

# The “blind spots” of organizational theories according to Guerreiro Ramos

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## Abstract

This article is based on two books, *Administração e contexto brasileiro* (Administration and Brazilian context) and *A nova ciência das organizações* (The new science of organizations), written by Guerreiro Ramos. The study presents the main aspects of the organizational theories analyzed by the author, observing particularly what he calls “blind spots”. Guerreiro Ramos exposes four crucial points that organizational theories fail to address and, in the development of these points, demonstrates concepts that are absorbed and transformed. The “blind spots” are: a) the notion of rationality that dominates not only organizational studies but also economics, political science, and social sciences; b) the non-distinction between substantive and formal meanings of organization; c) organizational theories have no clear understanding of the role of symbolic interactions; and d) finally, organizational theories rely only on a mechanomorphic view of the human. Guerreiro Ramos lists the points in a specific chapter of the book *A nova ciência das organizações* (The new science of organizations), and analyzes and explains them throughout the two works guiding this research. It appears that the author needed to present these blind points thoroughly before proposing his multidimensional model of society (which is not addressed in this study), a measure that may be explained by the extension and depth of his work, observed by the numerous possible agendas presented by several scholars in order to continue the study of Guerreiro Ramos’ contributions. It is possible to conclude that Guerreiro Ramos’ ideas remain current, and the criticisms and concerns he brought to the field of organizational studies are relevant and fundamental for those who intend to develop critical studies both in teaching and development managerial approaches.

**Keywords:** Organization studies. Organization theory. Organizations. Management. Sociology of organizations.

## Os “pontos cegos” das teorias organizacionais segundo Guerreiro Ramos

### Resumo

Este artigo se baseia em dois livros de Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, *Administração e contexto brasileiro* e *A nova ciência das organizações: uma reconceitualização da riqueza das nações*, e tem por objetivo apresentar os principais aspectos das teorias organizacionais analisados pelo autor, que os denomina “pontos cegos”. São quatro os pontos cruciais que as teorias organizacionais não suprem e, ao se desenvolverem, absorveram conceitos que foram transformados: a) a noção de racionalidade, que domina não só os Estudos Organizacionais, como também a economia, a ciência política e as ciências sociais; b) não distinção entre significado substantivo e significado formal de organização; c) as teorias organizacionais não têm clara compreensão do papel das interações simbólicas; e, por último, d) as teorias organizacionais se apoiam somente em uma visão mecanomórfica do homem. Os pontos, que são aprofundados ao longo das duas obras, aparecem enumerados em um capítulo específico de *A nova ciência das organizações*. A impressão é de que o próprio Guerreiro Ramos tenha sentido essa necessidade, como uma breve recapitulação, antes de propor seu modelo multidimensional de sociedade (que não é abordado neste artigo). Isso se dá pela amplitude e profundidade da obra de Guerreiro Ramos. Exemplo disso são as possíveis agendas para seu estudo já elaboradas por diversos outros autores. Conclui-se que o pensamento de Guerreiro Ramos se mantém atual, suas críticas e preocupações são pertinentes e mostram-se fundamentais para os que pretendem desenvolver estudos críticos na área de organizações, em seu ensino e no desenvolvimento de outras possibilidades de gestão.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudos organizacionais. Teorias organizacionais. Organizações. Gestão. Sociologia organizacional.

## Los “puntos ciegos” de las teorías organizacionales según Guerreiro Ramos

### Resumen

Ensayo basado en dos libros de Guerreiro Ramos: *Administración y Contexto Brasileño* y *La Nueva Ciencia de las Organizaciones*, que tiene como objetivo presentar los principales aspectos de las teorías organizacionales analizadas por Guerreiro Ramos y por él llamados “puntos ciegos”. Son cuatro puntos cruciales que las teorías organizacionales no suplen y que, al desarrollarse, absorbieron conceptos que se transformaron: la noción de racionalidad que domina no solo los estudios organizacionales, sino también la economía, la ciencia política y las ciencias sociales; la no distinción entre significado sustantivo y significado formal de organización; las teorías organizacionales no tienen clara comprensión del papel de las interacciones simbólicas; y por último, las teorías organizacionales se apoyan solamente en una visión mecanomórfica del hombre. Los puntos que aparecen en un capítulo específico de *La Nueva Ciencia de las Organizaciones* son profundizados con los análisis del autor en los dos libros. La impresión es que el propio Guerrero Ramos tuvo la necesidad de enumerarlos antes de proponer su modelo multidimensional de sociedad (que no se aborda en el artículo), como una breve recapitulación de aspectos que constan en sus obras. Esto se da por la amplitud y profundidad de la obra de Guerrero Ramos. Ejemplo de ello son las agendas posibles para su estudio ya elaboradas por diversos otros autores. Se concluye que el pensamiento de Guerrero Ramos continúa actual, sus críticas y preocupaciones son pertinentes y fundamentales para los que pretenden desarrollar estudios críticos en el área de organizaciones, en su enseñanza y desarrollo de otras posibilidades de gestión.

**Palabras clave:** Estudios organizacionales. Teorías organizacionales. Organizaciones. Gestión. Sociología organizacional.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1915-1982), one of the most important authorities on organizations in Brazil, was a severe critic of organizational theory (FARIA, 2009a; PAULA, 2008). According to the author, organizational theory does not have scientific validity and will be unlikely to have it, as long as it does not critically examine the epistemology inherent in the market system. Administration has developed as the planning of systems whose focus is to solve one-dimensional organizational problems based on technological knowledge that ignores its consequences from the point of view of human values, and well as errors due to the replication of models which are inappropriate in terms of time and local culture, and which reproduce market logic exclusively (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1983, 1989, 1996).

