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Title: The Comparative Method and Comparative Management: Uneasy Bedfellows or Natural Partners?

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The Comparative Method and Comparative Management: Uneasy Bedfellows or Natural Partners?

Abstract

The article considers the relationship between the comparative method and comparative management research. It begins with a comparison of quantitative and qualitative approaches and delineates the distinctive place of the comparative method. The comparative method originated in disciplinary fields such as comparative politics and comparative sociology, which took countries or societies as the main units of analysis. Since management research is mainly concerned with organization-level practices and strategies, the comparative method and comparative management were perceived as ‘uneasy bedfellows’. However, recently there has been a resurgence of the use of comparative methodologies in management research. The article highlights two developments linked with this trend. On the one hand, methodological innovations in Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) opened up new opportunities for the analysis of medium-N samples. On the other hand, the stream of comparative capitalisms and business systems provided a springboard to compare across countries, whilst using industries or organizations as the unit of analysis. Overall, the article argues that these theoretical and methodological developments suggest that the comparative method is a ‘natural partner’ of comparative management, and that the renewed relevance and deeper engagement with comparative methodology is set to further enrich methodological pluralism in international management research.

Keywords: case studies; comparative method; international and comparative management; qualitative methods; quantitative methods.

The Comparative Method and Comparative Management: Uneasy Bedfellows or Natural Partners?

1. Introduction

In recent years there has been a stream of contributions reflecting on the value and importance of case studies and generally qualitative methods in management research (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011; Cassell, 2016; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Rowley, 2014; Saunders and Bezzina, 2015). Much less attention, however, has been accorded to the increasing relevance and importance of the ‘comparative method’ for management research. Although the application of comparative methodologies has been increasing in recent years, there is little discussion and reflection of its place and relation to traditional qualitative and quantitative techniques. This discussion becomes even more pertinent in the context of international and comparative management, which is broadly construed as an important subfield of management (see McCann, 2013; Noorderhaven *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the present article aims to contribute to the discussion and debate of different methodologies in international and comparative management, by examining the case of methodological innovations in the comparative method.

The article begins with a review the literature that considered the weaknesses and strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches and conceptualises the comparative method as a ‘third way’ suitable for medium-N samples. It argues that important progress has been made, but deeper engagement with the comparative method will further enrich methodological pluralism in the field. It is argued that the comparative

method is likely to produce richer insights than single case studies, because the logic of causal inference resembles a quasi-experimental design and takes into account precious ‘counterfactuals’, which are sometimes implicit in single-case research designs. Additionally, the comparative method is also likely to shed more light on processes and mechanisms, which remain largely invisible to quantitative approaches. Similarly, qualitative comparative analysis can help to capture relationships of asymmetry and overcome problems in multiple regression analysis that consider symmetrical relationships (Fiss, 2011; Lange, 2013). Finally, it is argued that another advantage of the comparative method dwells on its capacity to contextualize the heterogeneity of cultural and institutional contexts across comparative capitalisms and national business systems (Brewster, 2007; Jackson and Deeg, 2008; Hotho, 2014; Vaiman and Brewster, 2015, pp. 156–157; Wood *et al.*, 2014).

The rest of the article is structured as follows. The next section considers critically the infamous quantitative/qualitative divide and the methodological debate between variable-oriented analyses and case-oriented approaches. The third section conceptualises the comparative method as a ‘third way’ that sits in between those two approaches and delineates the pattern of evidential reasoning that it follows. The fourth section discusses advances in comparative methodology and focuses on fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). The fifth section examines the importance of comparative method in light of comparative management and business systems theory, which strengthen the applicability and relevance of the comparative method in management research. The final section concludes by summarizing the main arguments, reflecting on the limitations of this article and proposing possible avenues for future research.

2. Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: A Critical Comparison

In a classic article in management, it has been argued that case studies take advantage of in-depth knowledge of the case, paying attention to ‘context’ and are best for exploratory research designs and theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, these arguments were viewed as too simplistic for variable-oriented researchers. Single case studies were repetitively challenged on the basis of the ‘too many variables, too few cases’ problem (George and Bennett, 2005; King *et al.*, 1994). In other words, this critique highlighted the fact that the number of cases is limited (in single case studies n equals to one), while there are usually many variables potentially having an impact on a given outcome of interest. This was thought to weaken the robustness of conclusions about causal relationships and rendered this type of research design as indeterminate. The response of qualitative researchers has been that ‘cases’ in qualitative research are not identical to ‘observations’ in large- n analyses, and even a single case is a source of multiple types of evidence (Yin, 2003, p. 86). Hence, in quantitative parlance, n is larger than one, and ‘degrees of freedom’ are not necessarily negative (George and Bennett, 2005).

Another weakness of the single case study suggests that it suffers from a severe *selection bias problem*, because the principle of random selection is violated. The selection bias problem was understood as a ‘truncated’ distribution of observations (King *et al.*, 1994, p. 130), in which causal relationships were different from the actual distribution of observations. But selection in case studies tends to follow ‘purposive sampling’ rules (Saunders and Bezzina, 2015, p. 300) and focuses on

‘critical cases’. The selection criteria are clearly articulated, and more often than not, they are theoretically motivated. In other words, researchers are enjoined to ask themselves ‘what is the case a case of?’ (Amenta, 2009, p. 356). Yet, a good piece of advice to avoid extreme selection bias is to that selection should allow for at least ‘some variation on the dependent variable’ (King *et al.*, 1994, p. 129). In other words, studies should not only include ‘positive’ cases, but also ‘negative’ cases, hinting to the importance of the comparative method that provides counterfactuals in mitigating the selection bias problem.

Nevertheless, it was assumed that threats to what statisticians call *external validity* remain. The fact that a single case may not be representative of a population leads to doubts about the generalizability of case study findings. Qualitative research was criticised for narrowness, lack of generality, geared to explain particular cases (Kiser and Hechter, 1991). Qualitative-oriented researchers address these concerns in various ways. On the one hand, case studies do not seek to generalise across a population, but generalise theoretical propositions, what was dubbed as ‘analytic generalisation’ (Yin, 2003, p. 10). Similarly, Ragin (2004) argued that case-oriented researchers problematize what constitutes the relevant ‘universe of cases’ within which propositions are applicable. In other words, single case studies do have generalizable implications, but generalisation is contingent. The way in which ‘contingent generalisation’ works is that each case study contributes to the cumulative refinement of theoretical propositions following a ‘building block’ approach (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 112; King *et al.*, 1994, p. 211). In other words, each case study contributes to the development of knowledge by being part of a broader research programme.

The scholarly value of case studies has also been dismissed as mere story telling in contrast to formal models capable of generating predictions. However, prediction and explanation are essentially the two sides of the same coin (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). The difference is perhaps that explanation is focused on past events, whereas prediction is preoccupied with the future. Indeed, these different approaches to explanation correspond to the different concerns of researchers on either side of the quantitative-qualitative divide. Qualitative researchers start with particular cases and their puzzling outcomes and then move backwards to find causes adopting a ‘causes-of-effects’ approach; whereas quantitative researchers follow the ‘effects-of-causes’ approach, seeking to estimate the average (or marginal) causal effect of one (or more) independent variable(s) on a dependent variable (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, pp. 230–232). Case studies were also criticised because this mode of inquiry cannot take advantage of experimental control or at least approximate it through statistical control. As a result, causal relationships were characterised by lack of clarity, suffering from problems of *equifinality*. It was thought to be impossible to delineate the relative impact of causal factors on a specific outcome, let alone establish causality ‘other things being equal’.

However, quantitative methods also suffer from several weaknesses. This principle of holding everything else constant could be mitigated by experimental modes of inquiry, including lab experiments and ‘randomized control trials’. Lab experiments with individuals have been around for some time in psychology and organizational behaviour research, but the *external validity* of these experiments has been a subject of vigorous debate as well (Dobbins *et al.*, 1988). Often, in organisational behaviour

studies and articles, lab experiments take place by recruiting undergraduate students as research participants. Still, the extent to which these studies' results generalise across other populations is seriously contested. For instance, in the context of management studies, it is debatable how far students are able to reproduce and simulate complex power relations between managers-employees in organizational behaviour/management research. In other words, *convenience sampling* may be part of even experimental-types of research design.

