The existence of definite organizational goals is a longstanding and central premise in organization and management research. It is more than 50 years since Cyert and March’s (1963) study on the behavioral theory of the firm and more than 30 years since Fama and Jensen’s (1983) work on the effects of differences in goals arising from variety of ownership and control. Although several decades have passed since the publication of these seminal studies, many aspects of organizational goals, especially those related to their antecedents and to the processes through which they are formed and become manifest in organizations, have received very fragmented theoretical treatment, and are thus only loosely integrated in organization theories. Therefore, there is a need to reassess the concept of organizational goals and their implications for firm behavior.

An organizational goal is generally defined as an aspiration level on a measurable organizational outcome. Among the different variables representing the goals that an organization may pursue, researchers have mostly focused on profitability (Greve 2003). Profit generation has direct consequences for the managers’ careers and job market value. Therefore, it is easy to understand why it is found to drive decision-making and, as a consequence, to affect organizational behavior and outcomes (Greve 2003). But organizations are often found to pursue other goals including productivity, sales, market share, and status (e.g., Baum et al. 2005) and research increasingly acknowledges the existence of a broad and very heterogeneous array of organizational goals that go beyond profit (e.g., Fiegenbaum et al. 1996).

A large body of research has examined the consequences of organizational goals for organizational behavior and outcomes. For example, behavioral theorists agree that organizations embrace strategic and operational change by introducing new products, entering new markets, engaging in M&As, and increasing R&D investments when they observe declining performance relative to their selected goals (e.g., Audia and Greve 2006, Chrisman and Patel 2012). What is more, multiple organizational goals may have additive effects, jointly influencing a single outcome, as well as interactive effects, such that the accomplishment of one goal may lower or increase the saliency of another goal, following hierarchical rules (Greve 2008).

Recent research has shown that organizations that differ in terms of industrial sector, size, ownership type, governance, or market position, among other characteristics, pursue diverse organizational goals. For example, firms operating in service industries are likely to place profitability before size goals, whereas manufacturing firms may follow the opposite approach (Greve 2008). Similarly, publicly traded companies are naturally prone to grow and increase corporate value. There may be conflicts between the goals of shareholders and managers and new mechanisms that change ownership and control may determine changes in
these goals (e.g. executive stock options, private equity buyouts). There may also be conflicts between the goals of multiple principals and agents (e.g., between majority and minority shareholders). Control by customer-owners in mutual firms diverts the organizational goals from profits and growth toward creating welfare for the customers. Again, in firms characterized by a major overlap between ownership and control (e.g., family firms) managers lose incentive to pursue growth and profitability goals (Berle and Means 1965), and recent research has found that they give priority to non-economic goals (Gómez-Mejía et al. 2007).

However, there has been little prior attempt to synthesize and compare the effects of these different goals on firm behavior. Given the importance of goal setting for predicting organizational behaviors and outcomes, it is essential to have a detailed understanding of what factors affect firms’ decision to pursue a specific set of goals. Although some partial analyses have been conducted on the topic, there is a need for developing a more detailed and comprehensive theoretical understanding of this phenomenon. We encourage therefore submissions for the special issue that propose a systematic review of existing theoretical and empirical evidence on the factors affecting firms’ decision to pursue a specific set of goals and propose an agenda that will hopefully inform future studies into the intriguing task of building a comprehensive view of the antecedents of organizational goals.

