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The quest for microfoundations in management and economics and the neglect of the concept of relation in the agency vs structure debate.

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We will start by internally reconstructing the salient features of the debate between methodological individualism, holism and the systemic approach, showing that, beyond some terminological claims, a “pure” methodological individualism has never been formulated and we will explain why this was the case. Then, we will show the theoretical gain brought to the methodological debate by the systemic approach, but also its limitations. Indeed, the systemic model, though privileging the relation, must acknowledge that the relation needs some ultimate elements (the individuals), which in turn are prioritised by methodological individualism. In synthesis, we aim to show that the two explanatory models, rather than being opposed need to be integrated, because they need each other. But for this to be done, we need to reflect on the role that the concept of “relation” plays in our understanding of the social structure and of the dynamics that characterise it.