Another serious weakness of the quantitative methods is that they may be able to do a very good job in establishing correlations, but establishing causality is much more difficult (less so for 'natural experiment' research designs). Along these lines, the multiple regression analysis has been criticised its inability to articulate or test the *mechanisms* and *processes* that link different variables and underpin relationships (Rothstein, 2007). For this part, qualitative research methods remain an indispensable part of the researchers' toolkit.

Quantitative analysis in the form of multiple regression analysis considers generally symmetrical relationships. As Fiss (2011, p. 394) explains *causal asymmetry* is the idea that the causes leading to the presence of an outcome may be different from those leading to the absence of the outcome, whereas in statistical analysis, causal symmetry is assumed 'because correlations are by their very nature symmetric'. However, in the real world many relationships are characterized by asymmetry, and therefore alternative research designs are more suitable. In these research situations, the comparative method and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) emerge as a possible way forward.

3. The Comparative Method: A Third Way?

In the context of the debate between quantitative and qualitative approaches, the ‘comparative method’ (Mahoney, 2004; Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Ragin, 1987) emerges as a ‘third way’. To begin with, comparative research designs might take two main forms: Most Similar/Different Outcomes (MSDO) and the Most Different/Similar Outcomes (MDSO) (Berg-Schlosser and De Meur, 2009). Most similar system studies are based on the belief that ‘systems as similar as possible with respect to as many features as possible constitute the optimal samples for comparative inquiry’ (Przeworski and Teune, 1970, p. 32). Comparative designs in social sciences do not seek to manipulate the impact of independent variables on dependent variables controlling for everything else. Instead, they seek to identify ‘systems’ (e.g. countries, regions, or organizations) as similar as possible, with the aim of exploring backwards the source of variation in the variables or outcomes of interest. As experimental control in social sciences is out of the question (Miller, 1949), the ‘similarity’ of comparative research designs approximates quasi-experimental conditions.

Interestingly, social sciences are not alone in their difficulty to assess the plausibility of propositions with a fully experimental mode of inquiry. Historical non-social sciences (e.g. geology, palaeontology, archaeology) face similar problems and are unable to employ experiments with ‘control’ and ‘treatment’ groups as readily as physics or chemistry. As Cleland (2002) insists, all sciences assess theories on the basis of evidential reasoning, albeit following different patterns. Geologists for example do formulate hypotheses about causes when they encounter puzzling traces

(effects) of long-past events. Then the goal becomes to discover a ‘smoking gun’ in the field, to adjudicate between competing explanations. The above pattern of evidential reasoning is reminiscent of what social scientists have called ‘process tracing’ (George and Bennett, 2005; Hall, 2006; Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). Small-N comparative research tends to be based on a theoretically motivated selection of a few cases for which the researchers try to ‘trace the process of how the main variables have been connected over time’ (Rothstein, 2007, p. 353). Since every theory or hypothesis has multiple observable implications, then finding *traces* of these implications gives the researcher the evidence one needs to corroborate or reject competing hypotheses.

Similarly to case studies, the problems of selection bias and external validity are addressed with the ‘building block’ approach in the comparative method. Within a comparative multiple-case or embedded case study design (Yin, 2003) the external validity of theoretical propositions is enhanced while cumulative findings gradually refine theories and enhance their plausibility and extend their applicability. In other words, collective comparative work in the social sciences becomes a medium of generalisation. A similar process takes place in geology as well. Oreskes (2000, p. 25) argued that geologists followed the ‘inductive approach’ to knowledge by ‘systematically and persistently observing geological processes and their products in as many places as possible’. The very same logic fits well with the comparative study of social phenomena. The work of the comparative researcher becomes very similar to the work of the geologist. Comparative researchers collect data by conducting multiple interviews, delve into historical archives, master the content of primary sources, triangulate evidence, and finally compare and contrast across different cases.

As in-depth knowledge of cases accumulates researchers become more confident of their findings challenging their own pre-suppositions and refining their theories. Surely, hypotheses and existing theories provide the essential guide as to what they will be looking for, but the eventual test of theories is only on the field. This exemplifies the pattern of ‘building block’ approach to the accumulation of knowledge in social sciences using the comparative method. Innovations in comparative methodology, such the variants of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), exemplify the capacity of the comparative method to increase the generalizability of findings. The next section considers those in more detail.

