

Systemic and Family Constellation as a Social Technology for Organizational Development: A Phenomenological-Systemic Approach

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ABSTRACT:

Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) is a phenomenological approach that reveals and harmonizes unconscious dynamics in human systems. This study positions it as a central—and not merely complementary—methodology in Organizational Development (OD), addressing the systemic roots that block transformation. The study highlights a strong convergence between theory and practice using a mixed-methods approach, consisting of an integrative literature review (28 articles, PRISMA protocol) and empirical research with 131 Brazilian constellation practitioners.

The results demonstrate that SFC promotes cultural change (by resolving hidden loyalties and systemic exclusions), integrates teams (by strengthening a sense of belonging), develops systemic leadership (by clarifying roles and hierarchies), and improves the organizational climate (by mediating deep-rooted conflicts). Direct impacts have been reported on innovation, productivity, and employee well-being. Bibliometric analyses (VOSviewer) confirm a consolidated theoretical core based on authors such as Hunger-Schoppe and Weinhold, with recent expansion led by the Netherlands, highlighting the transition of SFC from a therapeutic approach to an organizational and systemic methodology.

The study also proposes a practical three-phase framework for integrating SFC into OD programs, incorporating ethical guidelines, facilitator qualification criteria, and impact measurement protocols.

From a theoretical perspective, the research articulates the phenomenological principles of SFC (Belonging, Order, and Balance) with classical OD theories (Lewin, Schein, Bertalanffy), rigorously responding to methodological criticisms—subjectivity, replicability, and the lack of randomized controlled trials—through its epistemological basis in lived experience and empirical triangulation. It is concluded that Systemic and Family Constellation constitutes a social and strategic technology centered on human beings, capable of strengthening the resilience and adaptability of organizations in contexts of increasing complexity and uncertainty.

Keywords: Systemic and Family Constellation; Organizational Development; Phenomenology; Organizational Culture; Complex Systems; Systemic Leadership; Innovation.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary organizational environment is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, summarized by the VUCA (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). In this scenario, the sustainability of organizational performance depends less on operational efficiency or technological innovation and more on the management of the human system—the network of relationships, meanings, and emotions that sustain, and sometimes limit, the functioning of organizations. While relevant, traditional Organizational Development (OD) approaches reveal limitations in addressing these deep, systemic dynamics, which are often unconscious.

In this context, Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) presents itself as a methodology for paradigmatic change. Developed by Bert Hellinger (2001) in the therapeutic field, the approach has expanded beyond its clinical origins, consolidating itself as a phenomenological method—that is, grounded in lived experience

(Lebenswelt) and an understanding of the relational structures that shape reality (Husserl, 1913). Its theoretical framework is based on the "Orders of Love," which express three universal principles: belonging, hierarchical order, and exchange balance. Violating these principles tends to generate tensions and systemic dysfunctions, while their restoration favors cohesion and fluidity in organizational relationships.

Although previous studies indicate the effectiveness of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) in organizational contexts, this article proposes to advance this discussion by positioning SFC not as a complementary instrument, but as a central methodology in the field of Organizational Development (OD). It argues that Systemic and Family Constellations provides Organizational Development professionals with an analytical framework for identifying and intervening in the dynamics underlying organizational challenges—including institutional traumas and cultural dysfunctions—fostering transformation processes consistent with the systemic principles that structure collective relationships.

This research also addresses methodological criticisms often associated with Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC)—such as its alleged subjectivity, limited replicability, and lack of randomized clinical trials (RCTs). It argues that the phenomenological foundation of SFC constitutes a legitimate epistemological alternative to positivist approaches by prioritizing the understanding of systemic reality based on lived and embodied experience. This perspective has been progressively validated by converging empirical evidence from different organizational contexts.

The contemporary relevance of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) is evidenced by its growing academic consolidation and the expansion of its applications in various organizational contexts, with a focus on research and innovation centers in Europe, especially the Netherlands. Thus, this article not only integrates empirical evidence and existing theoretical foundations but also proposes an updated conceptual framework: SFC as a strategic methodology for human and systemic development in the field of contemporary Organizational Development (OD)—anchored in philosophical foundations, supported by empirical evidence, and oriented toward organizational practice.

Theoretical Framework: Systemic And Family Constellation as A Central Methodology for Organizational Development

This section establishes a theoretical connection between the phenomenological foundations of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) and the conceptual foundations of Organizational Development (OD). Far from being an ancillary practice, SFC is analyzed here as a structuring methodology, oriented toward understanding and transforming the relational dynamics that underpin the functioning of organizational systems—dimensions often overlooked by traditional management approaches. This discussion is supported by recent evidence indicating the academic consolidation and interdisciplinary expansion of SFC within the field of organizational sciences.

The "Orders of Love" in the Organizational Context

Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) is based on three universal principles—belonging, hierarchical order, and balanced exchange—termed by Bert Hellinger (2001) as the "Orders of Love." More than therapeutic guidelines, these principles constitute systemic frameworks that describe the patterns of interdependence and regulation present in human systems, including organizations. A rupture in these principles tends to generate relational tensions and collective dysfunctions, while their restoration fosters cohesion and dynamic stability. In the Organizational Development (OD) field, these frameworks offer analytical support for diagnosing and intervening in latent dynamics that sustain conflicts, blocks to innovation, and cultural resistance.

Belonging: The Right to Exist in the System

In an organizational context, belonging refers to the symbolic and functional recognition of all the elements that make up the system—individuals, teams, departments, completed projects, and even institutional legacies, such as departed founders. Exclusion, even unintentional, tends to create relational gaps that manifest in resistance to change, recurring conflicts, disengagement, and passive oppositional behaviors.

Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) is a systemic analysis tool to identify and reintegrate these marginalized individuals. This process has not only emotional but also strategic implications for collective functioning. Restoring belonging strengthens psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), which is associated with increased collaboration, innovation, and team performance. The perception of inclusion reduces anxiety, strengthens interpersonal bonds, and reinforces collective identity—factors recognized as essential for effective Organizational Development initiatives (Scholtens et al., 2024).

Systemic and Family Constellations presents theoretical connections with fields such as clinical psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, as indicated by analyses of co-occurrence of terms in the literature (Figure 5). This transdisciplinary nature reinforces its applicability to organizations, understood as complex social systems in which identity, belonging, and collective narratives are structured.

Order/Hierarchy: Respect for History and Roles

The principle of order—often misinterpreted as authoritarianism—refers to recognizing temporal precedence and functional legitimacy within a system. In the organizational context, this principle implies respecting the historical sequence—including founders, pioneering members, and structuring processes—and ensuring clarity of roles, lines of authority, and delineation of responsibilities. It is, therefore, not a question of immobility, but of recognizing the structures that ensure the stability and coherence of the system.

When this order is disregarded—for example, when new leadership devalues the experience of veteran members or when a newly created unit supersedes established structures without adequate integration—the system tends to experience role ambiguities, power struggles, inconsistent decisions, and a loss of effectiveness. In this scenario, systemic and Family Constellations are a diagnostic methodology capable of visually representing and reorganizing authority and legitimacy relationships, promoting alignment between position, function, and responsibility.

This realignment process fosters organizational clarity, decision-making consistency, and institutional stability (Borek, 2011; Groessl, 2022). Studies in the field of Systemic Organizational Constellations (SOCs) reinforce this applicability: authors such as Borek, Birkenkrahe, and Nikolić (Figures 7 and 8) comprise a theoretical core that demonstrates the feasibility of systematizing Systemic and Family Constellations (SFCs) for management, leadership, and governance contexts. These studies indicate that SFCs are a phenomenological model focused on understanding and intervening in power structures, succession processes, and strategic alignment dynamics.

Balance in Exchanges: Justice in Systemic Relations

The third principle—balance in exchanges—refers to the reciprocity between giving and receiving, encompassing financial dimensions and symbolic, relational, and emotional aspects. When an employee's investment of time, effort, or loyalty is not recognized proportionally, an imbalance develops, resulting in resentment, disengagement, and emotional exhaustion.

Systemic and Family Constellations allow us to identify these imbalances through the phenomenological representation of relationships, revealing the dynamics of recognition and compensation that sustain the organizational system. By exposing these asymmetries, the methodology facilitates the reestablishment of patterns of reciprocity. This process can manifest itself in actions of recognition, role adjustments, revisions to reward policies, or simple symbolic gestures of interpersonal validation.

Maintaining balance in exchanges is fundamental to organizational cohesion and sustainability. Empirical studies indicate that organizations with reciprocity flows perceived as fair—where effort and recognition are aligned—have higher engagement, retention, and productivity (Thege et al., 2022). Thus, Systemic and Family Constellations contribute to diagnosing dynamics of injustice and building symbolic and relational mechanisms that favor the restoration of collective balance.

Therefore, the "Orders of Love" proposed by Hellinger (2001) constitute observable systemic principles that govern the dynamics of belonging, order, and exchange in human systems. In the Organizational Development

(OD) field, these principles constitute a phenomenological lens that allows us to understand cultural and relational dimensions often neglected by traditional management models, which focus on formal structures and performance indicators.

By integrating the three principles—belonging, order, and balance—Systemic and Family Constellations has established itself as a systemic intervention methodology focused on transforming organizations' identity and cultural structures. Theoretical and bibliometric evidence indicate its growing relevance and transdisciplinary applicability, positioning it as an emerging scientific approach in contemporary Organizational Development.

Systemic and Family Constellations and the Foundational Theories of Organizational Development

Dialogue with Kurt Lewin's Theory of Change

Kurt Lewin's Theory of Change, formulated in the 1940s, constitutes one of the conceptual pillars of Organizational Development (OD) and applied social psychology. Lewin proposed that change—whether at the individual, group, or organizational level—is a dynamic and sequential process composed of three interdependent phases: unfreezing, shifting, and refreezing. Despite its synthetic structure, the model encompasses human transformation's cognitive, emotional, and systemic dimensions, maintaining theoretical and practical relevance in contemporary contexts characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA).

Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) aligns with this perspective by expanding its application to relational and unconscious levels of the organizational system—dimensions that often remain beyond the reach of predominantly rational or linear approaches to change. In this sense, SFC can be understood as a phenomenological complement to Lewin's Theory, capable of highlighting and intervening in the subtle dynamics that sustain the resistance or fluidity of organizational transformation processes.

1. Unfreeze: Breaking the Inertia of the Status Quo

This preparatory phase is often the most critical and challenging. Before any change can occur, it is necessary to "melt" the psychological, cultural, and organizational structures that maintain the system in equilibrium—even if that equilibrium is dysfunctional. The status quo, however inefficient, offers security, predictability, and identity. Disrupting it requires intentionally creating an imbalance—an unsustainable tension that makes change desirable and inevitable.

Typical strategies at this stage include:

- Clearly identifying what needs to change;
- Communicating the urgency and risks of inaction;
- Challenging ingrained beliefs, behaviors, and structures;
- Reducing restraining forces (resistance) and increasing driving forces (motivation for change).

In the context of Systemic and Family Constellation:

Systemic and Family Constellation (SFC) is a phenomenological catalyst for unfreezing. SFC generates a visceral collective insight by revealing unconscious dynamics—such as silent loyalties to past traumas, systemic exclusions, or distorted roles. This insight is not merely cognitive; it is bodily and emotional. It exposes the contradictions between official discourse and lived reality, creating a tension that naturally drives the system to seek a new configuration. At this moment, resistance to change—often irrational and unconscious—begins to dissolve, opening space for transformation.

2. Change: Navigating the Transition

Also called the transition phase, this stage corresponds to the moment when the system moves from its previous state to a new configuration. It is a period characterized by uncertainty, experimentation, and vulnerability, in which old references lose validity before new structures are consolidated.

The main actions associated with this phase include:

1. defining and communicating a clear vision of the desired future state;
2. offering support, training, and resources that enable experimentation with new behaviors;
3. managing emotions associated with uncertainty and fear of the unknown;
4. creating psychologically safe environments that foster learning and continuous adaptation.

In the context of Systemic and Family Constellation:

During the constellation process, the organizational system is symbolically represented and reconfigured, allowing for visualizing the relationships and interdependencies between its elements. Representatives—people or objects—assume positions that express structural and relational aspects of the system, enabling the experimentation of new configurations. This collective experience fosters the emergence of alternative patterns of interaction, favoring the legitimization of more coherent and functional forms of organization.

Change, in this sense, is not imposed externally but emerges from the system's own self-regulation, increasing its authenticity and sustainability. Thus, Systemic and Family Constellations contribute to transforming the transition phase into a structured process of learning and collective reorganization, in which the new is experienced before being institutionalized.

3. Refreeze: Anchoring the New Order

The refreezing phase consolidates the change, ensuring the new standard becomes stable and integrated into the culture, processes, and organizational identity. The goal is to institutionalize the new state, transforming it into a reference for operation and a basis for future adaptations.

The main strategies associated with this stage include:

1. Reinforcing desired behaviors and practices;
2. Aligning policies, structures, and recognition systems with the new reality;
3. Celebrating achievements and recognizing collective efforts;
4. Incorporating change into organizational narratives and rituals.

In the context of Systemic and Family Constellation:

The new relational configuration established during the constellation process facilitates refreezing. When the principles of belonging, order, and balance are reestablished, the system tends to reach a state of stability perceived as legitimate by the participants. The clarity and integration experienced during the constellation contribute to the internalization and sustainability of the new dynamics in the organizational routine. In this sense, change is understood cognitively and incorporated as a lived practice.

Despite being developed nearly eight decades ago, Lewin's model maintains contemporary relevance by:

1. offering a structured roadmap for planning and conducting change;
2. recognizing the human dimension of transformation processes;
3. presenting applicability to different scales and organizational contexts;
4. providing a conceptual basis for designing and consolidating interventions.

Integrating Lewin's model and Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) constitutes a complementary and expanded approach to change management. While Lewin's model provides the procedural framework, SFC introduces a phenomenological approach that explores emotional and systemic dimensions underlying resistance and adaptation processes. This integration enhances the effectiveness of Organizational Development (OD) interventions by balancing methodological rigor and experiential depth.

In organizational contexts marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), the articulation between Lewin's and SFC's perspectives offers an integrative way to understand and conduct continuous

transformations, preserving the coherence between process, human experience, and institutional sustainability.

Edgar Schein's Organizational Culture Model: Systemic and Family Constellation as a Tool for Deep Cultural Transformation

According to Edgar Schein (2017), organizational culture is not limited to values in leadership speeches or institutional materials. It is a dynamic system, composed of different levels of manifestation, in which the deepest elements—called underlying basic assumptions—influence collective behavior. These assumptions shape the beliefs, perceptions, and unconscious patterns that guide how members of an organization interpret and respond to reality. Thus, promoting sustainable cultural transformations requires accessing this more implicit and structural level of culture.

