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The Behavioral Architecture of Coordination, Agency, and Accountability in Organizations

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Abstract

Organizations increasingly operate through interconnected arrangements of human judgment, digital infrastructures, algorithmic systems, and formal accountability structures. These arrangements do not merely support work execution; they shape how actors coordinate, exercise influence, interpret information, and become responsible for consequences. This Original Behavioral-Systems Theory Article develops a conceptual synthesis explaining how organizational architectures distribute behavioral possibilities across coordination mechanisms, human and technological agency, accountability arrangements, and feedback processes. Drawing on scholarship concerning digital work, algorithmic management, coordination, sociotechnical systems, delegation, and organizational learning, the article proposes Behavioral-Systems Theory as an integrative framework rather than a validated causal model. The proposed theory argues that organizational behavior emerges from interactions among coordination architecture, agency configuration, accountability configuration, and feedback–adaptation architecture. It further introduces behavioral-system drift as a proposed construct describing divergence between formally designed arrangements and repeatedly enacted practices. The article develops theoretical propositions concerning coordination fit, agency–accountability alignment, calibrated delegation, feedback retention, accountability enactment, and system drift. The contribution is bounded by the absence of direct empirical validation of the integrated framework and by the need for multilevel, longitudinal, and comparative research designs. The proposed synthesis is intended to organize future inquiry into how organizations structure action, responsibility, and adaptation under conditions of increasing technological mediation.

Keywords: Behavioral architecture, Coordination mechanisms, Organizational systems, Human–technology agency, Accountability design, Behavioral-systems theory

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Introduction

Organizations have traditionally been examined through separate analytical lenses: structures of coordination, systems of control, patterns of decision making, and mechanisms of accountability. However, contemporary organizations increasingly combine human expertise, digital infrastructures, algorithmic recommendations, monitoring systems, and adaptive technologies within interconnected arrangements. These developments require attention not only to what technologies do, but also to how organizational architectures shape visibility, influence, responsibility, and adaptation. Digital infrastructures alter which behaviors become observable, how actions are interpreted, and how organizational members experience being connected to others through technological systems [1].

A central limitation of fragmented approaches is that coordination, agency, and accountability are often studied as distinct phenomena. Work-design research demonstrates that automation and algorithms reshape demands, resources, autonomy, and human influence rather than simply replacing tasks [2]. Research on algorithmic management further shows that digital systems can perform functions traditionally associated with managerial direction, evaluation, and control [3]. Algorithmic systems may therefore alter not only operational processes but also the distribution of discretion and responsibility within organizations [4]. At the same time, increased observation and transparency do not automatically produce accurate understanding or improved performance because visibility depends on interpretation, context, and relationships between observers and observed actors [5].

This article develops an Original Behavioral-Systems Theory Article that addresses these fragmented perspectives by proposing organizations as behavioral architectures. The article does not argue that organizations function as engineered machines or that technological adoption produces uniform outcomes. Instead, it proposes that organizational behavior emerges from the interaction of arrangements that determine how actors coordinate, what forms of agency are available, how accountability is allocated, and how feedback modifies future action.

The proposed contribution is Behavioral-Systems Theory, an original synthesis that connects established findings about coordination, technology, agency, and accountability into a broader conceptual architecture. The theory introduces four interacting domains: coordination architecture, agency configuration, accountability configuration, and feedback–adaptation architecture. It also proposes behavioral-system drift as a temporal process through which enacted practices may diverge from formally designed arrangements. These concepts require empirical examination and are not presented as validated causal relationships.

Systems and behavioral foundations

The behavioral architecture perspective begins from the premise that technologies and organizational systems are embedded within social arrangements. Learning algorithms, for example, are not simply computational tools; they can influence expertise boundaries, professional judgment, coordination practices, and perceptions of control [6]. Therefore, understanding organizational behavior requires examining how technical capabilities become incorporated into routines, roles, and decision structures.

Human responses to technological systems provide another important foundation. Research on trust in artificial intelligence demonstrates that trust depends on multiple characteristics of systems and interactions, including perceived capability, reliability, and contextual factors [7]. However, trust should not be treated as equivalent to system validity or organizational legitimacy. A behavioral architecture perspective therefore separates psychological responses toward technology from broader questions of authority, accountability, and organizational design.

