

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS IN ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES

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1 INTRODUCTION

Ultimately, an academic researcher's work amounts to achieving significant knowledge in a specific area. Initially, within this perspective, s/he will face the challenges of understanding how each research paradigm could provide a direction on this journey and also which research techniques could be applied in order to maximize these results (DAFT, 1983).

These challenges have been inspiring academic research and, as Edmondson and McManus (2007) observe, the number of researchers inserted in the field is growing, in order to study human behavior, and they are interested in organizations' everyday problems, particularly the submerged phenomena, in opposition to the regularity patterns of organizational reality. In these terms, the challenge of research paradigms comprises providing a model or a standard of science accepted in a collaborative way, to understand these realities and to construct sense and meaning.

As Vergara and Caldas (2005) observe, illustrious thinkers have contributed to forming mutually exclusive research paradigms, despite having strengthened the continuous search to overcome the dichotomous vision established in this field. Notably, Cunliffe (2011), Burrell and Morgan (1979, 2017), Morgan (1980, 2011), Mir and Mir (2002), Schultz and Hatch (1996), Pfeffer (1995), Morgan and Smircich (1980), Vergara and Caldas (2005) presented a more straightforward and tenuous vision, in order to make this dichotomy more palatable, suggesting the establishment of more permeable boundaries for subjectivist versus objectivist epistemology in *continuum ad infinitum*. For Vergara and Caldas (2005), in this case, activity within these boundaries would not exclude inspiration by any of the parties, but, conversely, contributes towards it.

Seen in these terms, a pronounced peculiarity in contemporary social research (e.g., subjects related to single or collective human phenomena, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology and other fields of administration and education, among others) have a major influx in the paradigmatic perspectives of this research (BURRELL; MORGAN, 1979, 2017; MORGAN, 1980, 2011; PFEFFER, 1982; ORLIKOWSKI; BAROUDI, 1991). This reality imposes a wider knowledge about these perspectives on researchers.

This is demonstrated by numerous schools of thought, bearing their own epistemological assumptions and respective methodologies. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979; 2017), Cunliffe (2011), Deetz (1996), Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) and Saccol (2009) the extension of personal convictions in the social phenomena studied are complex, and the plurality of these perspectives allow their exploration in distinct epistemological positions. This variety increases with the challenges identified, demonstrating the need for researchers to implement a learning process.

The emerging question will be how to start this process and Crotty (1998) classifies as scaffolded learning the approach used to teach and learn simultaneously, in order to provide an initial reflective structure, and then allowing the learner to establish more complex and long-term epistemological structures. This will lead to what Aristotle (2010) called *quid quid motetu ab alio movetur*.

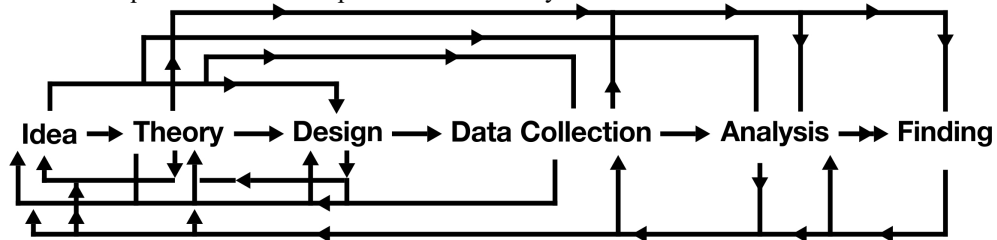
In these terms, for Aristotle (2010), rational intelligence does not act directly on the meaning but on the images created in memory. Thus, the corresponding imaginary in which people recognize each other and communicate emerge collectively from literature, expressing their vision of the world and *scientia constructio*. However, for Santos (2012), the world of ideas, when constructed correctly, adapt to the nature of the perceived reality. Consequently, it could be from the reality of the ideas, carrying in their essence the reality extrinsic to the human mind. Among the most relevant aspects of personal imaginary, Bacon (1973) highlights the importance of observation, experimentation, process and reflection on the

result. Therefore, it can be assumed that the author advocates: a) experience conducted to produce science; b) cut out reality in order to study it; c) steering the intellect for an oriented search and the established content of knowledge.