4. Innovations in the Comparative Method: Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

In the past, the comparative method has been more popular in other social sciences, such as sociology, political science and educational research, rather than management and organization studies. Thus, management research and comparative methodology were perceived as ‘uneasy bedfellows’. There are different possible reasons to explain this. Traditionally, comparative researchers have taken ‘countries’ or ‘societies’ ‘ as the main unit of analysis. Since scholars in management are concerned with strategies and practices at the level of individuals and/or organizations, this mode of inquiry appeared less relevant in the past. However, this trend has been reversing in recent years, since the comparative methodology, and especially Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) has been used extensively in the context of business and management studies. As Roig-Tierno *et al.* (2017, p. 19) document in their bibliometric study, the fields of business/economy and management/organization are

among the top four disciplinary fields (together with comparative politics and sociology) in the application of comparative methodology approaches. Recent advances in the comparative method consist of the further development of the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) methodology (Ragin, 2000; Rihoux and Ragin, 2009). This appears quite promising in its application for multiple organizations within and across contexts and relies on mathematical set theory and Boolean logic to provide generalizable insights by operationalizing variables from a set of cases and comparing them to develop ‘causal configurations’.

QCA differs in the approach of comparison from quantitative analysis. Multiple regression analysis takes a probabilistic approach to causation, whereas the traditional comparative method takes a deterministic approach to identify configurations of causal factors related with an outcome (Mahoney, 2004; Mahoney, 2000). The differentiation between necessary and sufficient conditions is crucial here. As Mahoney (2004, p. 84) explains ‘necessary causes assume that the absence of a particular value (or range of values) on an independent variable will always be associated with the absence of a particular value (or range of values) on a dependent variable’ whereas ‘sufficient causes assume that the presence of a particular value (or range of values) on an independent variable will always be associated with the presence of a particular value (or range of values) on a dependent variable’. To exemplify this further, Kogut et al (2004, p. 118) illustrate it mathematically:

‘Thus, a cause (X) that is sufficient or necessary for a given effect (Y) implies the following relationships:

X is a necessary condition: $Y \subseteq X$ if $Y \Rightarrow X$

X is a sufficient condition: $Y \supseteq X$ if $Y \Leftarrow X$

,

A more recent advancement in this stream uses fuzzy-set methods (Ragin, 2000). Fuzzy-sets modify QCA, because they allow ‘non-dichotomous scorings of the variables and incorporating a probabilistic comparative logic instead of a deterministic logic’ (Lange, 2013, p. 92). These techniques are most appropriate to be used to medium-N analyses for samples of 10 to 50 cases (Fiss, 2007, pp. 1194–1195) although smaller or larger samples are not ruled out (Rihoux and Ragin, 2009).

An important terminological clarification is needed here. A number of authors, in the context of QCA, refer to ‘causal conditions’ instead of ‘variables’ (see, for example Kogut and Ragin, 2006 *passim*; Mahoney, 2004). In fact, these terms have been used interchangeably. ‘Causal conditions’ may reflect, for example, dichotomous variables and the presence/absence of a variable to be functionally equivalent with the presence/absence of a condition. Even further, as Mahoney (2004, p. 83) argues that one needs not to make this assumption, for example, ‘with continuous measurement, one can hypothesize that a particular value (or range of values) on an independent variable is necessary or sufficient for a particular value (or range of values) on a dependent variable’. In other words, conditions would correspond to the value or range of values that a variable can take.

Even more, multiple regressions examine linear relationships between variables and estimates average causal effects, but QCA explores non-linear relationships and focuses on a non-probabilistic configuration of necessary and sufficient conditions that lead to different outcomes. Thus, qualitative comparative analysis can help to capture relationships of asymmetry and overcome problems in multiple regression analysis that consider symmetrical relationships (Fiss, 2011; Lange, 2013).

Fuzzy set QCA is not the only available variant of QCA; there are also crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) and multi-value Qualitative Comparative Analysis (mvQCA). A bibliometric study of the three QCA variants identified 469 articles, of which 50 per cent using csQCA, 47 per cent using fsQCA and only 3 per cent using mvQCA (Roig-Tierno *et al.*, 2017, pp. 19–20). Examples of applications of QCA can be found in a range of topics, for example, workers participation and learning (Cova and Rodríguez-Monroy, 2016); entrepreneurial activity, organizational strategy and performance (see overview by Roig-Tierno *et al.*, 2016, pp. 1262–1263); and crowdfunding campaigns (Kraus *et al.*, 2016). The next section considers the application of fsQCA methodology in the context of comparative management research.