The emergence of machines as collaborative participants further challenges traditional distinctions between human and technological actors. Research on machines as teammates suggests that artificial systems create new questions regarding collaboration, role allocation, and institutional design [8]. Similarly, sociotechnical approaches emphasize that organizations can establish boundaries around complex and difficult-to-explain AI systems through social and technical arrangements [9].

These foundations support a systems-oriented interpretation of organizational behavior. The relevant unit of analysis is not only the individual employee, technological artifact, or formal structure, but the relationship among them. Nevertheless, the evidence does not establish that every organization using advanced technologies will experience the same consequences. Context, expertise, task uncertainty, organizational norms, and existing authority structures remain important boundaries.

Coordination mechanisms

Coordination represents one of the primary mechanisms through which behavioral architectures organize collective action. In organizations characterized by interdependent work, coordination requires more than information exchange; it involves decisions about who participates, how activities are connected, how knowledge moves, and how exceptions are managed. Coordination mechanisms can differ according to actor selection and content-delivery structures, producing different forms of organized interaction [10].

Recent scholarship suggests that coordination effectiveness depends partly on social interpretation and perceived legitimacy. Studies of temporary teams indicate that perceptions of fairness and enforceability can influence willingness to engage in coordinating behaviors beyond formal role requirements [11]. Such findings suggest that coordination mechanisms are not purely structural devices; they are also behavioral arrangements shaped by expectations, trust, and perceived justice.

Coordination must also be examined across levels of analysis. Research on multiteam systems demonstrates that interaction patterns beneficial within one team may not operate identically across the wider system of interconnected teams [12]. This distinction is essential for a behavioral architecture perspective because local optimization may not correspond with system-level adaptation.

Furthermore, coordination arrangements can involve trade-offs. Evidence from dynamic teams indicates that coordination interventions may influence learning and productivity through complex relationships rather than producing a single universally positive effect [13]. Thus, the proposed theory treats coordination architecture as a conditional arrangement that must balance structure, flexibility, learning, and adaptation.

Table 1 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for the behavioral architecture of coordination, agency, and accountability in organizations.

Table 1. Definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for The Behavioral Architecture of Coordination, Agency, and Accountability in Organizations.

Construct or component	Definition	Problem addressed	Distinction from adjacent concepts	Proposed role	Uncertainty	Boundary statement
Behavioral visibility	Conditions through which actions become observable	Hidden work and interpretation gaps	Visibility is not performance	Proposed architectural input	Meaning depends on context	Observation does not guarantee understanding
Work-design architecture	Arrangement of demands, resources, and influence	Technology-driven job changes	Work design differs from automation level	Established foundation	Effects vary by design	No universal technology outcome
Algorithmic control	Technology-mediated direction, evaluation, or allocation	Changing control relationships	Control differs from technological capability	Established mechanism	Enactment varies	Not all algorithmic systems create identical control
Sociotechnical boundary	Social and technical limits around system use	Managing complexity and uncertainty	Boundary setting differs from technical restriction	Established foundation	Context dependent	Does not guarantee safety
Coordination mechanism	Arrangement for organizing interdependent activity	Collective action problems	Coordination differs from communication volume	Established mechanism	Effectiveness is conditional	No universally superior mechanism
Agency configuration	Proposed distribution of sensing, interpreting, deciding, acting, and revising capacities	Human–technology role ambiguity	Agency differs from autonomy	Proposed construct	Requires empirical validation	Capability does not equal authority
Accountability configuration	Proposed allocation of answerability, control, and consequence-bearing	Responsibility gaps	Accountability differs from monitoring	Proposed construct	Measurement remains open	Formal assignment may differ from practice
Feedback architecture	Proposed arrangement for learning, validation, and redesign	Adaptation failures	Feedback differs from information availability	Proposed construct	Temporal dynamics uncertain	Learning cannot be assumed

Redistribution of human and technological agency

Technological change increasingly affects not only how work is performed but also how agency is distributed. A behavioral architecture perspective therefore treats agency as a configuration of capacities rather than a fixed possession of either humans or technologies. Research on conjoined human–technology agency identifies multiple ways in which technological systems and human actors can become connected within organizational routines [14].

This perspective challenges a simple substitution model in which technology merely replaces human activity. The relationship between automation and augmentation is more complex because organizations may simultaneously automate some activities while expanding human involvement in others [15]. The relevant question is therefore not whether technology removes human agency, but how organizational systems redistribute opportunities to interpret, decide, intervene, and revise.

