

PRESENTATION

Critical thinking vs. organizational thinking

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This presentation serves a triple purpose: to better situate the call for work that we had launched, elucidating a little more our intention with the problematization of critical thinking versus organizational thinking; present to the public a distinction between formal organizational thinking and organizational thinking, placing them on their respective theoretical and practical planes; to anticipate to the reader the ideas underlying the texts of the authors who set out to systematize opinions and arguments in response to the provocation that our call for work launched to the academic community.

Keywords: Organizational studies. Critical theory. Management. Rationality. Policy. Political.

Pensamento crítico versus pensamento organizacional**Resumo**

A presente apresentação serve a triplo propósito: situar melhor a chamada de trabalho que havíamos lançado, elucidando um pouco mais nossa intenção com a problematização pensamento crítico *versus* pensamento organizacional; apresentar ao público uma distinção entre pensamento organizacional formal e pensamento organizacional, situando-os em seus respectivos planos teóricos e práticos; antecipar ao leitor as ideias subjacentes nos textos dos autores que se propuseram a sistematizar opiniões e argumentos em resposta à provocação que nossa chamada de trabalho lançou à comunidade acadêmica.

Palavras-chave: Estudos organizacionais. Teoria crítica. Management. Racionalidade. Política. Político.

Pensamiento crítico versus pensamiento organizacional**Resumen**

Esta presentación cumple un triple propósito: situar mejor la convocatoria de trabajo que habíamos lanzado, dilucidando un poco más nuestra intención con la problematización del pensamiento crítico *versus* el pensamiento organizacional; presentar al público una distinción entre pensamiento organizacional formal y pensamiento organizacional, ubicándolos en sus respectivos planos teórico y práctico; anticipar al lector las ideas subyacentes en los textos de los autores que se propusieron sistematizar opiniones y argumentos en respuesta a la provocación que nuestra convocatoria de trabajo lanzó a la comunidad académica.

Palabras clave: Estudios organizacionales. Teoría crítica. Gestión. Racionalidad. Política. Político.

INTRODUCTION

"Only when we are so inclined toward what in itself is to be thought about, only then are we capable of thinking" (Heidegger, 2002, p. 112).

This call for papers addresses a long-standing issue identified by Brazilian and international intellectuals in our field related to various schools of thought in philosophy, humanities, and social sciences. They have pointed out that organizational theories dominating the theoretical and practical fields of administration are based on a specific notion of rationality that naturalizes and legitimizes the *modus operandi* of the capitalist economic system. This system seeks to co-opt the entire social fabric for its own purposes through scientific, political, technical, and cultural means.¹

The target of these criticisms, mainstream management theories, constitute what we refer to as formal organizational thinking. This form of thought is more than the accommodation of ideas in an abstract and formal logical system highly idealized, built to somehow ensure the truth of certain propositions based on what is known or presumed as true in others (Hegenberg, 1995, p. 202). This formal organizational thinking qualifies the belief that only the methods of mathematically based natural sciences are suitable for validating knowledge – the *modus operandi* of positivist operationalism (Ramos, 2022, pp. 87-88). Additionally, it exclusively adopts the elements of instrumental and elective rationality (Habermas, 1984; Ramos, 2022). In other words, formal organizational thinking grants substantive material rationality a secondary or a null role in determining agents' social action by prioritizing formal-instrumental and elective – rationality.²

Theories rooted in formal organizational thinking rest on flawed ontic-epistemological premises, often crafted to facilitate the exploitation of natural resources and human beings. Once articulated in thought, social representations, metaphors, ideas, and ideologies masquerading as organizational science, these premises conceal the true purposes and coercive means employed by formal organizations. This reduces the organizational phenomenon to cryptopolitics – a normative dimension disguised as an established power configuration (Ramos, 2022, p. 32). Consequently, the average well-educated citizen, shaped by this corpus, struggles to grasp the power dynamics and interests at play, often legitimizing an economic system that disadvantages them in various ways, including economically.

