

Interorganizational relations from the perspective of strategy as social practice

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Abstract

This theoretical essay aims to reflect on interorganizational relations (IORs) from the idea of strategy as social practice (SSP), contributing to the debate on considering rationalities other than the instrumental in studies on interorganizational strategies. Therefore, critical theoretical assumptions of organizational strategy and organizational studies are reviewed. It is assumed that the IORs occur in everyday life through interactions between different agents, considering the analysis of micro-processes as inherent and complementary to analysis at the meso and macro level. The justification is that the instrumental rationality inherent to the dominant social science in the West, traditionally used to explain IORs, is not enough to contemplate the debate in the field of interorganizational strategies to consider the social context and the decolonial thought, which requires a look beyond economic utilitarianism.

Keywords: Interorganizational relations. Strategy as social practice. Rationalities. Microprocesses.

As relações interorganizacionais na perspectiva da estratégia como prática social

Resumo

Este ensaio teórico tem como objetivo refletir sobre as relações interorganizacionais (RIOs) com base na estratégia como prática social (EPS), contribuindo para o debate acerca da necessidade de considerar racionalidades alternativas à instrumental também nos estudos a respeito de estratégias interorganizacionais. Para tanto, resgatam-se pressupostos teóricos críticos da estratégia e dos estudos organizacionais. Parte-se da ideia de que as RIOs se dão no cotidiano, por meio das interações entre os diferentes agentes, considerando a análise dos microprocessos inerentes e complementares às análises em nível meso e macro. A justificativa é que a racionalidade instrumental inerente à ciência social dominante no Ocidente, tradicionalmente usada para explicar as RIOs, não é suficiente para contemplar o debate no campo das estratégias interorganizacionais, de forma a considerar o contexto social e o pensamento decolonial, que requerem um olhar para além do utilitarismo econômico.

Palavras-chave: Relações interorganizacionais. Estratégia como prática social. Racionalidades. Microprocessos.

Relaciones interorganizacionales desde la perspectiva de la estrategia como práctica social

Resumen

Este ensayo teórico tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre las relaciones interorganizacionales (RIOs) desde la estrategia como práctica social (EPS), contribuyendo al debate sobre la necesidad de considerar racionalidades alternativas a la instrumental también en los estudios sobre estrategias interorganizacionales. Para ello, se recuperan los supuestos teóricos críticos de la estrategia y los estudios organizacionales. Se parte de la idea de que las RIOs ocurren en la vida cotidiana, mediante interacciones entre diferentes agentes, considerando el análisis de microprocesos como inherente y complementario a los análisis a nivel meso y macro. La justificación es que la racionalidad instrumental inherente a la ciencia social dominante en Occidente, utilizada tradicionalmente para explicar las RIOs, no es suficiente para contemplar el debate en el campo de las estrategias interorganizacionales a los efectos de considerar el contexto social y el pensamiento descolonial, que requieren una mirada más allá del utilitarismo económico.

Palabras clave: Relaciones interorganizacionales. Estrategia como práctica social. Racionalidades. Microprocesos.

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INTRODUCTION

Interorganizational relationships (IORs) have increasingly become a recurrent practice (Agostini, Nosella, & Teshome, 2019; Lazzarini, 2007; Liou & Daly, 2021; Palumbo & Manna, 2018; Verschoore, Bulgacov, Segatto, & Bataglia, 2014). The pressure of the competitive environment has led to the establishment of different types of IORs, with diversified shapes and characteristics (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2008; Schrujijer, 2020; Todeva, 2006; Verschoore, Klanovicz, Durayski, & Vieira, 2016), which are established in a network of signifiers (Camillis, Bignetti, & Petrini, 2020). As stated by Cropper, Ebers, and Huxham (2008), as well as Verschoore et al. (2016), the different gains for agents involved in collaborative IORs, even become an important alternative. However, most Brazilian studies on interorganizational cooperation relations follow the instrumental rationality and economic vision, as pointed out by Kirschbaum and Guarido (2011); Szapiro, Lemos, Lastres, Cassiolato, and Vargas (2017); Verschoore et al. (2014); and Vizeu, Guarido, and Gomes (2014).

As pointed out by research carried out by Vizeu et al. (2014) and Souza, Lima, Coelho, Oliveira, and Milito (2015), it is necessary to look at other dimensions of IORs beyond capital, that is, the social, environmental and sustainability dimensions, which also create value. As stated by Souza et al. (2015), IORs strengthen the companies involved and favor the generation of jobs and income. In this logic, following the international trend, some Brazilian studies point to the need to think beyond the instrumental view and systemic nature. At the international level, Cropper, Ebers, Huxham, and Ring (2014) stress that studies should be enriched by different theoretical conceptions, such as sociological, psychological, political, evolutionary and critical, but also beyond organizational boundaries (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, Chalkias, & Cacciatori, 2019). At the national level, Balestrin, Verschoore, and Perucia (2014); Tescari and Brito (2018); Tureta and Lima (2011); and Vizeu et al. (2014) can be cited as examples of scholars who took advantage and point out other perspectives for analysis, considering social, environmental and sustainable dimensions.