Algorithmic management provides a concrete illustration of this redistribution. Research on online labor platforms shows that algorithmic systems can influence matching, control, compensation, and perceptions of belonging while workers continue to develop responses and adaptation strategies [16]. These findings suggest that agency is neither eliminated nor preserved unchanged; it is reorganized through new relationships among workers, managers, and technological systems.

The proposed Behavioral-Systems Theory extends this insight by distinguishing technological capability from legitimate authority. A system may generate recommendations, classifications, or predictions without necessarily possessing organizational authority to determine action. Likewise, humans may retain formal responsibility without possessing sufficient informational access or control capacity to meaningfully influence outcomes.

This distinction creates the foundation for later analysis of accountability design. If agency is redistributed, accountability arrangements must also be examined in relation to who can actually shape decisions and consequences. However, the proposed relationship between agency distribution and accountability alignment remains a theoretical proposition requiring empirical testing.

Accountability design

Accountability becomes analytically unstable when formal responsibility is separated from the capacity to influence relevant actions. Felt accountability is an individual perception of being answerable for decisions or outcomes and should therefore be distinguished from formal role assignment, monitoring, or legal responsibility [17]. This distinction matters because organizations may designate a responsible actor while simultaneously constraining that actor's information, discretion, or ability to intervene. Accountability consequently cannot be inferred merely from the existence of a named decision owner.

Accountability environments also operate at more than one level. Comparative theorizing suggests that objectively different work systems can produce similar experiences of felt accountability, while formally similar arrangements may be experienced differently by workers [18]. Accordingly, accountability design must distinguish the formal distribution of responsibility from the phenomenological experience of being answerable. Neither perspective alone adequately describes how organizational responsibility is enacted.

A further boundary concerns control capacity. Recent theory proposes that accountability is more defensible when it is aligned with meaningful capacity to affect the relevant process or outcome [19]. The proposed Behavioral-Systems Theory extends this idea by defining accountability configuration as the allocation of answerability, evaluability, explanation obligations, control capacity, and consequence-bearing across human and technological actors. This configuration is proposed rather than validated.

Accountability design also requires attention to evaluability: actors can be answerable only for decisions that can be meaningfully reconstructed and assessed. This does not require perfect transparency, but it does require enough traceability to distinguish recommendation, authorization, execution, override, and subsequent interpretation. The proposed configuration therefore separates explanation obligations from consequence-bearing. An employee may have to explain a decision without having controlled the technical process that shaped it, while an organization may retain governance responsibility even when operational action is delegated. This separation prevents nominal responsibility from being mistaken for substantive control.

Table 2 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in the behavioral architecture of coordination, agency, and accountability in organizations.

Table 2. Proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in The Behavioral Architecture of Coordination, Agency, and Accountability in Organizations.

Mechanism or relationship	Antecedent	Mediator or process	Moderator	Expected consequence	Rival explanation	Validation requirement
Coordination structure → coordinated action	Task interdependence	Actor selection and content delivery	Relational quality	More coherent interdependent action	Skilled informal coordination	Comparative field studies
Fair-enforceability → extra-role coordination	Unequal-work risk	Perceived justice	Team context	Greater willingness to coordinate	Leadership or workload norms	Cross-context replication
Multilevel coordination balance	Team-system interdependence	Within- and between-team interaction	Level of analysis	Different local and system outcomes	Network composition	Multilevel longitudinal tests
Coordination intervention → learning/productivity trade-off	Dynamic teamwork	Structured coordination	Task setting	Gains in one objective may constrain another	Clinical-task specificity	Replication beyond healthcare
Conjoined agency → altered action distribution	Human–technology coupling	Action selection and execution	Technology role	Redistribution of discretion	Ordinary role redesign	Direct measurement of agency
Automation ↔ augmentation	AI-enabled work	Recursive task reallocation	Task and temporal conditions	Changing human–technology contributions	Strategic restructuring	Longitudinal task-level tests
Agency–accountability alignment	Distributed action capacity	Control and answerability matching	Role and system autonomy	Proposed reduction in responsibility ambiguity	Culture or legal governance	Multilevel causal and process tests

Feedback, adaptation, and system drift

Behavioral architectures are not static. Organizational actions produce information about outcomes, exceptions, errors, and environmental change, but the availability of information does not itself constitute learning. When machine learning substitutes for human decision processes, the variety of actions and interpretations available to organizational learning may change, potentially narrowing opportunities to compare alternative courses of action [20]. This implication is conditional rather than inevitable because the effect depends on task structure, retained human participation, and the organization's learning arrangements.

