preoccupation with macro-trends. Indeed, in the discussions on global expansion, we saw a strong interest in general macro-economic and demographic trends, or perhaps product structure (Armijo et al., 1990), to the detriment of the structural, value-chain issues that often proved more important. Mexico's high demand for new housing, or its overall cultural fit with the US, or administrative habits may be less important than new regulation that allows institutional investors in Mexico to invest in securitized mortgages, for instance. This is not to downplay the role of the country-level factors that have been studied to date; rather, it is to stress that it is the more specific, institutional structures, and the degree of *fit*, *institutional* and *competence modularity* that determine the exportability and relevance of US mortgage banking skills.

Finally, some of the more successful global moves were those that explicitly took into account the importance of the value chain structure. Some, such as General Motor's finance subsidiary Residential Funding Corporation (RFC), tried to blend in the local market by identifying how to best integrate in the local value chain; this was facilitated by local M&A (in RFC's case, the purchase of Auritec SA).

Perhaps the most interesting strategy is one followed by firms such as Electronic Data Systems (EDS), or securitizers such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. These companies focus on their ability to provide infrastructure to changing markets, and predicated their strategy upon ensuring that the *value chain itself* was shaped in a way that will allow them to capitalize on their efficiency. This strategy, which brings to mind strategies of important infrastructure firms such as Bechtel Corp. or Hutchinson, ensure that other

national structures become increasingly like the ones in their home market, and this permits them to export their expertise. In other words, these firms, rather than adapting to their environment (as RFC did) focus on trying, often through lobbying and selective international alliances, to ensure that the environment evolves in a way that suits their interests. Firms such as EDS, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have consulting arms that link with regulators and governments, and whose aims are to ensure that these firms and industries evolve in a way which is beneficial to them. EDS has had an agreement with the Belgian government, for instance; and Fannie Mae has been working with the government of South Africa and Honk Kong to develop sister agencies. This suggests that an important, and ill-understood dimension of competition is the effort to shape particular value chain structures in ways that are advantageous to domestic or global players (cf. Henisz, 2003; Cacciatori and Jacobides, 2005). Such efforts, when done with a good understanding of value chain structures, can both yield advantages for the firms undertaking them, and can also change the layout of the competitive field for all firms involved. Clearly, the battle for shaping the nature and structure of the value chain merits dedicated research, going well beyond the confines of this paper.

Discussion: Value Chain Structure and Competency Exportability in Global Expansion

This paper set out to help us understand when firms can capitalize on their competitive advantage in expanding globally, and when they cannot: Over and beyond the challenges of a country's overall cultural or institutional framework, the distance in terms of administrative practices, Human Resource policies and habits, the *comparative structure* of the value chain was shown to play a very significant role in the potential of global expansion. Given that value chains can be decomposed in different ways, in different countries, diverse sets of co-specialized units will emerge; and this is why we need to understand the nature, structure and capabilities of the vertical modules for the same industry in different countries. To do so, I proposed a simple framework that considers two key aspects in an industry: The degree of competency modularity (and the resulting fit with the potential host country's need) and the degree of institutional modularity (and the ability of linking with the host country's other co-specialized firms in a way that preserves competitive advantage).

This angle of analysis can help explain not only firm-specific opportunities for expansion, but also aggregate patterns of globalization, by focusing on the sector level. Specifically, it gives a gauge of the degree of "compatibility" between sectors (and the extent of inter-national trade, FDI and MNC activity) in different pairs of countries. Indeed, aggregate, country-level factors would not be able to explain why some groups of similar countries have substantial global interaction in some sectors and not in others; nor would it be able to explain why in some sectors trade happens only between a few countries which may not share many macro-attributes in common. To wit, casual empiricism would suggest that differences in value chain structure such as those observed in construction may explain why some sectors are more open to others to global competition. Health care, financial services, professional services and construction, which together amount to a third or more of the GDP in many developed countries, all have very different value chain structures in different countries. The reason is not just direct regulatory involvement- but rather, this

reflects the fact that in sectors where there is no “one best way” to organize, a path-dependent process takes hold: When regulation is also involved, this path-dependency “hardens”, leading to a set of internationally inconsistent and nationally inert structures.