Given the complexity that involves the IORs and the need to debate these relationships through other lenses, this theoretical essay aims to reflect on the IORs under a strategy of social practice (EPS). The purpose is to contribute to the debate about the relevance of considering alternative to instrumental rationalities also in studies on IORs and for a more complete and integrated understanding of relationships. Therefore, critical theoretical assumptions of strategy and organizational studies are retrieved, assuming the relational view of strategy. This view has gained increasing strength, precisely because it brings gains to those involved and opposes the dominant perspective (Balestrin et al., 2014; Dyer, Singh, & Hesterly, 2018; Adami, Verschoore, & Antunes, 2019), which goes along the lines of relational sociology (Dépelteau, 2018a), seeking to elucidate complexities and expose interorganizational paradoxes, as Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, and Lê (2018) did, in addition to Jarzabkowski et al. (2019), due to its focus on social relations.

Thus, equated to studies of strategy as practice (Dias, Rosseto, & Marinho, 2017; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowiaki & Bednarek, 2018; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Tureta & Lima, 2011; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006), it starts from the idea that IORs occur in everyday life through interactions between different agents who maintain similar and antagonistic/paradoxical interests, not being directly accessible, observable and measurable, which requires lenses with the potential to reveal the dynamics that takes place beyond organizational boundaries, as pointed out by Jarzabkowski et al. (2019). In this way, it is understood that the micro level of analysis gains strength, focusing on microactivities and interactions between different agents in interorganizational relationships. The reality arising from the practices, relationships and effects of different agents is also assumed, which, as described by Alcadipani and Tureta (2009), in addition to Camillis et al. (2020), associate and disassociate in different arrangements.

In this logic, the questions, critical thinking, dialectics and thinking under the relational view of the strategy, at the level and in the sense proposed by Adami et al. (2019); Balestrin et al. (2014); Cropper et al. (2014); Dias et al. (2017); Dyer et al. (2018); Hohnson, Melin, and Whittington (2003); Jarzabkowski, Kavas, and Krull (2021); Johnson et al. (2007); Tescari and Brito (2018); Tureta and Lima (2011); Vizeu et al. (2014); and Whittington (2006), are necessary. Although the national and international debate has already advanced in different perspectives for the analysis of IORs, functionalist currents continue to predominate in empirical studies, being worked on in Porter's (1998) utilitarian view of competitive advantage, with the aim of merely achieving the economical ends. Thus, they do not contemplate the debate on how practices shape and are shaped by their social context (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019), assuming that the local has something global, and vice versa (Vizeu & Gonçalves, 2010), nor do they consider the social as something that is being added to IORs during translation (Bin, 2018; Whittington, 2006).

Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, and Vaara (2015) sought to explain the reconceptualization of the ontological change arising from the breaking of the traditional notion that strategy is something owned by organizations, but that people do in their daily work routines in organizations. The authors emphasize that EPS confirms its importance and legitimacy in the field since 2000, claiming that more recent works focus on the micro-level analysis of organizational strategies. Thus, they emphasize that EPS is an emerging research approach.

From the relational view of the EPS perspective, emerging themes that permeate the IORs need epistemological deepening, such as relationships of trust, collective actions, interdependence, conflicts, social capital, issues of power and interorganizational learning (IOL). The analysis of these microprocesses, without denying the meso and macro levels, under the theoretical lens of EPS, can elucidate and facilitate the macro look at the relationships established in different spaces and beyond the borders of IORs. It can also represent an approximation of the field with the decolonial bias of knowledge in management (Alcadipani & Faria, 2014) and an alternative to “co-construct the pluriversal amalgamation of knowledge” (Cooke & Faria, 2013), hitherto made impossible by the Eurocentric modernity (Alcadipani & Faria, 2014; Cooke & Faria, 2013; Islam, 2012; Lander, 2005; Quijano, 2005; Rodrigues & Hemais, 2020; Sauerbronn & Faria, 2009) and the centrality of the American thought (Souza & Oliveira, 2019) .

The results of these reflections are presented below, starting the debate about IORs and the predominance of the functionalist perspective and instrumental rationality in studies on the subject. Next, EPS is worked as an alternative possibility to the mainstream, emphasizing microprocesses in IORs, since the relational logic in the analysis of these microprocesses in such relationships is an alternative possibility to instrumental rationality and the utilitarian view of the phenomenon. Then, EPS is presented as an alternative to studies in IORs, with the unfolding of a research agenda. Finally, the final considerations are outlined.