These aspects are developed in detail in two books: *Administration and the Brazilian Context* and *The New Science of Organizations: Rethinking the Wealth of Nations*. In the former, the author develops his work in independent articles, each consisting of a deep analysis of its subject, featuring epistemological rigor and an ample bibliography. In the latter, he revises fundamental concepts, presenting their transformation during modern history, and as a result, analyzes the epistemological problems of organizational theory, and as the book’s title suggests, he proposes a new substantive theory of organization and a new paraeconomic paradigm.

The works are impressive in their breadth and depth, and it is arduous work to concatenate all their important contributions. That’s why the “blind spots” of organizational theories pointed out by the author have been selected as the subject of a more didactic presentation of his analyses. These points appear specifically in Chapter 6, “A substantive approach to an organization”, of *The New Science of Organizations* and they were adopted to organize ideas that in truth appear in two of his works. That’s why the “blind spots” appear to be more profound here than in the original chapter.

Finally, with the objective of encouraging advances in the substantive theory of organizations and organizations which distinguish themselves in terms of ethics and rationality, we will also present a few concepts related to the sphere of isonomy, such as communitarian and egalitarian organizations.

### First “blind spot”: the notion of rationality that dominates Organizational Studies, such as Economics, Political Science and Social Sciences

The understanding of this “blind spot” is a subject that permeates various instances of the analyses that Alberto Guerreiro Ramos develops: reason, rationality and ethics. Guerreiro Ramos (1989) makes a profound critique of modern reason. The author believes, based on a vast array of theoretical references, that natural sciences in the West are not based on an analytical form of knowledge, but are rather based on immediate political interests that are justified by their productivity. The same concession cannot be made to the social sciences, and epistemological errors have a normative dimension that is imposed by the established configuration of power which influences all of society (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989).

The author recognizes the beginning of a drastic change in the term reason beginning with the modern era in the West, which has come to reflect a “[...] semantic universe without precedents” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 2). In the old sense – which is based, according to the author, on Plato and Aristoteles – reason was understood as a force of the human psyche, which allows the individual to distinguish between good and evil, making it possible to order one’s personal and social life and, essentially “[...] the life of the reason of the human psyche was considered to be a reality that resists being reduced to a historical or social phenomenon” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 3).

In its modern sense, reason appears to be something that is acquired through effort and enables humans to make a utilitarian calculation of consequences. According to Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, the *transevaluation* of reason and human rationality implies a distortion in the key-concept of human life by seeking to legitimize modern society on a purely utilitarian basis. One of the author’s main theses consists of showing how reason, due to its centrality in human life, cannot be left aside in modern society, and thus, it has been transformed into an idea that is compatible with a normative structure that is centered on the market (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989).

To complement this discussion, it is important to examine another critique developed in *Administration and the Brazilian Context*, which analyzes rationality using two pairs of Weberian concepts: formal rationality and substantive rationality, as well as the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of absolute values or convictions.

Substantive rationality is “[...] every intrinsically intelligent act, which is based on lucid and autonomous knowledge of the relationships between facts. It is an act that attests to human transcendence, the quality of a creature equipped with reason” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1983, p. 39). Substantial rationality implies a domain of emotions, sentiments, impulses, prejudices and any factors that perturb an intelligent view of reality. In this sense, substantive rationality’s first objective is to preserve the freedom of the individual.

Formal rationality in turn, is related to the conquest of pre-established objectives, through acts and elements that are systematically related, or in other words, deliberate acts with specific goals. This type of rationality does not necessarily evaluate the intrinsic quality of one’s actions to achieve an objective.

To authors such as Herbert Simon (1970), rationality is the knowledge of consequences. Broad knowledge is found in organizations, especially those that are computerized; rational man is a being that calculates to find the best alternative to achieve objectives, and is indifferent to their value content.

Guerreiro Ramos argues that technological development and industrialization imprisons individuals, limiting their freedom to the extent that they submit to its formal criteria. In addition, formal rationality determines life in all organizations, not only those involved with the factory floor (as in the conceptions associated with Taylor and Ford). It also affects life outside them, in the constant struggle to improve life and career advancement, developing a dynamic that deteriorates the relationships between people, the subjectivity of individuals and the quality of their actions.

It may also be observed that the development of capitalism is the exacerbation of so-called *formal rationality*, which directly implies a *shrinking* of substantive rationality. The capacity of man’s survival within this context, is based on his capacity for self-rationalization, “[...] and depends on being capable of mentally organizing moral and physical self-control, keeping in mind the exercise of formally rationalized tasks” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1983, p. 39).

Guerreiro Ramos also focuses on the ethical problems within organizations, using another pair of Weberian concepts: the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of conviction. The author finds excerpts from the works of Max Weber himself that authorize relating formal rationality with the ethics of responsibility and substantive reality with the ethics of values or convictions.

The ethics of responsibility have as criteria utilitarian aspects provided by formal rationality, and is fundamentally pragmatic; while the ethics of values or convictions are implicit in all actions that relate to values. The author recognizes that relating the ethics of conviction to substantive rationality may be questioned, given that the latter implicitly contains the issue of values and may be therefore considered redundant. Guerreiro Ramos emphasizes that the analysis of rationality supposes actions that are the result of rationality, and therefore, it is consistent to analyze the types of rationality and the respective ethics that rule them (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1983, p. 42).