5. The Comparative Method, Comparative Management and QCA

The emergence of the institutionalist perspective in comparative management research shifted attention to the role that formal and informal institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) play in shaping management practices at the organizational level. One strand of institutionalist literature came to be known as the ‘comparative capitalism’ or ‘comparative business systems’ literature (Jackson and Deeg, 2008; Wood *et al.*, 2014) and included various strands. One of the seminal contributions in the comparative capitalisms strand articulated more eloquently that advanced industrialized countries fall within two types of systems, Liberal Market Economies and Coordinated Market Economies (Hall and Soskice, 2001) with different implications for management strategies to exploit comparative advantages. The basic

insight of this strand was that national-based institutions provide the key actors (enterprises and labor) with resources and constraints that bear on the organization of work and production. These take the form of institutional complementarities (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Witt and Jackson, 2016) and, as a result, the different institutional arrangements are also conducive to different versions of comparative advantage and management practices. A parallel strand of comparative business systems literature offered six main variants: fragmented, compartmentalized, industrial districts, state organized, collaborative and highly coordinated, which were to be found across and within countries (Whitley, 2007). The business systems approach was recently extended to examine the business context in Asian capitalisms (Whitley and Zhang, 2016).

The comparative capitalisms frameworks offered stylized pictures of how management practices tend to cluster across different models of capitalism or different business systems. These perspectives have provided a valuable anchor for background theory that helped to contextualize the examination of various management practices or the impact of management practices on performance (Kornelakis *et al.*, 2017). There are different practical ways that researchers followed to apply the comparative capitalisms framework in comparative management research. One way is to apply the comparative research design at the level of organizations. If one followed a single case study design, one would identify a single case because of some outcome of interest. For example, a firm might adopt an innovative management technique or might follow a particular strategy in response to a change in the business context. Then the researcher should keep this as the ‘leading case’ in the comparison, but should also try to identify another organization. The

second case should be as similar as possible to the leading one, but should have followed a different strategy, and thereby the research will be able to construct a ‘matched-pair’. This will provide the researcher with a ‘counterfactual’ case and will enrich the analysis and help deepen the understanding of why managers in the leading case behaved as they did, while the managers in the ‘negative’ case did not. Similarity is of course ‘constructed’ and one should not try to identify an identical case, these rarely, if ever, exist. The similarity may be based on many grounds, e.g. a competitor in the same industry/country or a similar organization in the same industry in another country. One study that exemplifies the comparative research design at the organizational level is the comparison of corporate governance strategies in British Telecom with Deutsche Telekom (Börsch, 2007). Another study that exemplifies this research design is the comparison of privatisation and internationalisation strategies across telecom multinationals (Kornelakis, 2015). Both examples pay particular attention to the external business context and explain how the firms responded differently to similar challenges.

Another way to apply the comparative capitalism frameworks in comparative management research is to apply this research design at the level of ‘industries’. Although the unit of analysis is now shifted from the ‘organizational level’ to the ‘meso-level’ of sectors, it makes a lot of sense to focus on industries of similar economic activity. One reason is that industry studies help to trace broader developments over time, because path-dependence is important (Sako, 2008). Systemic challenges tend to affect different national sectors simultaneously, for instance, the global financial crisis, emissions regulation or international accounting standards. The logic is similar as above. If one followed a single case study design,

one would identify a single industry due to some outcome of interest. For example, some industry might be showing exceptional competitive intensity due to price wars or product innovation due to disruptive technology or could be affected by the same level of regulatory change. Then the researcher should keep this as the ‘leading case’ in the comparison, and the task would be to identify another industry, which is as similar as possible to the leading case but followed a different response to the change, so as to construct a ‘matched-pair’. The second industry will then provide a ‘counterfactual’ case and will help the researcher understand why the leading industry exhibited one outcome of interest whereas the ‘counterfactual’ industry did not.

