

LANGLOIS, Richard Normand

Principal Contributions Perhaps because I approached economics from a background and perspective different from most, I was drawn early in my career to economic methodology (the logic of explanation) and to the history of thought, where I found in the writings of Smith, Marshall, Schumpeter, Hayek, and others many insights forgotten by the mainstream. As a result, much of my early writing had a methodological and doctrine-historical flavor. My edited volume from Cambridge in 1986 attracted some attention as a contribution to the 'new institutional economics' that sought to broaden that movement beyond strict neoclassicism. More recently, I have become impressed by the importance of economic history, and have undertaken industry studies and begun writing about the historical sources of competitive advantage and economic growth. As early as my dissertation, however, I had argued that one cannot explain the firm as an institution in comparative-static terms and that the key to the nature of the firm lies in the realm of economic change and uncertainty. I made this case in a 1984 paper, which also set forth a distinction between 'structural' and 'parametric' uncertainty that is cited surprisingly often. I thus see myself as having worked consistently to bring together transaction-cost economics (and 'the new institutional economics' more broadly) with an evolutionary theory of economic capabilities. I have proposed an explanation for vertical integration and disintegration that relies on what I call 'dynamic' transaction costs. And I have been a contributor (often with Paul Robertson) to the developing literatures on dynamic capabilities in economics and management strategy. Robertson and I have stressed (among other things) the importance of modularity and standard-setting in industrial evolution. And we have argued for a more nuanced and historically contingent view of the role of organizational form than one normally finds in the debate over industrial policy.