Comparative organizational research means different things to different people and encompasses a variety of research programs, some focused on specific methodologies and others exploring more substantive issues. “Comparative” is often used to describe research that is cross-national or cross-cultural, but more generally, comparative research explains contextual variation in social phenomena (Azumi & Hull, 1981; Ragin, 1987) including variation in organizational contexts. Comparative organizational analyses share an interest in revealing and explaining sources of enduring organizational heterogeneity (e.g., Clemens, 1997; Schneiberg, 2002). Variation in organizational forms, life-stages, and organizational cultures are examples of this kind of heterogeneity. Comparative analysis uncovers sources of persistent heterogeneity by focusing on contextual differences at varying levels of analysis, including across temporal and spatial dimensions (Aldrich, this volume). The need to explain difference is central to the comparative analysis of organizational bureaucracies prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s (Blau, 1955), the comparative approaches focusing on cross-cultural differences (Hofstede, 1980; Hamilton & Biggart, 1988), and the comparative analysis of organizational forms (Williamson, 1991).

This volume is an attempt to reinvigorate interest in comparative organizational analysis. The tendency of contemporary organizational
scholarship is to either treat organizations as all the same or as all unique (McKelvey & Aldrich, 1983). The former approach is associated with generalizable theories that abstract away from the organization as a site of study and setting of interest, and the latter approach is associated with efforts at thick description and less generalizability. Comparative analysis is a mode of study that sits somewhere in the middle of these extremes, developing theoretical explanations for variation in organizational behavior. Comparative analysis is situated between inductive and deductive reasoning, theoretical abstraction and empirical description, and the organization and its context. Comparative work inherently focuses on the concurrent needs to theorize and understand differences in organizations and to identify the contextual limits of generalizability, thus allowing for the unexpected to move theory in new directions.

While comparative approaches have always been a part of organizational sociology, and in fact we will argue that they were foundational to the subfield, they have nonetheless been far less prominent in the past three decades. The increasing sophistication of quantitative methods and the rise of more environmentally focused theories of organizations in the late 1970s have shifted the focus away from comparative analysis and the study of organizational heterogeneity. The tendency instead has been for scholars to advance theories that prioritize explanations of homogeneity (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) or at least that are generalizable across cultural, industrial, geographical, and temporal contexts. Indeed, the tendency has been to wipe away difference altogether and to prioritize abstraction over contextual specificity. While we certainly agree with the idea that generalizable theories are valuable and contribute to the creation of dominant paradigms (Pfeffer, 1993), we are concerned that the radical swing away from comparative analysis has caused organizational scholarship to lose some of its richness and even its organizational focus. Lacking the methods and theories to describe and explain enduring organizational differences has distanced our research from the vast diversity of organizational life that characterizes the empirical world in which we live (cf. Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006). More importantly, the lack of a comparative program of organizational research has weakened our ability to explain how organizations differ from other collective entities in society. Although grand patterns and pressures for homogeneity certainly exist in organizational life (Drori, Meyer, & Hwang, 2006), organizations are also “purposefully constructed,” and collective action is realized in an ever-growing variety of social forms (Coleman, 1991, p. 8). Understanding this variety of organizing and organizations is central to organization theory.
The purpose of this volume is to call for a reengagement with comparative approaches to organizational analysis. Rather than make a call for strict coherence or attachment to a particular method or theory, the volume seeks to spotlight and introduce a diversity of comparative research traditions. We include in the volume papers that offer potential for studying comparative organizational heterogeneity, drawing upon recent advances in theory and method. Moreover, we hope that this volume will encourage more discussion about comparative research. Rather than seeking convergence, we hope that the work presented in these pages will motivate ongoing experimentation in the design of comparative studies and in theoretical perspectives that will inform our understanding of organizational difference. To study heterogeneity, organizational scholars need a diverse toolkit (Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006).