Opposing formal organizational thinking, various theories, studies, and analyses have emerged to challenge this system and its premises, ideas, and practices. These reflections have gradually coalesced under the umbrella of critical thinking, which aims to analyze society's structure and economic order and its comprehensive impact on social relations of production, distribution, and consumption. The debates within this context cover various topics, including modernity and modernization, work relations, leisure, aesthetics, and scientific-technological progress.

This call for papers sought to attract studies exploring the relationship between critical thinking and organizational thinking. The intention was to stimulate collective academic reflection on thought, action, and the interplay between thought and action. Specifically, we aimed to foster a much-needed debate on organizational thinking through the lens of critical thinking and, conversely, to examine it in light of current formal organizational thinking. The articles published in this edition demonstrate that our objective was achieved. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the authors who, inspired by our proposal, submitted their manuscripts. We also express our gratitude to the reviewers, whose contributions expedited the completion of this project.

Before presenting a summary of each text in this issue of *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, we would like to share some thoughts on the topic. We do not intend to propose a categorical definition of organizational thinking but suggest some broad guidelines that distinguish it from formal organizational thinking, critical thinking, and general knowledge. This will help preserve the distinctive autonomy and potential of organizational thinking as we conceive it.

¹ *Cadernos EBAPE.BR* has fostered critical debate on administrative and organizational thinking from a Brazilian perspective. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this was perhaps the *raison d'être* for its creation and management from 2003 to the present day. This protagonism is exemplified by volume 4, number 3, 2006, and volume 7, number 3, 2009.

² The choice to use the Weberian conceptual pair of formal/material rationality is due to explanatory convenience. This does not mean that we are unaware that Weber, at certain points in his work, used the conceptual pair of theoretical/practical rationality, as Sell (2012, 2013) warns in his examination of rationality and rationalization in Weber's work.

The main characteristic of organizational thinking lies in its dual nature. In Aristotelian terms, it pertains to both the practical intellect (*noûs praktikós*), dealing with sensory realities, and the speculative intellect (*noûs dianoetikós*), addressing mental objects. Thus, it is neither limited to speculation nor to practice per se. Organizational thinking occupies an intermediate space, moving between the immanent and the transcendent. It is a form of speculation driven by desire and life's challenges while being a practice guided by substantive aspects of individual and collective ways of living. In this way, material rationality – normative or substantive – takes precedence over formal rationality – instrumental and elective – in determining thought and action.

Organizational thinking is a crucial element of practical and reflective human life. It is guided by the pragmatic investigation of what it means to organize and order our ways of life and acts as a guiding principle of social *praxis*. Its purpose is to ensure that individual and collective aspirations for a good life can materialize through the ongoing process of pursuing well-being. Organizational thinking is a continuous intellectual activity that balances the current social order with the desires for freedom and human well-being, aiming to guide political action that organizes individual and social life under the direction of ethical and just principles toward a final purpose or *telos*.

When human communities face challenges and threats that jeopardize their continuity and traditions, their members turn to reason, the memory of past experiences, collective expectations, and shared hopes to find guidance (Voegelin, 1982). In this way, each community enables its members to exercise free and joint organizational thinking to reflect, deliberate, choose, establish, and operationalize the criteria, means, and instruments that will implement ways of life that correspond to their aspirations for a good life. The political actions that organize and order the common purposes resulting from this process can, in some situations, be antagonistic, conflicting, or even revolutionary about the attitudes, values, and power structures that sustain social reality. This highlights the close connection between organizational thinking and the “political” and “politics” spheres, as put forward by Chantal Mouffe. The author understands “political” as related to the ontological dimension of antagonism that characterizes human societies, whereas “politics” means the ensemble of practices and institutions whose aim is to organize human coexistence, operating within a terrain of conflictuality informed by the “political” (Mouffe, 2015, p. 8).