Feedback also requires validation. Longitudinal ethnographic evidence shows that groups working with analytical technologies can develop different practices for validating outputs, with important consequences for whether technologies become effectively black boxed in use [21]. Thus, feedback architecture must include who interprets output, what knowledge is considered legitimate, how anomalies are escalated, and whether disagreement can alter subsequent decisions.

Organizational adaptation can further change the architecture being enacted. Longitudinal evidence on algorithmic introduction demonstrates that symbolic responses and local practices may redirect organizational change in ways not captured by the formal design [22]. Building on these component processes, this article proposes behavioral-system drift: progressive divergence between formally specified coordination, agency, accountability, and feedback arrangements and those repeatedly enacted in practice.

A feedback architecture must consequently be examined across levels and over time. Individual recognition of an anomaly matters only if the system provides a route for that observation to enter collective interpretation, escalation, and redesign. Conversely, an organization may collect extensive performance data while remaining behaviorally insensitive to contextual knowledge that does not fit existing categories. The proposed architecture therefore treats feedback capacity as an organizational pathway rather than as the sheer volume of information produced by a digital system.

Drift is not assumed to be harmful. Local adaptation may correct design limitations, accommodate contextual knowledge, or preserve workability. The theoretical concern arises when recurrent adaptations alter who can act, who is visible, or who is answerable without corresponding organizational recognition and redesign. Behavioral-system drift therefore requires longitudinal empirical testing that distinguishes productive adaptation from cumulative misalignment.

Proposed behavioral-systems theory

A relational perspective on emerging technology argues that organizational consequences arise through changing relations and interdependencies rather than through isolated artifact properties [23]. Behavioral-Systems Theory adopts this systems premise and proposes that organizational behavior is partly produced by the alignment or misalignment among four interacting architectural domains.

Human–AI collaboration similarly requires analysis at the level of the work system rather than the human–technology dyad alone [24]. The first proposed domain, coordination architecture, specifies how interdependent actors, information, handoffs, timing, and exception pathways are organized. The second, agency configuration, specifies how capacities to sense, interpret, recommend, select, execute, override, contest, and revise are distributed. The third, accountability configuration, specifies answerability, evaluability, explanation obligations, control capacity, and consequence-bearing. The fourth, feedback–adaptation architecture, specifies how outcomes, anomalies, contextual knowledge, dissent, and validation enter learning and redesign.

These domains must also account for technology properties. AI-related autonomy, learning, and inscrutability are interdependent organizational challenges rather than separable technical features [25]. Power, ideology, design histories, and institutional arrangements likewise condition how intelligent technologies are enacted [26]. Behavioral architecture therefore describes neither a purely technical system nor a formal organization chart; it concerns the behavioral possibilities created through their interaction.

Figure 1 presents the original conceptual synthesis for behavioral-systems theory, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