We begin this introduction by examining the historical roots of comparative scholarship and its decline in the modern era of organizational sociology. We note some key characteristics of a comparative analysis of organizations. We argue that while cross-cultural analysis has remained a vibrant area of research, comparative analysis at the organization level of analysis has waned, limiting our ability to theorize about organizational actors. We then highlight the contributions made by the authors whose papers are included in the volume.

**COMPARATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS AND ITS DEMISE**

Comparative organizational analysis once dominated American organizational sociology, grounded in rich case studies about organizational processes and outcomes. The Columbia school’s approach to organizational research was exemplary in this regard. Following the publication of Robert K. Merton’s (1940) essay, “Bureaucratic Structure and Personality,” he attracted a group of talented doctoral students to his formal organizations seminar (Crothers, 1990), the core of whom would go on to write dissertations, books, and articles forming the substance of American organizational sociology in the decades to come. Among those students were Philip Selznick, Alvin Gouldner, Peter Blau, Seymour Martin Lipset, Rose Coser, and James Coleman. While their work varied greatly in substantive content, their studies shared a theoretical interest in explaining intra-organizational dynamics and the unexpected outcomes of bureaucratic administration.
Organizations, they demonstrated, developed "lives of their own," quite outside the intents of their founders (Haveman, 2009; refer, especially, Selznick, 1957). Organizations, in other words, were adaptive to the needs of their constituents, but adaptations did not always produce the intended results. One of the unintended consequences of organizational development was increasing variety in the kinds of organizations that emerged to meet particular societal goals or ends. Thus, an inherent focus of this early comparative research was the explanation of variety in organizational types, policies, and outcomes and an emphasis on the ways in which organizations diverged from ideal types.

The comparative approach was based in the Columbia school's attachment to empirical rigor and in Merton's embrace of middle-range theories. Rather than seeking to develop an "all-encompassing general theory" of society, as characteristic of Merton's mentor Talcott Parsons, the Columbia school developed theories that explicated the "structural sources of variations in patterns of choice" (Coser, 1976, p. 150). Thus, Merton's perspective encouraged his students to search for patterns of structural heterogeneity in the organizations they observed. The diversity of organizations are represented in Gouldner's (1954) analysis of a gypsum mine, Coser's (1958) comparison of surgical and medical wards, Selznick's (1949) analysis of a public agency—the Tennessee Valley Authority, Blau's (1955) comparison of two government bureaucracies, and Lipset's (1950) analysis of the organization of an agrarian political movement. Following the style of Merton's students, finding and valuing the detailed differences in organizational life became the hallmark of organizational sociology in the 1950s and 1960s.

The other notable commonality of these studies was their interest in actors and the effects of purposive behavior within the organization. Rather than seeing organizations solely as reflections of larger societal configurations, Merton's students focused on the action internal to organizations, the consequences of such action on the larger entity, and its broader impact on society. For Selznick, organizations were the evolving outcomes of early decision-making and commitments in the organization's life course (Selznick, 1957). Gouldner (1954) did not see organizational rules as mere templates for action; they were potential sources of contention among actors whose interests collided. Blau (1955) contended that organizational structures are inherently dynamic, as actors within the organization often have conflicting views on rules and policies, placing pressure on decision-makers to adopt new policies to stabilize internal conflict. Rather than seeing organizations as static and stable, Blau observed the inherent instability and dynamic nature of organizations. Rose Coser's (1958) comparative study of
hospital wards examined how actors subvert the formal roles assigned to them, altering the intended purposes of bureaucracy. The focus on variation in actors’ interests and their relation to the larger social structure was a common feature of these comparative studies.