STUDIES OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS BEYOND THE FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE AND INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY

The predominance of instrumental rationality and the functionalist prism in organizational and interorganizational studies cannot be denied. Regarding this point of view, Mozzato and Grzybovski (2013, p. 506) write:

Functionalism presents theoretical assumptions related to regulation and objectivity, guided by the methods of natural sciences to understand individuals and presenting itself as rationalist and pragmatic, with a focus on structure, based on a regulated social order. In this sense, it seeks to provide practical and objective solutions based on determinism.

The determinism of the functionalist perspective is printed as much in studies developed in the area of strategy and organizational studies as in IORs. Likewise, the examinations developed in the Brazilian context follow the functionalist perspective, indicating acceptance of Eurocentric and North American assumptions, marginalizing Latin American studies and accepting the “imperialism of the North Atlantic” (Cooke & Faria, 2013). Thus, spaces are not opened for the formulation of new questions, as proposed by Alcadipani and Faria (2014), and it does not contribute to producing management knowledge based on Brazilian identity (Islam, 2012) nor are they considered as ontologies of social practices (Santos & Silveira, 2015), in a clear demonstration towards overcoming the individualism present in ontologies constructed by Weberian thought or structuralism, for example. Thus, the teachings of Schatzki (2005) can corroborate the analysis and explanation of social practices, as they offer a lens capable of revealing relationships/phenomena/elements imbricated in the social context and its dynamics.

In the same logic, Nicolini, Gherardi, and Yanow (2003) state that practice requires an act that is imbricated in knowledge from which learning results. Therefore, for Golsorkhi et al. (2015), the EPS approach has the potential to break through traditional paradigm boundaries and reveal who they are, what they do and how strategists do, as well as identifying the consequences of their actions. Thus, studies in IORs only under the functionalist conception and instrumental rationality tend to follow the coloniality of knowledge, which is the subject of debate between researchers located both in the center – Eurocentric and North American thought – and in the peripheries of the geopolitical production of the knowledge in the social sciences, characterized by knowledge produced outside hegemonic centers (Abdalla & Faria, 2017; Assis, 2014;

Ballestrin, 2013; Carvalho, Ipiranga, & Faria, 2017; Dussel, 2000, 2005; Lander, 2005; Leal & Moraes, 2018; Quijano, 2005). Through a centralizing, patriarchal and initial racist Eurocentric epistemological legacy (Dussel, 2005; Lander, 2005), to which North American thought is added a few centuries later (Souza & Oliveira, 2019), the colonizing and irrational praxis of modernity on the “non-moderns” is justified (Dussel, 2005) and limits studies in the social sciences, which is why they are understood based on their own realities and developed by specific and interconnected geo-history (Abdalla & Faria, 2015; Walsh, 2007). Thus, the challenges are imposed in the context of empirical research practices and teaching in administration, as pointed out by Carvalho et al. (2017), Leal and Moraes (2018) and Santos and Silveira (2015).

Based on Tenório (2009), the proposal for renewal in management is presented, in opposition to the functionalist approach, instrumental rationality and Eurocentric and North American thought, following other critical theorists in the history of organization theory in the context national, such as Alcadipani and Faria (2014), Cooke and Faria (2013), Guerreiro Ramos (1965, 1981), Islam (2012). Guerreiro Ramos (1965, 1981) already assumed this critical view of instrumental rationality, proposing a method of observation of social reality as it stands, aiming at its better and real understanding. Ballestrin (2013, p. 89) and the other members of the Modernity/Coloniality Group (M/C), in turn, propose the “radicalization of the postcolonial argument on the continent through the notion of ‘decolonial gyre’”. However, based on the criticism formulated by Oliveira (2020) of the work of Go (2018), care must be taken, in this field of ontological and epistemological disputes, not to radicalize an alleged intellectual independence. As an alternative to this, Oliveira (2020, p. 988) points to a group of Latin American social scientists who, since the early 1990s, have been building a “third element of the ‘modernity/coloniality’ dialectic, that is, a space of reconstruction of histories, rationalities and utopias denied by the imperial episteme”.

The renewal of management also requires thinking about contemporary social history and including the differences and opposites present in the social system, the decoloniality of knowledge, the complexity of IORs and the nature of EPS in strategy studies as a sign towards transmodernity in the meaning expressed by Dussel (2005) and Souza and Oliveira (2019). Anthropophagic post-colonial thinking (Islam, 2012) contributes to developing an alternative approach to the way of generating knowledge, which can also bring advances to studies on rivers, being one of the possible paths towards a better and fairer society.

There are alternative epistemological conceptions to orthodox functionalism, especially rationalities that are imposed and should be considered and thought of as possible in the perspective of changes in doing science with responsibility towards human beings and society (Mozzato & Grzybovski, 2013, p. 516).

