

## Global Rivalry, Inter-Firm Networks and Capability Building in the Inter-War Electrical Industry.

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The electrical industry – in its cross-border networks, licensing agreements, technology transfer, product development, foreign direct investment, and exports – was international in origin. The global orientation and inter-dependence of the industry fundamentally shaped the strategies and management of firms from the late 19th century onwards. Nonetheless, the First World War disrupted these established relationships. With the encouragement of their respective governments, firms were obliged to more national in their ownership, research and development, and management, or, in the aftermath of the war, to appear more national in their objectives. This paper will consider the countervailing trends in global rivalry and cooperative inter-firm networks during the inter-war decades, when the industry matured quickly in terms of electrical supply, electrical machinery, and consumer products. The international strategies of electrical manufacturing firms were more interesting and complicated than an increasing reliance on cartels, which has received much attention in the history books. This paper will consider how complex international business relations influenced or suited the emergent strategies, reviewing the operations of multinational and local firms based in Britain and its empire territories, and comparing them with US, German and other rivals. The paper will evaluate, in particular, the impact of cooperative inter-bank networks and alliances on the building and re-building of key organizational capabilities in ownership, management and product development.