It’s also important to emphasize that the two types of ethics are not antagonistic. Guerreiro Ramos observes that in Max Weber a change occurs in the perception of these two types of ethics. In the text in which they appear for the first time, *Politics as a Vocation* in 1918, Weber makes an analysis in which he considers the two forms of ethics to be “irrevocably opposed.” However, in *Economy and Society* of 1922, Weber seems to admit that both of them can coexist. He recognizes that in our society rational orientations in relation to values acquire a decidedly irrational character, to the extent to which what moves the rational as well as the objectives tends to acquire an absolute significance – the greater this is, the less reflection there is in relation to the consequences of actions (the role of substantive rationality). However, he points out that the absolute rationalization of actions related to objectives is a limiting case, and it is in this sense that Guerreiro Ramos (1983) proceeds with his analysis.

Even though the described scenario has been propitious for the domination of formal rationality, which is in consonance with the market system, the two types of rationality and their respective ethics are not necessarily antagonistic. In the end, it is difficult for an individual to act exclusively according to one or the other. In performing any job, it is necessary to employ self-rationalization, but individuals will guide their behavior based on their values, or in other words, their perceptions of the world and their ideas which are linked to the ethics of conviction. However, we can recognize the words of Guerreiro Ramos himself (1983, p. 43) that “the perfect equilibrium between man and an organization is unattainable

and utopic,” contrary to the preaching of books on Administration and consultants. Even though he recognizes this impossibility, Guerreiro Ramos observes that a minimal fulfillment of this ethic is indispensable to the internal integrity of individuals in organizations, even though they are conscious of the controversies and conflicts that the observation of ethics of conviction can bring. “In administrative or organizational situations, individuals usually find themselves in conflict. However, the degrees of content of this conflict can deteriorate to a greater or lesser extent from the human point of view, according to the structural characteristics of the organization (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1983, p. 43).”

In order to further the study of rationality within organizations, Serva (1997a, 1997b) proposes a construct based on the complementary nature of the substantive approach of Guerreiro Ramos and the theory of communicative action of Jürgen Habermas, so that it will be possible to demonstrate empirically how substantive rationality and formal rationality are employed in administrative practice, and as a potential redirection of theories of Administration. The structural characteristics that affect the greater or lesser observance of ethical standards related to values in organizations is related to global and societal conditions, the type of organization involved, and the individual characteristics of the people who make up the organization (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1983).

Since in the capitalist world (centered around the market and competition) the roles played by business leaders and senior executives have become more and more important, it is not difficult to understand why there is a trend towards the dominance of the ethics of responsibility to the detriment of the ethics of conviction in organizations, and, moreover, this fact is valued by companies. We can cite the book *Administration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, in which this quality is exalted:

In a company which was facing a downsizing process, the head of HR proposed that her department absorb an unusual amount of expenses. She thought, in examining the strategies and requisites for success in the short term, that the other departments were more important to the success of the firm. This sacrifice on her part was justified because she knew what the company’s results were and how those results were obtained. This sacrifice also gave her enormous credibility over time, to the extent that the managers came to trust her recommendations, which were focused on the company and not herself (ULRICH, 2003, p. 248).

It’s clear that behind this sacrifice, there was interest in gaining credibility within the company, but what occurred was due to formal rationality based on the ethics of responsibility. There was no type of questioning related to values – to the suffering that a downsizing or restructuring process inflicts on employees, for example –, what mattered were the results. The identity with the organization is such – “the company’s success is my success” – that it implies the (un)conscious renouncing of conduct according to the criteria of conviction: it is the ideal embodiment of worker relations.

In fact, studying managerial work, Gaulejac (2007) explains how managers live a paradox in which they celebrate the freedom of liberalism and a free company, and at the same time they feel dependent on a system in which they are “producers and are produced.” If they are listened to individually, they may even offer a discursive critique, that they adhere only partially to this power, but they don’t hesitate to use it on their subordinates, relying on language with double meanings. Gaulejac (2007, p. 124) states that it is impossible to live in this “paradoxical order” without becoming, by necessity, paradoxical themselves. In market organizations “the recurring appeal to ethics is the expression of the desire to restore consistency and symbolism to an inconsistent and chaotic universe.”

Those who occupy positions of power have the false impression that they are exempt from the process of objectification to the extent that they participate and influence decisions. This false consciousness, however, implies the most perverse form of alienation (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1983, p. 56-63). The imperative of the existence of these organizations, in these molds, implies and exacerbates the competition of these individuals which has consequences that go beyond the work environment and affect all of social life. This aspect will be addressed again in the third “blind spot,” since the psychology of a market-based society is another concern of Guerreiro Ramos. These analyses, which Guerreiro Ramos develops in depth in his works and have been summarized here, help us perceive that there is a relationship between substantive rationality and reason – in the classic sense. In turn, it’s clear the relationship between the preeminence of formal rationality with the process of industrialization and the transevaluation of reason in its modern sense.

In pre-capitalist societies, rationality is dressed in ethical standards and values, which are placed above any economic imperative – whose scope, inclusively, did not play a dominant role in those contexts. Expectations are unfounded, therefore, that technological development and its domain in various parts of society should raise the self-awareness of man. It is also important to emphasize that the diminution of what is called substantive skills also sustains the concentration of the means of production and knowledge.