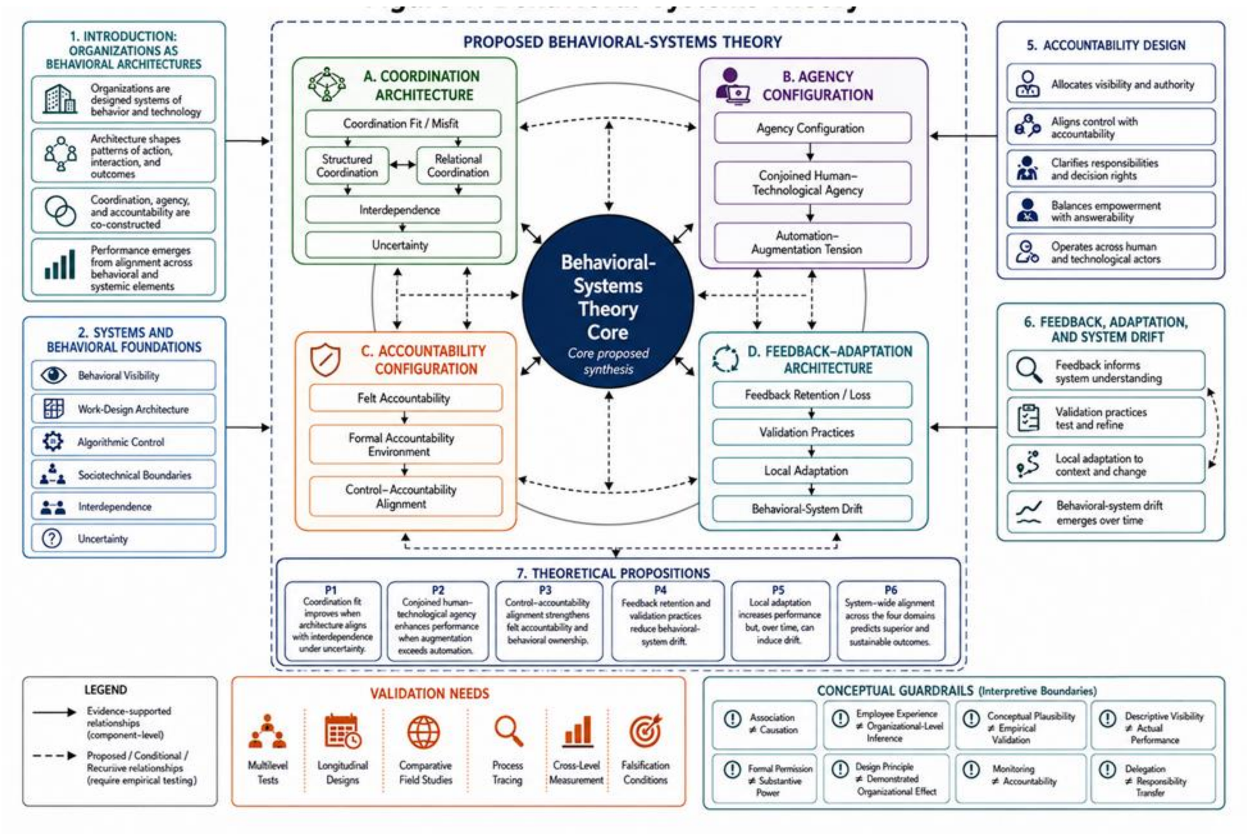

Figure 1. Behavioral-Systems Theory

Alignment in the proposed theory means intelligibility among domains, not perfect correspondence. Coordination may require centralized rules while agency remains locally distributed; accountability may deliberately remain organizational even when execution is technologically delegated. Misalignment becomes theoretically important when these differences make it difficult to determine who can intervene, what information is available, or how consequences are reviewed. The theory therefore predicts conditional tensions rather than a single ideal architecture.

The proposed theory likewise does not assume that tighter coupling is always preferable. Excessive alignment could produce rigidity, suppress local discretion, or constrain experimentation, whereas selective decoupling may preserve adaptive capacity. Its empirical value will therefore depend on demonstrating whether combinations of coordination, agency, accountability, and feedback explain organizational behavior beyond established constructs such as work design, control, trust, or team coordination when those constructs are considered separately.

Theoretical propositions

The propositions translate the proposed architecture into relationships that can be challenged empirically. Reliance on algorithmic advice varies with expertise and comparison conditions, indicating that delegation cannot be assumed from technical availability alone [27]. Experimental evidence also indicates that limited opportunities to modify algorithmic output can increase willingness to use imperfect algorithms [28]. These findings support a conditional interpretation of intervention rights rather than the stronger claim that more human control necessarily improves organizational performance.

Productive delegation further depends on metaknowledge about the relative capabilities of humans and artificial systems [29]. The propositions are intentionally stated at levels that can be operationalized without assuming their truth. Testing should distinguish the antecedent architectural condition from the proposed mechanism and from any subsequent organizational consequence. For example, a study of agency–accountability alignment should measure actual intervention capacity separately from perceived responsibility and separately again from downstream behavior.

P1 — Coordination-fit proposition. As interdependence and contextual uncertainty increase, highly structured coordination is proposed to require complementary relational or exception-handling mechanisms.

P2 — Agency–accountability alignment proposition. As action-selection capacity shifts toward technological actors, accountability is proposed to become more fragile when control, override, information access, and contestation remain with actors unable to influence the relevant action.

P3 — Calibrated-delegation proposition. Human–technology delegation is proposed to remain better calibrated when decision participants possess sufficient metaknowledge and meaningful but bounded intervention capacity.

P4 — Feedback-retention proposition. Greater substitution of human judgment is proposed to constrain organizational learning when alternative interpretations, exceptions, contextual feedback, and opportunities to test competing actions are removed.

P5 — Accountability-enactment proposition. Formal accountability allocation is proposed to predict enacted accountability less reliably as visibility, decision authority, control capacity, and consequence-bearing become distributed across different actors.