In this context, Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) presents itself as a methodology capable of exploring these underlying dimensions. While traditional Organizational Development (OD) approaches tend to operate at the most visible levels of culture—modifying artifacts, practices, or stated values—SFC enables the identification and phenomenological representation of the unconscious beliefs and dynamics that shape the organizational system. This approach broadens the understanding of culture as a relational and experiential field, in which recognizing latent systemic forces becomes a prerequisite for effective cultural change.

Schein's Three Levels of Culture and the Transformative Role of Systemic and Family Constellations

Artifacts: What is visible but not always understood

Artifacts represent the observable elements of organizational culture—physical environment layout, dress codes, rituals, slogans, hierarchical structures, and communication patterns. While easily identifiable, their interpretation requires knowledge of deeper cultural levels. A relaxed environment, for example, can indicate a culture of innovation and weakness in control and discipline mechanisms.

Systemic and Family Constellations are not limited to analyzing artifacts, treating them as superficial manifestations of underlying dynamics. An ineffective recognition ritual, for example, can signal processes of systemic exclusion or unresolved loyalties within the group.

Stated values: what one claims to believe

Declared values encompass the organization's strategies, philosophies, and principles—such as its mission, vision, and institutional policies. This level is conscious and articulable, but often disconnected from daily practices. Thus, inconsistencies can occur between organizational discourse and behavior: an institution may claim to value innovation but discourage mistakes; it may declare a focus on people but adopt practices that generate overload or demotivation.

Systemic and Family Constellations highlight these inconsistencies by allowing participants to symbolically and relationally represent the tensions between what is declared and what is actually experienced within the system. This phenomenological representation fosters collective awareness and realignment between institutional values and observable behaviors.

Basic underlying assumptions: what drives the system and is rarely questioned

This level corresponds to the deep core of organizational culture. It involves beliefs, patterns of perception, and tacit rules that guide collective behavior, such as:

- "Failure is unacceptable."
- "The final decision always belongs to the founders."
- "Discussing problems with leadership is avoided."
- "Growth requires total availability."

These assumptions emerge from successful adaptation solutions that, repeated over time, become consolidated as implicit truths. Because they are internalized unconsciously, they become automatic and resistant to change. Systemic and Family Constellations offer methodological resources to make these patterns visible and accessible to collective reflection, creating conditions for them to be reinterpreted and, when necessary, transformed.

Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) operates predominantly at the level of underlying basic assumptions—a dimension that underlies its main contribution to the field of Organizational Development (OD). During the constellation process, these assumptions become perceptible not as theoretical constructs, but as relational and symbolic manifestations that express the system's unconscious patterns. For example, a representative's immobility before the founder's figure may reveal a relationship of institutionalized submission; a group's withdrawal from a "failed project" may indicate the presence of an organizational taboo surrounding error.

By making these dynamics visible, SFC enables the system to recognize and reframe implicit beliefs, replacing them, when necessary, with frameworks more consistent with the organization's strategic objectives and emerging values. A participatory cultural reconstruction process creates a more inclusive, adaptive, and learning-oriented symbolic foundation.

The strategic relevance of this integration between Schein and the SFC can be summarized in three main aspects:

1. Understanding resistance to change: Most cultural transformation initiatives fail because they only intervene on the superficial levels of culture (artifacts and declared values), without reaching the basic assumptions. The SFC offers a method for accessing these directly and experientially.
2. Methodology applied to cultural transformation: While Schein describes cultural formation and persistence mechanisms, the CSF offers a practical approach to promote its review and updating.
3. Phenomenological convergence: Both models are based on the understanding that culture is lived and embodied, not merely cognitively represented.

In this sense, Schein's model provides the conceptual framework for understanding the structure of organizational culture. At the same time, Systemic and Family Constellations offers a phenomenological method for intervening at its deepest levels. By reestablishing the principles of belonging, order, and balance in exchanges, SFC acts on the symbolic foundations that sustain—or limit—the cultural coherence of organizations.

The integration between Schein and the SFC thus establishes a robust theoretical and methodological framework for promoting sustainable cultural transformations, based on the interaction between systemic analysis and lived experience. This articulation expands the possibilities for Organizational Development interventions, balancing conceptual rigor and phenomenological depth.

Systemic Foundations: Ludwig von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory

In the 20th century, as the sciences developed in specialized ways—biology focused on cellular structures, psychology on individual behavior, and management on organizational forms—Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy proposed the General Systems Theory (GST). His central argument asserted that all biological, social, mechanical, or organizational systems share universal principles of organization, interaction, and adaptation.

TGS thus emerged as a metatheory focused on understanding the processes and relationships that structure systems at different levels of complexity. Rather than being restricted to a specific domain, the theory offers a set of general concepts for analyzing any system as an integrated and dynamic whole. This perspective established conceptual foundations that influenced the development of fields such as cybernetics, ecology, and, later, Organizational Development (OD).

Fundamental Principles of General Systems Theory — and their Relevance for Organizational Development

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts

A system is not merely an aggregate of elements but an organized whole in which the parts influence each other. A system's behavior cannot be understood solely by analyzing its components in isolation. Changing one part affects the whole, and the whole, in turn, guides the functioning of each part.

In the organizational context, leadership changes, for example, affect not only the department involved but also the organization's climate, productivity, and culture. Systemic and Family Constellations work at this level, mapping the organizational system and reorganizing its internal relationships to produce systemic, not merely isolated, transformations.

Open systems and dynamic boundaries

Organizations are open systems constantly exchanging information, resources, and energy with the external environment. Their vitality depends on their boundaries' permeability and ability to respond to stimuli from the market, customers, competitors, and society. Overly closed systems tend toward entropy, which is characterized by a loss of adaptability and progressive disorganization.

In Systemic and Family Constellations, the constellation highlights when the organizational system is "closed" to specific flows—for example, when it ignores market feedback or resists diversity. By reestablishing the flow of information and including relevant external elements (such as former employees, competitors, or market trends), the SFC helps to increase systemic openness, promoting adaptation and innovation.

Homeostasis and equifinality

- Homeostasis: refers to the system's ability to self-regulate to maintain internal stability in the face of external pressures.

Example: a team that, after a conflict, redefines roles and adjusts communication to restore cooperation.

- Equifinality: indicates that open systems can achieve similar results from different initial conditions.

For example, two organizations with opposing cultures may achieve innovation through different pathways—one through creative autonomy, the other through structured discipline.

In Systemic and Family Constellations, the constellation acts as a mechanism of systemic self-regulation. Reestablishing the principles of belonging, order, and balance in exchanges fosters the spontaneous search for new states of stability perceived as legitimate by the participants. The SFC also respects the principle of equifinality, allowing each system to find unique solutions consistent with its history and context.

Input, processing, output, and feedback

Every open system operates in cycles of exchange and regulation:

- Input: inflow of resources (information, people, capital).
- Processing: internal transformation of these resources.
- Output: results generated (products, services, decisions).
- Feedback: return information that guides new adjustments.

In the context of Systemic and Family Constellations, input corresponds to the issue brought to the constellation; processing occurs in the dynamics experienced by the representatives; output manifests itself in the new systemic configuration; and feedback is expressed in perceptions of clarity, belonging, and relief, which indicate integration of the changes. This cycle reflects the principles of continuous organizational learning.

Synergy and emergence

- Synergy: The interaction between system elements generates results that could not be achieved in isolation.
- Emergence: New and unpredictable properties emerge at the system level due to interactions between its parts.

Example: A company's "culture of innovation" does not belong to any single individual, but emerges from the interaction between leadership, structure, and shared values.

In Systemic and Family Constellations, the constellation constitutes a space for systemic interaction in which relationships between representatives produce collective solutions. The new configuration that emerges from the process is a systemic property—not rationally planned, resulting from the interaction between all system elements.

General Systems Theory (GST) conceives organizations as complex social systems—networks of interdependent people, processes, and meanings. Effective interventions must consider these interrelationships, avoiding approaches that address problems in isolation.

Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) is a practical application of General Systems Theory (GST) principles to the organizational field. While GST offers a conceptual framework for understanding systems' logic, SFC provides a phenomenological methodology for intervening in them in an integrated manner.

- System visualization: Spatial representations make connections, distances, and exclusions perceptible, functioning as a relational map.
- Revealing interdependencies: Changes in one element highlight their effects on the entire system.
- Restoring self-regulation: Reorganization based on belonging, order, and balance promotes functional stability.
- Generating emergent solutions: New configurations emerge in a participatory and self-regulated manner, rather than being imposed externally.

Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory provides the theoretical framework for understanding organizations as living, dynamic, and interdependent systems. Systemic and Family Constellations, in turn, offer a phenomenological approach for observing and reorganizing these systems based on their relational patterns. They form a robust theoretical and methodological framework for contemporary Organizational Development, combining systemic rigor with phenomenological depth.

Phenomenological Foundations of Systemic and Family Constellations and Response to Methodological Criticisms

Systemic and Family Constellations is not, in essence, a psychotherapeutic technique, a coaching method, or a management tool—although it can be applied in these contexts. Instead, it is a phenomenological methodology, that is, a mode of investigation and intervention that draws on lived experience (Lebenswelt, in the Husserlian sense) to understand the structure of phenomena as they manifest in reality.

Although central, this philosophical basis has often been ignored or interpreted superficially by critics and some practitioners, resulting in misinterpretations of its validity and epistemological status. Therefore, this section's objective is to clarify the phenomenological foundations underpinning Systemic and Family Constellations and, based on them, offer a conceptually structured response to the principal methodological criticisms leveled against this approach.

Systemic and Family Constellation as a Phenomenological Practice: from Husserl to Hellinger

Edmund Husserl proposed phenomenology in the early 20th century. It is a philosophical approach focused on returning "to the things themselves" (zu den Sachen selbst). This return entails suspending prior judgments,

explanatory theories, and scientific assumptions to describe phenomena as they are experienced in immediate experience. This process, called phenomenological reduction, does not deny objective reality but recognizes that access always occurs mediated by consciousness and perception.

Although he did not identify as a philosopher, Bert Hellinger incorporated an essentially phenomenological approach into his practice. Instead of starting from theoretical models of systems or traumas, he closely observed what emerged in the representational field, describing phenomena as they manifested. Belonging, Order, and Balance principles were not conceived as dogmas but as empirical regularities identified by observing countless human systems. When these orders are disrupted, tensions and dysfunctions arise; when reestablished, the system tends toward cohesion and balance.

This approach resonates with Husserl's concept of intentionality—consciousness is always consciousness of something (Husserl, 1913)—and with Merleau-Ponty's (1945) concept of the lived body (Leib). In constellation practice, knowledge emerges from the representatives' bodily and relational perception, which expresses the systemic field through sensations, movement impulses, and variations in presence. The representative does not cognitively interpret the role, but perceives it phenomenologically.

In summary, the epistemology of Systemic and Family Constellation is based on direct experience: knowledge is not produced by discursive analysis but by observation and description of the system's manifestations in the phenomenological space.

"In the constellation, one does not discuss the system—the system reveals itself. And it reveals itself through the body, through movement, through silence, and through the gaze." – Hellinger (2001, p. 34, free translation)

Responding to Methodological Criticisms: Subjectivity, Replicability, and Validation

Recurring criticisms of Systemic and Family Constellations focus on three principal axes: (1) excessive subjectivity, (2) lack of replicability, and (3) lack of scientific validation based on randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Below, each of these is discussed in light of phenomenological epistemology and the empirical findings of the present research.

Excessive subjectivity

Phenomenology recognizes subjectivity as a constitutive knowledge condition, not a methodological flaw. In Systemic and Family Constellations, subjective experience is the means by which the phenomenon manifests itself. Rigor is not based on neutrality, but on the precise and intersubjectively shareable description of the perceptions emerging in the field. Therefore, the validity of a constellation depends on the phenomenological agreement between observers and participants, not on the statistical objectification of the phenomenon.

Lack of replicability

In the positivist paradigm, replicability presupposes reproducing identical results under controlled conditions. In the phenomenological paradigm, the focus shifts from repetition to the recurrence of structures of experience. Thus, Systemic and Family Constellations are replicable not in their specific contents, but in the relational regularities that emerge in different contexts—such as exclusion, hierarchical inversion, or imbalance in exchanges. Several qualitative and metasynthetic studies have confirmed this structural stability between constellations (Borke, 2015; Groessl, 2022).

Lack of empirical validation (RCTs)

The criticism regarding the lack of randomized controlled trials ignores that Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) operate within a phenomenological paradigm, whose validation is not based on the measurement of isolated variables but on the internal coherence of the phenomenon and the consistency of observable effects. Mixed-method studies (qualitative and quasi-experimental) have documented measurable impacts of SFC in organizational and educational contexts, particularly in reducing conflict and increasing cohesion (Thege et al., 2022).

Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) responds to methodological criticisms not through uncritical adherence to positivist empiricism, but by reaffirming its phenomenological basis as a legitimate means of producing knowledge. Its epistemological validity resides in its experiential consistency, structural reproducibility, and the intersubjective observability of emerging phenomena. Thus, SFC contributes to the field of Organizational Development as a pluralistic scientific approach that expands the ways of investigating and intervening in complex human systems.

Responding to Methodological Criticisms: Subjectivity, Replicability, and Scientific Validation

Criticism 1 — "Systemic and Family Constellations are too subjective, as they depend on the facilitator's intuition and the representatives' feelings."

Phenomenological Response:

In phenomenological epistemology, subjectivity does not constitute a methodological error, but rather the starting point of investigation. Knowledge emerges from lived and shared experience—not from theoretical abstraction. Systemic and Family Constellations do not seek Cartesian neutrality, but rather access to systemic reality through the embodied experience of participants. What manifests during the constellation is not "purely subjective" data, but an intersubjective phenomenon, validated by the perceptual convergence of multiple representatives. When people with no prior knowledge about the system report similar sensations—such as tension, blockage, or an urge to move—a pattern of phenomenological coherence is observed that transcends individual perceptions.

Empirical Response:

The data from this survey indicate that 84% of constellation practitioners report coincidences between the representatives' perceptions and the actual information from the system, even without any prior briefing (Table 10). This spontaneous intersubjective convergence constitutes one of the leading indicators of the method's internal validity and highlights the experiential consistency of Systemic and Family Constellations.

Crítica 2 — "Systemic and Family Constellations are not replicable, as each constellation is unique and depends on unpredictable factors."

Phenomenological response:

The notion of replicability, in the positivist paradigm, presupposes the exact repetition of results under controlled conditions. However, human and social phenomena are intrinsically singular and contextual. Thus, literal non-replicability does not represent a flaw, but an ontological characteristic of living, self-organizing systems. Phenomenological rigor resides not in the identical repetition of events, but in the recurrence of experiential structures—patterns of relationships that manifest consistently in different contexts, such as exclusion, hierarchical inversion, or imbalance in exchanges.