In this logic, it is understood as pertinent to EPS, whose studies have as a precursor Whittington (1996), which seeks an alternative approach to the strategic, having the social good as something essential. Later, in 2006, the same author proposes the conceptual triad of EPS: a) strategy praxis, which concerns what people do in practice; b) strategic practices, which refer to the common and everyday routines through which praxis materializes; and c) strategy practitioners, which refers to those involved in strategic praxis, those who carry out the practices. For the author, this triad – praxis, practices and practitioners – should be considered in the analysis of the work developed from the perspective of EPS, in order to contemplate the complexity that involves the phenomenon under analysis and be able to reflect the social context in which it occurs (Jarzabkowski & Bednarek, 2018; Whittington, 2006).

In the EPS bias, strategy is analyzed as something people do (Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007), admitting that the social context assumes unique importance (Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 2005) and that the IORs that develop in it are difficult to understand, with orthodox/utilitarian methodologies (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019). Based on the teachings of Corradi, Gherardi, and Verzelloni (2010), it is stated that practices become locus in which researchers study the activities of practitioners and represent a descriptive term of social phenomena linked to the non-rational cognitive view of knowledge. Thus, according to Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl (2007), Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) and Whittington (2006), the strategy analysis needs to consider each person, the practices of each organization, the activities (praxis) of the strategy and the social context. In this logic, the strategy requires a decolonial option in the transmodern perspective (Abdalla & Faria, 2017; Go, 2018). In fact, Go (2018) unmasks the relationship between postcolonial theory and relational sociology. Though they may appear to be opposites, both grant ontological and analytical primacy in constitutive relationships.

Tureta and Lima (2011) work on the concept of interorganizational networks from the structural to the relational, following the EPS, focusing on everyday practices and on the approach of Johnson et al. (2003, 2007) and Whittington (2006) in the field of strategy. “The EPS presents itself as an alternative to the macro perspectives that relegated the micro dimension to the background and did not consider the relationships between people and their practices carried out in the daily lives of organizations as central” (Tureta & Lima, 2011, p. 78).

Given the complexity that involves RIOs and the need to consider alternative to instrumental rationales, the relational view of strategy has been gaining more and more strength in research (Adami et al., 2019; Balestrin et al., 2014; Tureta & Lima, 2011). When thinking from the relational view of strategy (Adami et al., 2019; Balestrin et al., 2014; Cropper et al., 2014; Dias et al., 2017; Hohnson et al., 2003; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Tescari & Brito, 2018; Tureta & Lima, 2011; Vizeu et al., 2014; Whittington, 2006), it is understood that there is a broader view of the reality of the different contexts that sustain IORs.

In this logic, Dépelteau (2015, 2018b) highlights the relevance of relational sociology centered on procedural thinking and on the idea of interdependence and co-production, highlighting important issues such as power and non-human agents. For the author, relational sociology is an approach that has grown in different areas of knowledge, including the social sciences. The manual he edited (Dépelteau, 2018a) aims to elucidate the complexity and scope of the growing approach to relational sociology, allowing for a redefinition and a look at basic epistemological and ontological principles. Relational sociology takes up fundamental questions and dilemmas, focusing on “relationships”, even shedding light on how the characteristics of social relations today should be interpreted.

The IORs understood by the relational view of the strategy focus on cooperation, not competition, even though they do not deny it (Nalebuff & Brandenburger, 1997). It is a vision that goes beyond the economic perspective on IORs and a utilitarian notion that is based on Porter’s theoretical foundations (Porter, 1998). Thus, it can contemplate the sociological perspective, for example, which Kirschbaum and Guarido (2011, p. 17) point towards the “economic aspects of strategic action” and which Kirschbaum (2010) emphasizes in relation to the construction of institutions, as standards of interaction between groups and construction/transformation of social bonds.

If, on the one hand, the sociological perspective of IORs, in the logic pointed out by Kirschbaum (2010), Kirschbaum and Guarido (2011), has gained ground in the field of strategy, as observed in the works by Balestrin et al. (2014) and Vizeu et al. (2014), on the other hand, consider EPS as an alternative perspective, which does not deny the economic aspect, but rejects intensive economic exploitation. Therefore, several aspects need to be respected in fact, such as local, regional and national culture, as pointed out by Matos, Amaral, and Costa (2017), or even individual, as referred by Bin (2018). The authors refer to Celso Furtado regarding the fact that “substantive development involves the cultivation and strengthening of the values of the culture itself” (Matos et al., 2017, p. 233). Similarly, studies such as those by Szapiro et al. (2017) highlight the importance of more texts guided by the fundamentals of sustainability, which takes place through the recognition of the social as a source of doing and knowledge. With regard to the Brazilian and Latin American reality, they state how important it is to consider the local and the social in the development of strategies as a way of overcoming the predominance of North American and Eurocentric thinking, as described by Vizeu and Gonçalves (2010).

