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My interest in the field of modular production was first developed toward the end of my PhD research in 1999. I was visiting a supplier that provided seating solutions on a synchronous basis to Nissan Manufacturing UK and wanted to explore the operational dimensions of synchronous supply. What struck me at the time was that the supplier was charged with providing complex seating modules that included a variety of seating material options, plug and play electronics, lumbar support and a variety of airbag options with associated ignitors. This modular approach required the supplier to manage over 60 upstream suppliers and necessitated the development of lean operations that could deliver faultless products to Six Sigma levels. It was clear at the time of my visit that delivering on a synchronous basis was accommodated by modular production and that this method of production had implications for supply chain management, the configuration of supplier operations and the changing role played by OEMs who were increasingly seeking modular solutions in an environment characterized by high risk and low cost.

Ten years on and having written a number of papers relating to modularity and acted as reviewer for a number of modularity focussed papers it became evident to me that this was a growing field of operations and supply chain research and that this area would benefit from a special issue examining key issues and exploring future research avenues. The special issue could test or explore the growing focus upon modular strategies, the role of product architecture, the impact of modularity upon the structure of supply chains and the potential for applying modular thinking within a service sector context.

This special issue attracted 25 papers and five appear in this issue. It is fitting that the first paper of this special issue is a reflection of a *Harvard Business Review* paper first published in 1965 by Professor Martin Starr and often cited as the first paper to explore the power of modularity. Having read Starr's (1965) paper for my own research I decided to contact him and explain the thinking behind the proposed special issue and request his services as a reviewer. To my delight Martin Starr agreed to support this project by not only providing excellent reviews but also by submitting an update of his seminal paper. I asked Martin Starr about the impact of his paper back in 1965 and he explained what happened shortly after its publication:

[…] After the *Harvard Business Review* article appeared, I was invited to give a talk about modular production to the University of Western Ontario. They had a large auditorium built in theater style and my audience consisted of about ten people crowded down at the front. One of the PhD students said “you should have seen this place last evening. Betty Friedan was here to talk about her book, *The Feminine Mystique*.” He continued, “Every seat was taken and they were standing in the back of the auditorium.” It was not easy to give my talk after that introduction.

The second paper analyses the supply chain implications of modularity by exploring product performance of manufacturing within Hong Kong. The paper reports the results of a large-scale study and suggests that companies with high levels of product modularity tend to outperform companies with more traditional non-modular operations.

In the third paper, modularity is examined within the context of coordination capabilities in order to analyze how process interdependencies are managed through modularity and coordination mechanisms. The authors found that understanding which interdependencies hide potential rents and organizing transfer to appropriate such rents becomes a formidable weapon for firms competing in industries characterized by outsourcing and modularity.

Service modularity is the subject of fourth paper which focuses upon the provision of modular care and service packages for independently living elderly. The author proposes that modularity theory should distinguish between the creation of modular offerings in care provision versus their creation in goods production. Examining modularity within such a setting is clearly demanding and, in many ways, it is often more difficult to partition and design services than it is to partition and design products.

Finally, fifth paper returns to more traditional territory with an exploration of platform use within the automotive sector. The authors contend that literature relating to modularity is generally focused on the planning and design of the first generation of platform, assuming the possibility to anticipate its evolution over time. The research demonstrates that this assumption needs to be challenged especially in dynamic environments when the firm decides to re-use the platform on more than one generation. The authors demonstrated that when the platform has a long life cycle, the products developed on the platform and the platform itself co-evolves. Thus, rather than a one-step planning process the authors observe a continuous interaction between technical, marketing, economic and strategic questions during the platform lifecycle. Robertson and Ulrich's (1998) framework thus could be extended towards a continuous planning process. The smart reuse routine highlights the interplay or the co-evolution between the products and the platform.

This special issue brings together, for the first time, a collection of papers that explore the validity, scope and dimensions of modularity and modularization. Together, they demonstrate that the concept of modularity is applicable to both tangible and intangible environments and that there is plenty of scope to extend modular thinking into, as yet, untapped and unexplored areas. The current economic crisis may hasten the acceleration of modular production as manufacturers seek to reduce costs whilst maintaining quality. Similarly, an increasing number of service environments have explored modular service provision (education (with distinct modules attracting a set amount of credits and outlining clear aims and objectives), banking services (with modularized financial package options), healthcare (seeking modular solutions to capital projects, particularly building provision)) which present many possibilities to test existing concepts, tools and techniques of modularity and to extend and solidify the modular lexicon.

**Desmond Doran** *Guest Editor*