Empirical response:

The literature on Organizational Systemic Constellations (OSC) —especially the works of Borek (2011), Birkenkrahe (2018), and Nikolić (2021) — demonstrates that it is possible to establish replicable process protocols, even if specific results vary. These protocols include diagnostic, management, and post-constellation integration steps (Figure 7). The findings of this research corroborate this trend: 72% of constellators report following structured procedures even in open contexts (Table 10).

Criticism 3 — "There is no robust scientific evidence; RCTs and objective metrics are lacking."
Phenomenological response:

The requirement for randomized controlled trials (RCTs) as the sole criterion for validity stems from an epistemological model specific to the natural sciences, which does not fully apply to qualitative and phenomenological methodologies. Phenomenology, ethnography, and action research—widely recognized in the

social sciences—validate knowledge through experiential coherence, triangulation, and intersubjective observability. Systemic and Family Constellations fit into this paradigm, prioritizing a deep understanding of patterns and relationships in complex human systems, rather than the measurement of linear causalities.

Empirical Response:

Although RCTs are limited in this field, this research used methodological triangulation—combining systematic review, empirical survey, and bibliometric analysis—to compose a corpus of converging evidence. The results indicate consistent impacts of Systemic and Family Constellations on strategic axes: improved relationships (89%), conflict resolution (81%), and increased innovation (76%) (Table 10). Furthermore, the bibliometric analysis highlights consolidating a growing theoretical and empirical core (Figures 3, 4, 7, and 8), with increasing conceptual rigor and interdisciplinarity.

Methodological criticisms directed at Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) stem primarily from the application of validation criteria external to the phenomenological paradigm. When analyzed within its epistemological framework, SFC demonstrates internal consistency, structural reproducibility, and intersubjective validity.

Its scientific strength lies in its ability to reveal invisible relational patterns, produce collective insight, and catalyze observable systemic transformations—essential for advancing contemporary Organizational Development.

Beyond Criticism: Systemic and Family Constellations as a Science of Relational Complexity

More than responding to criticism, Systemic and Family Constellations proposes a paradigmatic expansion, establishing itself as a science of relational complexity. This approach integrates contributions from different fields of knowledge:

1. Phenomenology, by emphasizing direct access to lived experience and the intersubjective perception of phenomena;
2. Systems Theory, by understanding the interdependencies and self-regulation mechanisms of human systems;
3. Relational neuroscience, by highlighting the neurobiological bases of belonging, safety, and empathy;
4. Social psychology, which analyzes group dynamics and processes of unconscious influence.

This epistemological convergence is evidenced by the recent evolution of the scientific literature on Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC), in which terms such as epistemology, complexity, and artificial intelligence appear as axes of conceptual intersection. These trends indicate that SFC is consolidating within a post-Cartesian and interdisciplinary paradigm, guided by the integration of experience, system, and context.

Therefore, systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) is not characterized as an intuitive or unscientific practice, but as a phenomenological-systemic methodology supported by a consistent philosophical foundation and converging empirical evidence. Criticisms that classify it as subjective or imprecise often stem from an epistemologically inadequate interpretation—the application of positivist criteria to a phenomenon of a phenomenological nature.

Understood in its very foundations, SFC represents a science of relational experience, focused on investigating the invisible patterns that structure complex human systems. This approach broadens the scope of Organizational Development by including symbolic, affective, and intersubjective dimensions traditionally neglected by rational and linear management models.

Far from being a limitation, its phenomenological basis gives it contemporary relevance. In organizational contexts characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), Systemic and Family Constellations offers a theoretical and methodological framework capable of integrating reason and experience, analysis and perception, structure and relationship—indispensable aspects for understanding and intervening in changing human systems.

Analyzing the phenomenological, systemic, and epistemological foundations of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) allows us to understand that its contribution to Organizational Development transcends the instrumental sphere, reaching a paradigmatic level. SFC articulates complementary dimensions of knowledge—lived experience, systemic structure, cultural dynamics, and relational complexity—in an intervention model that integrates philosophy, science, and organizational practice. The conditions for a comprehensive theoretical synthesis capable of integrating the different frameworks presented are consolidated by highlighting the coherence between its phenomenological basis and its empirical applications. The following section, therefore, proposes an integrative synthesis of the theoretical framework, outlining how the contributions of Lewin, Schein, Bertalanffy, and Hellinger converge to support SFC as a central methodology for organizational transformation in the 21st century.

Integrative Synthesis of the Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the frameworks presented allows us to identify a theoretical-epistemological convergence that positions Systemic and Family Constellations as a methodology for profound organizational transformation, simultaneously grounded in phenomenological, systemic, and relational principles. Although originating from distinct fields, the models of Lewin, Schein, Bertalanffy, and Hellinger share a familiar premise: the organization is a living, dynamic, and interdependent system, whose sustainable change depends on integrating structure, culture, and human experience.

In Kurt Lewin's view, change is conceived as a cyclical, self-regulating process—unfreezing → changing → refreezing—in which the system seeks a new equilibrium after periods of tension. Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) expands this model by intervening at the relational and unconscious level of the system, catalyzing the "unfreezing" of hidden patterns and promoting spontaneous reconfigurations that make the "refreezing" more legitimate and stable. Thus, SFC provides the phenomenological tool for experiencing, in the relational field, the process of transformation that Lewin describes in conceptual terms.

In Edgar Schein's theory, culture is a system of basic assumptions guiding organizational behavior. SFC offers a method for accessing and reconfiguring these deep layers, revealing the symbolic patterns and tacit beliefs that support—or block—organizational learning. If Schein provides a theoretical diagnosis of culture, SFC provides practical intervention to transform it, operating at the levels of underlying artifacts, values, and assumptions through intersubjective experience.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory provides the conceptual foundation that unifies structural and experiential levels. General Systems Theory teaches that biological, social, or organizational systems are open, interdependent, and self-regulating wholes. Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) translates these principles into living practice, allowing us to observe, represent, and reorganize complex human systems based on their patterns of interaction and feedback. By applying the concepts of openness, homeostasis, and equifinality to the relational field, SFC transforms systemic theory into a methodology for concrete intervention.

Finally, Bert Hellinger provides the phenomenological and ethical foundations that lend existential depth to systemic practice. His proposal—observing what manifests without imposing interpretations—reclaims the Husserlian principle of returning to lived experience (*zu den Sachen selbst*). Hellinger shifts the focus from linear causality to relational and symbolic perception, recognizing that transformation occurs when the system is seen, recognized, and reintegrated in its entirety.

The synthesis of these four frameworks allows us to understand Systemic and Family Constellations as a methodology of transdisciplinary integration.

1. From Lewin, it inherits the procedural model of change;
2. From Schein, the understanding of culture as a living system;
3. From Bertalanffy, the conceptual framework of complexity and interdependence;
4. From Hellinger, the phenomenological and experiential dimension of knowledge.

Combining these approaches, Systemic and Family Constellations constitute a hybrid paradigm—

simultaneously descriptive and interventional—that connects theory and practice in a continuous cycle of organizational learning. Its strength lies in integrating different levels of reality (structural, relational, and symbolic), offering Organizational Development professionals a conceptual and methodological framework for dealing with the complexity of contemporary organizations.

In short, Systemic and Family Constellations emerges as a phenomenological-systemic social technology capable of uniting the conceptual rigor of organizational science with the experiential sensitivity of relational practices. This integration opens up a new perspective for Organizational Development in the 21st century: organizational change as a living, relational, and conscious process—where understanding the system is simultaneously transforming it.

The theoretical framework developed in this chapter demonstrated that Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) constitutes an intervention methodology deeply consistent with contemporary paradigms of Organizational Development. By integrating the contributions of Lewin, Schein, Bertalanffy, and Hellinger, it became clear that SFC operates as a bridge between theory and experience, structure and relationship, reason and perception—articulating phenomenological, cultural, and systemic dimensions in a model of comprehensive organizational transformation.

This theoretical-epistemological synthesis repositions SFC not as a peripheral practice, but as a scientific instrument for interpreting and reorganizing complex human systems, grounded in intersubjective experience and supported by converging empirical evidence. Thus, the chapter consolidated the conceptual foundation necessary to understand the place of Systemic and Family Constellations in the field of Organizational Development and to justify its adoption as the methodological axis of this research.

Chapter 3—Methodology—will detail the research approach adopted, describing the research design, data collection and analysis procedures, and validity criteria employed. The objective will be to operationalize, at the empirical level, the phenomenological-systemic principles outlined here to examine how Systemic and Family Constellations manifest, are applied, and produce observable effects in contemporary organizational contexts.

METHODOLOGY: A TRIANGULATED AND ENRICHED APPROACH

The strength of this study lies in its triangulated methodological design, which combines three complementary dimensions of research:

- (1) an integrative review of international scientific literature,
- (2) an empirical survey of Brazilian professionals working with Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC), and
- (3) bibliometric and term co-occurrence analysis.

This methodological triangulation allows for the articulation of theoretical, practical, and quantitative evidence, offering a comprehensive, multifaceted, and contextualized view of the field of SFC within the context of Organizational Development (OD). The goal is to build a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, validating convergences between theory, practice, and contemporary scientific literature.

Integrative Literature Review (PRISMA Protocol)

As detailed in Paula et al. (2025), an integrative literature review was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, recognized for its rigor and transparency in the scientific review process.

The search was conducted in six international databases — PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Cochrane Library, Dimensions, and Embase — covering 2000 to 2025. The final corpus included 28 peer-reviewed articles, 23 on Systemic and Family Constellation (SFC) and 5 on Systemic Organizational Constellation (SOC) (Appendix 1).

Inclusion criteria included publications with:

- application of SFC in organizational, educational, or social contexts;
- description of methodology and empirical results;
- full text available in English, Portuguese, or Spanish;
- peer review.

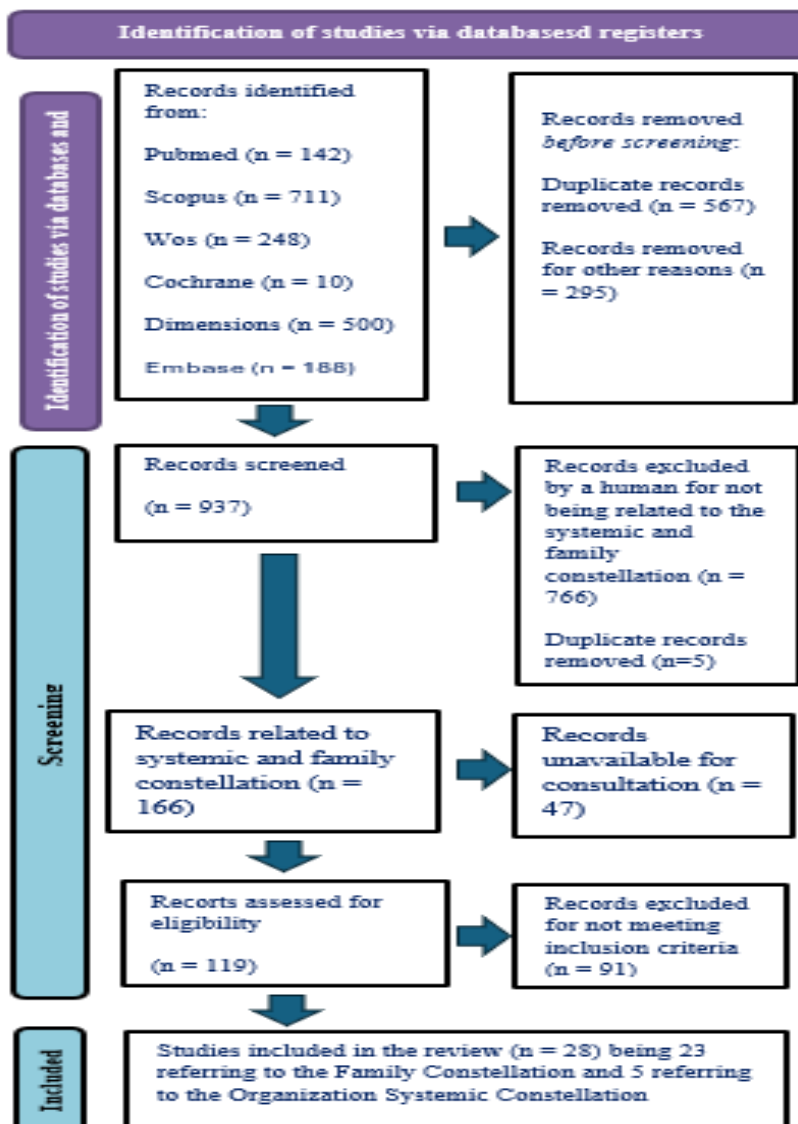
We excluded theoretical studies without empirical application, non-peer-reviewed technical reports, and articles without explicitly mentioning SFC or SOC.

The selection process followed the four steps of the PRISMA protocol: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Qualitative analysis allowed us to map global research trends, evidence of effectiveness, and prevailing theoretical foundations for applying CSF in organizational settings.

The results of this review consolidated the three central dimensions that guide this research:

1. The phenomenological-systemic foundation of SFC;
2. The empirical expansion of the methodology in organizational contexts;
3. The need for integration between practice and scientific evidence.

Figure 1 – PRISMA Flowchart



Reason 1: Duplicate documents

Reason 2: Other reasons

Reason 3: Documents unrelated to Systemic and Family Constellation

Reason 4: Documents unavailable for access

Reason 5: Documents that did not meet the inclusion criteria

Empirical Research with Brazilian Constellators

In addition to the integrative review, a descriptive-exploratory empirical survey was conducted, as presented in Paula et al. (2024). An online survey (Appendix 2) was administered to a sample of 650 systemic constellators working in Brazil, of whom 131 responded fully to the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 20.15%.

The instrument was developed to capture four core dimensions related to the practice of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) in the context of Organizational Development (OD):

1. Practitioner profile: Predominantly female (78%), aged between 40 and 60, with training primarily in therapy, psychology, coaching, and related fields.
2. Application in organizations: Frequency of use, application contexts (conflict resolution, leadership development, cultural management), and perceived effectiveness.
3. Perceived impact: Qualitative and quantitative indicators of improvements in communication, empathy, cooperation, innovation, and productivity.
4. Challenges and recommendations: Main reported barriers (cultural resistance, lack of scientific recognition) and suggestions for improving the practice (advanced training, ethical guidelines, and ongoing supervision).

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis, enabling the identification of patterns, convergent perceptions, and critical dimensions of professional practice in organizational SFC.

Complementary Bibliometric Analyses

To contextualize the scientific developments in the field and expand the research's theoretical validity, the 28 articles included in the integrative review underwent bibliometric analyses using VOSviewer software.