Cropper et al. (2014) point out some themes on which studies on IORs need to advance: trust, social capital, interdependence, power, IOL, change and temporality. In this logic, the dimension of microprocesses becomes central, looking at the relationships between people, thus making it possible to research how and why events happen, with their respective consequences.

RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE ANALYSIS OF MICROPROCESSES IN INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS

Based on the study themes identified as emerging by Cropper et al. (2014) in IORs, it is understood that microprocesses involving collaborative interdependence, AIO and knowledge exchange need to be better studied and understood from a relational viewpoint, in the EPS logic, and related to meso and macroprocesses. In the relational view, society becomes the reference. As such, changes in relationships are impacted by global and local movements. In doing so, the decolonial perspective is also considered, given that the local has something to say to the global.

From this point of view, Bin (2018, p. 546) argues that “the challenge is how to integrate theoretical reflection at a global level with local research [...]. The question is how to integrate local research with the contemporary need to create far-reaching theories”. As the author points out, this dialectic is a reality and needs to be respected, since the local is not disconnected from the whole and this whole interferes with the local. In other words, local expressions are shaped and help shape this whole. “It is less and less possible to believe that both the national State and the individual are as autonomous as previously thought” (Bin, 2018, p. 561).

By dealing more specifically with microprocesses, in the EPS logic, AIO and the exchange of knowledge are facilitated, even more when considering the collaborative interdependence, which requires, as Nohria and Eccles (1992) and Rusbult and Kubacka (2009) point out, collective and committed attitudes, with the collective objective prevailing. According to Lubatkin, Florin, and Lane (2001) and Muthusamy and White (2005), interdependence concerns the link between different agents, it can be both referring to the objectives – common between the different agents, showing converging interests – and to the resources – interdependence of resources between the agents, referring to the sharing or joint use of resources, with receptivity and exchanges due to the needs to carry out a given business –, as well as in the complementarity in the accomplishment of the tasks – interdependence between the agents regarding joint tasks, with receptivity and exchanges in the sense of complementing the tasks.

The interdependence of objectives and resources or complementarity in carrying out tasks reveals a reciprocal commitment between the partners who maintain interorganizational relationships (Lubatkin et al., 2001; Muthusamy & White, 2005), consolidating the collaborative interdependence. As pointed out by Human and Provan (1997) and Muthusamy and White (2005), information is part of interdependence, and the partner needs to be receptive to it and to learning, which positively influences the absorption capacity, culminating in the susceptibility to learning through interorganizational relationships.

International (Crossan, Lane, White, & Djurfeldt, 1995; Crossan, Mauer, & White, 2011; Gibb, Sune, & Albers, 2017; Greve, 2005; Inkpen & Tsang, 2007; Nooteboon, 2008) and national authors (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2008; Estivalete, Pedrozo, & Cruz, 2008; Mozzato & Bitencourt, 2014; 2018) point out that AIO is an emerging topic that needs to be expanded and deepened. As pointed out by Mozzato and Bitencourt (2014, 2018), following the relational view of the strategy, AIO is understood as part of an organizational learning continuum (AO) and analyzed under a less cognitive and more social-behavioral approach. Thus, AO is a process that occurs at different levels – individual, group, organizational and interorganizational (Antonello, 2007; Chan, 2003; Correia-Lima, Loiola, Pereira, Costa, & Leopoldino, 2019; Neves & Steil, 2019) –, contemplating the theoretical approach to learning based on practices (Corradi et al., 2010) and following the sociological perspective according to the assumptions of Silvia Gherardi.

In a sociological perspective, the AO process is socially constructed as the individual interacts in daily activities (Gherardi & Strati, 2014). Learning takes place with the participation of people in social activities, and reflexivity is directly linked to this participation, occurring in the flow of everyday experiences (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2001). In this logic, knowledge is the result of continuous construction, connections in action, knowing and doing in participation (Gherardi, 2000). Thus, knowledge is not separate from knowing (Antonello & Azevedo, 2011; Nicolini, 2012). Antonello and Azevedo (2011) state that learning and knowledge are seen as processes in the action of people’s activities, thus perceived in a more critical and analytical way. Therefore, evidence is given to collective achievements, the result of interactions between humans and non-humans (Bertolin, Cappelle, & Brito, 2014; Gherardi, 2015). As Bispo (2013) well points out, the sociological perspective presupposes that there is no way for people to learn something that is not placed in a social interaction space, which opposes the more pragmatic perspective of the strategy.