In that regard, it is important to note that the growing harmonization of business practices, either mandated by national and international regulatory agencies, or brought about by the institution of actual or presumed “best institutional practices” may lead toward greater isomorphism in value chain “junctions” and structures.¹⁴ This convergence is reinforced by global competitive dynamics: As some very effective global competitors emerge in particular parts of the value chain in one country, they may force changes in the value chains of other, host countries. Local firms in these countries, in turn, try to accommodate and capitalize on these global competitors’ capabilities in their national setting, by finding more effective, modular ways to link with them. As such the structures of industries are endogenously changed, with modularization of capabilities begetting institutional modularization, begetting even more pronounced benefits from being modularized, in a process similar to that described by Jacobides and Winter (2005). Thus, through competition, a global convergence in terms of value chain structures is often self-reinforcing, and this process, when initiated, leads to increasing globalization of previously insular sectors.

The prospect of globalization can also *shape* the nature of the value chain. If a global competitor can draw on one of the existing “ecosystems” with which the global competitors’ capabilities *do* fit, then that type of vertical eco-system, linking one or more global competitors can gradually out-compete other variants; that is, the battle between different ways of organizing the value chain in the national context may be affected by global competition, as global competitors will try to ensure that their preferred structure will be supported in the host country. As such, the existence of even a limited set of potentially “vertically co-specializable” local firms may be the thin edge of the wedge that will enable successful global expansion. These competitive dynamics play out at the level of institutional / value chain structure as well as on the level of the product or service. Indeed, the way in which global firms affect the institutional layout of sectors in the countries they operate or plan to do so, remains an intriguing venue for research, especially considering the current rhetoric of firms such as Fannie Mae that try to “illuminate” other countries and guide public policy in a way that will be convenient to them (Shell, 2003: Ch 2-3). This suggests that we must be wary of blanket prescriptions on “superior” ways of organizing and setting up the value chain—“institutional monocropping” has its dangers both at the level of societal institutions (Evans, 2004) and at the level of industry structures. We should not forget that firms can be relied upon to advocate what is most beneficial for them, not for society as a whole, as the “Global Value Chain” literature also suggests (Gereffi et al, 2005; Gibbon and Ponte, 2006).

¹⁴ For instance, Herrigel and Wittke (2004) in their study of automobile production systems, found that in different countries vertical dis-integration took on a different form, yet convergence was increasingly plausible, whether domestically (i.e. vertical co-specialization between different local participants being isomorphic) or internationally (i.e. vertical specialization happening so as to accommodate particular global competitors onto the local setting); similarly, Helper and Sako (1995) also found some convergence on how parts of the value chain are connected.

This provides a fresh angle on the role of technological standards, and, most importantly perhaps, of global ways of defining and transmitting information (such as the emerging XML communication and information protocols); it suggests that efforts to manipulate an “industry architecture” (see Jacobides et al, 2006) can lead to drastic changes in the nature of global competition. Changes in information technology might affect strategy on the global and national level, by virtue of their creating a homogenized, and decomposable value chain (Evans and Wurster, 1997). Yet the extent to which either regulation or Information Technology alone can lead to such changes in the value chain structure is unclear. Clearly, more attention to the strategic and institutional impacts of IT and standards is called for.

While the impact of Information Technology on industry structure might not be quite as pervasive as we once thought, the efforts to homogenize value chains internationally do continue apace, driven not only by regulators but also, and mainly, by the firms that expect to profit from it. Our empirical illustration suggested that firms such as Fannie Mae or Bechtel Corp. or Hutchison Industries are trying to benefit by advocating, using heavy lobbying, structures in the value chain where they can expand, or where the US and the World Bank invests in. This provides a further strategic spin on Henisz’s (2003) recent discussion on how firms succeed in global expansion through their capabilities to shape their institutional environment abroad.