## Second “blind spot”: organizational theory does not distinguish between substantive significance and formal significance within an organization

It is an error that formal economic organization is the paradigm according to which all forms of organization are studied. “The field of organizational theory cannot understand the historical peculiarity of organizations of an economic nature and their functions” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 123).

This is why the author distinguishes between substantive and formal organizations. In substantive organizations there is no standard behavior between and amongst individuals and between them and the outside environment. The family and informal groups would be examples of substantive organizations. Formal organizations on the other hand are “[...] projected systems, created deliberately to maximize resources” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 125) or the achievement of determined objectives. In this sense, formal organizations have existed in various societies – formal power structures have already been mapped in primitive societies, in Europe, Ancient Greece, and Rome along with classic examples of churches and military organizations – but they have only recently become the subject of systematic study.

The concern with the utilization of resources – skills in our formal rationality – have also always been present in any society, beginning with the most rudimentary. In them, individuals were already dedicated to resolving problems related to the utilization of resources, the best ways to organize harvests, to irrigate plantations, construct housing, roads, or in other words the activities necessary to the life of a community. In non-market societies, however, production still has a substantive sense. The lives of individuals in these societies is compact, because there is no formal, legal or contractual differentiation in the manner in which they act.

It may be observed that the development of Western capitalism implies a cultural transformation which affects even organizations which were originally substantive. This point touches on another important transevaluation of a concept that is quite pertinent to this discussion which Guerreiro Ramos does not explore. With the advent of economic, social and organizational theories, the idea of competition has also been transformed, as Kropotkin alerted us (1902). The development of this society has provoked a transition between cooperative relationships (present in what are called mutual assistance institutions) to the exacerbated competition between individuals. Kropotkin (1902) criticized what Darwinists (and not Charles Darwin himself) and socialists have preached, which is that man, because he has a superior intellect, can mitigate the effort and competition in life among individuals of the same species, while, at the same time, the competition for survival of every animal with the other members of its species constitutes the “law of nature.” This argument is criticized by Kropotkin (1902) and frequently it is articulated in various areas to bring an air of naturalness to the preeminence of competition and being competitive in a capitalist system. Kropotkin (1902) observed in his studies the great importance of “mutual aid” in relation to the issue of competition. The author observes that in nature, precisely during periods of calamity/scarcity of food, which is the time when competition emerges, that the progression and evolution of the species are compromised. Once periods of adversity are overcome, aspects of cooperation guarantee the survival and evolution of the species. He explains this as “an instinct that has been slowly developed among animals and men in the course of an extremely long evolution”; and also: “[...] it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience – be it only at the stage of an instinct – of human solidarity” (KROPOTKIN, 1902, p. 3). The institutions of mutual assistance – tribes, communitarian villages, guilds, medieval cities – which have developed since the most remote periods led the author at the end of the 19th century to study the development of cooperatives, associations and mutual societies, strike movements and workers’ organizations. With this study, Kropotkin (1902) emphasized the importance of the “mutual aid” that has been inherited by man over his long period of evolution and which today is still active in society.

To explain the transition from a society based on substantive concepts to a society focused on the market, which finds in formal organization its tool for perpetuation, Guerreiro Ramos makes a transformational analysis of relationships, of non-market to market societies (POLANYI, 2000), or from primitive societies to bourgeois societies (SAHLINS, 1976).

Sahlins (1976) establishes a difference between bourgeois society and primitive society. “In Western culture, the economy is the main *locus*” from which emanates symbolic production; and “[...] the singularity of bourgeois society is not in the fact that the economic system escapes symbolic determination, but that the economic symbolism is structurally determined” (SAHLINS, 1976, p. 232). Production reflects the overall scheme of society, which is characterized by economic relationships. “The cultural scheme flexes in a variable manner in relation to a dominant symbolic point of production, which provides the main code for other relationships and activities (SAHLINS, 1976, p. 233).”

There exists, therefore, a “[...] privileged institutional *locus* of symbolic processes, from which emanate the classifications imposed on the entire culture” (SAHLINS, 1976, p. 233). In Western culture, the production process of merchandise is institutionalized. In the “primitive world”: the locus of symbolic differentiation remains within social relations, mainly those of relatives.

A second characteristic of the domain of economic factors is that “the relationships of production establish the main classification of Western society” (SAHLINS, 1976, p. 236). In tribal or primitive societies, bartering relations still imply a social coefficient, a type of relationship. In capitalistic societies, material conditions affect important dimensions of social relationships, even outside of explicitly commercial relationships.

In other words, money is to Western capitalism what family relationships were to primitive society. Capitalistic societies have generated an inversion of what would be the natural order of things; instead of a cultural group (society) determining the production of goods/objects with a natural group (nature) providing offerings to meet these demands and differentiation, the economy becomes the locus. Based on a constant need to (re)produce goods, it comes to re(create) the necessary symbols for its perpetuation, and, in turn these symbols and production relationships come to structure the relations of society, and also interfere, in seeking this rationality/productivity, with the course of nature.

Productive rationality is based on formal organization (bureaucracy). This was the model that existed historically, and adjusted to the capitalist system, it makes the new system viable.

Max Weber understood that modern society would be fundamentally marked by formal organizations, which make it appropriately labeled as an organizational society. Guerreiro Ramos sees Max Weber as an important reference (TENÓRIO, 2009), despite his criticism in *The New Science of Organizations* for having chosen to develop a type of theory based, above all, on the notion of formal rationality. Thus, he proposes to do in his work what Weber did not: develop the idea of a substantive theory (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989). This is why the critique of this second “blind spot” has to do with the domain of formal organizations:

The objectives of human life are varied and just a few of them belong essentially to the sphere of formal economic organizations. In the attempt to create and maximize the resources necessary to material well-being, the individual can perform mechanomorphic activities, which are those which are specific to economic organizations. However, operational and mechanical rules cannot be adjusted to the entire spectrum of human conduct (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 125).