As presented by Berg (2001), the presence of analytic induction is corroborated in the approaches of qualitative research, which currently encompasses theory-before-research concomitantly with research-before-theory, as they are arranged in a spiral format, allowing a logic of procedures to be formed: a) commencing the research from an idea; b) gathering theoretical information; c) correcting the information; d) re-commencing the study, analyzing the possible designs; e) re-examining the theoretical assumptions; f) refining the theoretical assumptions and g) possibly improving the idea.

Also according to Berg (2001), and corroborated by Daft (1983), with every two steps forward in analytic induction, there are one or two steps back, before continuing with the current model. Thus, the result will not be a forward linear progression but a forward and backward spiral process in which the following phases might and should progressively complement each other in the course of the research. Figure 1 illustrates the above-mentioned inductive research model designed by Berg (2001).

Figure 1 – Model of qualitative research phenomenon: theory-before-research and research-before-theory



Source: Berg (2001, p. 19).

Based on these assumptions and the perspective of maximizing the growth of the teaching-learning process, this article presents a vision of academic research centered on analyzing the phenomenon and its distinct forms, applying the sense of scaffold and not edifice. Therefore, it intends to encourage reflective practice in academic research approaches, such as the *a priori* promotion of procedure for *a posteriori* positioning of philosophical assumptions of their strategies.

Thus, the research is justified by the essence of establishing analogies about the knowledge, leaning towards the idiosyncrasies of the essence of real agents, so that they are conveying to the world and itself. According to a verse by Antonio Machado, this aspiration converges to: “*a distinguir me paro las voces de los ecos, y escucho solamente, entre las voces, una*” (ANCRUGON, 2013).

Thus, a sense of stability and direction is demonstrated, while each researcher continues to construct their own building. In other words, insofar as whether individually, or even collectively, progress is made towards understanding and presenting the research process proposed, according to its reality and forms which are useful for the purpose of the selected research (DAFT, 1983).

Although for Edmondson and McManus (2007), the potential relevance of field research is motivating, the research journey may be confused and inefficient, teeming with logistical obstacles and unforeseen events. For these authors, academic research provides additional challenges, which may obscure the development of a theoretical contribution during the *continuum* of the field visit.

Shepherd and Challenger (2013) also highlight the need for researchers to revisit the concepts of paradigm(s) and be aware of the controversy surrounding them. Therefore, the need to update the epistemological typology to be incorporated in social science debates is

highlighted, with a view to expanding the definitions of objectivism and subjectivism and adding intersubjectivity to this mix. On this point, Cunliffe (2011, p.7) sublimates that “neither Burrell and Morgan nor Morgan and Smircich offer an adequate conceptualization of intersubjectivity, nor address its importance for studying and theorizing organizations.”

Since researchers’ growing interest in interpretivist analyses is verifiable, and considering the need to learn about the fundamental and structuring questions, this article is justified in proposing ontological, epistemological and paradigmatic labelling as a support. It is specifically aimed at researchers in the initial phase of research activities, suggesting a set of philosophical assumptions to conduct and evaluate interpretivist, positivist and critical research as an information system.

Therefore, the structure of this article is presented as follows: in addition to the introduction, the second chapter discusses the ontological and epistemological distinctions that are the basis for the research paradigms described. Lastly, chapter three presents the final considerations, consolidating proposals for future research.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section analyzes the expansion of the organizational research limits developed from the standpoint of a multiparadigmatic profile (SCHULTZ; HATCH, 1996; PFEFFER, 1995; GIOIA; PITRE, 1990). Thus, the research method concentrates with more evidence on the context of broader and more fluid intellectual currents, which for Buchanan and Bryman (2007) encourage a more pragmatic approach. In these terms, Gioia and Pitre (1990) argue in favor of a multiparadigmatic approach as a resource to establish a correspondence between paradigms and efforts towards theoretical construction, as a way of transposing limits on undefined paradigms. This perspective enables the production of insights into organizational phenomena that not only enable academics to recognize inherent and irreconcilable theoretical distinctions but also encouragement to adopt a more comprehensive overview.