Practices are actions that take place in the daily flow of activities, both in structured (formal situations) and unstructured (informal/casual) social spaces, triggering learning (Corradi et al., 2010; Janowicz-Panjaitan & Noorderhaven, 2008; Nicolini, 2012; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). In formal and informal learning situations, participation takes place through the interaction between individuals in different social spaces, which involve communication, dialogue and reflexivity (Larsson, Bengtsson, Henriksson, & Sparks, 1998; MacDonald & Crossan, 2010; Nicolini, 2012; Pimentel & Nogueira, 2018).

In such social spaces, social interaction can produce conflicts, a microprocess with multiple dimensions that includes political issues, motivations, people and changes in context. Thus, based on Guiddens and Sutton (2017), conflict is configured as a process of struggle and involves tensions, being part of social interactions, not necessarily configuring itself as negative. In fact, the AIO can be the result of such tensions, since its resolution requires negotiation and agreements between agents.

For learning to take place in social interaction spaces, a central element is the bonds of trust between those involved in IORs, making it evident that it needs to be generated, developed and maintained (Hibbert, Huxham, Sydow, & Lerch, 2010). Therefore, trusting relationships explain cooperation, facilitating the understanding of exchanges (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2008; Woolthuis, Hillebrand, & Nooteboom, 2005). Above all, relational trust, derived from repeated interactions between parties over time, generates positive expectations about the parties' intentions (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998) and can positively influence cooperation. Furthermore, the collective learning process is strengthened by long-term relationships based on trusting relationships (Larsson et al., 1998).

Issues related to power are also part of IORs (Giglio, Pugliese, & Silva, 2012; Yeung, 2008), and there may even be asymmetry between the different agents involved. As Yeung (2008) points out, power constitutes an element inherent to IORs, characterized by the ability to influence, control or resist the actions of others and can be used in a positive or negative way (Huxham & Beech, 2008). Power can be coercive, but when used positively, it helps in conflict resolution, leadership, and knowledge creation.

As Nahapiet (2008) points out, social capital assumes a unique importance in IORs, positively impacting established relationships, increasing trust and cooperation. Thus, value is created through connections between agents and relationship networks constituted in different social spaces, aligning the concept of social capital with the theoretical perspective of immersion (embeddedness) proposed by Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000). Nahapiet (2008) states that ties (friendship, kinship) are valuable resources for conducting social relationships. In this logic, she understands social capital as the sum of current and potential resources available and derived from established relationships.

In addition, social ties leverage collective actions, such as exports and/or joint purchases, advertising campaigns, etc. Such practices require a relational governance structure, worked in the logic of Giglio, Ryngelblum, and Jabbour (2020) and Grandori (2009). In the governance process and in IORs as a whole, interorganizational responsibility and reliability assume a unique importance (Ramanujam, 2018; Sydow, Schübler, & Helfen, 2021).

INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STRATEGY AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE: NECESSARY INTERSECTION

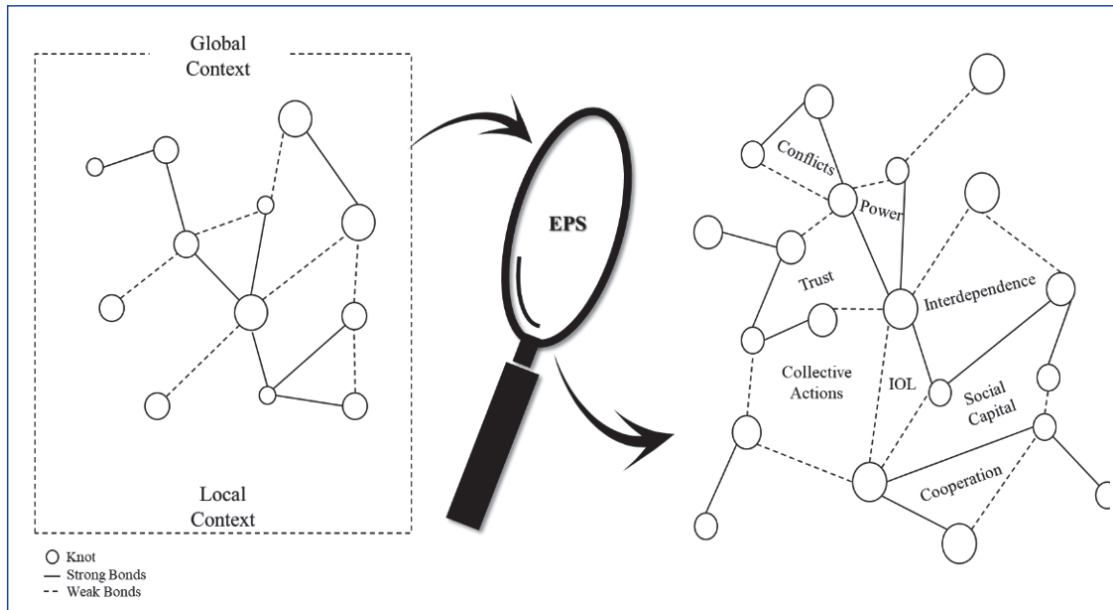
IORs, analyzed from the perspective of EPS, are relational arrangements between human and non-human actors, overcoming the traditional logic centered on knots and ties, as well as sustaining that social phenomena require a conceptual scheme that contemplates objective and subjective ontology. From the point of view of relational ontology, based on Searle (1995), the capacity of human agents to attribute functions to objects or phenomena, which can be agentive (intentional) or not, is recognized. Likewise, it is recognized that IORs are the result of practices and effects of various agents arranged in a social context, which was built by them in continuous translational movements, in the sense described by Alcadipani and Tureta (2009) and Camillis et al. (2020), helping in the construction of a local reality, but not unique, as it contains something global, as stated by Vizeu and Gonçalves (2010).