Organizational theories do not recognize that capitalist organizations and their functions have a historicity. The organization is tied to a society of a type without precedent: a capitalistic market society. The way in which these models, and as a result this ideology and society, are naturalized is mistaken (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989).

Guerreiro Ramos therefore proposes overcoming the “[...] theoretical parochialism” of organizational theories (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 134) and suggests a substantive approach to organizations. One approach which recognizes the variety of the social systems that comprise the macro-social space, justifies that the economic organization is just a particular case of a social microsystem; the economic organization exists for market purposes and refers itself (or at least should refer itself) to this enclave of society; administrative behavior is incompatible with the full development of human potential; economic organizations live a paradox by generating operational compulsions in individuals at the same time, seeking to eliminate their dissatisfaction; individuals who have an adequate comprehension of their self-realization will seek appropriate spaces where they can in fact develop it (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989).

Among other organized social systems, isonomies stand out, whose contexts suggest greater equality. These are workers’ companies, local consumer associations, groups of citizens interested in community subjects, and other organizations in which people seek lifestyles that are different from those that dominate society (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989).

## The third “blind spot”: organizational theory does not have a clear understanding of the role of symbolic interaction within interpersonal relationships as a whole

In all societies there are a series of actions which are symbolic, and among these are economic activities, which are conditioned above all by the imperative of subsistence. In primitive societies, economic life was limited and subordinated to other determinants of symbolic life, as we have seen with Sahlins (1976) in the previous item. Anthropological studies of various currents of thought offer proof that is difficult to find in pre-capitalistic societies, activities that are purely economically motivated. Only in modern society has the idea been disseminated of an economic man as the standard behavior of individuals. Even though the experience of Hawthorne and the development of the Behavioral School have tried to ameliorate this idea, it continues to be the core of organizational theories: market logic.

Next, we will examine Guerreiro Ramos’s critique of the limitations of organizational theory, and then what is not inherent in it and what economic organizations do not contemplate (symbolic interactions).

### *Behavioral syndrome*

Guerreiro Ramos severely criticizes the dominant influence of behavioral psychology in Organizational Studies. This view restricts our psyche to just one aspect: behavior. This fact dominates the “behavioral syndrome” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 51).

The psychological foundations of organizational theory in vogue are erroneous and the development of a new science of organization demands an analytic explanation of this psychological base. Organizations are cognitive systems and the way in which organizational theories articulate the cognitive system inherent to a specific type of organization end up generalizing and normalizing them (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989).

To Guerreiro Ramos (1989, p. 50), what is called *organizational theory* does not have any scientific rigor whatsoever; it is a tautology. According to the author:

[...] a scientific theory of the organizations is not based on cognitive systems inherent to any type of existing organization; it should first rather make an evaluation of organizations in terms of understanding what is generally appropriate conduct for human beings, taking into account their substantive as well as functional requirements (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 50).

The “psychological reductionism” of current organizational theory does not distinguish behavior from action. Behavior is the form of conduct that is based on formal or functional rationality, an estimate of consequences and decorum, which is also common to other animals: “[...] it is mechanomorphic conduct, dictated by outside imperatives. [...] As a result, it lacks ethical content of general validity” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 51). This last aspect (ethics) is, in truth, is one of the critiques of the author, who says that the original meaning of the word *behavior* has been lost, because originally it implied the recognition of order and customs, however, this meaning has been neglected in favor of the social gregariousness of our society. According to Guerreiro Ramos (1989, p. 51), “[...] men and women do not live any more in communities where substantive common sense determines the course of their actions.... The individual becomes a creature that behaves.” Action, on the other hand “[...] is appropriate for agents who deliberate on matters because they are conscious of its intrinsic objectives. To recognize these objectives, action constitutes an ethical form of conduct” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 51). Or at least it should. The behavioral syndrome occurs in contemporary industrial societies and is appropriate for formal reasoning and rationality. The rules and norms of episodic systems affect the life of society as a whole.

Not only do the market and its utilitarian character become all-encompassing historic and social forces in their large-scale institutional forms, but they also prove to be very convenient for the scaling and exploitation of natural processes by the maximizing of human invention and productive capacity. However, throughout this entire experiment, the individual gains material improvement in life and pays for it with the loss of personal meaning and self-determination (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 51).

Some characteristics are disseminated. The *individuality* of modern man is fluid, following utilitarian calculations, market trends, everything that is transitory and fleeting. *Perspectivism*, in terms of personal conduct as well as others is affected by the perspective that each person has of his or her own interests – which is the key ingredient of human conduct in any society, but it is only in capitalistic society that the individual is conscious of this – that good behavior is that which takes into consideration decorum, outside points of view, and the interests at stake. *Mannerism* is appropriate to this society. The individual is fluid, ready to perform the role that is necessary, which is “the legitimation of episodic forms of human conduct,” and continues to be postulated by behavioral sciences: “objective” and “value free”. Those who investigate behavior study processes in which it is form that matters rather than substance (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 62). In positive and systemic *operationalism*, permeated by the controlled guidance of the world, things are the results of efficient causes, with the entire world being a mechanical chain of antecedents and consequences, as human behavior is as well (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 63).

