

Call for Papers

Organization Science Special Issue Experiments in Organizational Theory

Editorial Team

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Submission window: August 1 - September 15, 2019

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 in the process of becoming the go-to method for micro-institutional inquiry (see Bitektine, Lucas and Schilke 2018, for a recent review). Expanding Zucker's (1977) seminal study of institutionalization and cultural persistence, recent studies demonstrated the rapid spread of false beliefs and counterfactual behavior in markets, even in seemingly ideal conditions (Levine et al. 2014). They 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, Bernard and Nagel 2017), status theory (Correll et al. 2017), organizational categories (Kovács, Carroll and Lehman 2014), innovation (Boudreau and Lakhani 2016), transaction cost economics (Harmon, Kim and Mayer 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 (Coleman 1990; Merton 1949). Their design can eliminate extraneous factors and the resulting endogeneity (Brewer 1985). What is more, experiments can be easily replicated (Croson, Anand and Agarwal 2007). This may be one reason why experimental results are at least as robust as those of other methods, as 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). And 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 forthcoming). As such, experiments can play a central role in advancing a true multi-level approach in organizational theory (Felin, Foss and Ployhart 2015), one that links macro-phenomena—whether organizational, network, market, or societal—with micro-processes. Institutional theorists, for instance, commonly agree that we must account for micro-processes (Battilana 2006; Bitektine and Haack 2015; Fine and Hallett 2014; Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012). Similar calls for research into micro-processes are heard in other domains: the behavioral theory of the firm (Gavetti, Levinthal and Ocasio 2007), corporate governance (Westphal and Zajac 2013), exploration–exploitation (Lavie, Stettner and Tushman 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, Jarvenpaa and Majchrzak 2011; Levine and Prietula 2014). Individual behavior, cognition, and affect are up-front again, promising a better understanding of organizational phenomena, and we believe 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 in 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 multi-level designs are strongly encouraged. These may, for instance,
 - test behavioral assumptions and individual-level processes that underlie a macro-level theory,
 - investigate whether a theoretically-proposed mechanism is indeed behind an observed empirical regularity,
 - or otherwise bridge the micro and the macro, as in Coleman's (1990) bathtub framework (see Felin, Foss and Ployhart 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, economics, or 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, Bernard and Nagel 2017).
- We welcome multi-method papers, such as those that mix experiments with qualitative methods (Fine and Elsbach 2000), archival data (Audia, Locke and Smith 2000), or agent-based models (Fang 2012)—as long as the experimental approach lies 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 (Laureiro-Martínez and Brusoni 2018; Reypens and Levine 2017).
- 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 (Reypens and Levine 2017). Yet, we still expect authors to explain why these populations are appropriate for their study (Bitektine, Lucas and Schilke 2018).
- Experiments are uniquely positioned to enhance the validity and reliability of organizational theory. For that, we support efforts such as:
 - Open data and instruments: Sharing of data and instruments (e.g., instructions, tasks, 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 PM EST). Submissions will be reviewed on a rolling basis, so earlier submissions will receive a quicker response. Special requests for early submissions (prior to 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 of 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 winter 2020-21.

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