The Columbia school laid the groundwork for a rich, actor-centric approach, but over time, the focus changed. A particular brand of comparative organizational study began to crystallize: the analysis and construction of typologies (e.g., Stinchcombe, 1959; Blau & Scott, 1962). In some ways, this attempt to schematize differences in organizational life was a return to Weber’s search for universal types, although now it was being done with a finer grain of analysis. Comparative research also began to change in the 1960s and 1970s as scholars increasingly emphasized the environment and technology as causal factors (for an early example of environmental determinism, refer Dill, 1958). The Aston group and contingency theorists, more generally, examined the fit of organizations’ structures with the technology used and the nature of the tasks performed by the organization (Perrow, 1967; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Kaplan, 1968; Pugh, Hickson, & Hinings, 1969). Comparative analysis by the late 1960s was primarily interested in explaining static differences between organizations as a function of environmental, technological, and task-related variation. This emphasis differed dramatically from the Columbia School’s interest in the internal dynamism of organizations.

However, this focus on static organizational differences soon lost steam. In fact, one might say that the limited scope of the project – to explain fit between organizational structures and task or environmental requirements – brought on the radical transformation of organizational sociology in the late 1970s. Declining interest in organizational structure as a phenomenon was accompanied by a sudden move to higher levels of analysis. Organizational scholars began examining phenomena external to the organization (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976). For example, Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) turned their attention to inter-organizational relations. Meyer and Rowan (1977) brought macro-cultural phenomena, such as widely shared beliefs in the rational efficacy of certain organizational structures, into the purview of organizational analysis. Hannan and Freeman (1977) suggested the proper unit of analysis was populations, making the case for an ecological study of organizational forms. The effect of this sudden innovation was to cause a complete shift to higher levels of analysis, moving organizational sociologists’ sights to activities occurring at the levels of networks (Granovetter, 1985), fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and populations (Hannan & Freeman, 1977).

Analytically, the new theories were also more interested in broad patterns of organizational change (e.g., isomorphism) rather than focusing on...
comparisons between organizations. A new set of methodological tools accompanied the shift in analytic emphasis, including new types of regression models made accessible with advancements in computer technology and software. While comparative methods allowed scholars to focus on the variation between organizations, the new quantitative methods were perfectly suited for assessment of means across populations. While these methods were powerful in identifying the central tendencies of organizational behavior, regression models also obscured the differences between organizations, especially in relation to outliers on distribution tails (cf. Baum & McKelvey, 2006). The reliance on these methods may have unintentionally driven organizational sociology to become focused on homogeneity rather than providing explanations for heterogeneity.

The use of quantitative methods, of course, was in many ways a great improvement in the pursuit of scientific knowledge about organizations. As Blau argued, in reflecting on his own shift to quantitative analysis, using large datasets based on archival organizational information reduced the costs of data gathering associated with intensive case studies and assisted scholars who were “trying to discover the principles that can explain the structure of organizations on the basis of relationships between organizational characteristics” (Blau, 1974, p. 2). Blau’s shift from a comparative approach to an agenda grounded in the dogged pursuit of generalizable principles is representative of much organizational analysis over the past 30 years. It is certainly not our agenda to deride the benefits of generalizability; however, we wonder what has been lost or deemphasized as the comparative approach has waned. Most notably, as we argue later, the decline of the comparative approach has caused organizational scholarship to be less sensitive to the varieties of organizational experience and led to a loss of interest in studying the organization as a unique level and unit of analysis.

**THE VALUE OF A COMPARATIVE APPROACH**

In this section, we discuss three important ingredients to comparative studies of organizations: theoretical development through observations of unexpected outcomes or patterns, the focus on organizational heterogeneity, and an emphasis on actors and the organization as a unit and level of analysis. The first two of these characteristics continue to be featured in comparative analysis, but as we argue here, what has been less prominent in recent organizational theory, comparative or otherwise, has been a focus on organizational actors.
The Element of Surprise and Theory Development

The proclivity to uncover the unexpected and unintended outcomes of social action was a hallmark of Mertonian analysis (Merton, 1936; Boudon, 1990; Elster, 1990), but it was especially prominent in his students’ work on organizations. The ability to find divergences from expected patterns was as much a result of a particular methodological approach – case-based analysis – as it was a goal of theory building. Highly empirical, Gouldner, Blau, and the others closely “stuck to the facts,” wherever they would lead. Whether examining mining operations (Gouldner, 1954) or medical units (Coser, 1958), they found that the closer one gets to the organization and to the work that takes place in the organization, the more divergence from the ideal type one sees.