In these terms, Mir and Mir (2002) highlight that epistemological discussions should focus on social engagement and thereby make room for alternative theorization and criticism. However, for Schultz and Hatch (1996) and Pfeffer (1995), the multiparadigmatic strategy promotes interaction through a functional and interpretive frontier, i.e. developing the idea of the interface as a new strategy to engage multiple paradigms.

2.1 Ontology

Ontological questions circumstantially return to the Greek philosophers Plato (being) and Aristotle (metaphysics) but the central question currently deliberates whether social entities (e.g., organizations) can and should be considered objective, as a social actor with an external reality or considered a social construction built on social actors’ perceptions and actions (PASIAN, 2016). However, Creswell (2010), Flick (2010), Hacking (1999a, 1999b), Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) and Saccol (2009) put forward three sets of beliefs that delineate a way of researching the world of ideas, namely: a) beliefs about the object or phenomenon under study; b) beliefs about the notion of knowledge; c) beliefs about the relation between knowledge and the empirical universe. Various intellectual positions on these three sets of belief form distinct research perspectives or the universe of the perspective that scientific researchers have adopted in their studies.

Thus, from different ontological and epistemological insights that result in various research paradigms, the aim was to advise on the way to research the world of ideas, informing the philosophical instance that will provide elements for each actor’s various world views, i.e. the research participants (SHULTZ; HATCH, 1996; PFEFFER, 1995; GIOIA; PITRE, 1990; SACCOL, 2009). Hence, ontology is studied initially, followed by

epistemology and research paradigms, which sustain the academically analyzed research proposals.

According to Pasion (2016), ontology is devoted to studying the question of being and understanding about the nature of reality and, under this circumstance, has contributed to demarcating the epistemology to be followed. It initially defines how the subject perceives the world and its phenomena, whether physical or social, serving as a base to demarcate the research problem and has three main classifications, which will be addressed: a) realist; b) subject-object interaction, and c) idealist.

2.1.1 Realist ontology

For Crotty (1998) and Saccol (2009), ontology is the study of being and the search for the nature of reality. Thus, every theoretical perspective incorporates a way of understanding the ontological and epistemological concepts, as they emerge concomitantly. Therefore, defining the nature of reality counts on defining how knowledge is generated. Due to this confluence of meanings, writers have found difficulties in maintaining ontology and epistemology conceptually separated. For realist ontology, reality exists outside the mind and subsequently requires objectivist epistemology, which defends that meaning exists in objects, independent of any awareness. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), in some cases, realism is identified with objectivism, and this establishes a certain causal link between the two areas, when it is assumed that the researcher's position should be of objective detachment, in order for them to understand how things really work.

In Saccol's (2009) understanding, realist ontology conjectures the existence of the nature of reality concluded outside the mind, independent of individuals' capacity of perception and the mental constructions that they may allege having (e.g., trees, rivers and winds, among other concepts). The natural world exists, independent of individuals' perceptions and according to this ontological lens, subjective (e.g., formed from perception and the human mind) and collective concepts (e.g., formed based on constructing meanings through social interaction between individuals and the world) are rejected.

2.1.2 Subject-object interaction ontology

Subject-object interaction ontology considers social reality as the product of negotiation and the mutual sharing of meanings between social subjects. In these terms, the researcher assumes that the nature of the reality to be investigated is not perceived as realist or idealist, i.e. it is not assumed that it is essentially external, or the result of subjects' individualized perceptions. In this case, the nature of the reality is constructed by sharing in society, in a collective instance; consequently, it is intersubjective (SACCOL, 2009; CUNLIFFE, 2011).

2.1.3 Idealist ontology

Idealist ontology assumes that the external world is solely made up of appearances and does not have a separate existence independent of our thoughts (BLAIKE, 2007; CUNLIFFE, 2011). In these terms, it sets off from the assumption that an entity only exists following the observer's reflection, in a mental construction process (SACCOL, 2009). Thus, reality is described in distinct ways:

- a) Reality as a projection of human imagination: the social world and what passes as reality is a projection of individual consciousness. It is an act of creative imagination and dubious intersubjective status. This position is commonly known as solipsism. Thus, reality is concealed by human processes that judge and interpret the phenomenon in the consciousness before a full understanding of the structure of the meaning that expresses it. Consequently, the nature of world phenomenon may only be accessible to human beings through phenomenological methods of perception (MORGAN; SMIRCICH, 1980). Therefore, reality can be perceived as a social construction and symbolic discourse.