Apart from choosing complementary cases on the basis of ‘constructed similarity’ these may be chosen on purpose on the basis of outright difference. In this case the MDSO design would be followed, i.e. two industries, which are *prima facie* so different but seem to converge on some outcome of interest. There are examples of studies that exemplify different types of comparative design using the ‘industry’ as the unit of analysis. One seminal study examined work organization changes in two very different industries, automobile and telecommunications, and found that convergence to similar practices was stronger than expected (Katz and Darbishire, 2000). Another example of a recent study that placed the industry-level as unit of analysis followed the most similar/different outcomes design and examined patterns of corporate governance in automotive supply chain sectors in selected countries (Lippert *et al.*, 2014).

Seminal studies in this stream of comparative research have illustrated the relevance of the QCA analysis for comparative management research. One example by Kogut et

al (2004) consists of the study of configurations of high performance management practices, and the authors re-examine a dataset with high performance working practices, using fuzzy-set QCA, and illustrate how fuzzy set methodology provides an approach to reduce this complexity by logical rules that permit an exploration of the simplifying assumptions. A more recent study by Witt and Jackson (2016) applied fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to data from 14 industries in 22 countries across 9 years, and revealed that comparative advantages in industries with radical innovation emerged in specific configurations mixing coordinated and liberal institutional features. Another study, used data on 30 OECD countries from 2000 and 2011 through a fuzzy-set analysis of innovation specialization patterns and illustrated that the national business systems typology needs to be extended but overall remains relevant for describing variety in national frameworks (Hotho, 2014).

6. Concluding Remarks and Further Research

The article considered the value of the comparative method in management research and the subtleties of the underlying logic that distinguishes it from quantitative analyses or single-case qualitative approaches. It was argued that the comparative method is a ‘third way’ approach that sits in between the other approaches. Although the main unit of analysis has been ‘countries’ or ‘societies’ in other social science fields, it may also be fruitfully applied in management research. The article analysed how the advances in theory and method outline the renewed relevance of the comparative method.

One the one hand, the explosion of the ‘comparative capitalisms’ and ‘comparative business systems’ literature suggest how the comparative method might be applied across different countries, so as to show sensitivity to systemic changes and national cultural and institutional contexts. The comparative method might also be applied in the same country context, by framing the comparison using ‘industries’ or ‘organizations’ as the unit of analysis. In this way, the institutional and cultural context is held constant, and other outcomes of interest may vary. However, the comparative method is equally relevant to other fields in management, which do not necessarily rely on theoretical frames that dwell on comparative management and comparative business systems.

This relevance of the comparative method for management has been reinforced if we take into account an increasing number of articles in diverse topics that have been based on Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The advances in QCA allow the analysis of medium-N samples, taking a conjunctural causality approach and identifying configurations that lead to similar outcomes. Indicatively, the fuzzy-set QCA allows moving from a more deterministic understanding of causality to a more probabilistic one.

The article suggested that the comparative method provides richer insights than single case studies taking into account the diversity of the cross-national institutional and cultural contexts. At the same time it may also shed light on fine-grained processes and mechanisms compared to large-N samples using quantitative analysis. Hopefully, the greater diffusion and broader application of the comparative method will foster

methodological innovation and enrich methodological pluralism in international and comparative management research.

As a final remark, we have to acknowledge that this article considered some examples of innovations in comparative methodology (fuzzy set QCA). However, one of the limitations of this paper is that we did not get into further details on other variants of QCA, such as crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) or multi-value Qualitative Comparative Analysis (mvQCA). Further research on these methodological innovations should consider those alternatives in more detail including applications and examples in management research. Further research on this area could also consider how QCA methods may be nested into mixed and multi-method research designs. For example, how QCA can be nested within quantitative analysis of large-N samples, whereby causal relationships are broadly unveiled by multiple regressions, whereas causal configurations are unveiled by QCA methods of medium-N cases. Overall, the article argued in favour of the comparative method a 'natural partner' of comparative management approaches that require contextualization of conditions that lead to different outcomes. The comparative method has the potential to overcome some of the weaknesses of either single-case qualitative methods or quantitative methods. Therefore, further and deeper engagement with the comparative method is a welcome development that will likely to enrich methodological pluralism in the field of international management.

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