This sort of case-based, inductive analysis continues today in the tradition of ethnographic research. Ethnographies of work in different organizational and occupational settings have yielded key insights about the contingencies affecting work dynamics and patterns of organizing (e.g., Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989; Barley, 1996; for a review, refer Barley & Kunda, 2001). Scholars continue to use case studies “for developing grounded theory” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 532; also refer Suddaby, 2006; Edmundson & McManus, 2007), inductive analysis meant to develop new theory and extend current theory in new directions. The detail-oriented nature of ethnographic studies presents possibilities for comparative work that challenge the conclusions of laboratory work or regression analyses that focus on central tendencies.

It is important to note that the Columbia school’s approach was not merely descriptive; it was thoroughly grounded in theory. Furthermore, their inductive analysis was meant to lead to the formation of testable hypotheses. As Haveman (2009) notes, one of the strengths of their comparative research was the ability to move between inductive and deductive analysis, tightening and modifying Weberian theory when necessary. Case-based comparative analysis has the potential to reign in theory when it becomes too hasty in making vast generalizations. It does this by providing examples of cases that do not fit the accepted theoretical model and by pointing to situations and contexts in which a theoretical model might not apply or where it needs to be modified (Ragin, 1987). The purpose of well-designed comparative research is to contextualize theory and set bounds on generalizability, rather than merely describe and report. Thus, comparative research inherently involves the development of theories about context. While scholars of cross-cultural analysis have vigorously sought to develop
theories of context at the national level (Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007), we are still limited in our theoretical ability to explain heterogeneity at the organization level (i.e., variation not attributable to cross-cultural or other environmental differences). Theorizing organization-level heterogeneity is the second characteristic of comparative research.

**Theorizing Organization-Level Heterogeneity**

Comparative analysis focuses extensively on between-organization differences. Organizations often look quite different from one another, and many of these characteristics run more than skin deep. One of the purposes of comparative analysis, then, is to identify the important sources of variation that explain not only variation in behavior, policy, and so on but also differences in kind (just as Barley and Kunda, 2001, argue that scholars should use comparative analysis to investigate the dynamics that segregate “families” of occupations). Comparative analysis is fundamentally concerned with examining segregation processes that create enduring variation within organizational populations, fields, or markets. Comparative approaches, in this sense, offer a corrective to macro theories of organizations that tend to focus on the homogeneity within families of organizations. Organizations of a particular form, population, or industry probably exhibit much more diversity than our present theories can explain. Policies and practices of organizations often diverge when our theories might lead us to expect “startling homogeneity” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148).

Comparative approaches draw attention to those characteristics that distinguish organizations (Selznick, 1957), such as configurations of characteristics and resources (Meyer, Tsui, & Hinings, 1993; Fiss, 2007), partitioning of resources and identities into distinct market niches (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000), or as distinguishing identity characteristics (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Sources of persistent variation, such as life-stage and life-type, may explain why organizations behave differently. Old organizations have different motivations, capabilities, and structural positions than young organizations. Hospitals behave differently than manufacturing firms. Nonprofit organizations clearly have different constraints on their behavior (and are founded for different reasons) than for-profits.