- b) Reality as a social construction: refers to a continuous process, continually created and recreated in the conflicts of daily life, insofar that social actors are established in their world in order to introduce a sphere of significant definition. This takes place through languages, labels, actions and routines, which form symbolic ways of being in the world.

Social reality is inserted in the nature and use of these forms of symbolic action. The symbolic forms of being in the world, such as through the use of language, may result in the development of shared undertakings, containing multiple realities, only limited to moments in which they are actively constructed and sustained (MORGAN; SMIRCICH, 1986).

- c) Reality as symbolic discourse: refers to a pattern of symbolic relationships and meanings sustained through a process of actions and human interactions (MORGAN; SMIRCICH, 1986). An example of this way of seeing and interacting in the world is Michael Craig Martin's work, "An Oak Tree" initially shown in London in 1974, in which the artist argued that the glass of water displayed in reality was not a glass of water but, in fact, an oak tree. This is how the artist presented the power of creating reality.

To summarize, for Berger, Luckmann and Zuleta (1968), Blaike (2007) and Cunliffe (2011) in the viewpoint of idealistic ontology, the social actor externalizes the subjective reality of their personal being in the social world and, consequently, internalizes the latter as objective reality.

Thus, following the *a priori* definition of ontology, epistemology and its idiosyncratic distinctions will now be discussed.

2.2 Epistemology

Can the existence of an objective truth that needs to be identified accurately, and with certainty, be confirmed? Does this eagerness make the meaning an essentially subjective act, independent of the object, or do the subject and the object contribute towards the construction of their meaning? Various epistemological positions are included in these questions, which involve an in depth analysis into the way research should be performed and how to present the results (CUNLIFFE, 2011; DEETZ, 1996)

Epistemology is the science of the means, the rules and methods of human knowledge. Seen in these terms, it is the base of all the other sciences and, consequently, essential due to the human being's voluntary consciousness (SALMIERI, 2016; RAND, 1990; DEETZ, 1996). Therefore, it is important to highlight the distinction between subjectivism-objectivism and subject-object, due to the confusion displayed by Cunliffe (2011) on the use of these terms. Consequently, according to this author, the need to update the typology by incorporating debates underway within social sciences that extend the definitions of subjectivism and objectivism and therefore add intersubjectivity into the object of analysis is highlighted.

From the first years of life, the human being acquires knowledge which is provided to them empirically by experience, which Aristotle (2010) called *doxa*, as a way of identifying common knowledge, in other words, knowledge bestowed on everyone through experience and the interactions between them and the surrounding world. However, insofar that coherent knowledge of cause and effect by means of correlations and through parsimonious distribution is obtained, it evolves to knowledge called *speculum*, in other words, which faithfully translates the image of a speculative act – theoretical knowledge. However, Santos (2012, p. 138) states that in philosophy this term has the following meaning: "connection-chemistry-subordination-subalternation." To summarize: for the Greeks, *episteme* brought together all the theoretical knowledge and had the aim of achieving the truth and removing

mistakes, which distinguishes it from *doxa* (merely practical knowledge). Consequently, epistemology in this research is defined as work of the human being's desire, who tends to achieve what is right and be distanced from what is wrong, through observation.

Therefore, it is a philosophical subject that seeks to determine the reach and nature of the source of knowledge. Thus, it studies the relation between the subject and the object, with the aim of knowing the truth of its own reality and the surrounding reality. Seen in these terms, this lens seeks to discover the correlation of cause and effect concerning life and human relations. According to Aristotle (2010) and Santos (2012), knowledge is a set of stored information that is derived from observing events that occur in life and successive *a priori* learning, originating from this observation. This knowledge originates in sensory perception, progresses to understanding and culminates in reason. It is a phenomenon with a broad multiplicity of aspects, such as psychological, sociological and biological. This science leads to distancing the excrescences of primary knowledge (HACKING, 1999a).