The mappings covered two principal axes:

1. Citation networks between countries, authors, and documents, highlighting scientific production's historical and geographic evolution on SFC and SOC (Figures 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8).
2. Co-occurrence of keywords, identifying emerging thematic cores and the growing interdisciplinarity of the literature, with connections between psychology, sociology, philosophy, management, and computer science (Figures 5 and 9).

This analysis allowed us to identify the most cited authors, the predominant conceptual trends, and the field's progress toward a paradigm of relational and systemic complexity.

Theory-Practice Convergence Analysis

The final stage of the investigation consisted of a systematic comparative analysis of the findings in the scientific literature and the empirical perceptions of Brazilian constellation practitioners (Table 1). The objective was to assess the degree of convergence between theory and practice, verifying whether the trends described in international studies are confirmed in practitioners' daily experiences.

The results demonstrated high convergence in improving interpersonal relationships, team management,

organizational development, and conflict resolution. These results reinforce the evidence that Systemic and Family Constellations catalyze systemic transformation processes, aligning with the phenomenological and systemic premises discussed in the theoretical framework.

Methodological Summary

The adopted methodological approach—combining systematic review, empirical research, and bibliometric analysis—gives the study scientific robustness and practical relevance. This triangulation ensures that the results obtained are simultaneously theoretically grounded and empirically verifiable, expanding the internal and external validity of the research.

More than validating Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) as a tool applicable to the organizational context, this methodological design offers a holistic and integrated view of the field. It positions SFC as a consolidating social technology supported by a consistent theoretical basis, transdisciplinary application, and measurable impact on contemporary human systems.

RESULTS

Convergent Evidence on The Application of Csf as a Catalyst for Organizational Development (Od)

This chapter presents the complementary research findings from bibliometric, empirical, and comparative analyses. Although some of the findings were published in two previously published articles, the results here offer a broader and more comprehensive synthesis of the research, highlighting the evolution, applicability, and effectiveness of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) in the context of Organizational Development (OD).

The data presented reinforce the internal and external consistency of the adopted methodological triangulation, confirming the convergence between scientific literature, professional practice, and quantitative analysis. In addition to empirically validating the phenomenological-systemic assumptions discussed in the theoretical framework, the results contribute to outlining the current state of the art and practice of SFC, with an emphasis on three central dimensions:

1. Theoretical consolidation, evidenced by the expansion and diversification of scientific literature on SFC and SOC;
2. Geographic and institutional expansion, demonstrating the growth of the field in different countries and organizational sectors;
3. Transformative potential in contemporary organizations, revealed by the observable effects of SFC on conflict resolution, strengthening organizational culture, and promoting systemic learning.

These results confirm the role of SFC as a methodology that catalyzes change and organizational development processes, capable of integrating cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions in the same field of intervention.

Results of Bibliometric Analysis

Using VOSviewer software, an in-depth bibliometric analysis was conducted based on the 28 scientific articles included in the integrative review—23 focused on Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) and 5 on Systemic and Organizational Constellations (SOC). The objective was to map the structure and dynamics of the scientific field, identifying the following axes of analysis:

1. Production and collaboration patterns among countries, authors, and institutions;
2. Temporal and geographic evolution of publications;
3. Citation networks and intellectual influence, revealing the central theoretical cores;
4. Co-occurrence of key terms, highlighting conceptual trends and growing interdisciplinarity.

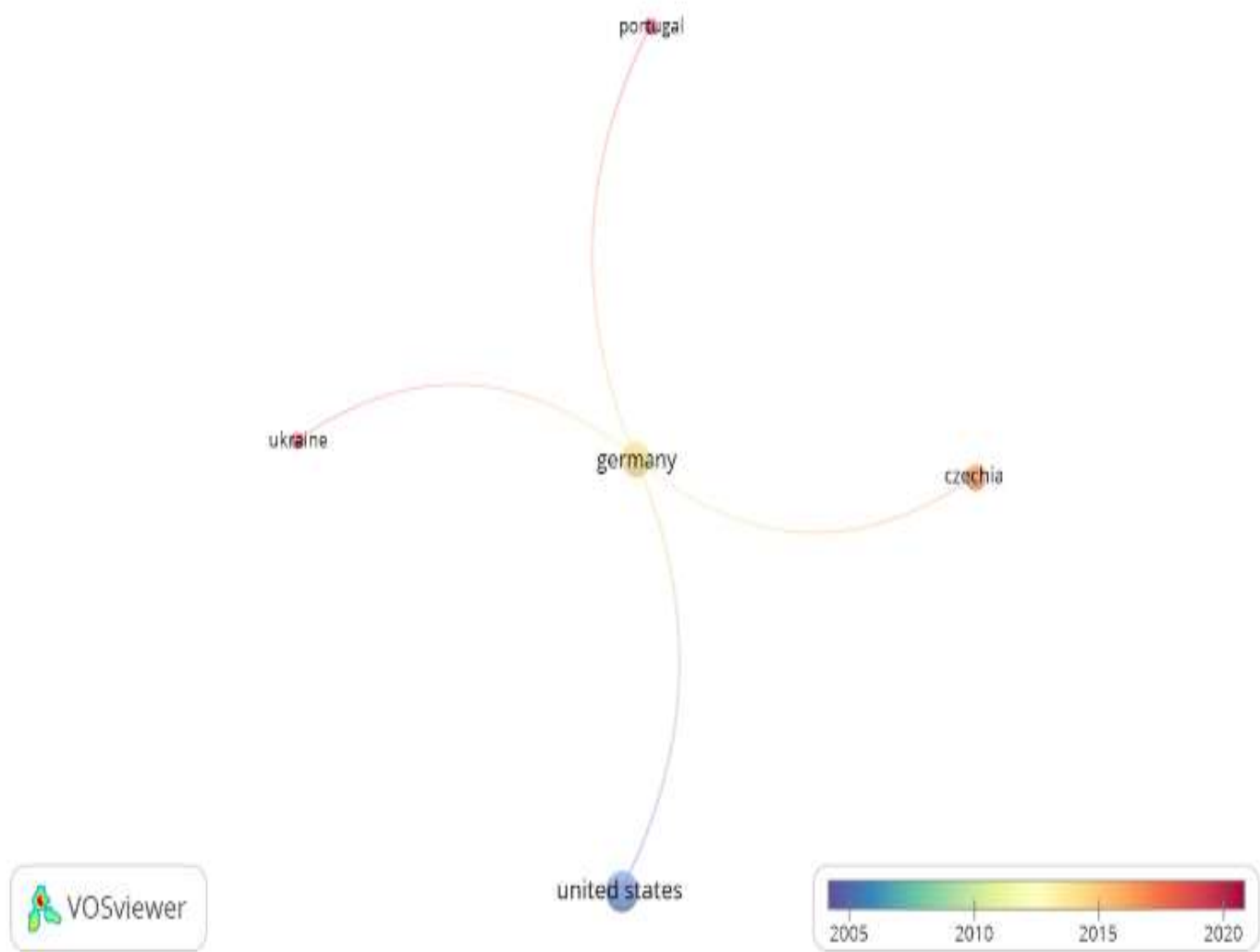
This approach allows us to understand how the field of SFC has been shaping up within the global academic

landscape, highlighting its paradigmatic transition from an originally therapeutic approach to an organizational and systemic methodology applied in management, leadership, and innovation contexts.

The results presented in the following subsections—including citation network maps, keyword co-occurrence analysis, and conceptual evolution—demonstrate that SFC is consolidating itself as a robust, interdisciplinary, and rapidly expanding field of research, with increasing dialogue between the humanities, social sciences, and organizational sciences.

Temporal and Geographic Evolution of Publications

Figure 2 – Citation network map between countries in the CSF literature (2005–2020).



Source: Prepared with VOSviewer.

Figure 2, generated using VOSviewer software, shows that Germany constituted the academic epicenter of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) from 2005 to 2020, consistent with its origins linked to Bert Hellinger. The country has the highest number of citations and co-authorships, consolidating its position as a central reference in developing and disseminating the field. The first international expansions, predominantly observed in blue tones, occurred before 2010, with the United States standing out as the initial hub of reception and conceptual adaptation.

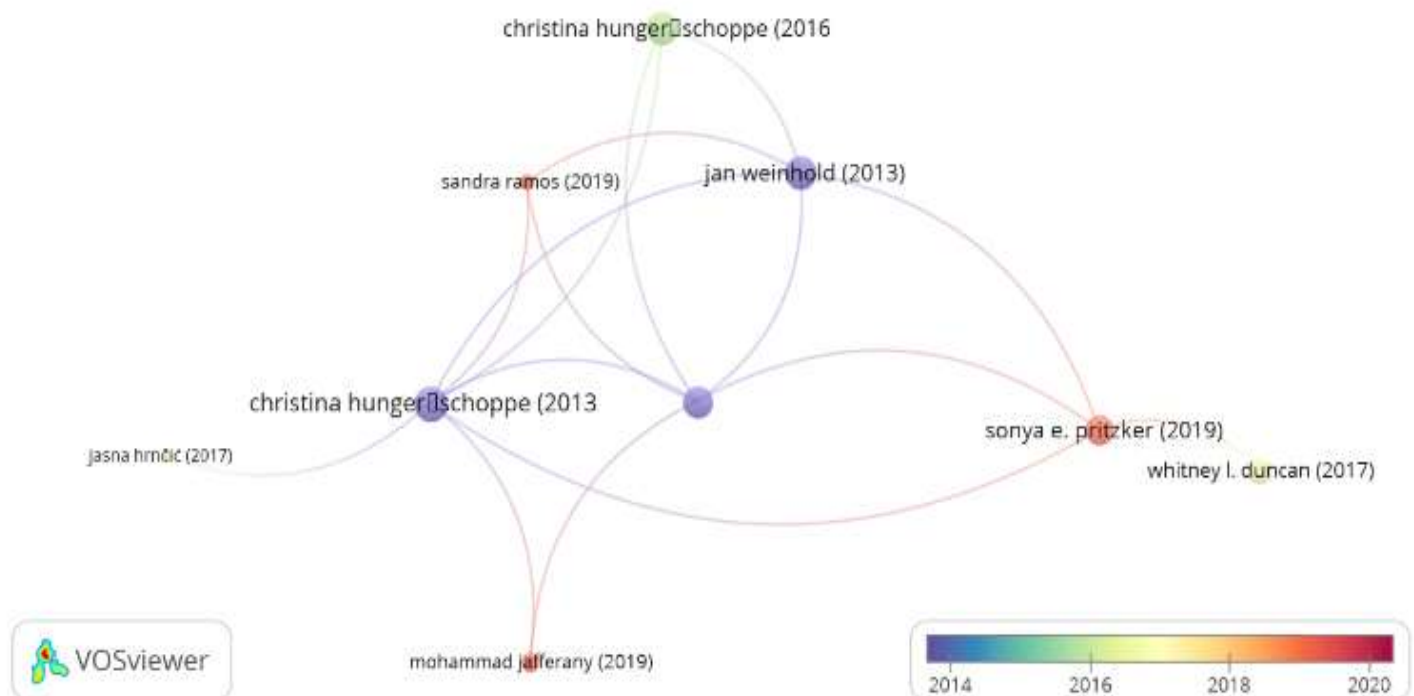
Since 2015, a process of accelerated internationalization has been observed, indicated by warm tones

(yellow/red), with the emergence of new connections involving Central and Southern European countries, such as Portugal, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic. This movement represents geographic and thematic diversification, marked by expanding SFC applications to fields such as education, justice, mental health, and organizational development.

Although Germany remains the predominant theoretical and radiating center, the co-authorship network demonstrates a dynamic and interdisciplinary expansion pattern, characteristic of a global consolidation field. Temporal evolution suggests a transition from localized knowledge to international epistemology, in which SFC asserts itself as a pluralistic, scientific approach to continuous conceptual evolution.

4.1.2 Citation Networks and Intellectual Influence

Figure 3 – Citation network map among documents in the CSF literature (2013–2020).



Source: Prepared with VOSviewer.

Figure 3, created with VOSviewer software, maps the citation relationships between the main scientific articles on Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) published between 2013 and 2020, revealing the intellectual structure of the field. Christina Hunger-Schoppe's seminal work (2013) emerges as the epicenter of the network—the most cited and influential article, acting as a central link between authors such as Jan Weinhold, Sandra Ramos, and Mohammad Jafferany. Her subsequent work (Hunger-Schoppe, 2016) reinforces this protagonism, consolidating, in partnership with Weinhold, a cohesive theoretical core that supports the conceptual foundations of contemporary SFC.

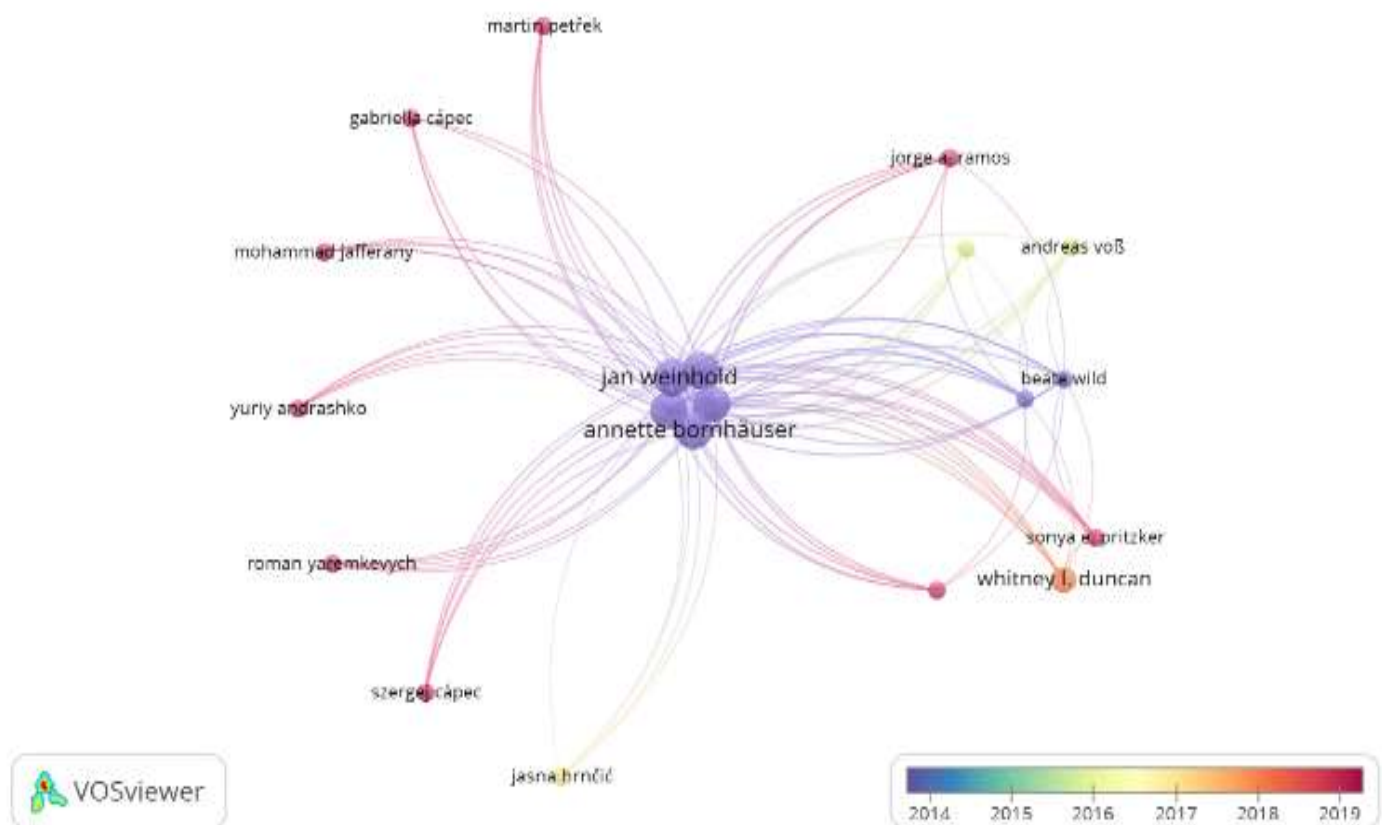
Beyond this founding core, the network reveals a process of dynamic and interdisciplinary expansion, led by authors such as Sonya E. Pritzker (2019) and Whitney L. Duncan (2017) — whose most recent publications (represented in warm tones, especially red) expand the application of SFC to fields such as medical anthropology, cross-cultural psychology, and relational health studies.

