Call for Papers

The notion of configuration – that the whole is best understood from a systemic perspective and should be viewed as a constellation of interconnected elements – is one of the central ideas of organization studies. That this notion has at the same time remained one of the field's least understood aspects is one of the greater paradoxes of organization studies. While configurational thinking was a central feature of organization theory during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Child, 1972; Miles & Snow, 1978; Mintzberg, 1983), and while some key contributions emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. Ketchen, Thomas & Snow, 1993; Child, 2002), the development of the configurational approach appeared to slow down. Now, with the emergence of set-theoretic methods such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) (Ragin, 1987; 2008), we are currently witnessing a new and invigorated approach to configurational thinking along with methods that are better geared towards tackling the complexity of interconnected elements.

In this sub-theme, we want to further this development by calling for a rethinking of the way we look at organizations and a reshaping of the methods we use to study them. We ask: how can we push forward configurational theory and analysis in organization studies? How can we bridge disciplines, theories, and methods in this perspective? What does a new configurational theory look like, and what methodological developments do we need to develop and test it?

We invite papers that enhance our understanding of both configurational theory and methodology in organization studies. As such, we welcome contributions from multiple theoretical perspectives.
and seek cross-pollination between the various approaches to understanding organizations as complex systems. We particularly welcome studies that incorporate insights from related disciplines. Likewise, we encourage both theoretical contributions that aim to clarify the theory and (causal) mechanisms of configurations, and empirical and methodological contributions that strive to enhance our ability to capture the dynamic nature of configurations. We especially welcome papers deploying set-theoretic methods such as crisp and fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA).

We encourage submissions that engage the following kinds of questions:

• How can we re-conceptualize our understanding of organizations and organizing based on a configurational approach? What avenues does this open for building novel theory?
• What are the basic forms and elements of organizational configurations? What new typologies are needed to understand their diversity?
• What are the key (causal) mechanisms of configurations, and what is the role of configurations in causal explanations? How can we apply these causal mechanisms in designing effective organizations?
• Most prior work on configurations has focused on the infrastructure of material interdependencies, but how can we expand this to integrate the socio-political and symbolic-cultural side of configurations emphasized by institutional theory?
• Many organizational phenomena are essentially constituted by configurations of configurations. What is the role of complexity theory in understanding this aspect of configurations, and how can we build on its insights and methods?
• What other existing theories in organization studies might be advanced by connecting to the configurational perspective? At the same time, how can the configurational perspective benefit from the insights of those theories?
• How do we conceptualize configurations across levels of analysis? Empirically, how do we study configurations that reach across the individual, organizational, and supra-organizational levels?
• How can we build both theory and method that allow for a dynamic rather than static understanding of organizational configurations?
• What is the relationship between small- versus large-N analysis in configurational thinking? Further, to what extent, if any, can a configurational analysis benefit from a more traditional linear perspective (e.g. the combination of QCA and regression)?
• Where do we need to advance the current state of the art in QCA as a methodology?
References


The convenors

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