To continue, according to Crotty (1998), when developing a research proposal, initially two specific questions should be answered: a) which methodologies and methods should be used in the proposed research; b) how to justify that choice and the use of methodologies and methods. Seen in these terms, the justification of this preference for methodology and methods is something that meets the philosophical assumptions of theoretical perspective concerning reality incorporated into the research.

These epistemological questions extend into another four basic questions for any research process, in order to answer the two initial questions, namely: a) which methods will be used; b) which methodology governs that choice; c) which theoretical perspective will best suit that choice and d) which epistemology communicates this theoretical perspective. .

2.2.1 Objectivist epistemology

According to Cunliffe (2011) and Hacking (1999a), objectivist epistemology is related to the way knowledge is constructed. Thus, it is assumed that the meanings present in the objects and entities exist independent of any rationalization of the human mind. Therefore, the existence of an objective interpretation in everything that exists is defined, and that this meaning is expected from what is achieved. Thus, knowledge about everything is conveyed objectively and rationally. In this field, mathematical language finds fertile ground to transmit its concepts, like an entity allied to the above-mentioned epistemological lens in the construction and transmission of knowledge (CROTTY, 1998; HACKING, 1999a; CUNLIFFE, 2011).

This epistemological lens is centered in the relation of consciousness with existence, and with regards to recognizing the fact that reality exists independent of any perception of consciousness and experience. Epistemologically, it is recognition of the fact that consciousness (of the human being) should acquire knowledge of the reality through specific meanings (reason), without harmonizing with certain rules (logic). Therefore, although the reality is unchangeable in any context, a response is only true and can only be obtained through specific mental processes that are required from all those in search of knowledge. Therefore, there is no replacement for this process (CROTTY, 1998; RAND, 1990; SALMIERI, 2016).

For Rand (1990) and Salmieri (2016), metaphysically, the only authority is reality and, epistemologically, the mind. In other words, they establish that the former is the final arbiter of the latter. Therefore, research undertaken with a positivistic spirit may choose to use the quantitative approach, underlying the positivistic position. This research lens may contribute to the soundness of the research and make its findings convincing.

To summarize: objectivist epistemology maintains that meaningful reality remains, even over adverse conditions, which the consciousness may consider. Seen in these terms, a tree in the forest is a tree, independent of someone being aware of its existence. Objectively,

therefore, it gives the intrinsic meaning of a tree. According to Crotty (1998) corroborated by Salmieri (2016) and Cunliffe (2011), when human beings recognize it as a tree, they simply discover a meaning which has been there, waiting for them the whole time.

For these authors, a major part of the ethnography has been undertaken in this spirit. In the objectivist vision, “what does knowledge mean” – the understanding and intended values are considered in the people and/or phenomena that we are studying (CROTTY, 1998, p. 8). Consequently, if we approach it correctly, we can discover the true objective in this way.

However, continuing with this analysis, the next epistemological lens, in other words, constructivist epistemology rejects this view of human knowledge.

2.2.2 Constructivist epistemology

Qualitative researchers widely invoke social constructivist epistemology and claim that meanings are achieved from engagement, in which the world view is constructed. Therefore, it describes a perspective distinct from those represented by positivist and post-positivist paradigms (CUNLIFFE, 2011).

Thus, the meaning attributed is constructed through interaction between mental processes, following interaction between the subject and the object. Therefore, social constructivism assumes that the construction of meaning takes place through social interaction processes between the parties and intersubjectivity (DEETZ, 1996; CROTTY, 1998; HACKING, 1999a; SACCOL, 2009). It is an extremely useful research lens to study how meanings are attained; in other words, how reality is constructed through interactions between people and the world they inhabit (CHARMAZ, 2003, 2008).

This lens assumes reality as being socially constructed and, for Charmaz (2008), she visualizes the social actors as clients at a specific organization, who may express specific interpretations of situations that are found at a certain moment. These specific situations may affect their actions and the nature of their social interaction with the other stakeholders. Consequently, a researcher needs to understand social actors’ subjective reality to then be able to understand their actions, reasons and intentions in a significant way. Thus, also according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), client service at an organization has a reality that is separate from the clients who receive it. This is the reason why the subjectivist view in providing services to clients is continually reviewed (CUNLIFFE, 2011).