On the practical level, the rapid growth of outsourcing and offshoring shows how firms such as Infosys or Capita try to develop modules that do fit in particular industries; they try to adapt or potentially change the value chain structure. This paper’s angle, which combines the analysis of value chains with exportability of competitive advantage, can thus help shed some further light to the growing phenomena of outsourcing and offshoring, which surely merit more dedicated research.

Limitations

The analysis, of course, has several inherent limitations. For instance, it does not address the “internalization” issue directly. To address it, we would need one more dimension to the 2 x 2 modularity matrix, which would consider whether an advantage at any part of the production process can be “traded” through licensing or franchising, or whether this requires direct expansion. The new dimension would be the “advantage tradeability”, that is, the extent to which a firm would be able to “monetize” its advantage by creating a license or trading agreement for a particular area where a firm is strong. Another issue that has not been addressed is the choice of mode of global expansion (e.g., Greenfield vs. Merger & Acquisition). While this analysis holds for both of these cases (inasmuch as global expansion rests on the desire to leverage some advantage abroad), we could speculate that entering through acquisition might mitigate some of the concerns of vertical co-specialization in the host country, inasmuch as there is a possibility of blending the home competitive advantage with the embeddedness in the local institutional context. Follow-on research could consider how the mode of entry relates to comparative value chain structure and the modularity in capabilities or institutions.

This framework also did not address another important question that relates to MNC's in particular, which consists of the benefits from global operation not in "exporting" but in "developing" competitive advantage in the first place. In the literature, there is a broad consensus that a MNC is "an international network that creates, accesses, integrates and applies knowledge in multiple locations" (Almeida, Song and Grant, 2002: 148). Consistent with this "Differentiated Network" model of the MNC (Nohria and Ghoshal, 1997), we know that the MNC's distinctive feature is that it operates in multiple countries, each of which is characterized by a distinct task environment or organizational field (Ghoshal and Nohria, 1989; Westney, 1993), and that it draws on these differences to generate and leverage new knowledge (McKeivily et al, 2004; also, see Markides and Geroski, 2004). The specific question here becomes, how different should the value chain structures be, before "requisite variety" that can generate new knowledge gets lost in an inchoate medley of different and incommensurate structures? The impression from the field is that modest differences in value chain structures might be of some help in the sense of maximizing learning and experience, but that growing differences are quick to take their toll on both the ability to leverage and the ability to learn from multiple settings. It may well be the case that such differentiated networks need to operate on the basis of a more or less similar structure of the industry so as to render learning feasible, let alone effective. The particular role of the comparative structure of the value chain in facilitating or hampering the knowledge in such "differentiated networks", then, is a promising venue for future research.

Concluding Note

As Meyer and Rowan (1977) noted, organizations encompass "systems of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks and boundary spanning relations". This paper provided one specific, new way of looking at the evolution of these networks. It looks at the structure and the dynamics of the institutional layout of sectors; at the nature of the value chain and the relationships of actors within it. This allows us to build on several useful institutional and evolutionary economics frameworks, including the synthesis recently attempted by Jacobides (2005) and Jacobides and Winter (2005). Also, this view is also consistent with Shanley and Peteraf's (2004) recent discussion of "vertical groups", and extends their work by suggesting that in different national contexts, different types of groups emerge. As a result, in dissimilar circumstances, global expansion may be problematic *because* of the existence of incommensurate groups with incommensurate capabilities.

The new perspective offered in this paper helps us revisit both the rationale for global expansion, and the mode of expansion abroad; it helps explain how and why competitive advantage can be exported, and highlights a new level of analysis that could be useful in the study of global management issues for firms, sectors and countries. I thus hope that this analysis opens up the way for more research, both on the theoretical and on the empirical level. For all the limitations of early-stage research, I hope that this paper will lead to richer discussions and a better understanding of the exportability of competitive advantage- and of the structure and evolution of increasingly globalizing industries.