In IORs, human agents commit to a cooperative behavior and are able to share mental states (beliefs, desires, intentions). It is collective intentionality (Searle, 1995), which is different from individual intentionality, as it aggregates individual intentions and depends on the human capacity for symbolization to acquire existence. Symbolization takes place in interactions that occur in different social spaces (structured and unstructured), between humans and/or non-humans.

Seeking to overcome the alternatives of instrumental rationality, it is also proposed the analysis of microprocesses in IORs. The microprocesses to be investigated are those that occur in the ties of IORs, such as AIO, trust relationships, collective actions, interdependence, conflicts, social capital, issues of power, although knots are not denied. However, microprocesses will only impact organizational routines if there is susceptibility to learning and collective intentionality as described by Searle (1995). Social relationships, in turn, occur both in organizations (organizational level) and in relationships between organizations (interorganizational level), permeated by context (local and global).

In Figure 1, these microprocesses of IORs are shown under the theoretical lens of EPS with the purpose of encouraging researchers to look at IORs from other theoretical perspectives. When considering the relational ontology in the analysis, reality is not assumed as given, but rather as a result of practices, of relationships built by humans, which are continuously associated/disassociated in different arrangements. Therefore, it is necessary to consider that IORs occur in a social context of a place (local dimension), but contain global content, are established in a network of signifiers and in different social spaces (physical or not). They take place in moving (dynamic) social spaces, which is why they require a careful look from the researcher to what happens inside them, such as conflicts, power and other social phenomena (microprocesses) resulting from the different arrangements between agents.

Figure 1
IORs microprocesses under the EPS theoretical lens



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

To guide the researcher's gaze in the process of analyzing IORs' microprocesses, the EPS lens is metaphorically used (Dias et al., 2017; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski & Bednarek, 2018; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Johnson et al., 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006). However, this does not mean distancing the researcher, that is, taking reality as given, but considering EPS to enter the field. Although, it is necessary to get rid of prejudices – not distinguish between subject and object – and apprehend the relationships in transactions. Present rationality is an alternative to instrumental rationality, following approaches similar to those worked by Adami et al. (2019), Balestrin et al. (2014), Jarzabkowski et al. (2019), Liou and Daly (2019), Tureta and Lima (2011) and Vizeu et al. (2014).

Based on the assumptions of relational ontology, it is possible to apprehend everyday life, relationships, the collective and the social context beyond organizational boundaries, decolonizing social reality as it stands (Aldadipani & Faria, 2014; Dulcel, 2005; Fchatzki, 2005; Nicolini, 2012; Souza & Oliveira, 2019).

In this logic, it is proposed that studies on IORs be developed in the light of the EPS perspective, following the relational ontology, in a vision that goes beyond the utilitarianism present in the theoretical current of competitive advantage. As mentioned by Golsorkhi et al. (2015), the EPS concept has the potential to break traditional paradigmatic boundaries, allowing for the recognition of the social system as complex, multifaceted and paradoxical. In the logic of the relational view, society is the reference base, and changes in relationships reveal movements from the local to the global, and vice versa. Consequently, it is understood that EPS opens perspectives for new studies also in the field of interorganizational strategies. In this way, other rationales can be seen, even enabling the reinvigoration of the research agenda in IORs and in EPS itself.

In this context, new research possibilities are presented here. Initially, the possibility of researching the microprocesses of IORs under the theoretical lens of EPS is highlighted, as shown in Figure 1. When EPS is privileged, such microprocesses need isolated research (one by one), as well as combined research. Furthermore, in this logic, different social spaces can be researched, in order to explore beyond the boundaries of relationships, configuring studies with a more critical bias, in which the global reality does not overlap with the local one. Thus, it is perceived as pertinent to investigate the different micropractices that occur in IORs from a longitudinal perspective – from the beginning of training to its consolidation – without ignoring that the social is in motion and that such movements must be aggregated in the analytical process.