We will return to the example of the book *Administration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. In it, Ulrich (2003) proposes how employees should prepare for the organizations of the future. In them, individuals should “behave” in a “different” manner. They should be flexible, committed to learning, with no boundaries and capable of joining and working with a team, they should consider themselves to be a single person company. To do this, they need to answer five important questions which the author justifies:

1. First: self-confidence. “How should I take responsibility for my career?” Employees are responsible for monitoring their career (ULRICH, 2003, p. 247).
2. Second: resilience. “What is the lifecycle of my knowledge?” It is necessary to keep oneself constantly informed, following current ideas and innovations. Employees can change projects and work if unexpected opportunities arise (ULRICH, 2003, p. 249).
3. Third: results. “Who benefits from my work and what value do I provide them?” Employees who provide value remain active (ULRICH, 2003, p. 248).
4. Fourth: relationships. “To whom do I matter and who matters to me?” The successful executive is busy, focused globally and interacts with technology, therefore “defining who you care about and who you socialize with is a challenge” (ULRICH, 2003, p. 249). Friendships are important and should be considered by employees of the future.
5. Fifth: determination. “What do I want to do and what is my identity?” Employees should perform a “personal audit” to constantly ask themselves: “what do I want to do?” In a chaotic external world (characterized by change, globalization, learning, etc.), successful employees will find inner peace by reflecting and making their own decisions, shaping their own identities (ULRICH, 2003, p. 250).

Under these circumstances, behavior is always thinking and acting strategically. When one talks about reflection and the ability to shape one’s own identity, other questions arise: what type of identity can be constructed? Can employees make decisions about their careers?

### *Symbolic interaction*

Market logic neglects aspects of human interaction. To reproduce this logic, “conventional organizational theorists” freely talk about subjects such as love, self-fulfillment, virtue, and confidence, terms which do not belong to the field of economic organizations (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989), as if motivational practices effectively encompass these characteristics and contribute to the construction of the subjectivity of employees.

To explain symbolic interaction, Guerreiro Ramos (1989) reviews the works of various authors on this subject, whose theoretical orientations did not always coincide. Even so, he arrives at some propositions.

The first questions scientific knowledge as the only way to arrive at knowledge, or as a reliable source. This current of thought also recognizes the role of myths, religion, arts and various manifestations that represent the knowledge inherent in those realities (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 127).

The second proposition is that true existence, on an individual and a group level, it is not an evident fact, it is a “[...] tension between the potential and the real” and, that being so, it cannot be explained according to “mechanomorphic” categories (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 128). This current of thought considers the organization to be the interior framework of what occurs in social action, not considering the organization to be a determinant factor in this action. The changes that occur in an organization are consequences of the actions of the units and not of other forces that do not consider these units.



The third proposition understands that symbolic interactions are free from formal repression. Experiences are exchanged through symbolic interactions that imply more intimate and informal exchanges or communication, which are not projected or have room for functional behavior. "There is little tolerance for the ambiguity in instrumental social interaction, while there is great tolerance for ambiguity in symbolic interaction (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 12)."

Therefore, the economic organization, its rationality and its functionality are distinct from other social systems. It is inappropriate to attribute the development of aspects related to love, self-confidence, self-realization, honesty, and many others to an economic organization. The psychology of contemporary society is a recurrent theme in the works of Guerreiro Ramos<sup>1</sup>. The author argues that while the formal economic organization continues to be the center of human existence in this society, the problems that result from this dynamism tend to get worse and worse (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989).

What one observes is that Western capitalism deteriorates the character of modern man, which has become unable to put itself in another place; relationships are superficial and based on interests. According to Fromm (2000, p. 39):

Modern man is alienated from himself, from his peers and nature. He has been transformed into an article, and experiments his life forces as if they should produce the maximum profit attainable under current market conditions. Human relationships are essentially those of alienated automatons, each one basing his or her safety on being close to the herd and not being different in terms of thoughts, feelings or actions. At the same time that everyone is trying to be as close as possible to others, everyone feels extremely alone, invaded by a deep feeling of insecurity, anxiety and guilt that always occurs when human separation cannot be overcome. Our civilization offers many palliatives that help people become consciously unconscious of this isolation; above all, the strict routine of mechanical and bureaucratic work is what helps them remain without knowing their most fundamental human desires of aspirations, transcendence and unity. With just routine, man cannot overcome his unconscious desperation through routines of entertainment, and the satisfaction of always buying new things and soon exchanging them for others.

These propositions help us understand the success of social networks on the internet, with the loss of substantive organizations, and the process of making society one dimensional as described by Marcuse (1979) and the absence of communal aspects of life.

Meanwhile, in terms of economic organizations and Organizational Studies we are witnessing a new fashion: the management of people and business based on wholistic precepts, seeking to understand humans from their professional, emotional, physical, mental and spiritual aspects through days of seminars, training or even programmed weekends. To Faria (2007c), there seems to be no doubt that to be human in the wholistic purpose of Administration, what is of value is your work effort. It follows that a human being:

[...] is a piece of merchandise that should be treated so that it will produce better to “bring more gains to the company.” Exploiting “emotional depth”, desires, true “inspiration”, “weaknesses” and “peace in the heart and the soul”, means perfecting control mechanisms through disciplining the “spirit”, making them more subtle, less perceptible, more ideological and disguised through concepts and discourses that exploit an imaginary “uniqueness”, offering an invisible and abstract “aura”, to obtain identification between the subject’s “mission in the world” and obligations within the reality of his or her activities in the company. This corporation together with strategic intelligence plans and executes a true kidnapping of the subjectivity of the employee (FARIA, 2007c, p. 163).

