



Call for Papers

Organization Theory – Special Themed Section: *Catalysing & Crystallizing*

Theorizing the Configurational Nature of Organizational Phenomena

Special Themed Section Guest Editors:

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Submission Deadline: January 31, 2027

Background

Configurational ideas in organization studies have developed along multiple theoretical and disciplinary traditions, yet these traditions have rarely been brought in direct conversation with each other. Set-analytic approaches (Fiss, 2011; Misangyi et al., 2017), typologies of strategy and structure (e.g., Miles & Snow, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979), system thinking (e.g., Kimsey et al., 2025), complexity theories (e.g., Gavetti, Levinthal & Rivkin, 2005; Siggelkow, 2002), and network theories (e.g., Padgett & Powell, 2012) all share a core configurational insight: organizational phenomena are constituted through combinations, relations, and interdependencies rather than independent attributes, and grasping their causal complexity means theorizing non-linear dependencies and contradictions (Furnari et al., 2021).

Despite the breadth of configurational theorizing in organization studies and the social sciences at large, much of its theoretical promise remains only partially fulfilled. Configurational ideas – while pervasive – have often remained siloed, implicit, and under-theorized. The purpose of this *Catalysing & Crystallizing* section is to surface different approaches to configurational theorizing and to put them into substantive dialogue with one another to extend configurational thinking and build richer organizational theories.

Specifically, we invite contributions that address some of the underexplored themes and questions that configurational theorizing raises, such as: (a) how configurations form, evolve, and dissolve; (b) the role of agency, intentionality, and unintended consequences in configurational formation, change, and evolution; (c) how a growing configurational approach can be informed and enriched by other styles of theorizing, research fields and disciplinary traditions.

To address these themes, we invite cross-disciplinary explorations that venture outside the domain of organization theory and build on neighbouring social science disciplines that have developed configurational ideas without necessarily labelling them as such (think of, for instance, Norbert Elias' notion of social figurations and configurations; Pierre Bourdieu' configurational approach in sociology, including his application of correspondence analysis; or Ruth Benedict's configurational thinking in anthropology). Closer to home, work on institutional complementarities and path dependence in comparative political economy (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), on emergence and self-organization in complexity science (Anderson et al., 1999), on relational constitution in sociology (Emirbayer, 1997), and on conjunctural causal mechanisms in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978) all resonate directly with configurational theorizing and intuitions. Yet, more work is needed to bring these and other related disciplinary traditions systematically into dialogue with configurational theorizing in organization studies (Campbell & Fiss, 2026).

Simultaneously, organization and management scholars working on categories (Kennedy & Fiss, 2013), cognition (e.g., Calic et al., 2025), sustainability (e.g., Slager et al., 2023), inequality (Ragin & Fiss, 2017), platforms, algorithms and human-AI assemblages (Hsieh & Vergne, 2023; Glaser, Sloan & Gehman, 2024), business models (e.g., Massa et al. 2017), organizational paradoxes (e.g., Hahn & Knight, 2021), sense-making (e.g., Tsoukas, 2017), and practices (e.g., Nicolini, 2012; Wiedner, Dacin & Furnari, 2024) have developed configurational intuitions, even if often speaking different theoretical languages. In parallel, renewed debates about pluralism in theorizing (Cornelissen, 2025; Cornelissen, Höllerer, & Seidl, 2021), disorganizing (Quattrone & Zilber, 2025), and process ontologies (Cloutier & Langley, 2020) have opened space for the kind of boundary-crossing dialogue that this section seeks to advance.

Accordingly, we invite contributions that develop configurational theorizing across its many disciplinary incarnations and theoretical traditions, including set-theoretic, typological, comparative-historical, dialectical, paradox-based, complexity-based, practice-theoretic, network-based, relational, and others. Moreover, we welcome contributions that deliberately reach across disciplinary boundaries to adjacent fields and communities. Our aim is to infuse configurational theorizing with new voices and perspectives and to engage in novel and stimulating conversations to push forward the theoretical frontier of configurational scholarship.

Objectives and Scope of the Special Themed Section

This envisaged *Catalysing & Crystallizing* section explicitly seeks to also bring in voices from the outside and the margins of our scholarly community. Rather than seeking to foster a unified, singular theoretical approach, it looks to advance the field through in-depth engagement among a plurality of approaches in search of provocative and generative new theoretical avenues (see also Höllerer, Quack, & Delbridge, 2026).