A second related aim of the special issue is to encourage research that investigates the micro-foundations of goals’ formation into organizations. Building on early studies, researchers have increasingly highlighted the need to understand the processes and mechanisms through which organizations can pursue a definite set of goals despite the different interests of their individual members (Cyert and March 1963). In this vein, Cyert and March challenged the prevailing view in economics according to which firms’ decisions could be conceived as being made by unitary actors, and they pointed to the importance of building “something analogous – at the organizational level – to individual goals at the individual level” (Cyert & March, 1963, p. 30). More recently, Argote and Greve (2007) noted that despite the emphasis posed in the Cyert and March’s (1963) behavioral theory on conflicts of interest and internal bargaining among organizational members and coalitions thereof, the theoretical and empirical work exploring how organizational goals are formed is not nearly as refined as the work that has been done at the aggregate level. In fact, these aspects have been addressed by a rich body of research in sociology and psychology, which explores the processes and mechanisms that characterize group decision making (see, e.g., Erez and Arad 1986, Hinsz et al. 1997). However, these studies have primarily been conducted in laboratory settings, therefore they cannot be directly applied to real contexts where organizational members have a history of interactions and operate in a larger social context.

We encourage therefore submissions that systematically review and contextualize the theoretical perspectives that have been used so far to describe the micro-level processes through which goals are established within groups and organizations, as well as the existing empirical evidence on the anatomy of these processes. Prospective authors are encouraged in particular to develop and propose innovative ways for integrating different theories, traditionally used in distant fields of study (such as psychology, sociology, and politics), to develop a conceptual framework of goal formation in organizations. Again, we believe that the anatomy of the micro-level process underlying goal formation is different depending on factors such as industrial belonging, size, ownership type, governance, and market position. For example, Kotlar and De Massis (2013) found idiosyncratic social interactions taking place
in family firms to manage goal diversity and commit organizational members to pursue family-centered goals.

We encourage contributions that are focused on the following themes:

- Taxonomies, typologies, hierarchies and coherent classifications of organizational goals;
- Antecedents of and relationships among multiple and diverse goals (e.g., economic vs. non-economic goals, social goals, ethical goals);
- Antecedents and correlates of organizational goals;
- Processes and mechanisms through which organizations and sub-units form definite goals (goal setting, goal formulation, goal assessment, goal revision, goal withdrawal);
- Relationships between organizational goals and employees (e.g., motivation, rewards, incentives, commitment);
- Relationships between organizational goals and individual/group decision-making processes (including cognitive and emotional aspects);
- Antecedents and formulation processes of goals in different types of organizations (e.g., entrepreneurial firms, publicly-traded firms, family firms, social enterprises);
- Time and temporal considerations in organizational goals (e.g., short-term and long-term goals, temporal evolution and adjustment of goals, timing and sequencing of goal-setting behaviors, changes in goals as a function of situational factors such as leadership/ownership successions and environmental jolts);
- Impact of different classes of goals on firm behavior and outcomes, in areas such as innovation, entrepreneurship, human resource management, internationalization, diversification, professionalization, alliances, etc.;
- Multi- and cross-disciplinary perspectives on organizational goals (e.g., psychology, sociology, politics, economics);
- Cross-cultural differences in goals and goal formulation processes;
- Organizational goals in organization and management theories (e.g., organizational theory, agency theory, resource-based view, behavioral theory, stakeholder theory).

**Submission Process and Deadline**

Manuscripts should be submitted via online submission at [http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ijmr](http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ijmr), highlighting that you wish to be considered for the Special Issue, ‘Organizational Goals: Antecedents, Formation Processes, and Implications for Firm Behavior’. Manuscripts should follow the *IJMR* Author Guidelines available at: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1468-2370/homepage/ForAuthors.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1468-2370/homepage/ForAuthors.html).

Additionally see also:


Contributors should send a copy of their submission to Alfredo De Massis, to whom they might direct enquiries in the first instance should they wish to discuss suitability of submission for the Special Issue (a.demassis@lancaster.ac.uk).

Manuscripts should be submitted by **April 30th 2016**. The expected publication date of the Special Issue is early 2018.
Special issue guest editors

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Chair of the Academy of Management Entrepreneurship Division, receiving its Mentor Award in 2009. He was recently ranked #1 worldwide for publications in academic entrepreneurship and in entrepreneurship. He has recently published (with Al Link and Don Siegel) *The Chicago Handbook of University Technology Transfer and Academic Entrepreneurship* (Chicago University Press, 2015).

**References**