Witnessing the expansion of this wholistic vision is a warning that we have arrived at an extreme point of human degradation, a point at which the efficiency of economic organizations is affected, awakening them with these practices that seek to supply what is no longer supplied in other social systems.

<sup>1</sup>Referenced by various authors, including Erich Fromm.

#### Fourth “blind spot”: organizational theory is incapable of distinguishing work from occupation, and is only concerned with a mechanomorphic view of man

Guerreiro Ramos emphasizes that within all pre-capitalistic societies there exists some type of differentiation between activities and occupations. Even though the nature of each one varies from society to society, two traits suffuse this distinction. First, activities are determined externally “by objective necessities”. Second, occupation is “[...] autonomously exercised by the individual according to his or her desire for personal realization” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 130).

In its original sense, *leisure* corresponded to the most serious effort that a person could perform, because it was related precisely to the qualitative character that occupations have. In the market society, the meaning of leisure, therefore has changed, becoming a synonym for idleness, diversion, pastimes. Idleness, contrary to what many believe, is the incapacity to have leisure and also, in our time, a lack of work. Within this context, paradoxically, the existence of a leisure class is only possible due to the role of private property in the means of production. The significance of work in the modern world has been altered by the market’s logic. Within this system, work has been transformed into the main criterion of worth and merit.

In the epistemological framework of the market system, work has been transformed into the source of all values. Among the reasons for this, we have the conditions created during the industrial revolution, which permit organizations to broaden their dominion over social life to an unprecedented extent, these conditions make it impossible for man to occupy himself properly, making him a mechanism of the production system – “[...] the transformation of the individual into a worker is a requirement of the mechanical plan of production” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 133). The need for objective standards of profits and costs imply a pricing system which transforms individuals into cost items through their salaries – “[...] the transformation of the individual into a worker is a requirement of production accounting” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 133). The market system can only be transformed into the dominant sector to the extent that “[...] the process of socialization induces individuals to accept their psychological requirements” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 133).

Guerreiro Ramos (1983) terms the industrialization of society the *ecumenical process*, which gradually results in greater similarities. Administrative theory has worldwide scope: the process of industrialization makes nations more similar in their organizational aspects, which tends to diminish cultural differences; technologies in given sectors tend to be the same everywhere, as do the socio-technical systems created to operate these organizations. This fact, associated with the universal desire for higher standards of living that industrialization entails, produces forces that result in cultural changes in the countries that have industrialized or are industrializing. These forces are so powerful that they provoke considerable changes in social traditions and the organization of the family, including established cultures. While this occurs in nations which are passing through the process of industrialization, in nations that have already passed through this process the differences become less and less (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1996).

The world has become more and more uniform and concise in various aspects. When we associate this fact to the consequences that they cause in countries that structurally are very different, we have a serious problem. However many attempts are made to approximate or copy technologies and forms of organization, it is always necessary to take into account each nation’s own reality. If this is not done, the results are more negative than positive.

#### *To provide continuity*

The “blind spots” of organizational theories pointed out by Guerreiro Ramos are in harmony with the seeking of alternatives such as the discussion of Social Economics and Solidarity, other strands of economics that seek to coordinate self-managed productive activities. Isonomies are egalitarian organizations with communitarian ends that have arisen more and more often as a form of resistance and differentiation in the face of the systematic saga of an instrumentalized market society. "Given that a complete materialization of the concept has still not been found, it only serves a heuristic purpose (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 151)."

In these organizations, a substantive approach to organization would be dominant or would receive greater stimulus for its development, with the participation of their members in a context that would seek to preserve substantive rationality, permeated by symbolic interactions and contributing to the process of constructing the subjectivity of their participants. In *Administration and the Brazilian Context*, for example, in discussing the decision-making process as a locus of conflict, Guerreiro Ramos cites self-management as the model capable of minimizing it.

Here it is pertinent to remember the work of Henri Desroche (1914-1994)<sup>2</sup> and his perspective of the political project of actors involved in cooperative/collective organizations. Cooperativism treated in terms of principles or postulates runs the risk of distancing itself from the morals that originated it and becoming a vague doctrine. Based on his studies, he suggested that the cooperative ethic involves the elements *creativity*, related to the pleasure of creating a group and developing relationships and movements; *solidarity*, manifested by the limits of the rights and interests of capital, and with the emphasis on social results, the cooperator gives up its immediate interests in the hope of finding an economic regime capable of providing a better standard of living, better for the individual and his or her group; *ecumenicity*, which recognizes the intersection of interests in cooperation and solidarity, permitting common practices which can encompass various references; an ethic of responsibility, balanced with the ethic of conviction (which in this case is related to the other cited elements), and finally, a cooperative project is developed with the responsibility to meet the needs of its members which can be the fragility of cooperativism, or also its vigor and capacity to combine human values with the weight of responsibilities (DESROCHE, 2006).

In order to study self-management more deeply, Webering (2015) directed her focus towards the dimension of cooperation that animates self-managed ventures. Cooperatives transform the dynamics of capitalist work organizations in which workers do not articulate themselves by their own will, but have their work coordinated by third parties, because they are formed based on cooperation between the workers themselves. However, since human organizations also go through an evolutionary process, they suffer from their own problems with Administration and the maintenance of democracy, the appearance of a managing class, the division of work and disputes for power. However, knowing and understanding this dynamism is an important part of developing strategies that self-reinforce cooperative identity. Work constructed collectively, even if it is performed to guarantee the survival of individuals, gains new meaning through cooperation, because it recovers their autonomy and the liberating potential of collective work.