Precision in the use of the terms “political” and “politics” here is crucial. Mouffe gives “political” an essential ingredient: antagonism. The political belongs to the ontological level and is inherently antagonistic, exposing acts of the institution of hegemony. In contrast, politics belongs to the ontic level and involves the construction of hegemony, expressing established power relations. The political reveals and confronts politics. The dividing line between them is essentially unstable, requiring constant displacements and renegotiations between social agents. In light of Mouffe's conception, organizational thinking can be considered a border entity, constantly moving between the political and politics, without ever fully aligning with either.

This same condition is observed in organizational thinking when examined through the lens of political thinking proposed by Raymundo Faoro. In his text “Is there a Brazilian political thought?”, Faoro asserts that “political thought is politics in itself, not political construction” or its theoretical and speculative formulation (Faoro, 1994, p. 8). This means that political thought cannot be reduced to ideology, philosophy, or political science. Reducing it to philosophy or political science misrepresents the nature of politics, which is, in essence, an action or activity; converting it into mere ideological action or practice results in distortion. In Faoro's words: “Politics, which is neither philosophy, nor science, nor ideology, which is neither extreme in action nor rationalized in theory, actually occupies the space of what is called political thought, which is not necessarily formulable, not coherently rationalized in formulas” (Faoro, 1994, p. 12).

Political thought exists in a middle ground between *praxis* as ideology and *logos* as philosophy and political science. It is rooted in political experience, the real activity of political action. Because it represents uninformed, atheoretical knowledge, it is not scientifically premeditated in terms of propositions, principles, and theoretical statements (Faoro, 1994, p. 15), although being *logos*-centered. Even though it falls under the jurisdiction of *praxis*, it manifests as an action directed by *logos*, guided by abstract and systematizable ideas rather than prescriptive models, theories, or philosophies.

In both activity and, *a fortiori*, in practice, there is a transition between forms and structures of existence from two perspectives: the territory of being and the field of value. What exists will come into being according to values such as law, justice, and the interplay of being and value guided by suggestion. This dimension connects practice with experience, informed knowledge, and reality. [...] Political practice, though derived from ethics, is distinct from it, yet both engage in practical reason. The activity within political thought is part of the realm of being and not a mere value: the being evolves within a world of values (Faoro, 1994, p. 17).

From this perspective, organizational thinking is not synonymous with the organization itself; rather, it represents the essence of the process of becoming an organization. Organizational thinking precedes the construction or design of an organization. It represents the potential; it is the act of organizing, guided by a specific thought. It is the organization, the objective realization, materially and subjectively, of organizing thought and action. In other words, organizational thinking is rooted in the conceptual realm, while the act of organizing and the organization itself, even when guided by organizational thinking, are both based on functional or instrumental principles (Ramos, 2022). This consideration does not imply a dichotomy between substantial – organizational thinking – and operational – organizing and organization. Instead, it highlights that the intelligent act of organizational thinking begins to fade as it acquires concreteness. Hence, there is a constant need for movement between the immanent and the transcendent, making each relevant to the other.

A narrow conception of organizational thinking can be found in formal organizational thinking. This mode assumes established social frameworks as naturally legitimate, often defending the principles that support these frameworks. By attempting to enclose organizational thinking within formalistic statements, organizational theories endow it with rationality, logic, norms, and procedural methods, thereby converting it into formal knowledge. These theories move through propositions, sentences, concepts, and nominal definitions. Equating organizational thinking with formal organizational thinking promotes reductionism, failing to recognize Ramos's central distinction between substantive and formal theory and the associated human life (Ramos, 2022, pp. 53-73).