The geographic and thematic diversity of researchers—including names like Jasna Hrnić, working in Eastern Europe—confirms scientific production's global, plural, and interdisciplinary nature on SFC. This movement indicates a shift from a theoretical field centered on Hellinger and his direct successors to a decentralized and expanding academic network that articulates multiple methodological and epistemological approaches.

In short, the citation network reveals a living and maturing academic ecosystem: rooted in solid theoretical foundations, but continually renewed by interdisciplinary and cross-cultural contributions. This pattern of connection and influence indicates a field undergoing scientific consolidation, advancing from its therapeutic origins to complete academic legitimacy on the international stage.

Co-authorship Networks and Academic Collaboration Structure

Figure 4 – Citation network map between authors in the CSF literature (2014–2019).



Source: Prepared with VOSviewer.

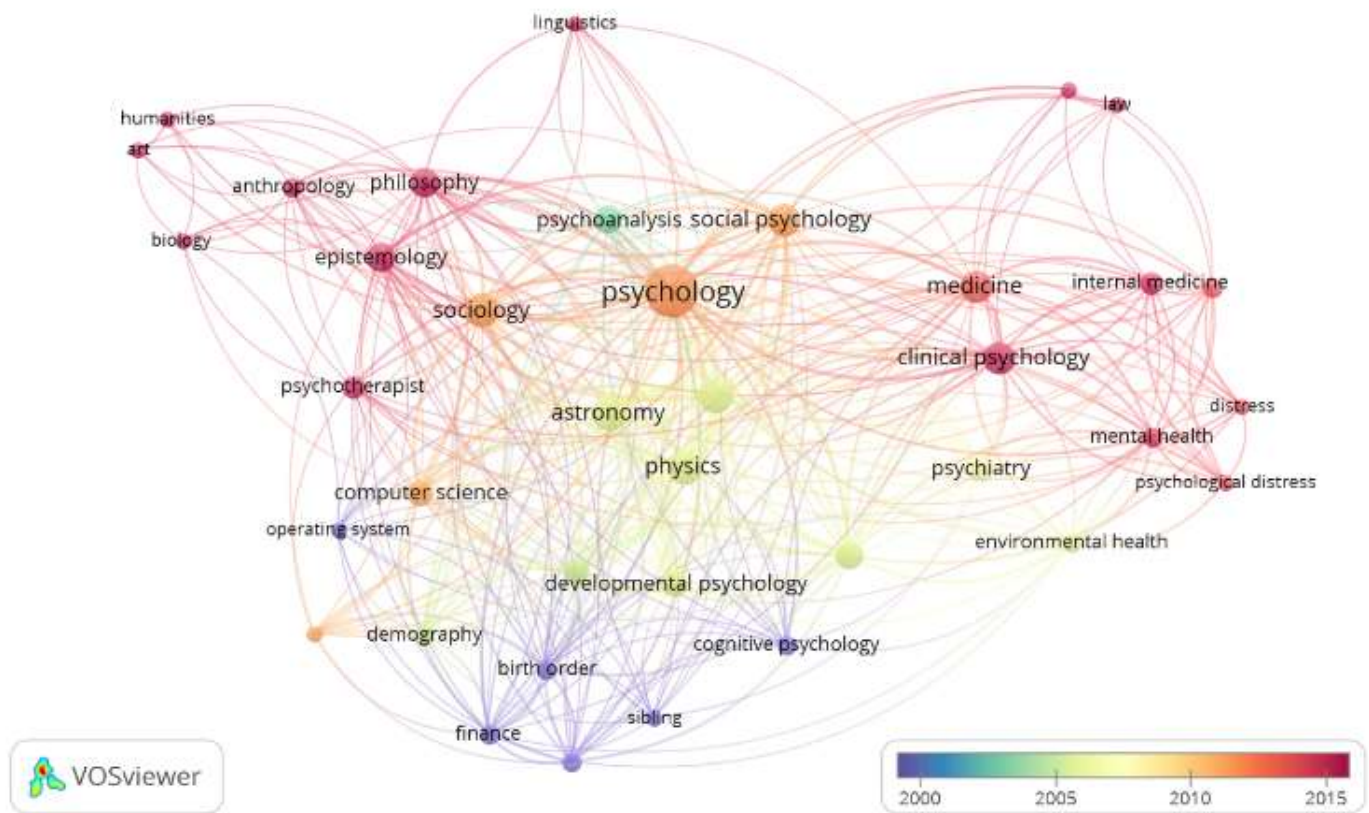
Figure 4, generated using VOSviewer software, shows that Jan Weinhold and Annette Bornhäuser are central authors in the literature on Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) from 2014 to 2019, standing out both for the volume of citations and the density and stability of their co-authorships. The structuring influence of this duo extends to researchers such as Beate Wild, Sonya E. Pritzker, and Whitney L. Duncan, forming a cohesive and productive theoretical core that has consolidated the conceptual and contemporary practical foundations of SFC. This core is a paradigmatic reference for new research, signaling academic maturity and theoretical consistency.

At the same time, the network reveals a dynamic and multicultural expansion, characterized by the emergence of new research centers—represented in the red regions of the map—led by Duncan (2017) and Pritzker (2019). Their contributions broaden the SFC's reach to medical anthropology, cross-cultural psychology, and applied cultural studies, demonstrating growing interdisciplinarity and epistemological plurality.

Peripheral authors such as Mohammad Jafferany, Tomáš Čápec, and Václav Petřek, although less connected to the central core, maintain relevant citation and collaboration links, representing emerging lines of research and methodological variations within the field. International collaborations—involving countries such as Croatia and Ukraine—reinforce the SFC's global, transdisciplinary, and constantly renewing nature, combining theoretical solidity with openness to innovation and cultural diversity.

4.1.4 Co-occurrence of Terms and Conceptual Interdisciplinarity

Figure 5 – Map of co-occurrence of terms in the CSF literature (2000–2015).



Source: Prepared with VOSviewer.

Figure 5, generated using VOSviewer software, presents a mapping of the co-occurrence of terms in the literature on Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) between 2000 and 2015, demonstrating a trajectory of epistemological expansion. The central core of the network, firmly anchored in terms related to psychology—mainly clinical, social, developmental, and cognitive psychology—confirms the therapeutic and psychological roots of the approach.

However, around this gravitational center, concepts emerge from other disciplines, such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and epistemology, signaling a transdisciplinary migration of SFC to the broader scope of the humanities and social sciences. This conceptual expansion reflects a movement of theoretical integration. SFC engages with themes such as culture, identity, belonging, and relational complexity—essential dimensions for understanding social and organizational systems.

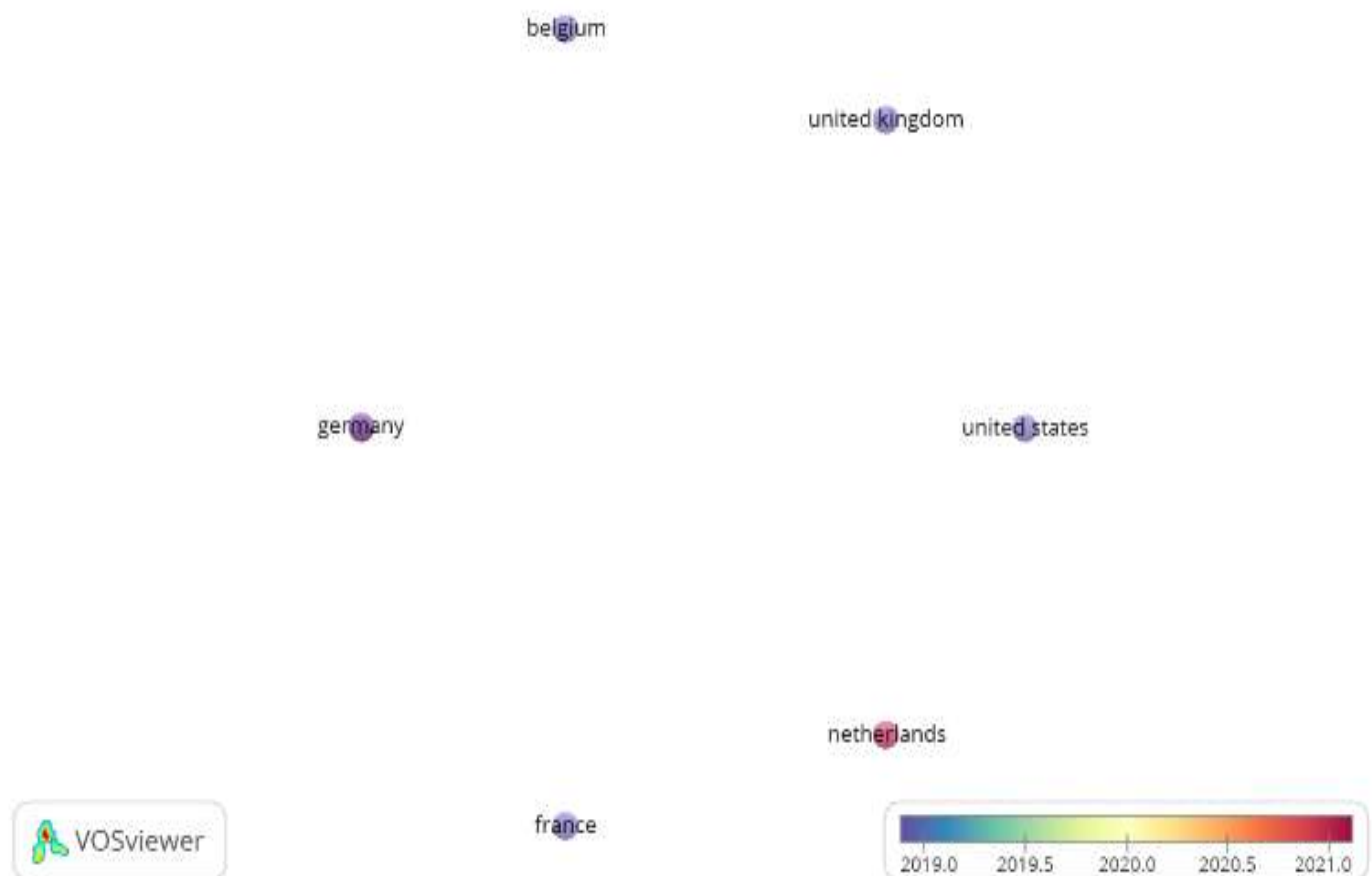
The unexpected connections with traditionally distant fields, such as physics, astronomy, and computer science, are noteworthy, suggesting conceptual connections with theories of complexity, information, and open systems. These links, although peripheral, point to an epistemological expansion of the field, which goes beyond the confines of clinical practice to explore analogies and systemic models applicable to organizational, educational, and technological contexts.

The temporal evolution of the terms—represented by the color gradient ranging from blue (older terms) to red (newer ones)—evidences an accelerated thematic diversification since 2010, with the incorporation of new axes of application, such as law, environmental health, and social studies. These terms, located on the periphery of the network, indicate emerging areas of conceptual experimentation and reflect the SFC's process of continuous adaptation to contemporary demands.

In summary, the mapping demonstrates that SFC maintains its psychological foundation but transcends its clinical origins, consolidating itself as an epistemologically plural, interdisciplinary, and constantly renewing approach. Far from being a closed or dogmatic field, SFC expands its boundaries into social, organizational, and technological domains, reaffirming its growing academic relevance, its adaptive capacity, and its potential for scientific and transdisciplinary innovation.

Geographic Distribution and Paradigmatic Transition of the Systemic Organizational Constellation (SOC)

Figure 6 – Map of countries by average year of publications on CSO (2019–2021).



Source: Prepared with VOSviewer.

Figure 6, generated with VOSviewer software, maps the geographic and temporal distribution of scientific production on Systemic Organizational Constellations (SOC) between 2019 and 2021, revealing a significant shift in the approach's academic epicenter. Although Germany—the birthplace of the methodology systematized by Bert Hellinger—maintains its historical role as a founding reference, its recent publications appear in cool (bluish) tones, indicating that the most impactful contributions occurred in earlier periods.

In contrast, the Netherlands is emerging as a new hub of innovation and scientific production, distinguished by its intensely reddish hue, representing more recent, high-impact publications in the analyzed context. This movement reflects a paradigmatic transition: from the therapeutic and Germanic origins of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) to an applied and organizational version of the methodology, driven by contemporary European academic and institutional contexts—especially the Dutch, which have been integrating the constellation into management, coaching, and organizational development programs.

Therefore, the Netherlands absorbed the conceptual legacy of SFC and began to lead its epistemological and operational update, adapting it to the challenges of complex, networked organizations in the 21st century. This

geographic and theoretical shift reinforces SOC's dynamic, evolving, and internationalized nature. It consolidates itself as a living and expanding approach progressively aligned with the global corporate world's strategic, human, and systemic demands.

Direct Citation Network and Conceptual Evolution of the Organizational Systemic Constellation (OSC)

Figure 7 – Citation Map between Documents in the OSC Literature



Source: Prepared with VOSviewer.