These “blind spots” are also important to the need to think about the meaning of technology. Guerreiro Ramos shows marked concern with the replication of theories, concepts, techniques and institutions. Even though this thinking normally is related in a more specific way to *The Sociological Reduction*, published originally in 1958 (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1996), there is a constant restlessness in his work (PAULA, 2008). At the end of *The New Science of Organizations*, discussing his new paraeconomic paradigm, Guerreiro Ramos also makes a necessary connection with social reconstruction, an area of growing interest that began to figure in studies of the “technologies of social instruments” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 151). In fact, beginning in the 1980s, the meanings of technology began to be a preoccupation of the Philosophy and Sociology of Science, which examine the instrumental rationality that they are based on (NEDER, 2013).

The Canadian Andrew Feenberg has become one of the main references in this area by developing a critical theory of technology, a non-deterministic approach which goes well beyond the rational control of nature and which counterposes the concept of technology which is impregnated in Western society. In the modern economic structure, technology is associated with functionality and rationality without taking into account the society within which it exists; it is the social institutions that have to adapt. Feenberg proposes a reform of the traditional definition of technology giving it a new focus that brings together multiple contexts which leaves aside the simple consideration of rational means, which he calls *subversive rationality*. The author demystifies the assumption that technology is the path to progress and development and that efficiency identifies this path (FEENBERG, 2010).

As a response, the proposal of technology is rooted in society, whose discussion includes the problem of teaching it and gains force in engineering. Social Technology (ST) arose through the discussions of Appropriate Technology (AT) in the 1980s, which is positioned as a solution to the problems of conventional technology developed in wealthy countries which needs to be adjusted to the reality of poor countries. (DAGNINO, 2006).

The main peculiarity of ST is that it is developed together with its users, and it can be a demand that arises from them (in general, small low-income producers and consumers), through participative methodologies that develop the potential and creativity of the direct producer. This technology can be, inclusively, an already existing technology that has been adjusted to the space and time of the group involved (LIANZA and ADDOR, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> He belonged to the School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences (University of Paris), and was the director of the Cooperative College of Paris, coordinating for 40 years the collection *International Archives of the Sociology of Cooperation*.

ST is related to feelings of community, and it is more egalitarian to the extent that it brings individuals closer again, ceasing to be at the exclusive service of capital, but rather at the service of man. As a consequence, ST stimulates substantive rationality associated with an ethic with values that are different from the usually known ones, which also has formal rationality to the extent that it seeks the economic viability of small ventures usually linked to a Solidarity Economy (SILVA and WEBERING, 2010).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Guerreiro Ramos shows us how in modern times, the concept of reason has suffered *transevaluation*. This fact is related to the way in which formal rationality and its ethics of responsibility have also come to dominate society to the detriment of substantive rationality based on the ethics of values. At the same time, the development of formal market organizations has been observed along with how they have come to be central in this society. These factors have also affected the culture and character of modern man, who has come to develop behavior through the calculation of its consequences and the ways in which it may be of interest. Activities derived from the objective necessities of survival have also been transformed into the core of social life, in which work becomes the main criterion of recognition and merit.

Guerreiro Ramos argues that organizational theory needs to be reformulated based on new epistemological fundamentals, because it has been an ideology of the market system ever since Frederick Taylor (1856-1915). As a merciless critic, to him proponents of Scientific Management (like Taylor) and positive operationalists (like Herbert Simon) still have more legitimacy – if they are limited to the environment of market organizations, because they were gravely mistaken in expanding the logic of these activities to society and human nature – than the behavioral theories that have been applied to Administration. To Guerreiro Ramos, this union “is spurious” and “hides a sinister purpose”, and the only excuse available to its defenders is their “mistaken good faith” (GUERREIRO RAMOS, 1989, p. 137).

In the thinking of Guerreiro Ramos we can perceive a current relevance, conscience and methodological rigor which still have much to contribute to organizational studies and teaching. Fortunately, we have observed an increase in discussions of organizational forms which are less alienated and degrading to individuals, that respect their integrity and question the dominance and evolution of formal rationality and its utilitarian character within the capitalist world. Examples of this are thematic areas that appear in events, organizations (such as the Brazilian Society of Organizational Studies – SBEO – created in 2012), and publications related to Critical Organizational Studies (FARIA, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2009b, 2009c; PAULA, 2008), as well as the pioneering works of Maurício Tragtenberg, Fernando Prestes Motta and Alberto Guerreiro Ramos himself.

Recognizing that the formal organization of the market is just one of various microsocial types of organization, he argues that substantive organizational theory recognizes various types of existing social systems. This is why we have touched on some concepts and logic related to Solidarity Economics, cooperativism and ST, which support continuity in the study and practice of these organizations which have a communitarian and more egalitarian essence. Many things have been done, but we are still far from recognizing the space and importance of these organizations which offer greater potential to provide underlying rationality to human groupings which involve a conception that is broader than simply pure reason.

The works of Guerreiro Ramos offer important and singular contributions to those who are involved in Organizational Studies and their teaching, and in the development or analysis of other management possibilities and uses of technology. His thinking contributes to those who wish to think about and construct a more critical Administration, based on the rigorous epistemologies that Alberto Guerreiro Ramos emphasized so much.

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