In line with *Organization Theory*'s editorial policy, we therefore also welcome a variety of forms of contribution, including theory papers, generative scholarly essays, agenda-setting provocations, and cross-disciplinary syntheses. We are looking for theoretical work that engages deeply with the configurational character of organizational phenomena. Contributions may build from established configurational traditions or from adjacent conversations outside the domain that do not typically use the language of configurations but nevertheless grapple with configurational problems. Purely methodological contributions, empirical applications, and data-driven theorizing are outside the scope of this section. Limited empirical illustrations are welcome where they advance theory.

Themes and Topics

Possible contributions include, but are not restricted to, the following themes and questions. The themes overlap, and we likewise welcome work that engages across them.

(1) The dynamic dimensions of configurations

Configurations are often theorized as cross-sectional and largely static structures, yet the phenomena they explain are inherently dynamic. Organizations, institutions, fields, and practices emerge, stabilize, mutate, fracture, and dissolve over time. A dynamic configurational perspective would therefore need to theorize not only what configurations are, but how they come into being, how they endure, how they change, and how they come apart and cease to exist. Accordingly, contributions in this theme would aim to advance the theoretical understanding of configurational dynamics. We particularly welcome contributions building on theories and perspectives coming from outside the core organizational domain.

- How do configurations emerge, and what conditions shape their trajectories?
- How might theories outside of our field inform our understanding of configurational dynamics and change?
- What roles do sequencing, timing, path dependence, agency, and context play in the formation of configurations?
- Through what mechanisms and processes do configurations acquire coherence, stabilize, adapt under pressure, and reconfigure?
- How and why do configurations come apart and unravel, and what does this imply for theories of organizing and disorganizing (Quattrone & Zilber, 2025)?
- Are processes of disorganizing simply the reverse of organizing, or do they follow different underlying logics?

(2) Agency, intentionality, and causality in configurational theorizing

Configurational theorizing often emphasizes how conditions combine to produce outcomes, but many organizational configurations are also shaped by actors who intentionally seek to assemble, maintain, disrupt, or avoid particular states of affairs. This raises important questions about the relationship between agency and intentionality in configurational accounts. Actors may purposefully construct configurations – as when entrepreneurs assemble resources, managers design organizational systems, or institutional actors build coalitions – but configurations may also hamper or undermine actors' intentions. Conversely, some configurations persist not because any actor intends them, but because

they are sustained by distributed practices, institutionalized routines, or power dynamics. This theme invites contributions that theorize the role of purposive action in configurational causality. By deliberately placing agency and intentionality at the center of configurational theorizing, contributions to this theme can deepen our understanding of how configurations are not only observed but enacted, contested, and transformed.

- When are configurations the product of strategic design, and when do they emerge from distributed, unintended, or only partially coordinated action?
- How do agency and intentionality shape the formation, stabilization, change, or dissolution of configurations?
- How might configurational theorizing better account for negative intentionality, such as efforts to prevent accidents, scandals, failures, or forms of disorganizing?
- How can we theorize unintended consequences as a by-product of complex, intentional outcomes?
- How do power and politics shape which configurations become legitimate, durable, visible, or taken for granted?
- How can configurational theorizing better capture the interplay between purposive agency and structural constraint?

(3) How configurational theorizing relates to other styles of theorizing and intellectual traditions

Configurational theorizing shares deep affinities with several styles of theorizing that do not typically use configurational language, such as process theorizing, relational sociology, institutional and evolutionary economics, evolutionary biology, complexity science, systems thinking, paradox theory, dialectics, and practice theory, among others. These traditions have developed detailed accounts of how phenomena are constituted through relations, processes, combinations, and tensions. Even so, their connections to configurational theory remain mostly implicit. Contributions to this theme would aim to surface and explore these connections and bring configurational theorizing into a productive dialogue with them.

- How does configurational theorizing relate to process theorizing, given their traditionally different treatments of stability and change?
- How might configurational theorizing engage with relational and network perspectives, where actors and outcomes are constituted through patterned relations rather than independent attributes?
- What can configurational theorizing learn from complexity theories and systems thinking about emergence, feedback loops, thresholds, and nonlinear change?
- How do evolutionary, institutional, and ecological theories of organizational change and diversity inform a dynamic configurational perspective, and vice versa?
- How might paradox, dialectical, and configurational approaches jointly theorize contradiction, tension, and mutually constitutive elements?
- What kinds of causal structures distinctively characterize configurational phenomena and theorizing?
- What distinctive epistemological and ontological foundations can underpin configurational theorizing?

Submission Process

Manuscripts should be submitted through Organization Theory's online submission system, with the appropriate Special Themed Section selected at the "Manuscript Type" option, by January 31, 2027. Authors should follow the journal's submission guidelines (<https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/OTT>). For administrative support and general queries, please contact Sophia Tzagaraki, Managing Editor of Organization Theory, at orgtheoryjournal@gmail.com.

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