The prevailing scientism in our field seeks to suppress organizational thinking, transforming it into a type of political-administrative behavior with conservative and quietist tendencies under the guise of apolitical technicality. This contributes to the thesis of the administration–politics dichotomy. Such formal theory aims to “abolish the political element of associated human life” (Ramos, 2022, p. 70). In contrast, organizational thinking, resistant to being reduced to a mere practice of legitimizing the status quo, guides organizational political action in a way that is averse to maneuvers of convenience, which aim only to accommodate established interests and powers.

As management acquired the status of official administrative knowledge in graduate and undergraduate programs and the business world, inquiry into and interest in organizational thinking were gradually abandoned. Common knowledge began to incorporate managerialism, stabilizing aspects of this formal character of organizational thinking in its practices and social representations. This process did not occur without resistance from common knowledge itself, which prevented the formal character attributed to organizational thinking from completely dominating its forms of essential understanding. Thus, traces of the vitality of non-formalized organizational thinking remain, as demonstrated by various alternative management practice initiatives.

Formal organizational theories and the sector of common knowledge influenced by them cannot contain the active force of organizational thinking. This is because organizational thinking introduces novelty, innovation, and surprise by expressing what has not yet been thought of. The act of thinking that establishes the foundations of a critical epistemology is rooted in engaged, lucid, and critical knowledge with an emancipatory interest (Paula, 2015). As such, it can acquire a confrontational, antagonistic, conflicting, or revolutionary character in relation to the established status quo. This act of thinking focuses on what is most appropriate to think about, on what invites thought – in essence, on what is thinkable. As Heidegger notes, “Only when we are so inclined toward what in itself is to be thought about, only then are we capable of thinking. [...] The thought-provoking matter already is intrinsically what must be thought.” At the same time, the individual cannot think “as long as that which must be thought about, withdraws” (Heidegger, 2002, p. 113).

In our view, the question arises: What, in contemporary social reality, is most important to think about carefully in our field? The articles published here alert us to “what needs to be thought about carefully” and demand attention from organizational thinking.

Even if not entirely subsumed under *praxis*, organizational thinking is inherently practical. It manifests through ideas, concepts, worldviews, and mentalities, but it is also present in social practices that organize and guide individual and collective life. These practices result from deep reflection on our human condition and the challenges we face when acting to change this condition. Thus, organizational thinking leaves a record in individual and collective memory as well as in various cultural products. When we observe a city, village, factory, way of life, residence, or small group, we can infer that an underlying organizational thought guides and institutes their order and organizational way of being. It is *praxis*, normative par excellence, that gives such organizations their distinct form, content, and substance.

This normative action that aims to organize and offer some order can take on an antagonistic, conflictive, or revolutionary character driven by contesting organizational thinking. However, it can also acquire an ideological, legitimizing, conservative, or protocol character. In these cases, the element of authenticity and innovation in organizational thinking may be lost over time and space, retreating to the plane of becoming hope, or, in Heidegger’s words, retreating into memory and remembrance: “Memory is the gathering and convergence of thought upon what everywhere demands to be thought about first of all” (Heidegger, 2002, p. 118). When such a situation occurs, it indicates that “organizational thinking,” in quotation marks, operates predominantly under the domain of formal rationality. This means that both thought and action are promoting non-thinking and non-acting.

It was primarily this type of formal organizational thinking that we highlighted in the call for papers. Naturally, our expectations also included organizational thinking, as characterized above. However, by contrasting critical thinking with organizational thinking, our main intention was to highlight the presence of two distinct epistemological bases capable of guiding organizational practices. From the perspective of critical thinking, we aimed to question both the limits and cognitive validity of formal organizational thinking and its social practices, as well as the limits of conservative, mystified, and obfuscated common knowledge (Santos, 2001, p. 107; Ramos, 2022, p. 72). Both hegemonic mental representations determine the utilitarian functionality of formally structured social systems.