Variation in life-stage and life-type may not only explain variation in organizational behavior, but, explaining this variation may also propose challenges to the generalizability of particular theories. Take, for instance,
the critique levied against contemporary organizational theory as limited in its focus on “formal organizations as abstract instrumentally-oriented entities operating in environments that are narrowly conceptualized as material resource spaces” (Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2002, p. 3). While data about large, publicly traded, for-profit organizations may be more readily available, these organizations certainly are not the most common kinds of organizations in society (Aldrich, 1999). The organizations that researchers typically make their objects of study are older, have more resources, and have different institutional purposes than the vast majority of organizations that constitute the “richly textured n-dimensional space in which organizations navigate” (Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2002, p. 3). While we acknowledge that studying Fortune 500 firms is useful, it may be dangerous to the viability of our theories if we oversample on these kinds of organizations and ignore the vast variety of organizations that exist. Limiting our theoretical analysis to populations of organizations of this type introduces a peculiar kind of selection bias (Denrell & Kovacs, 2008). Furthermore, unwillingness to examine other kinds of organizations hampers our ability to theorize about the sources and consequences of heterogeneity. Much of what goes on in organizational life becomes invisible to our theoretical lenses. A comparative approach calls for us to be more theoretically sensitive to this variety and its consequences on behavior.

Organizational Actors in Society

The final component of comparative organizational analysis is an emphasis on the organization as a distinct, even privileged, kind of social entity in society. The emphasis on organizations as social actors was central to the work of Selznick (1949, 1957), Coleman (1982, 1990), and Perrow (1979, 2002). Specifically, their work was comparative in nature in that it sought to situate organizations historically and offer insights into their distinctive nature relative to other social forms. For Selznick, organizations make path-dependent choices that lead to substantial heterogeneity and over time organizations “become infused with value” (Selznick 1957, p. 19), developing internal logics that justify their continued existence. Coleman saw organizations as distinct types of social actors, capable of purposeful behavior and exerting asymmetric influence in society. Perrow saw organizations as powerful wealth accumulators with interests distinct from and often conflicting with those of other actors in society. Overall, each of these
literatures suggested a unique organizational perspective – a perspective that recognizes the social actor status of organizations and what this means for understanding organizational heterogeneity and the social landscape (King, Felin, & Whetten, 2009).

Symptomatic of the lack of focus on the organization as an actor is the pointed emphasis on levels of analysis other than that of the organization. The most dominant theories and commonly used independent variables of the organizational literature tend to focus either on how the lower (individual) or higher (population, environment) levels instantiate the organization. But, clearly the organization, as a social actor, also has considerable influence both on the individuals that might compose the organization and the environment in which the organization is embedded. The bottom line is that the organization needs to be theorized as a unique kind of context and social actor. The organization needs to be considered as an important independent variable in its own right. A comparative organizational perspective then would give more priority to the organization and focus on how the organization’s choices, forms, history, and so forth might help us understand heterogeneity in organizational and societal outcomes.

Our concern about the organizational level itself has also recently been noted by others. Gavetti, Levinthal, and Ocasio (2007, p. 524) argued:

[I]n recent years the organizations field as a whole has become decidedly less organizational in its focus. Arguably, the most important developments in organizational theory in the last two decades have corresponded to the increasing understanding of and theorizing about the environment and broader social context in which organizations operate. In this respect, “macro” organizational theory has begun to parallel, in some fashion, the neoclassical theory of the firm in which the “firm” is a relatively vacuous structure that serves as the elementary unit in a theory of markets (emphasis added).

A theoretical refocusing on the organization level would be linked to an interest in explaining the dynamic interactions between these organizational actors, their constituents, and broader society (Perrow, 2002; King et al., 2009). Clearly, organizations are not undisturbed reflections of their environment or aggregations of their members. Organizations actively coerce, exert influence, resist conformity, and shape relationships with others. All of these actions are at least in part determined by the unique historical character of the organization and other internal factors (Selznick, 1957). One purpose of a comparative approach, then, is to refocus on the organization as an actor, an important level of analysis, and as a powerful context in its own right.
ABOUT THIS VOLUME

The purpose of this volume is to present an array of empirical research and theoretical ideas on how comparative analysis might be conducted. Although different in their approaches, the scholars featured in this volume seek to explicate sources of organizational heterogeneity and put forth a set of methodological tools and theoretical perspectives for the purpose of comparative organizational analysis. Each paper offers a unique take on what it means to study difference in organizations.