P6 — Behavioral-system-drift proposition. Repeated adaptations and workarounds are proposed to increase divergence between formal and enacted behavioral architectures when they are not surfaced through feedback and redesign.

Table 3 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for testable propositions, evaluation criteria, and practical responsibilities.

Table 3. Testable propositions, evaluation criteria, and practical responsibilities.

Proposition or criterion	Unit and context	Observable indicator	Evidence required	Falsification condition	Organizational responsibility	Misuse risk	Readiness boundary
P1 Coordination fit	Team or system	Exception frequency and coordination pattern	Comparative multilevel evidence	Rigid structure remains effective across uncertainty	Specify handoffs and escalation	Treating structure as universally optimal	Context-specific testing required
P2 Agency–accountability alignment	Role or system	Match between action capacity and answerability	Longitudinal process evidence	Misalignment shows no systematic accountability effect	Map control and responsibility	Assigning blame without control	Not validated as governance rule
P3 Calibrated delegation	Human–AI task	Delegation relative to capability	Controlled and field evidence	Metaknowledge does not improve calibration	Maintain capability awareness	Human-control symbolism	Task transferability unproven
P4 Feedback retention	Organization	Diversity of interpretations and tested alternatives	Longitudinal learning measures	Reduced variety does not alter learning	Preserve challenge and validation channels	Equating automation with learning loss	Mechanism remains conditional
P5 Accountability enactment	Individual through system	Gap between formal and experienced responsibility	Multilevel measurement	Formal assignment reliably predicts enactment	Examine authority and consequence-bearing	Monitoring as accountability proxy	Requires cross-level validation
P6 Behavioral-system drift	Organization over time	Divergence between formal and enacted arrangements	Repeated observations and process tracing	Local adaptation remains aligned without redesign	Surface and review recurrent workarounds	Labeling all adaptation as failure	Proposed construct, not readiness metric

Organizational design implications

Organizational design implications follow from the proposed theory only as hypotheses and responsibility domains. Electronic performance monitoring research shows that consequences depend on what is monitored, how monitoring occurs, why information is collected, and the surrounding work context [30]. Accordingly, behavioral visibility should not be increased under the assumption that more observation automatically improves accountability. Monitoring can generate traceability while simultaneously producing ambiguity about interpretation, authority, or legitimate use.

Agentic information systems also require explicit delegation design. A delegation perspective emphasizes appraisal, distribution, and coordination when tasks or authority move to or from agentic technological artifacts [31]. Organizations therefore need to distinguish task execution from decision authority and from responsibility for consequences. Formal retention of a “human in the loop” is insufficient as evidence of substantive influence when that human lacks relevant information, time, expertise, or intervention capacity.

Evaluation requires comparable caution. Field research on machine-learning tools shows that formal ground-truth labels and model-performance measures can omit situated expert know-how that matters in practice [32]. Design responsibility therefore includes validation of how system outputs interact with contextual knowledge rather than reliance on technical metrics alone.

These implications also require explicit allocation of organizational responsibility for system review. Designers, managers, users, and governance actors may possess different forms of knowledge and control, so responsibility should not be inferred from technical proximity alone. A defensible design process would make these differences observable and contestable while preserving uncertainty about which configuration will perform best in a particular setting.

Figure 2 presents the original conceptual synthesis for mechanisms, boundary conditions, and organizational consequences, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