According to Crotty (1998), there is no objective reality that is waiting to be discovered for this epistemological perspective. Thus, the truth or its meaning, exists within and outside of involvement with the reality present in the world. Therefore, meaning is not discovered but constructed. Different people may construct distinct meanings for the same phenomena, in other words, this distinction of understanding is clearly displayed in specific cultures. In this world vision, the subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of the assigned meaning.

2.2.3 Subjectivist epistemology

The third epistemological lens exposed here is subjectivist epistemology, which emerges from structural, post-structuralist and post-modernist forms (CUNLIFFE, 2011). In subjectivism, the meaning does not result from an interaction between the subject and the object but emerges, established on the object by the subject of the action. According to this lens of knowledge, the object as such does not contribute towards producing meaning, as it is created from the subject’s consciousness; in other words, in a sense, this knowledge may be created from nothing. The meaning is imported from another place; in other words, for the object, the assigned meaning may come from dreams or even primordial archetypes that are located within collective consciousness, religious beliefs, and other forms (CROTTY, 1998; MIR; MIR, 2002; CUNLIFFE, 2011).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2006), this lens of knowledge is of a subjective nature and is displayed in practices, activities and daily discourse. In this sense, for the

authors, knowledge emerges collectively through reflective processes. Its aspects can only be accessed by taking part in actions in which this knowledge is expressed. In these terms, it can arise individually or socially.

Knowledge is constructed internally and, therefore, is completely subjective; in other words, it is created from social actors' perceptions and their consequent actions. Therefore, it is a continuous process insofar that this phenomenon of social interaction is in a constant state of change (SAUNDERS; LEWIS; THORNHILL, 2009). In these terms, it is dependent on the context and its focus of a holistic nature. Table 1 presents the basic assumptions for a debate on subjectivism and objectivism in social sciences.

Table 1 – Basic assumptions of the subjectivism versus objectivism debate in social sciences

SUBJECTIVIST approaches to social science		OBJECTIVIST approaches to social science				
Core ontological assumptions	Reality as a projection of human imagination	Reality as a social construction	Reality as a realm of symbolic discourse	Reality as a contextual field of information	Reality as a concrete process	Reality as a concrete structure
Assumptions about human nature	Man as a pure spirit, and conscious being	Man as a social constructor; the symbol creator	Man as an actor, the symbol user	Man as an information processor	Man as an adaptor	Man as a responder
Basic epistemological stance	To obtain phenomenological insight, revelation	To understand how social reality is created	To understand patterns of symbolic discourse	To map contexts	To study systems, processes and change	To construct a positivist science
Some favored metaphors	Transcendental	Language game, accomplishment, text	Theater, culture	Cybernetics	Organism	Machine
Research methods	Exploration of pure subjectivity	Hermeneutics	Symbolic analysis	Contextual analysis of gestalten	Historical analysis	Laboratory experiments and surveys
Some research examples	Phenomenology	Ethnomethodology	Theory of social action	Cybernetics	Open systems theory	Behaviorism

Source: Morgan and Smircich (1980, p. 492) with additions from Mendonça (2001, p. 6).

Remenyi et al., (1998), Crotty, (1998), Cunliffe (2011), Deetz (1996) and Denzin and Lincoln (2006) emphasize the need to research the details of every situation in order to understand the reality or perhaps one which finds harmony behind this reality. This assumption stems from an interpretative position, in which the subjective meanings that encourage social actors' actions need to be explored, so that researchers can understand the reasons present in this behavior.

2.3 Paradigms

Based on different ontological and epistemological perspectives defined *a priori*, the research paradigm status can be defined, however there are no fully exclusionary definitions in terms of scientific research procedures and techniques.

The level of paradigmatic evolution in a scientific field has various significantly important outcomes, which affect the researcher's capacity to perform coordinated actions (PFEFFER, 1993). Also according to this author, the study of organizations has numerous

subspecialties and these certainly diversify in the conditions of the level of their development. However, he argues that the field of organizational studies is characterized by a tolerably sparse level in paradigm development, above all in comparison to some adjacent social sciences, such as psychology, economics and political science.