We begin with three essays, written by respected veterans in the field of organizational studies, about the past, present, and future of comparative scholarship. First, W. Richard Scott reasons that while for a time organizational scholars believed that organizations were converging on similar forms and practices, this empirical consensus has broken apart. Empirical evidence indicates much more diversity in the organizational world than can be explained by institutional theories of isomorphism and global political culture. Institutional theorists have expressed a renewed interest in explicating sources of difference among organizations, relying, in particular, on social movement theory to explore the emergent properties of organizations.

Second, Howard Aldrich’s essay argues that temporal variation and spatial variation are important factors shaping organizational heterogeneity. Comparative organizational scholarship should be sensitive to time and space when designing studies and consider the theoretical implications of contextualizing in this way. In particular, scholars should consider using a life course perspective to understand maturation differences in organizations as well as cohort effects that might explain historical differences. National and regional variation may account for unique cultural or institutional influences. By contextualizing organizations, Aldrich seeks a conceptual middle ground that neither treats all organizations as alike nor treats all organizations as unique.

In our third essay, David Whetten argues that comparative research is inherently concerned with context effects and that, as organizational scholars, we ought to have something to say about the organizational context. Organizations are not only context-specific outcomes, but they are also significant contexts that shape behavior at other levels of analysis. Scholars ought to consider the purposeful and intentional action of organizations in shaping higher levels (e.g., fields or institutions) and in influencing lower levels (e.g., teams or individuals). In short, he makes the case that organizational scholarship needs to more carefully carve out a theoretical place for organizational actors.
We follow this with three essays proposing theoretical and methodological tools useful for the comparative analysis of organizations. First, Rodney Lacey and Peer Fiss tackle the methodological problem of how to study cross-level effects when organizations and industries are characterized by heterogeneous attributes. They propose that rather than relying solely on multi-level modeling, which tends to isolate the effects of causal variables net of the effects of level-specific heterogeneity, scholars ought to examine how attributes at various levels combine in causal patterns. Their configurational approach to studying cross-level variation relies on Ragin’s qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). They argue that this method is ideal for comparative analysis because it is fully interactive and allows the researcher to conceptualize diversity as broadly as a theory will allow. Rather than conceiving of behavior at any level as a linear function of attributes at any other level, QCA is based on the assumption that attributes at various levels combine in unique ways to produce differing outcomes. Lacey and Fiss outline how QCA may be used as a powerful tool in the study of diverse organizational behavior.

Second, Wohlgezogen and Hirsch advance theories about organizations and their environments by urging scholars to focus on their interactional relationship, specifically on the “negotiation space” in which organizations operate and the “negotiation moves” they take to influence and shape their environment. Their theoretical innovation enriches comparative organizational analysis as it reconceives actor–environment variation as variation in actor–environment relations. Their theorization of actor–environment relations prioritizes the agency of actors in shaping environments, while also recognizing constraints imposed by variation in the environment.

The third essay by Omar Lizardo provides a theoretical perspective for comparing different organizational forms, one of the most intensively studied concepts in contemporary organizational sociology. Highlighting the joint contributions of ecological (specifically, the resource partitioning model) and field theories, Lizardo shows how segregation processes lead to the creation of antagonistic organizational forms – restricted and mass producers. He argues that these forms coexist precisely because each relies on a distinct theory of valuation and worth, which is associated with their positions in a broader culture. The paper points to cultural distinctions as an important source of organizational heterogeneity.