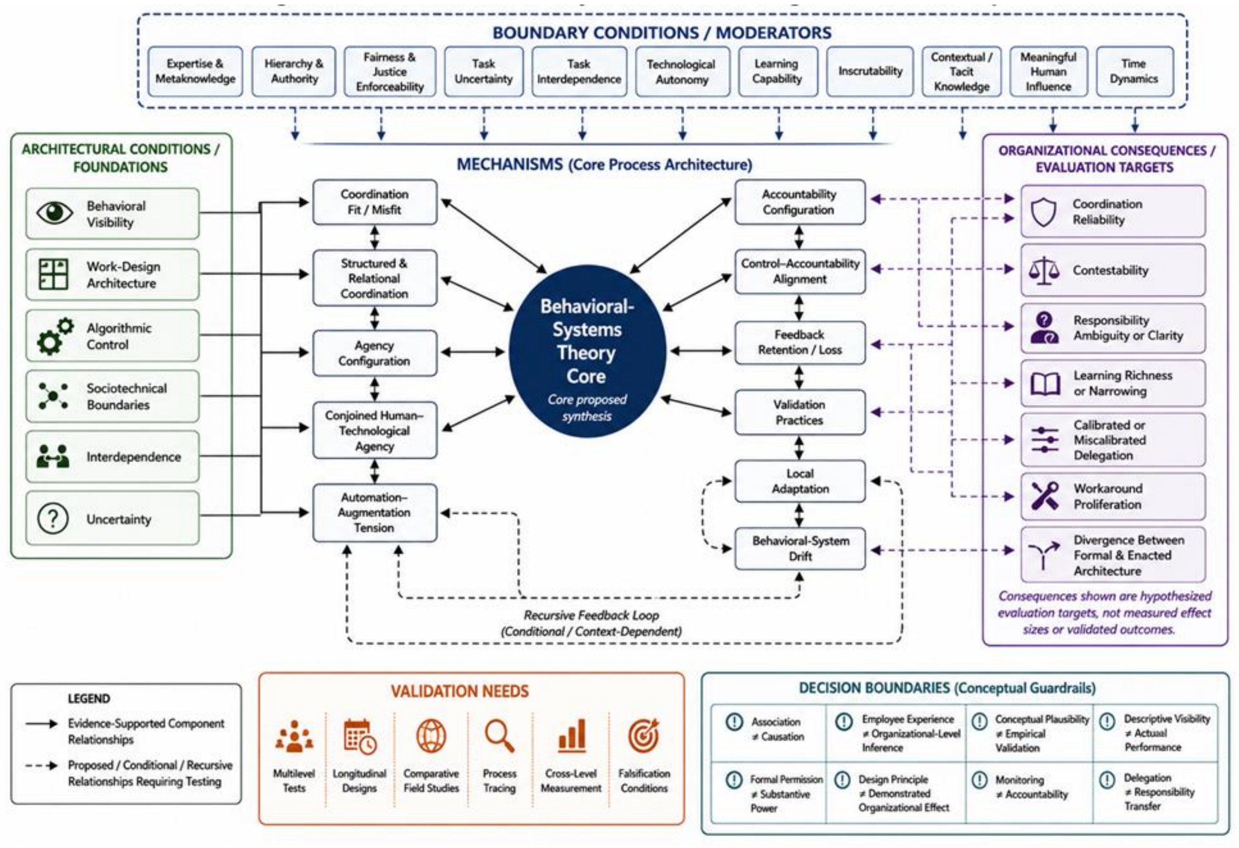

Figure 2. Mechanisms, Boundary Conditions, and Organizational Consequences

The design implication is consequently diagnostic rather than prescriptive. Organizations can examine whether coordination requirements, actual action capacities, accountability claims, and feedback pathways remain mutually intelligible. Such examination cannot establish that a particular configuration is optimal; its value is to expose assumptions that should be tested before organizational consequences are attributed to people or technologies.

The principal boundary is that coherence among architectural domains is a research proposition rather than an established performance condition. Future studies must determine when alignment supports coordination and learning, when deliberate decoupling preserves beneficial discretion, and when local adaptation develops into consequential drift. The theory therefore favors explicit diagnosis of decision rights, escalation pathways, validation responsibilities, and consequence-bearing over claims that any standardized governance arrangement is universally appropriate.

Conclusion

This article proposes Behavioral-Systems Theory as an original account of how organizations structure coordination, agency, accountability, and adaptation under increasingly technology-mediated conditions. Its central contribution is to shift analysis from isolated technologies, roles, or control mechanisms toward the behavioral architecture connecting them. Coordination architecture organizes interdependence; agency configuration distributes capacities to interpret and act; accountability configuration allocates answerability and control; and feedback–adaptation architecture determines how experience can alter subsequent practice.

The proposed construct of behavioral-system drift adds a temporal dimension by distinguishing formal architecture from arrangements repeatedly enacted through local adaptation. The principal boundary is that coherence among architectural domains remains a research proposition rather than an established performance condition. The theory requires multilevel, longitudinal, comparative, and intervention-based testing to determine when alignment supports coordination or learning, when deliberate decoupling preserves useful discretion, and when adaptation produces consequential drift. It does not establish universal relationships, optimal designs, causal effects, or implementation readiness. Its contribution lies in specifying testable relationships and decision boundaries for examining how organizational systems distribute action and responsibility.

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