The genealogy of the reification potential of formal organizational thinking and the organizational theories that constitute it has consistently served economic purposes at the expense of addressing more substantial social and environmental issues. From its origins in the 19th century to the present day, the influence of market culture has dominated the rationalities that drive organizational actions. This phenomenon, originating in economic determinants, has expanded considerably with scientific and technological advances, especially through information technology, now encompassing almost all productive activities at both the state level and within civil society. This expansion has intensified the potential to commodify not only the workforce responsible for producing goods and services but also society as a whole.

Thus, organizational thinking emerges as a cognitive action with an epistemological basis that provides a correct understanding of the anomalies and contradictions arising from the illusory projections of formal organizational thinking. To avoid the perception of this proposition as radical fundamentalist, we must consider the possibility that organizational theories and technologies should first be subjected to critically oriented social theories. These theories possess an innate ability to perceive social reality, which is preliminary to the perception of organizational realities. In other words, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Organizational thinking with an exclusively economic-instrumental orientation can be practiced as long as the individuals involved in production – whether as producers or consumers – are not reduced to mere commodities or barcodes but recognized as human beings with rights and as part of an ecosystem needing attention.

This issue of *Cadernos EBAPE.BR* aims to publish articles that address this antithetical proposition: critical thinking versus organizational thinking. Below are the titles of the texts and their respective summaries.

“Theorizing from Habermasian notions in administration research,” by Ricardo Lebbos Favoreto and Ewerton Roberto Inocêncio

Habermasian thought constitutes a significant reference in contemporary sociology and philosophy, permeating various fields of the social sciences, including administration, where it holds considerable potential. However, the transfer from its original loci in sociology and philosophy to different fields is not seamless and requires mediation. This article aims to demonstrate a way of mobilizing the Habermasian framework in administration research at the epistemological and methodological levels. The study employs a didactic case based on a research investigating communicative distortions in corporate sustainability reports. At the methodological level, the Habermasian framework helps to explore the procedures adopted in the didactic case, revealing the framework’s explanatory potential. This study seeks to stimulate the use of the Habermasian framework in administration research by replicating the approach introduced in this article or, more importantly, inspiring other forms of operationalizing the framework.

“Bodies, intentions, and affections: reflections for non-representational studies of organizational practices,” by Ítalo da Silva, Pamela Karolina Dias, Elisabeth Cavalcanti dos Santos, and Flávia Zimmerle da Nóbrega Costa

In this article, three discussion points are important for us to present critical reflections on deepening organizational theory. Our central aim is to relate the discussion on corporeality, intentions, and affections as non-representational analytical dimensions for studies of organizational practices, particularly with regard to the (re)creation of power relations when they promote inclusions or exclusions in practice. First, we highlight the problem of organizational theory in neglecting the body, intentions, and affections from an anti-rationalist and anti-cognitivist perspective. We advocate a pre-reflexive immersion in contact with organizational practices. Second, we suggest the analytical category of bodily-affective intentionality to perform such a pre-reflective immersion in understanding organizational practices since it is through this analytical perception that affective atmospheres or flows of affect are constituted. Third, we re-look at the notions of differences, performance, and performativity to understand how the bodily-affective intentionality (re)produces inclusions and exclusions in organizational practice. Finally, we offer reflective questions for further research in the area with the expectation that the proposed analytical relationship imbricated between bodies, intentions, and affections together with the concepts of atmospheres, differences, performance, and performativity, contributes to the area of non-representational organizational studies, in general, and to the area of practice-based studies, specifically.

“Analysis model applied to the state of the art of the administration epistemology,” by Lucas Canestri de Oliveira, José Roberto Pereira, and Eloisa Helena de Souza Cabral