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FIGURE 1

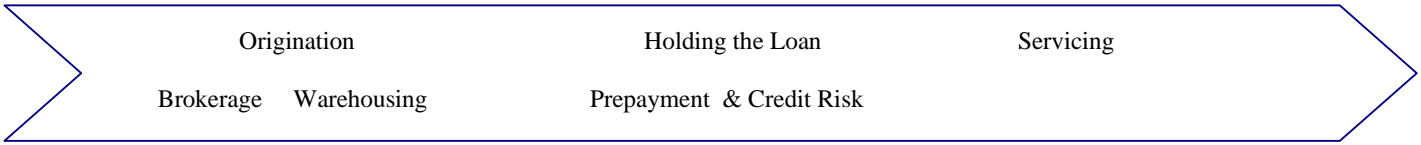
**A Simple Typology of Sectors:
Identifying Attributes that determine Exportability of Competitive Advantage**

<p>Institutionally Modular No critical non-substitutable links within the sector</p>	<p>Need to “impose” scope or change Will require adaptation of hosts</p>	<p>Exportability straightforward given firm’s module “fits”</p>
<p>Institutionally Non-Modular Dense linkages specific to the country and sector</p>	<p>Exportability problematic Calls for systemic adaptation / change</p>	<p>Need to replicate or substitute chain e.g. Japanese transplants</p>
	<p>Integral Capabilities Cannot separate & choose part of sector</p>	<p>Modular Capabilities Can pick and choose where to expand</p>

FIGURE 2

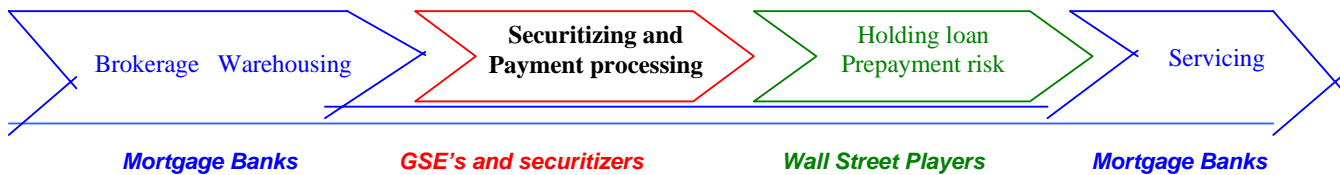
An Illustration: The Dis-integrating Mortgage Banking Sector (from Jacobides, 2005)

Original Structure: Integrated Housing Finance Provision

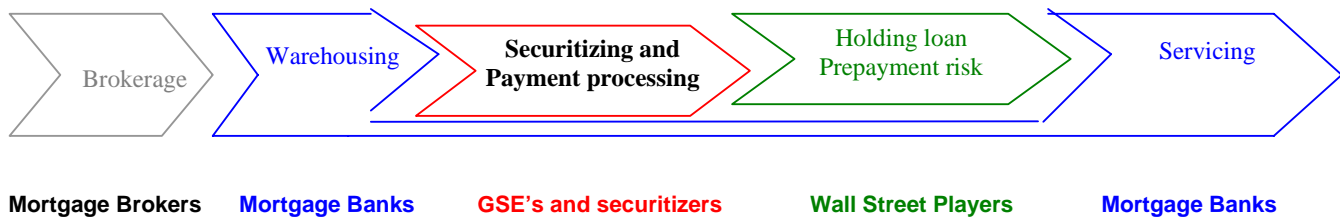


Integrated Banks and Savings & Loans

First Value Chain Change - Securitization and Secondary Market for Loans (1978=> 1988)



Second Value Chain Change: Creation of Broker Segment (1983=> 1987)



Third Value Chain Change – Creation of Market for Mortgage Servicing Rights (1989=>1993)