Figure 7 presents the network of direct citations among academic documents in the field of Systemic Organizational Constellations (SOC), highlighting three central works interconnected by mutual citation relationships: Leo Borek (2011), Marcus Birkenkrahe (2018), and Domagoj Nikolić (2021). These works form the most consistent theoretical-epistemological axis of the recent literature, demonstrating continuity and conceptual deepening over a decade.

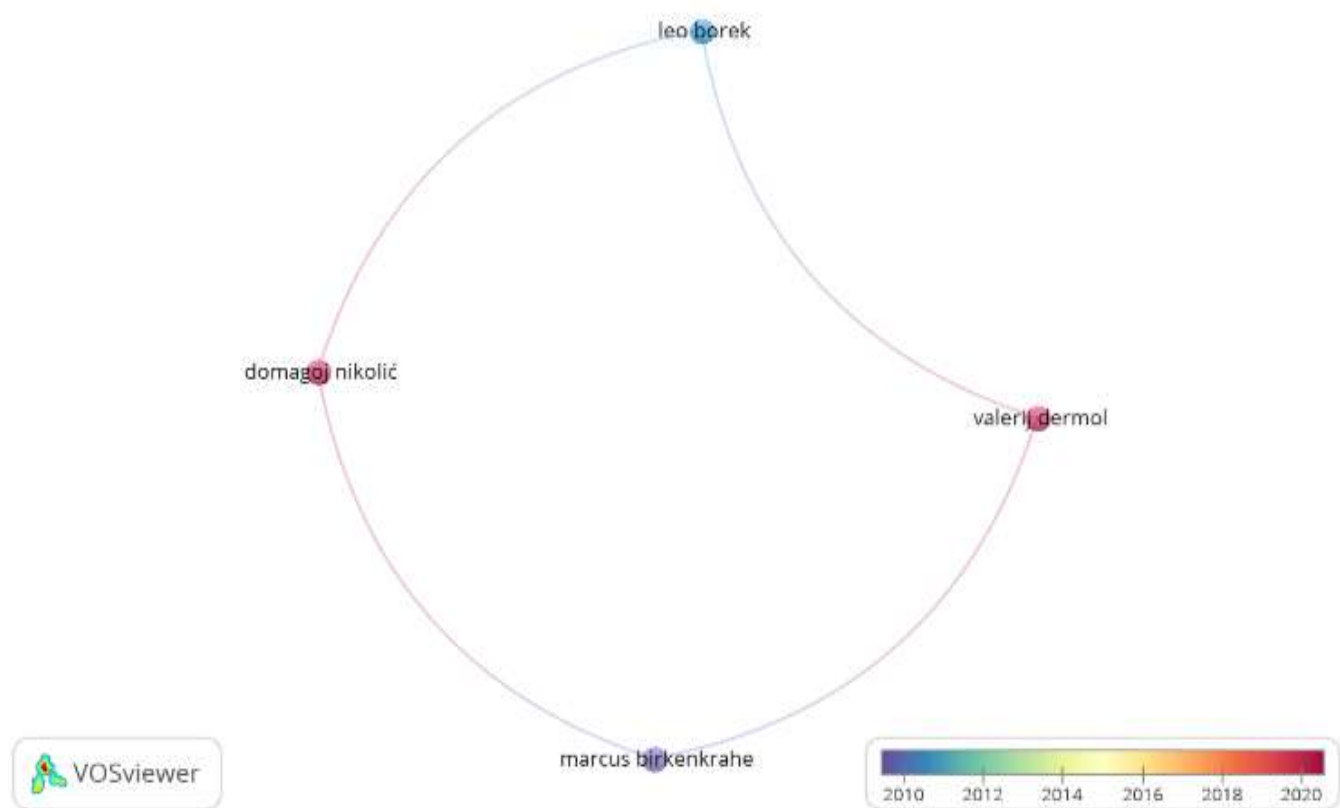
Borek's (2011) study represents the field's inaugural milestone, introducing the first structured concepts for applying constellations in organizational contexts, connecting systemic foundations with diagnostic and intervention practices in companies. Later, Birkenkrahe (2018) expanded this framework by proposing applied methodological models and discussing the integration of SOC with leadership, coaching, and organizational development approaches, strengthening the methodology's practical and scientific character.

Nikolić (2021), the most recent and densely interconnected work, synthesizes and updates the debate. He directly cites Borek and Birkenkrahe's studies and articulates them from a more mature phenomenological-systemic perspective. His contribution consists of systematizing principles, dimensions, and operational guidelines, positioning the SOC as a strategic tool for organizational transformation in the contemporary scenario.

This sequence highlights a cumulative and progressive process of knowledge construction, in which new research builds on previous contributions, consolidating a coherent and continually evolving theoretical core. The pattern observed in the citation network reveals the methodological maturation of SOC and the emergence of new trends and research gaps, especially regarding empirical validation and integration with contemporary theories of Organizational Development (OD) and Relational Complexity.

Co-authorship Network and Conceptual Density of the Organizational Systemic Constellation (OSC)

Figure 8 – Citation Map between Authors in the OSC Literature



Source: Prepared with VOSviewer.

Figure 8, created with VOSviewer software, highlights the formation of a cohesive and interconnected theoretical core in the literature on Systemic Organizational Constellations (SOC), structured around four key authors: Leo Borek, Marcus Birkenkrahe, Valerij Dermol, and Domagoj Nikolić. Borek's seminal work (2011), represented in bluish tones, serves as a founding reference, establishing the conceptual and methodological foundations that guide subsequent research—primarily through direct connections with Nikolić and Dermol, who revisit and expand upon his original formulations.

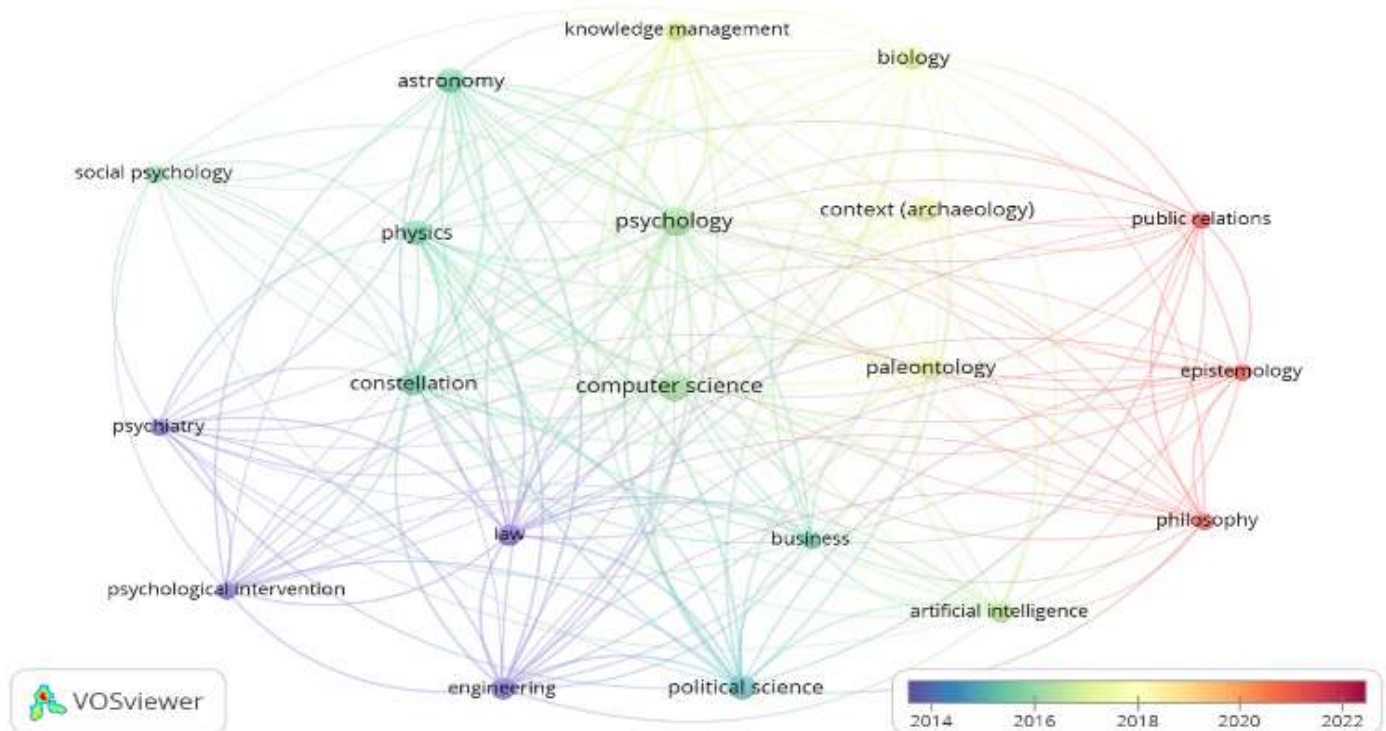
Subsequently, Birkenkrahe (2018) emerges as a link in the theoretical and methodological transition, articulating Borek's inaugural foundations with the most recent contributions in the literature. His work represents a turning point in the field, consolidating a continuous and intentional evolution toward a more applied and scientifically systematized approach.

The network's temporal dynamics, represented by the color transition from blue to red, demonstrate accelerated and collaborative growth since 2018. Nikolić and Dermol have deepened their dialogue and expanded the theoretical scope of SOC to dimensions such as systemic leadership, knowledge management, and organizational learning. This interconnectedness of authors confirms not only the academic maturity of SOC but also its vitality and interdisciplinary nature.

Far from being limited to empirical practices, SOC is consolidating itself as a structured and expanding research domain, supported by consistent international and theoretical collaborations. The co-authorship network presented here reveals a dynamic, transdisciplinary, and strategically relevant field, driven by authors who legitimize Systemic Constellations' scientific and organizational application in the 21st century.

Co-occurrence of Terms and Interdisciplinary Expansion of Systemic and Organizational Constellations (SOC)

Figure 9 – Map of co-occurrence of terms in the SOC literature



Source: Prepared with VOSviewer.

Figure 9, generated with VOSviewer software, presents a mapping of the co-occurrence of terms in the literature on Organizational Systemic Constellation (OSC), revealing a rapidly expanding field of increasing interdisciplinarity. The central term "constellation" establishes organic connections with different domains of knowledge—psychology, philosophy, management, law, political science, computer science, and artificial intelligence—evidencing that OSC has transcended its therapeutic origins to establish itself as a methodology applied to human, organizational, and technological contexts.

This conceptual diversity reflects OSC's integrative and adaptive capacity, which engages with multiple scientific paradigms to respond to the complexity of contemporary organizations, marked by simultaneously behavioral, ethical, systemic, and digital challenges. This interconnection suggests that the constellation, as a phenomenological-systemic tool, offers a common language for analyzing complex social, institutional, or technological systems.

The temporal evolution of the terms—evidenced by the color gradient ranging from blue (older terms) to red (newer ones)—indicates a significant epistemological transition: from predominantly pragmatic and sectoral approaches (such as engineering, law, and psychological intervention) to critical, reflective, and theoretical perspectives centered on epistemology, organizational philosophy, and public relations. This shift signals the academic maturation of SOC, which is no longer treated solely as a descriptive or operational technique and has become a robust theoretical and strategic research field.

In short, SOC emerges as a cutting-edge methodology that integrates human and technological knowledge around a common purpose: to understand and transform complex systems ethically, collaboratively, and sustainably. Its growing presence in areas such as artificial intelligence and digital management reinforces its potential to influence strategic thinking, organizational ethics, and systemic innovation—especially in hybrid and digitalized environments, where the balance between technology and humanity becomes imperative for the future of organizations.

Comparative Analysis between Integrative Literature Review and Empirical Research Results

Table 2 presents a comparative analytical synthesis that integrates the findings of the integrative literature review with empirical data obtained from 131 Brazilian constellation practitioners. This allows a direct correlation between the scientific knowledge produced and professional practice in Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) applied to Organizational Development (OD).

The results were organized into strategic thematic axes—interpersonal relationships, organizational management, conflict resolution, and systemic innovation—which enabled the identification of patterns of convergence between theory and practice. The comparative analysis reveals a high degree of coherence between the principles and effects described in the international literature and the perceptions reported by Brazilian practitioners, validating SFC as a relevant, practical, and operationally applicable approach in organizational contexts.

In addition to the observed convergence, the analysis highlights persistent gaps and opportunities for improvement, particularly in three critical dimensions:

1. Impact measurement is limited due to the scarcity of quantitative indicators that capture cultural and relational transformations.
2. Professional training and qualifications, given the heterogeneity in the curricula and training practices of constellators;
3. Ethics and supervision, due to the need for standardized protocols that ensure methodological integrity and the psychological safety of participants.

These results reinforce SFC's empirical and theoretical robustness and outline concrete paths for scientific and practical advancement in the field. By articulating evidence from complementary sources—peer-reviewed literature and professional field experience—the triangulated analysis consolidates SFC as a consolidating scientific methodology, characterized by theoretical consistency, empirical validity, and potential for interdisciplinary innovation.

Table 2 – Convergence between Literature Findings and Constellators' Perceptions about SFC

Thematic Axis	Findings From Scientific Literature	Constellators' Perceptions (N = 131)	Degree Of Convergence
Personal and Professional Relationships	Improved communication, empathy, clarity of bonds, and recognition of invisible loyalties. The constellations help restore belonging and resolve the dynamics of exclusion (Hunger-Schoppe & Groessl, 2022).	89% reported improved interpersonal relationships; 84% reported greater emotional clarity and empathy.	✓ High
Organizational Management	The CSF helps clarify roles, align systemic values, and make decisions more consistent with organizational identity (Scholtens et al., 2024).	72% support CSF as a valuable tool for leadership and team management.	✓ High
Organizational Development	The systemic approach promotes structural changes,	68% stated that they used CSF in organizational	✓ High

Thematic Axis	Findings From Scientific Literature	Constellators' Perceptions (N = 131)	Degree Of Convergence
	overcoming resistance and integrating new members.	change and succession processes.	
Organizational Innovation	CSF encourages new perspectives by revealing hidden patterns, fostering collective creativity (Weinhold, 2015). Future trends include use with AI and augmented reality.	76% said that CSF increases creativity and innovation in teams.	✓ High
Productivity and Efficiency	Reducing internal conflicts, clarifying roles, and systemic alignment are linked to increased collective performance.	70% achieved productivity gains after applying CSF to teams.	✓ High
Conflict Resolution	Spatial visualization of systems allows us to identify conflicts' emotional and historical roots, promoting reconciliation.	81% stated that CSF was effective in resolving interpersonal and organizational conflicts.	✓ High
Implementation Difficulties	Subjectivity, lack of quantitative data, cultural resistance, and need for different facilitators.	64% cited resistance to adoption in companies, lack of knowledge of the technique, and logistical difficulties.	✓ Very High
Training and Qualification	Need for rigorous training and professional ethics (Bornhäuser, 2018).	78% suggested improvements in training, with more supervision, ethics, and integration with other approaches.	✓ High
Application in Technological Contexts	Trends point to integration with AI, augmented reality, and digital platforms.	42% use digital tools; 35% expressed interest in AI for simulation.	♦ Average
Interdisciplinarity and Expanded Application	CSF is applied in law, health, education, politics, and technology.	58% of constellation practitioners work in different areas (coaching, therapy, HR, education).	✓ High

Source: Prepared by the author based on an integrative literature review and empirical research (2025).