The importance of developing research that explores the “reason for the other” in the transmodern perspective in the context of Brazilian EPS studies is also notable. Development of more in-depth studies on the impact of the global on the local, and vice versa, considering the IORs from the perspective of EPS, will be very revealing.

Regarding research methods, the need for more longitudinal and comparative studies in different interorganizational configurations is highlighted, in addition, of course, to different methodologies, including combined ones. The development of ethnographic analyzes in different practical realities, with immersion in the field, has a unique importance in EPS. Similarly, action research can be worked from this perspective.

Research that analyzes the impact of IORs on each participating agent, using EPS, can bring important results. Deepening studies on the different social spaces in IORs, structured and unstructured, focusing on relationships and practices, can also bring revealing results.

Finally, given the practical and relational nature of EPS, studies focusing on practice and space are presented as a research suggestion, the latter as a social construction, connected to history and cultural production. In a similar logic, one could not fail to mention the necessary investigations in different spaces, such as virtual ones.

Such research suggestions are presented in order to instigate further research in this area, with a view to strengthening those in the field of IORs and EPS, enabling EPS to gain greater legitimacy in organizational studies. In this way, another rationality is glimpsed, other than the instrumental one.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the end of this theoretical essay, after reflections on the need to analyze IORs from different perspectives, the need to consider alternative rationalities to the instrumental and purely economic ones becomes evident, rescuing critical theoretical notions of organizational strategy and organizational studies. Therefore, the need for more debates on interorganizational strategies that value the social place, the relationships established in the practices and the way in which they are interconnected with the social context is defended. Thus, once the limits and the overcoming of the use of instrumental rationality for studies of IORs have been demonstrated, constructs and theories still little considered by the mainstream of the strategy should be resorted to, also at the level of interorganizational analysis, with EPS as an alternative.

In this way, the economic approach is not rejected, but broader assumptions are circumscribed, the complexity present in IORs and the nature of EPS are unveiled, in line with the current debate – for example, from a sociological perspective, as stated by Kirschbaum and Guarido (2011). Thus, society is the reference base for studies of IORs, but aligned with postcolonial sociological contributions in the sense described by Go (2018), in order to free itself from the imperial episteme that still underlies its rationality. Likewise, practices need to be recognized as (de)marked by actions and sayings, as contextualized by Schatzki (2005) and endorsed by Santos and Silveira (2015). Therefore, the aim is to look beyond economic utilitarianism also in IORs, which can be inclusive, as mentioned by Kirschbaum (2015).

It is argued that EPS, as one of the epistemological options, helps in the development of research to decolonialize the practices of each organization and place itself as an alternative to Eurocentrism and US imperialism present in the main stream of strategy studies, as described by Vizeu and Gonçalves (2010). When the researcher conducts his studies on IORs considering the transdisciplinarity in the analysis of the objective and the microprocesses in the Brazilian context, with all its particularities and specificities, simplistic generalizations are avoided and it contributes to decolonizing reason. Thus, the expectation is for greater valuation of the production of research carried out in Brazil through their consumption by Brazilian researchers and

also from other countries; the local has something to say to the global, breaking the north-south imposition. As Bin (2018) well points out, even though theories are built globally, it is in the local reality that they are used to explain phenomena, so the challenge is posed when consistency in this (inter)connection between the global and the local is understood as necessary.

In this logic, it is necessary to understand the place from its particular reality, studying the conflicts and inherent social movements, "immersing" in the real scenario, as it is presented. Thus, the focus is directed to the social, in which it is possible and necessary to analyze the different stages of each interorganizational configuration from the beginning, through strengthening, until reaching a more evolved stage. Along these lines, territorial governance processes, through the establishment of local democratic practices, the participation of numerous agents at different levels and decision-making processes, mutually reinforce legitimate demands, according to the particularities of each location, aligning understanding to the conception of power posed by Quijano (2005).

As much as we have focused, including in Figure 1, on some of the microprocesses that take place in the relational routine of IORs, it is understood that other variables are inherent, which makes it essential to consider that IORs occur in a complex social system, but that the systemic nature is only the central principle, as stated by Jarzabkowski et al. (2019). Therefore, when analyzing the microprocesses in IORs, care is taken not to carry out naive analysis. Taking on the relational ontology from the EPS perspective helps in this regard.

Without intending to present definitive conclusions, at the end of this theoretical essay, it is believed to have broadened the theoretical perspective and instigated deeper debates and empirical research that work the IORs from the perspective of EPS, which tend to be more adequate to the reality of each phenomenon studied, in addition to being fairer, due to its orientation towards the social. It is believed that such contours can help to minimize the downfall that capitalism in crisis imposes on society. Therefore, by shed light on alternative research opportunities, it contributes to the understanding of the need for reflection and deepening of essential questions in research on the subject, making it evident that there is no need to accept what is imposed by the mainstream.

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