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Call for Papers

Special Issue on Experiments in Organizational Theory

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Introduction

In this special issue, we set out to expand organizational theorists' methodological repertoire with experiments—studies in which the environment is sufficiently controlled to rule out competing explanations of causality. Since the field's inception, organizational theorists have advocated for experiments (e.g., Weick 1967, Zelditch 1980). In recent years, this call has been amplified. Among institutional theorists, for example, experiments are becoming the go-to method for microinstitutional inquiry (see Bitektine et al. 2018 for a recent review). Expanding the seminal study of Zucker (1977) on institutionalization and cultural persistence, recent studies showed the rapid spread of false beliefs and counterfactual behavior in markets, even in seemingly ideal conditions (Levine et al. 2014). These studies experimentally manipulated institutional complexity (Raaijmakers et al. 2015), institutionalized belief systems (Hafenbrädl and Waeger 2017), various types of institutional logics (Glaser et al. 2016), and organizational identity (Schilke 2018). Experiments are becoming prevalent throughout organizational theory, utilized in such diverse domains as social network theory (Mason and Suri 2012), market and entrepreneurial competition (Levine et al. 2017), status theory (Correll et al. 2017), organizational categories (Kovács et al. 2014), innovation (Boudreau and Lakhani 2016), transaction cost economics (Harmon et al. 2015), evolutionary economics (Wollersheim and Heimeriks 2016), and search and routines (Laureiro-Martínez et al. 2015).

The experimental approach offers several unique qualities. Foremost, experiments can identify causality—the gold standard of science (Merton 1949, Coleman 1990). Their design can eliminate extraneous factors and the resulting endogeneity (Brewer 1985). What is more, experiments can be easily replicated (Croson et al. 2007).

This may be one reason why experimental results are at least as robust as those of other methods, which a massive replication effort found (Camerer et al. 2016). Such rigorous testing of causal arguments can address questions that lay at the heart of organizational theory, complementing other methods (Schilke 2018). Finally, experiments can uncover mechanisms. This can aid, for instance, in measuring individual-level processes, thereby enhancing our understanding of how individuals are embedded in and respond to larger entities, whether in top-down or bottom-up processes (Smith and Rand 2018). As such, experiments can play a central role in advancing a true multilevel approach in organizational theory (Felin et al. 2015), one that links macrophenomena—whether organizational, network, market, or societal—with microprocesses. Institutional theorists, for instance, commonly agree that we must account for microprocesses (Battilana 2006, Thornton et al. 2012, Fine and Hallett 2014, Bitektine and Haack 2015). Similar calls for research into microprocesses are heard in other domains: the behavioral theory of the firm (Gavetti et al. 2007), corporate governance (Westphal and Zajac 2013), exploration–exploitation (Lavie et al. 2010), population ecology (Baum and Amburgey 2002), evolutionary economics (Felin et al. 2012), and new organizational forms, such as online communities and open collaboration (Faraj et al. 2011, Levine and Prietula 2014). Micro-level behavior, cognition, and affect are upfront again, promising a better understanding of organizational phenomena, and we believe that experiments will play a key part in this endeavor.

This special issue offers scholars an opportunity to push boundaries, conceptual and methodological, with experimental approaches (Bitektine and Miller 2015). We maintain a broad definition of experimental research, including experiments in the laboratory and the field or investigations that combine experiments and other methods.

Theoretical Scope

• Submissions should make a significant theoretical contribution to

- testing,
- expanding,
- reframing, or
- questioning an important organizational theory.

Papers that do not explicitly speak to a question at the core of organizational theory fall outside the scope of the special issue.

Relevant organizational theories include but are not limited to institutional theory, evolutionary economics, the behavioral theory of the firm, status theory, trust and embeddedness theory, social network theory, new organizational forms, transaction cost economics, population ecology, entrepreneurship, diffusion, and innovation, among others.

Submissions that include multilevel designs are strongly encouraged. These may, for instance,

- test behavioral assumptions and individual-level processes that underlie a macrolevel theory;
- investigate whether a theoretically proposed mechanism is indeed behind an observed empirical regularity; or
- otherwise bridge the micro and the macro, such as in the bathtub framework of Coleman (1990) (see Felin et al. 2015 for a recent discussion).

Methodological Scope

• Submissions must have experimental methodology at their core. Relevant experimental approaches include laboratory experiments as well as artefactual, framed, and field experiments (conducted, to varying extent, in the participants' everyday environment) (see Levitt and List 2009). Outside the scope of this special issue are techniques that attempt to identify treatment effects in naturally occurring data, such as natural experiments.

• Experiments may follow the traditions of sociology, psychology, or economics, or they may be a blend of disciplinary traditions (Ariely and Norton 2007).

• Many experimental studies include a manipulation, whereas others do not. For instance, a manipulation is uncalled for if an experimental study simply seeks to contrast theory and actual behavior or isolate processes in a controlled environment (Lant and Montgomery 1992, Levine et al. 2017).

• We welcome multimethod papers, such as those that mix experiments with qualitative methods (Fine and Elsbach 2000), archival data (Audia et al. 2000), or agent-based models (Fang 2012)—as long as the experimental approach is at the core of the paper.

• We welcome innovative experimental methodologies, such as the use of novel behavioral tasks, video clips, neuroscientific instruments, and protocol

analysis (Reyppens and Levine 2017, Laureiro-Martínez and Brusoni 2018).

• Recent surveys of published research found no systematic differences between the behavior of managers and students (Fréchette 2015, 2016), and we are aware that online labor markets offer a unique opportunity for experiments (Reyppens and Levine 2017). However, we still expect authors to explain why these populations are appropriate for their study (Bitektine et al. 2018).

• Experiments are uniquely positioned to enhance the validity and reliability of organizational theory. For that, we support efforts such as the following.

– Open data and instruments: Sharing of data and instruments (e.g., instructions, tasks, and measures) through a public depository, such as the Open Science Framework (OSF; <http://osf.io>).

– Preregistration: Counterintuitive findings can be more convincing if the hypotheses and analysis plan have been registered before data collection began. Preregistration, which provides a time-stamped copy of the hypotheses, can be easily done at the OSF.

– Reporting of exact *p*-values and statistical power, discussion of effect sizes, and use of alternatives to null hypothesis testing (Wasserstein and Lazar 2016).

Review Process

Manuscripts must be submitted electronically via <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgsci> (choosing “special issue” in step 1). All submissions will receive a comprehensive screening. Manuscripts falling within the methodological and theoretical scope of the special issue (as defined above) and deemed to have a reasonable chance of conditional acceptance after no more than two rounds of revisions will enter the review process. Reviewers will be asked to respond quickly, and authors will have strict deadlines for revisions. The submission window will open on August 1, 2019 and close on September 15, 2019 (11:59 p.m. EDT). Submissions will be reviewed on a rolling basis; therefore, earlier submissions will receive a quicker response. Special requests for early submissions (before August 1) may be accommodated in individual cases. We will invite authors to a special issue conference at the University of Arizona held in May 2020, where they will present and receive constructive feedback, a means of further condensing time in review. The special issue is scheduled for publication in the winter of 2020–2021.

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