Visual Synthesis of the Dialogue between Theory and Practice

Figure 10, represented by a Venn diagram, visually summarizes the dialogue between the academic knowledge produced on Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) and the practical experiences of 131 Brazilian

constellation practitioners participating in the empirical research. The diagram allows us to visualize the epistemological intersection between theory and practice, highlighting both fields' convergence, divergence, and complementarity points.

At the academic level, the scientific literature emphasizes organizational management, innovation, productivity, and the theoretical mechanisms of systemic change, emphasizing the approach's conceptual framework and phenomenological-systemic foundations. At the professional level, the constellation practitioners' accounts highlight personal and relational transformations, the interdisciplinary application of the methodology, and operational, ethical, and educational challenges faced in daily practice.

At the intersection of theory and practice, there is a robust convergence along four fundamental strategic axes:

- Improving interpersonal and organizational relationships, reinforcing the role of the SFC as a promoter of cohesion and empathy;
- Team management and systemic leadership development, focusing on belonging, clarity of roles, and balance in exchanges;
- Organizational development and overcoming resistance to change, aligning practice with the Lewin and Schein models;
- Shared challenges, such as the inherent subjectivity of the method, institutional resistance, and the need for qualified training and certification.

These overlapping findings empirically validate the theoretical framework of SFC while enriching its practical application, demonstrating that constellation practitioners act as co-authors and co-constructors of knowledge. In practice, these professionals translate, adapt, and expand academic concepts in real, dynamic, and complex contexts, contributing to the continuous evolution of CSF as a scientifically and socially relevant methodology.

Figure 10 – Convergence between Theory and Practice: The Dialogue between Scientific Literature and the Experience of Constellators

Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the integrative review and empirical research (2025).

Thus, Figure 10 demonstrates that Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) is not merely a theoretical tool or an intuitive practice but a hybrid, dynamic, and self-reflective field in which science and experience continually feed into one another. This integration gives SFC epistemological relevance, scientific legitimacy, and transformative potential within contemporary human and organizational development. By articulating theory and practice dialogically, SFC consolidates itself as a living methodology capable of producing applied knowledge, fostering relational innovation, and promoting sustainable systemic transformations in organizations.

DISCUSSION

Fsc As a Catalyst For Organizational Development — The Theoretical Synthesis That Explains Its Practical Efficacy

The findings of this research not only confirm the effectiveness of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) in organizational contexts and elucidate the reasons for its effectiveness. SFC is a catalytic methodology because its phenomenological-systemic basis simultaneously provides the interpretative lens and the intervention tool necessary to access and transform the deep layers of human systems. In these dimensions—emotional, relational, and unconscious—classical Organizational Development (OD) theories traditionally identify bottlenecks in change but lack practical, empirical tools for action.

The consistent convergence between scientific literature and professional practice (Table 1; Figure 10) constitutes empirical and epistemological evidence that Systemic and Family Constellations is not an isolated

technique, but the operational embodiment of an integrated theoretical framework capable of producing structural, cultural, and identity transformations in organizations. This articulation between theory and practice, observed in the methodological triangulation, positions the SFC as a highly complex social technology in which change and understanding emerge simultaneously.

This discussion interprets the results in light of the proposed integrative theoretical synthesis, demonstrating how the interaction between the SFC principles—Belonging, Order, and Balance—and the foundations of Lewin, Schein, and von Bertalanffy explains and enhances each of the observed impacts. Such integration allows us to understand Systemic and Family Constellation not only as an applied methodology, but as a living synthesis between systemic theory, phenomenological epistemology, and organizational practice, making it one of the most coherent and contemporary responses to the challenges of Organizational Development in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world.

Facilitating Profound Cultural Changes: Systemic and Family Constellation as Surgery on Basic Assumptions (Dialogue with Schein)

Both the scientific literature (Pritzker et al., 2019; Nikolić et al., 2022) and professional practice (76% of constellation practitioners, Table 10) converge in recognizing that Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) are uniquely effective in diagnosing and healing "organizational traumas"—emotional, relational, and symbolic patterns that perpetuate invisible cultural dysfunctions. This effectiveness finds a solid theoretical explanation in Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture, according to which sustainable transformation requires accessing the deepest level of culture: the Basic Underlying Assumptions.

While traditional Organizational Development (OD) tools act on superficial levels—artifacts and declared values—SFC intervenes at the unconscious core of culture, where the tacit beliefs that shape collective behaviors and sustain resistance to change reside. From this perspective, Systemic and Family Constellations function as "precision cultural surgery": by making visible the repressed contents of organizational history—such as exclusions, injustices, or ruptures of belonging—it allows the system to recognize, integrate, and release them.

This phenomenological process, in which the invisible manifests itself through the lived experience of representatives, concretely achieves what Schein describes as a necessary condition for authentic cultural change, but for which he did not propose an operational method. The SFC fills this methodological gap, translating Schein's theory into experiential practice. By restoring belonging to what has been excluded—a forgotten founder, a failed project, or a marginalized group—the constellation dissolves unconscious loyalties that sustain dysfunctional assumptions, such as "mistakes are unacceptable" or "problems are not discussed."

The bibliometric analysis (Figure 3), which identifies Christina Hunger-Schoppe's (2013) work as a central reference in the literature, reinforces this understanding: the author is a pioneer in demonstrating that Systemic and Family Constellations constitute a channel for accessing the organizational collective unconscious, allowing for profound and restorative interventions in the cultural patterns that limit development and innovation. Thus, the SFC engages with Schein's model and operationalizes and expands it, transforming a conceptual diagnosis into an experiential methodology for sustainable cultural change.

Integrating Teams and Fostering Belonging: Building Relational Homeostasis (Dialogue with von Bertalanffy)

The effectiveness of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) in promoting cohesion, integration, and belonging in teams—evidenced by 89% of constellation practitioners who report significant improvements in interpersonal relationships (Table 1)—finds its theoretical foundation in General Systems Theory (GST), proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy. According to GST, every living system seeks homeostasis, a dynamic equilibrium that ensures stability and adaptability in the face of internal and external changes. In organizations, symptoms such as chronic conflict, disengagement, or resistance to innovation are not individual failures, but expressions of systemic imbalance.

Systemic and Family Constellations act precisely as a mechanism for organizational self-regulation. By mapping

the system and making visible the relationships, exclusions, and interdependencies that structure a team, they allow for restoring the natural flow of belonging and communication, promoting a spontaneous realignment between the parties. The system regains internal coherence when each member finds and occupies their "rightful place"—formally and symbolically recognized.

In this sense, the SFC principle of Belonging corresponds, in phenomenological terms, to the systemic homeostasis described by Bertalanffy: the reintegration of excluded elements restores global balance and allows the system to reorganize itself more healthily and functionally. This restoration is not limited to the emotional level. However, it directly impacts psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), understood here not as a subjective construct, but as a concrete systemic condition—a product of the balance between inclusion, role clarity, and mutual recognition.

The bibliometric analysis (Figure 4) reinforces this interpretation, highlighting that authors such as Jan Weinhold and Annette Bornhäuser have played a central role in consolidating a systemic theoretical foundation for SFC. Their contributions demonstrate that, by integrating Bertalanffy's principles with phenomenological practice, Systemic and Family Constellations offers an operational model of relational homeostasis capable of strengthening bonds, optimizing collaboration, and sustaining resilient organizational cultures.

Developing Systemic Leadership: Navigating Change with the Phenomenological Compass (Dialogue with Lewin)

Applying Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) in systemic leadership development—reported by 72% of constellation practitioners (Table 1)—goes far beyond behavioral skills training: it involves an ontological transformation of the leader's stance. This transformation is illuminated by Kurt Lewin's (1947) classic model of organizational change, which proposes three interdependent phases—Unfreeze, Shift, and Refreeze—as a framework for understanding the human and systemic transformation process.

Lewin recognized that the most critical stage is Unfreezing, which requires breaking the emotional and unconscious inertia that sustains the status quo. At this point, SFC offers the missing instrument: a phenomenological compass capable of accessing and experientially translating the hidden dynamics that block change. During a constellation, the leader not only rationally understands the forces that keep the system stagnant—they experience them bodily and emotionally. This direct experience with invisible loyalties, disrespected hierarchies, and symbolic exclusions produces the tension necessary to "melt" old psychic and relational structures, catalyzing true unfreezing.

Systemic and Family Constellations offer a safe space for phenomenological experimentation in the Change phase. The leader, guided by the principles of Order (recognition of history, roles, and precedence) and Balance in Exchanges (justice and reciprocity), co-creates a new, healthier, and more coherent configuration with the group. Unlike traditional approaches, this new order is not imposed, but emerges organically from the system itself, becoming legitimate and sustainable.

Finally, Refreezing occurs naturally and seamlessly, anchored in the participants' sense of belonging, clarity, and systemic relief. This emotional and symbolic experience serves as a somatic marker of learning, allowing the new order to consolidate as a culture—not just as a formal process, but as an embodied collective identity.

The evolving literature on Systemic Organizational Constellations (SOC) reinforces this interpretation: Nikolić (2021), expanding on the foundations established by Borek (2011) and Birkenkrahe (2018), describes SOC as a phenomenological driver of Lewin's process, uniting procedural structure and experiential depth. Thus, the integration between Lewin and Hellinger reveals itself as theoretical and operational: Lewin provides the map for change; Systemic and Family Constellations offer the compass that guides the journey.

Resolving Intractable Conflicts: Systemic Intervention beyond Mediation (Dialogue with von Bertalanffy and Schein)

The unique ability of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) to resolve persistent and seemingly intractable

organizational conflicts—reported by 81% of constellation practitioners (Table 1)—derives from its simultaneous action at the systemic and cultural levels. While traditional mediation methods focus on the rational, discursive, and behavioral levels, seeking agreements between conscious parties, SFC operates in the invisible layers of culture and relational structure—precisely where conflicts perpetuate.

From Edgar Schein's perspective, many conflicts do not result from isolated disagreements, but from underlying assumptions that shape collective behavior—tacit beliefs such as "authority is not questioned" or "those who make mistakes lose their place." Simultaneously, according to Ludwig von Bertalanffy, every system seeks homeostasis; when this is disrupted by exclusions, overloads, or imbalances in exchanges, conflict emerges as a symptom of the system's attempt to self-regulate.

In this context, Systemic and Family Constellations act as a systemic healing intervention, going beyond superficial negotiation. Through the phenomenological visualization of the system—where departments, projects, or individuals are represented in the space—it becomes possible to identify exclusions, hierarchical inversions, or unfair exchanges that fuel tension. A conflict between departments, for example, may reflect an invisible loyalty to a forgotten founder or the resentment of a group that has lost its historical role.

By reorganizing the system based on the principles of Belonging, Order, and Balance in Exchanges, SFC restores the flow and legitimacy of relationships, fostering genuine reconciliation. This transformation is not limited to cognitive consensus but extends to the emotional and symbolic level: the parties rationally "agree" and feel that systemic justice has been restored.

This approach vividly synthesizes the contributions of Schein and Bertalanffy. While the former explains why conflicts perpetuate (because they are anchored in invisible cultural assumptions), the latter offers the key to understanding how they manifest in the system as attempts at self-regulation. Systemic and Family Constellations, in turn, provide the phenomenological instrument that transforms this understanding into practical action, enabling reintegration, collective learning, and the restoration of relational homeostasis.

Overcoming the "Innovation Block": Unleashing Collective Intelligence by Restoring Balance (Dialogue with von Bertalanffy and Lewin)

In contemporary organizations, innovation rarely fails due to a lack of ideas; it is blocked by emotionally unsafe and culturally imbalanced environments, where fear, distrust, and resentment restrict the creative flow. Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) acts precisely at this point, restoring Balance in Exchanges—a principle essential to the health of human systems and their capacity for renewal. According to General Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy), only open and balanced systems can sustain learning, adaptation, and continuous innovation processes.

The data from this survey corroborate this perspective: 76% of constellation practitioners (Table 10) report that applying the SFC favors organizational innovation, not by introducing new ideas, but by releasing blocked psychic and relational energy. When employees perceive that their efforts, loyalty, and contributions are fairly recognized—symbolically, emotionally, and materially—the system moves from a state of alert to a state of systemic openness, an essential condition for creativity and constructive risk-taking.

In dialogue with Kurt Lewin, this restoration of balance is equivalent to the unfreezing process: the moment when the system abandons rigid defenses and patterns to allow the emergence of something new. Systemic and Family Constellations catalyze this movement by healing collective traumas, restoring belonging, and dissolving emotional blocks, creating a safe relational field where innovation emerges spontaneously. In this sense, creativity is not just an individual attribute, but an emergent property of balanced and fluxing systems.

The co-occurrence analysis of terms in the literature on Organizational Systemic Constellation (Figure 9) reinforces this view: the links between "constellation," "artificial intelligence," and "epistemology" indicate that Systemic and Family Constellation is positioning itself as a methodology of relational innovation, capable of integrating human, technological, and ethical dimensions in hybrid and digital environments. Thus, by restoring balance and trust, the SFC unleashes collective intelligence—transforming the organizational system into a

living space of co-creation, adaptability, and continuous learning.

Integrative Synthesis of the Discussion: Systemic and Family Constellations as a Systemic Social Technology

The integrative analysis of the results allows us to understand that Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) not only dialogues with the main classical paradigms of Organizational Development (OD) but also integrates them into a practical and phenomenological synthesis, offering the theory of change a living body of application. In essence, SFC emerges as a systemic social technology, capable of translating theoretical concepts into transformative experiences, promoting sustainable cultural, relational, and structural changes.

The dialogue with Edgar Schein reveals that Systemic and Family Constellations act where traditional approaches fail: at the level of Underlying Basic Assumptions, the unconscious core of organizational culture. By making the invisible visible—beliefs, taboos, and silent loyalties—SFC performs the "cultural surgery" that Schein postulated but never operationalized.

With Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Systemic and Family Constellations shares the view that organizations are living, self-regulating, and interdependent systems. Its principle of Belonging is the phenomenological expression of homeostasis: by reintegrating what has been excluded, the system regains its dynamic balance and strengthens its adaptive capacity.

In Kurt Lewin's work, Systemic and Family Constellations find the structural change map—Unfreeze → Change → Refreeze—and provide the phenomenological compass that makes this process experiential and profound. Constellations facilitate unfreezing by dissolving unconscious resistance, guiding change through co-creating new symbolic orders, and anchoring refreezing in a sense of legitimacy and restored belonging.