In these terms, Shepherd and Challenger (2013) argue that the pluralism of paradigms is constructed to mutually oppose each other and demonstrate that understanding this dispute as inherently dialogical. Therefore, what is sought in this study is to coherently present the line of thinking of each of the three research paradigms analyzed, thereby preserving the researcher's freedom and creativity in meeting the basic objectives s/he has established (BURRELL; MORGAN, 1979, 2017).

2.3.1 Positivist paradigm

Paradigmatic studies considered positivist - studies based on functionalist assumptions - are characterized by the premises of the existence of *a priori* fixed relations of the phenomena that are basically investigated from structured questionnaires (MARTINS, 1997). For authors such as Amboni et al. (2017), Bulgacov and Bulgacov (2007), Saccol (2009), Serva, Dias and Alperstedt (2010), this model defends assumptions that consider concrete reality, rationally ordered in compliance with the rules of natural sciences. In this paradigm, it essentially works to test a theory, in an attempt to increase the prediction of understanding the results of a phenomenon. The theoretical criterion of the positivist paradigmatic lens is demonstrated in the quantifiable measures of the variables, the test of the hypotheses and design of the inferences (CRESWELL, 2010, 2014; CROTTY, 1998; HAIR JR. et al., 2005; ORLIKOWSKI; BAROUDI, 1991; SACCOL, 2009).

Thus, Creswell (2010), Crotty (1998), Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) and Saccol (2009) explain that the *modus operandi et argumentandi* of the philosophical instance that presents the basic assumptions of the positivist world view, considers, explains and predicts what will take place through the regularities and affinities of cause and effect among the elements which form it.

Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) suggest three sets of beliefs that outline the way of seeing and researching: a) beliefs about the notion of knowledge; b) beliefs about the phenomenon or object of study, and c) beliefs about the relation between knowledge and the empirical universe.

Therefore, according to Crotty (1998) and Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), the perspective of the positivist logic reflects the following precepts: a) the phenomenon of interest is unique, tangible and fragmentable and this is the best description of any chosen aspects of the phenomenon; b) the researcher and the object of inquiry are independent, and there is a clear distinction between the observation reports and theoretical affirmations; c) the generalizations are correct and independent of time or its context, and are feasible. For this reason, it is deduced that the theoretical concepts are precise and have invariable and fixed meanings; d) the phenomenon presents true and unidirectional relations of cause and effect that can be identified and tested through hypothetical-deductive logic and e) the investigation is free of *a priori* values. Thus, positivist logic implies that the researcher is working with the observation of a social reality and that the final result of this research may derive from generalizations.

2.3.2 Interpretivist paradigm

Interpretivist paradigmatic assumptions are present in many organizational studies in Brazil (BARROS, 2002, 2004; CARVALHO, 2003; DAVEL; VERGARA, 2001; FONSECA, 1998; GODOY, 1995; MOREIRA, 2002, 2004; SILVA; VERGARA, 2003). According to the assumptions presented by Amboni et al. (2017), Klein and Myers (1999), Saccol (2009), Santos, Koerich and Alperstedt (2018) and Walsham (1993, 1995a, 1995b) the interpretivist paradigm emerged as a prominent feature in information systems research. For these authors,

this paradigm contributes to understanding the thinking and human action in social and organizational contexts. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979, 2017), in this model, the social world vision has a more flexible ontological view, as it does not perceive the social reality of the people involved in the social process; in other words, reality becomes understood with support leaning towards the active participant's, instead of the observer's point of view (e.g., SCHULTZ; HATCH, 1996; LEWIS; GRIMES, 2005; MORGAN, 1997, 2005; MUNCK; SOUZA, 2010; PINTO; SANTOS, 2008; VERGARA; CALDAS, 2005).

Along these lines, Klein and Myers (1999) propose seven principles that derive from anthropology, phenomenology and hermeneutics. Although they confirm that interpretivist research does not subscribe to the idea that a pre-determined set of criteria could be applied in a mechanistic way; in other words, it does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the complexity of creating human sense. Thus, insofar that the social situation emerges, it tries to understand the phenomena through the meanings the individuals attribute to them.