The volume concludes with three empirical papers that offer unique ways of doing comparative organizational research. Katherine Chen and Siobhán O’Mahony elucidate our understanding of how organizations differentiate
themselves from conventional forms using a comparative ethnographic study design. The two settings – the Burning Man arts event and the Open Source software community – are each cases in which resistance to conventions and institutionalized norms of organizing led to the creation of novel organizations. Chen and O’Mahony’s paper demonstrates the strengths of comparative research in developing theory and examining how intentional collective action leads to the creation of novel forms.

Fabio Rojas looks at explanations for heterogeneity within a particular kind of organizational community – a social movement. Rojas’s study of the anti-war movement indicates that variation in social movement organizations’ internal structure may be explained by contextual differences at the time of an organization’s founding combined with the unique technical configurations of the organization. Thus, movement organizational heterogeneity is jointly attributable to historical and political environmental influences and technical path dependencies.

The final paper of our volume written by Carol Caronna, Seth Pollack, and W. Richard Scott use a comparative case study approach to explain the emergence of organizational heterogeneity in the U.S. health care field. They show how organizations facing the same environmental conditions may experience very different outcomes. The paper discusses how organizations’ identities, positions in subpopulations, and relationships to the field account for heterogeneous motivations and varied responses to changes in a field’s institutional logic. The paper nicely illustrates how scholars can use comparative case studies to identify sources of persistent heterogeneity.

**GOING FORWARD**

Given the recognized need for more theoretical development and methodological tools in the study of organizational heterogeneity (Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006), the time is ripe for a revitalization of comparative organizational analysis. The papers in this volume point to various extensions of comparative research, combining different levels of analysis and theories of context. Some of the papers (Chen and O’Mahony and Caronna et al.) use inductive, case-based analysis to engage in theoretical development. Lacey and Fiss, in contrast, suggest how a set-theoretic approach gives us methodological leverage in dissecting and explaining heterogeneity in large-N datasets. The papers offer varying views on how to conceptualize
sources of enduring heterogeneity, demonstrating that comparative analysis need not be tied to a single method.

Contributions in this volume also address the need to reconceptualize the role of the organization in organization theory, which we have argued is the most sorely missed ingredient in current organizational scholarship. Making the organization the center of comparative analysis of course does not mean that we should ignore variation at other levels of analysis, casting aside the many theoretical advances of the past 30 years of organizational scholarship. On the contrary, comparative research should consider the interaction between levels of analysis. As Wohlgezogen and Hirsch, Caronna et al., and Rojas demonstrate, organizational effects both interact with environmental effects and organizations actively shape their environments. Using configurational analysis, per Lacey’s and Fiss’s suggestion, is a useful methodological tool with which to investigate these dynamic, cross-level interactions. Similarly, comparative research ought to consider interactions with the individual level of analysis. Patterns of selection in and out of organizations at the individual level may account for significant differences in organizational outcomes, while at the same time, different kinds of organizations may attract different kinds of individuals. Chen and O’Mahony demonstrate how individual motivations and founder effects inform organizational decision-making, shaping the novelty of organizational choices. Lizardo argues that segmentation in form maps onto identity distinctions at the individual level. Cultural variation, in a sense, is reproduced through individual affiliations with organizations that reinforce their identities. Organizations are an important link between individuals and culture, giving them a medium through which to express preferences and enact their identities. Lizardo’s paper suggests that theories about cultural heterogeneity should give more consideration to the role of the organizational context.

The papers in this volume make space for new kinds of comparative organizational analysis. It is our hope that scholars will build on these ideas in the future and reinvigorate the comparative study of organizational heterogeneity by advancing new theories of context and developing innovative methodological tools to study the interrelatedness of contexts. Clearly, our call for comparative organizational work is also a push for making the organization more central to our theories and using study designs that are sensitive to variation at the organizational level. The term organizational, after all, should be something that we as organizational scholars can meaningfully engage with and theorize, beyond relegating it to mere individual-level or environmental causes. Thus, we hope that one
outcome of an increased interest in comparative organizational scholarship would be a renewed focus on the organization as a social actor.

REFERENCES