At the same time, SFC offers an alternative to conventional mediation and conflict resolution practices, operating beyond the rational and behavioral levels. Its systemic intervention reorganizes relationships according to the principles of Order and Balance, dissolving structural tensions and reestablishing relational homeostasis—not through agreement but through symbolic reconciliation.

Finally, in organizational innovation, Systemic and Family Constellations demonstrate that creativity is an emergent property of balanced systems. Restoring Equilibrium in Exchanges removes the emotional and cultural blocks that impede Lewinian Thawing, activating collective intelligence as the system's vital force.

Together, these five axes—culture (Schein), system (Bertalanffy), change (Lewin), conflict, and innovation—form an integrative framework within which SFC consolidates itself as a scientifically anchored and operationally applicable methodology. More than an intervention technique, it represents a new grammar of organizational transformation: a language that unites theoretical rigor with lived experience, the rational with the sensible, the visible with the invisible.

Systemic and Family Constellation, therefore, not only complements classical approaches to Organizational Development — it updates and transcends them, offering contemporary organizations a path to evolve from mechanical systems to living, conscious, and self-regulating systems capable of learning, innovating, and flourishing in a VUCA world.

Framework for Integration: From Theory to Practice — A Systemic Model for Contemporary Organizational Development

Given the robust convergence between theory and practice evidenced in this research and considering the operational gaps identified in the literature and professional practice, we propose a three-phase practical framework for integrating Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) into Organizational Development (OD) initiatives. This model represents the strategic embodiment of the theoretical synthesis presented, offering a clear, ethical, and measurable path toward organizations' systemic and cultural transformation.

► Phase 1: Systemic Diagnosis and Strategic Preparation

(Alignment with Schein and Lewin)

Before the intervention, a comprehensive mapping of the organizational system is performed, identifying:

- The level of culture (Schein) at which the blockage manifests itself—artifacts, stated values, or basic assumptions (e.g., a structural fear of error or exposure);
- The phase of Lewin's model needs to be activated—unfreezing, change, or refreezing.

This diagnosis ensures that the constellation is not a one-off or symbolic event. However, an action strategically inserted into the organizational change cycle ensures coherence between purpose, process, and culture.

► Phase 2: Systemic Intervention — Thawing and Reconfiguration

(Operationalization of Lewin and von Bertalanffy)

In this phase, the SFC catalyzes the change process, promoting Thawing (Lewin) by phenomenologically revealing the unconscious dynamics and hidden bonds that sustain stagnation (Schein).

Through the spatial representation of the system, dysfunctional relationships become visible, and the symbolic reorganization of elements according to the principles of Belonging, Order, and Balance in Exchanges restores relational flow and systemic homeostasis (von Bertalanffy). This reconfiguration is not imposed, but emerges organically from the system itself, becoming authentic, legitimate, and sustainable.

► Phase 3: Embedding, Sustainment, and Impact Assessment

(Lewin Consolidation and Schein Validation)

The Refreezing (Lewin) phase aims to consolidate the new systemic orders into organizational practices, rituals, and narratives. To verify the change in the Basic Assumptions (Schein), hybrid metrics are proposed, capable of capturing both objective indicators (performance, retention, innovation) and subjective transformations (psychological safety, cohesion, and engagement).

This integration of quantitative and phenomenological measurement ensures that the intervention's effects are observable, replicable, and sustainable over time.

Final Summary

This framework demonstrates that Systemic and Family Constellations, far from being merely a complementary tool, constitute a central methodology for contemporary Organizational Development. It is the operational bridge between theoretical diagnosis, concrete intervention, systemic thinking, and transformative action.

By integrating and updating the contributions of Schein, Lewin, and von Bertalanffy, Systemic and Family Constellations consolidates itself as a strategic social technology, essential for building vibrant, adaptive, and resilient organizations—capable of continuous learning and thriving in contexts of increasing complexity.

Final Considerations: Fsc as a Strategic Technology For Human and Systemic Transformation —

SUMMARY OF THE NEW DISCUSSION

This research not only validates Family and Systemic Constellations (SFC) as an effective tool for Organizational Development (OD) — it redefines its role, positioning it as a central, catalytic, and epistemologically grounded methodology for organizational transformation in the 21st century.

The expansion of the theoretical framework — articulating the phenomenological principles of SFC (Belonging, Order, and Balance) with the classic pillars of DO (Lewin, Schein, and von Bertalanffy) — goes beyond a conceptual exercise: it is the key to explaining why and how SFC produces profound, sustainable, and measurable impacts on organizations.

The theoretical discussion demonstrates that Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) does not act on symptoms but on organizational phenomena's systemic and unconscious roots. It is the "phenomenological compass" Lewin needed to navigate the Thawing, the "surgical instrument" Schein sought to operate on the Basic Assumptions of culture, and the "self-regulation tool" Bertalanffy envisioned to restore homeostasis in open systems.

From being an intuitive or mystical practice, SFC emerges as the operational materialization of an integral theoretical framework, uniting systemic thinking and transformative action.

The convergence between global scientific evidence (integrative review of 28 articles) and the practice of 131 Brazilian constellation practitioners — corroborated by bibliometric analyses (VOSviewer) — constitutes a robust empirical validation: Systemic and Family Constellation (SFC) acts at a level of depth where traditional management tools often fail.

The reported impacts—in cultural change, team cohesion, systemic leadership, conflict resolution, and innovation stimulation—directly express this unique ability to access and reconfigure the human system.

Bibliometric analyses reinforce this legitimacy, demonstrating that the field is expanding and consolidating internationally.

Although Germany remains the founding center, academic leadership is shifting to centers such as the Netherlands, which have been systematizing and innovating the application of Systemic and Family Constellations in management contexts.

Authors such as Hunger-Schoppe, Weinhold, Borek, Birkenkrahe, and Nikolić today form a cohesive theoretical core that underpins Systemic and Family Constellations as a rigorous, transdisciplinary, and rapidly evolving approach that engages psychology, sociology, philosophy, administration, and even computer science.

Central Contributions of this Study

1. Innovative Theoretical Synthesis:

This article proposes the first systematic and in-depth theoretical bridge between the phenomenology of Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) and the founding theories of Organizational Development. It demonstrates that SFC is compatible with Lewin, Schein, and Bertalanffy and represents their practical evolution, providing the concrete mechanisms to operationalize their more abstract concepts.

Epistemological Response to Criticism:

By grounding Systemic and Family Constellations (SFC) in its phenomenological foundation, the study offers a structured response to criticisms of subjectivity and lack of replicability.

SFC does not seek Cartesian objectivity, but rather the intersubjective and embodied validation of lived experience—a legitimate and necessary epistemology for dealing with human complexity.

Practical and Strategic Framework:

The proposed model of three integrated phases (Systemic Diagnosis, Phenomenological Intervention, Incorporation, and Evaluation) transforms the Systemic and Family Constellation from an isolated event into a strategic intervention aligned with the objectives and metrics of Organizational Development. It responds to the

gaps the literature and the constellators pointed out.

2. Legitimation as a Core Technology:

Systemic and Family Constellations cease to be a "complementary tool" and establish themselves as a catalytic methodology for Organizational Development.

Its relevance lies in its action on the invisible level of loyalties, exclusions, and symbolic imbalances that govern collective behavior and shape organizations' destiny.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

For Organizational Development professionals, consultants, and leaders, this study offers more than a framework—it offers a new lens for interpreting and intervening in organizations.

It is an invitation to transcend the rational, the technical, and the visible, and to delve into the living complexity of human systems, where real change happens.

Future research directions, anchored in this new theoretical discussion, include:

1. Systemic Causality Studies:

Develop protocols that, respecting the phenomenological nature of Systemic and Family Constellations, can map causal relationships between interventions and organizational outcomes (e.g., how does the restoration of Belonging directly affect innovation?).

2. Empirical Validation of the Proposed Framework:

Test the three-phase model in different organizational contexts and cultures, evaluating its impact on the sustainability of changes and the return on investment (ROI) of Organizational Development initiatives.

3. Integration with Neuroscience and Complexity Science:

Investigate the neurobiological bases of systemic principles (e.g., how the brain responds to the restoration of Order) and expand the dialogue with complexity theories to mathematically model the effects of Systemic and Family Constellations.

4. Applications in Hybrid and Digital Environments:

Explore immersive technologies (VR/AR) and artificial intelligence to simulate systemic dynamics and apply Systemic and Family Constellations in remote or hybrid teams, an emerging field highlighted in the literature (Figure 9).

In a VUCA era, where organizations are continually challenged to reinvent themselves, true resilience is not born of speed or procedural agility, but systemic health.

Systemic and Family Constellations are the technologies that enable this health to be cultivated, restoring the vital flows of belonging, order, and balance that make human systems alive, adaptive, and creative.

This article concludes with a definitive invitation: that the field of Organizational Development recognize and integrate Systemic and Family Constellations not as an alternative, but as a central pillar of its contemporary practice. Only by honoring the invisible forces that connect us—the universal principles that govern life in systems—can organizations truly transform: becoming more human, more just, more intelligent, and, above all, more alive.

Systemic and Family Constellations are, and always have been, the compass for this Journey.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 1 - Records selected for the integrative literature review

Title	References	DOI	Country
Teaching note: birth order theory critique as a learning opportunity	Groessl J., 2022.	10.1080/02615479.2020.1819972	United States
Addressing the Theory of the Family Unconscious in the Context of Esotericism	Gyimesi J., 2023.	10.1163/15700593-02301007	Germany
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FAMILY CONSTELLATION THERAPY IN REDUCING PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS IN A NATURALISTIC SETTING	Thege B.K. et al, 2022.	10.24869/psyd.2022.497	Hungary
Technologies of the Social: Family Constellation Therapy and the Remodeling of Relational Selfhood in China and Mexico	Pritzker S.E. et al, 2019.	10.1007/s11013-019-09632-x	China and Mexico
Healing the Fallout From Transgenerational Trauma: Supporting Clients in Making Peace with Their History	Welford E., 2019.	10.1080/03621537.2019.1650233	United Kingdom
Effects of family constellation seminars on itch in patients with atopic dermatitis and psoriasis: A patient preference controlled trial	Jafferany M. et al, 2019.	10.1111/dth.13100	Ukraine
Process of Change and Effectiveness of Family Constellations: A Mixed	Ramos S. et al, 2019.	10.1177/1066480719868706	Portugal

Methods Single Case Study on Depression			
Extended family constellations workshop efficacy on intuition measure and experience	Geils, C. et al, 2018.	10.1080/14330237.2018.1475527	South Africa
Mid- and Long-Term Effects of Family Constellation Seminars in a General Population Sample: 8- and 12-Month Follow-Up	Hunger C. et al, 2015.	10.1111/famp.12102	Germany
Exploring patterns of relationship between trauma symptomization and family constellation: Implications for working with trauma presentations in systemic practice	Gatfiel E. et al, 2017.	10.1080/01926187.2017.1348267	Australia
Experiencing spiritual aspects outdoors in the winter: a case study from the Czech Republic using the method of systemic constellations	Jirásek I. et al, 2017.	10.1080/01416200.2014.984586	Czech Republic
The Experience in Personal Social Systems Questionnaire (EXIS.pers): Development and Psychometric Properties	Hunger C. et al, 2017.	10.1111/famp.12205	Germany/United Kingdom
Dinámicas Ocultas: Culture and Psy-Sociality in Mexican Family Constellations Therapy	Duncan W.L., 2017.	10.1111/etho.12175	Mexico
Family constellation seminars improve psychological functioning in a general population sample: Results of a randomized controlled trial	Weinhold J. et al, 2013.	10.1037/a0033539	Germany
Improving experience in personal social systems through family constellation seminars: Results of a randomized controlled trial	Hunger C. et al, 2014.	10.1111/famp.12051	Germany
Sister of the Heart and Mind: Healing and Teaching with Family System Constellations	Crawford J., 2013.	10.1080/02703149.2012.720554	Estados Unidos
Earliest Recollections and Birth Order: Two Adlerian Exercises	Parrott L., 1992.	10.1207/s15328023top1901_9	United States
Family Constellation and Schizophrenia	Burton, A. et al, 1963.	10.1080/00223980.1963.9916625	United States
Spirituality in family constellations and its reflections	Rodrigues, AP. et al, 2023.	10.23925/1677-1222.2023vol23i2a9	Brazil

for the mediation of conflicts in the judicial power			
Family Constellation — A Therapy Beyond Words	Stiefel, Ingeborg et al, 2002.	10.1002/j.1467-8438.2002.tb00484.x	Germany/Europe
Sibling Niches and the Diagnosis of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Rasmussen, Paul R. et al, 2019.	10.1353/jip.2019.0010	United States
Family constellation as a treatment for overcoming the consequences of violence on victims	Hrncic, Jasna, 2017.	10.2298/tem1702219h	Serbia
Family constellation and birth order variables related to vocational choice of dentistry.	Rule, W.R. et al, 1979.	10.2466/pr0.1979.45.3.883	United States
A Systemic Perspective on Organizations: International Experience with the Systemic Constellation Method	Scholtens S. et al, 2024.	10.1007/s11213-023-09642-2	International Context
How organizational systemic constellations foster organizational trauma healing	Nikolić D. et al, 2022.	10.3233/hsm-211570	Slovenia
Let's Sculpt It!: Experiencing the Role of Organizational Context in Coaching	Fatien Diochon P. et al, 2021.	10.1177/2379298119833692	International Context
Team structural constellations and intra-team conflict	Borek L., 2011.	10.1108/13527591111182652	Austria
System constellations as a tool supporting organisational learning and change processes	Birkenkrahe, Marcus, 2008.	10.1504/ijlc.2008.023179	Alemanha/Nova Zelândia

Source: Prepared by the author (2025).

APPENDIX 2

Empirical Research Questionnaire (Applied in the second half of 2023 and first half of 2024)

1. Full Name
2. Email
3. Sex
4. Age
5. Profession
6. Address
7. Year of Training as a Family Constellation Practitioner
8. Do you have other training? Which ones?

9. Do you work as a Family Constellation Practitioner?
10. How many constellations have you facilitated?
11. In your experience, in which areas have Family Constellations been most frequently applied?
12. In your experience, what percentage of your clients have obtained positive results after applying Family Constellations?
13. Share a success story after applying Family Constellations.
14. Do you apply Family Constellations and/or its foundations in another professional activity?
15. Has Family Constellations contributed to your personal life? What contributions?
16. Has Family Constellations contributed to your professional life? What contributions?
17. Have you noticed changes in your relationships after Family Constellations? What contributions?
18. In your opinion, what can be improved in Family Constellator Training?
19. In your opinion, what personal characteristics can contribute to becoming a Family Constellator?