The article proposes a systematization of the epistemological paradigms already identified by research that studied the literature on administration epistemology. Such systematization is carried out through an analytical review, in which an analysis model, the result of a theoretical consortium between Ramos and Piaget, is the guiding thread. The different paradigms are analyzed according to their degree of reflexivity against the backdrop of the philosophical foundations of general epistemology. In the field of administration epistemology, it was observed that from the pioneering to the current works, the different authors defend a reflective decentring capable of generating a movement that takes the theory of organizations from the construct that Ramos calls the theory of necessity to the field of theory of possibility and beyond. Thus, the use of Platonic/Aristotelian/Cartesian archetypes by Kantian and post-Kantian archetypes was overcome. The analysis model is applied a second time to the abstracts of the last 30 theses of a graduate program in administration, defended from July 2019 to November 2022. Ten abstracts from each of the three lines of research were analyzed. In this second application, the model was adjusted with the inclusion of other theoretical and methodological aspects, now containing nine reflexivity indicators. It was demonstrated that, due to the different degrees of reflexivity, each line of research has its own characteristics in adopting theories and methods.

“Thinking about organization and organization studies based on the philosophy of praxis,” by Maria Ceci Misoczky

This essay proposes a reflection on the themes of organization and organizational studies, taking the propositions of Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez’s philosophy of praxis as the foundation. The author’s propositions are systematized in the first part of the text, what refers to the definitions of praxis and teleology – what defines the proper human activity – to the inseparable relationship between theory and practice in praxis; to the levels and forms of praxis - repetitive and creative, spontaneous and reflexive; to the philosophy of praxis. Based on these foundations, a reflection is made on Administrative Theories, Organizational Theories, Management as the hegemonic version in Administration and Organizational Studies (OS), Organizational Analysis understood as a predominantly interpretative and constructionist theoretical activity, and Critical Management Studies. It ends with a discussion about OS as a space with the potential for a creative praxis in relation to the organization of liberating social struggles. The challenge is to think about organization as a category with possibilities of content developed based on creative dialogues and learning processes with the knowledge produced in the praxis of organizing liberating concrete struggles embedded in material socio-historical relations.

“Peripheral businesses and Miltonian thought: approaches and possibilities for organizational studies,” by Thiago Cunha de Oliveira and Sergio Eduardo de Wanderley

In this theoretical essay, the general objective is to identify how the approximation between the notion of peripheral business and the Miltonian thought can add, in the theoretical aspect, to the field of organizational studies. The specific objectives are to establish theoretical approximations between the notion of peripheral business and Miltonian thought and to analyze the viability of using the notion of peripheral business as a theoretical and methodological basis for the dialectical historical materialist analysis anchored in Miltonian thought. A theoretical triangulation was carried out between the notion of peripheral business, elaborated by Márcio Sá and other researchers, and the theory of the two urban circuits of underdeveloped countries, structured by Milton Santos and based on Marxist notions. It is pointed out that there are no theoretical incompatibilities between the notion of peripheral business and Miltonian thought, and that the approximation between these perspectives tends to add to the field of organizational studies by enabling the performance of empirical analyses based on dialectical historical materialism about how organizations and subjects located in one or both of the circuits relate to each other.

“Alternative organization: from critique of organization to organization of critique,” by Matheus Machado and Fabio Bittencourt Meira

The term “alternative organization” (AO) has often been used unsystematically, referring to intuitive and common-sense notions. At the same time, authors who use it strive to incorporate critique as a distinctive element of organizational practice. This essay aims to problematize the concept of open access by searching the literature for elements that allow critique to be conceived as a component of organizing practices. It was necessary to situate the confrontation with the problems of social reality without falling into dogmatic conceptions or relegating OA to a position of subordination. This essay contributes to the debate by presenting a set of critical perspectives found in the literature dealing with OA, adding the relatively recent approach of immanent criticism, as conceived by Rahel Jaeggi (2018). This is a non-essentialist, dialectical perspective that takes the claims and conditions posed in social reality as its starting point, responding to the problems and crises that arise in the context. From there, the transformative potential falls on the practices of organizing themselves and seeks to transform them. This perspective points to a concept of organization that mediates partial solutions to problems arising from the contradictions of social reality.

We hope you have a good reading!

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DATA AVAILABILITY

The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was published in the article itself.

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