



## On the use of qualitative comparative analysis in management<sup>☆</sup>



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### ABSTRACT

Researchers now use qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) beyond its original purposes in political and sociological sciences and apply this method of analysis in the field of management. This article offers a comprehensive and critical review of all the uses of QCA in management studies up until February 2015. This study shows how QCA extends beyond an empirical technique and how this method offers a genuine formalization of qualitative analysis, which opens new ways of knowledge production in management scholarship. This also study provides important implications for business management research.

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## 1. Introduction

The qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) derives from the classical comparative methods that John Stuart Mill theorizes in 1843. Ragin (1987) develops and popularizes the method in his seminal work. The QCA is a tool and approach for researchers who want to find a balance between case-oriented and variable-oriented analysis (De Meur & Rihoux, 2002). The QCA constitutes a useful analytical method for cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2003) that focuses on the complexity that characterizes the cases under investigation. Cases are configurations of variables; this definition has a dual purpose: First, these configurations reveal the trajectories and paths that variables follow to achieve similar or different results. Second, these configurations provide explanatory paths with complex causality and where combinations of factors explain a research result. QCA is also an approach as well as a research technique (Curchod, 2003; Rihoux & Marx, 2013). In this regard, QCA aids in the identification of causal structures (Ragin, 1987). QCA is therefore an instrumentation of generic analytical approaches for which qualitative methodologists advocate (Miles & Huberman, 2003).

QCA draws on Boolean algebra and set-theoretic approaches and operates through two types of software: those based on graphical user

interface (GUI) (e.g., TOSMANA and fsQCA) and those based on command line interface (CLI) (e.g., R and Stata packages). The areas of research that use QCA are mostly political sciences and sociology (Rihoux, Álamos-Concha, Bol, Marx, & Rezsöhazi, 2013). However, although management research increasingly uses QCA, this method still remains relatively new to a large number of scholars and no critical review and overview on its use in management research exists.

Hence, the contribution of this article is twofold. First, this study is the first comprehensive analysis of the use of QCA in management research (up until February 2015). This attempt thus helps to structure the literature for existing and potential QCA users. Second, by organizing the field, the study identifies current management issues of interest and how researchers investigate these issues through QCA. This discussion shows how QCA extends beyond an empirical technique and offers a genuine formalization of qualitative analysis, which opens new ways of knowledge production in management scholarship.

Following this introduction, the next section explains the research method for this study. Section 3 presents the main issues that management research studies through QCA and the main contributions to the literature. The last section comprises conclusions and presents some implications for future studies.

## 2. Research method: a content analysis

### 2.1. Delimiting the scope of the investigation

This study first identified management articles using QCA in Web of Science database and then triangulated the results with the COMPASS

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database. The final sample comprised 95 articles from aggregated databases (Cairn, Ebsco, and Science Direct) and publishers (Sage and Emerald) (see Fig. 1). To obtain the articles, the study used six sets of keywords. The first set combined the themes “qualitative comparative analysis,” “QCA,” and “Management.” From this combination, the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth used “Fuzzy-set,” “fsQCA,” “mvQCA,” “Crisp-set,” and “csQCA,” respectively, instead of “QCA.”

2.2. Coding methods for data reduction

The study developed a theme dictionary (Fig. 2). The review, the research object of research and the research objective helped to identify management areas of interest (Colquitt and George, 2011; Grant and Pollock, 2011). This study assessed whether researchers use QCA for its intrinsic value (i.e., extending the understanding of management

practices) and/or instrumentally, that is, for its extrinsic value (the interest of the management phenomenon is secondary). Finally, regarding the scope of an article, this study assessed to which extent researchers add new theoretical perspectives to the area of research.

QCA comprises three variants: crisp-set, multi-value, and fuzzy-set. This research considers as types of studies: empirical, theoretical, and methodological studies. Regarding cases, this study inductively identified four attributes for type of cases: country, organization, individual, or other types of cases that do not fit in the first three categories.

3. Anatomy of investigated management phenomenon

Researchers use QCA mainly to investigate four major management objects across eleven research domains (see Fig. 3), with an

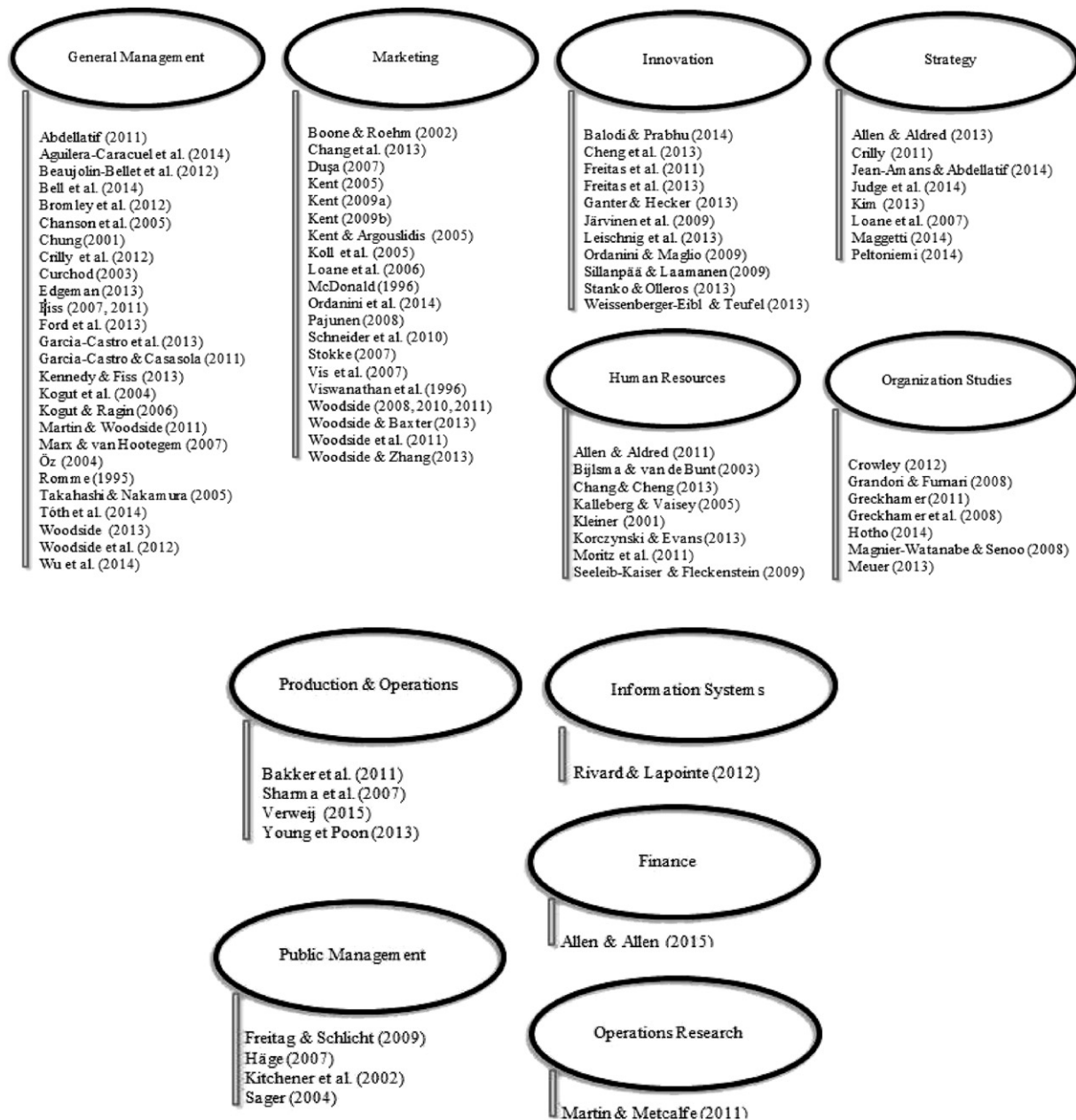


Fig. 1. Use of QCA in management. Note: This figure shows every article that this study analyzes. However, the reference section includes only those works that this article explicitly references.

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