Research can be “classified as interpretative, assuming that knowledge of the reality is obtained through social constructions, such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools and other artifacts” (KLEIN; MYERS, 1999, p. 69). Interpretivist researchers seek to understand the phenomenon through the meanings the participants attribute to them (CROTTY, 1998).

Thus, it is important to explicitly define that often, erroneously, a distinction between qualitative and interpretive research is not established, since they are not synonyms of qualitative research. Qualitative research may be interpretivist or otherwise, depending on the researcher's underlying philosophical assumptions (KLEIN; MYERS, 1999; MYERS, 1997; 2004). In these terms, Chua (1986) suggests that academic research may adhere to a positivist, interpretivist or critical position, and qualitative research may be interpretivist or even critical.

Thus, according to the interpretivist, paradigmatic research lens, generalization is not sought and, instead, the aim is to understand the structure of the phenomenon observed in greater depth, which could be used in other settings at a later date. In other words, from the knowledge acquired from the observation and study of this phenomenon, the *a posteriori* application of this knowledge to other similar phenomena. With regards to the criteria adopted for its classification, it highlights a non-deterministic perspective in which the researcher's intention is centered on increasing understanding of the phenomenon in certain contextual and cultural situations, respecting the principle of the participants' perspective, according to which the researchers do not impose their *a priori* understanding of the situation (CROTTY, 1998; ORLIKOWSKI; BAROUDI, 1991; SACCOL, 2009).

2.3.3 Radical Humanist Paradigm: Critical Theory

The last paradigmatic alternative presented in this study is critical theory. Brookfield (2014), Chua (1986), Gramsci (1971), Habermas (1987a; 1987b), Houben and Rehbein (2011), Lukács (1971, 2008), Marcuse (1968) and Vighi (2012) confirm that both interpretivist and positivist researchers are unable to critically evaluate and analyze the forms of knowledge expressed in these areas.

Similarly, within this context, for Burrell and Morgan (1979) and *a posteriori* reinforced by Hassard and Cox (2013) and Brookfield (2014) there was a division between the theories that subscribed subjective and objective insights in society. In many aspects, this debate was conducted following Louis Althusser's (1969) publication of his work entitled *For Marx*. This presented the notion of an epistemological break and emphasized the polarization of Marxism in two fields: a) those that emphasize the subjective aspects of Marxism, e.g., Lukács and the Frankfurt School; b) those who defended more objective approaches and, in this sense, associated to Althusserian structuralism. Thus, critical researchers differ regarding the precise role of a future event (due to the epistemological break) desirable in setting off

social change. In turn, Habermas (1974) differentiates critical research into two main types: a) the formation of critical theories that could be applied by therapists to begin a process of enlightenment and self-reflection among the actors; b) the selection of appropriate political strategies. In this sense, Chua (1986) considers that social scientists are responsible for forming critical theories, and the task of selecting political strategies belongs to the collectively represented community. Furthermore, Habermas (1974) recognizes and emphasizes that critical theory does not provide the reasons, conditions or even the justifications for everyday political decisions. However, this position is opposed by Althusser (1969) and Poulantzas and Blundi (1975), who see Marxism as a science which could be used to develop a political strategy, in order to lead the working class into power.

According to Klein and Huynh (2004, p. 200), the power of discourse in critical theory is based “on the strength of the best argument”, in order to overcome the misinterpretation, self illusion and social conflicts of emancipatory interest. For these authors, the discourse in this theory is the appropriate context in which an important idea should be explained. According to these authors, various types of argument may be used in corresponding discourses. Table 2 summarizes the types of argumentative discourse.

Table 2 – The construction of Habermas theory of communicative action blocks – models of argumentation

Reference Dimensions Forms of Argumentation	Problematic Expressions	Controversial Validity Claims
Theoretical discourse	Cognitive - instrumental	Truth of propositions; efficacy of teleological actions
Practical discourse	Moral – practical	Rightness of norms of action
Aesthetic criticism	Evaluative	Adequacy of standards of aesthetic and authentic value
Therapeutic critique	Expressive	Truthfulness or sincerity of expressions
Explicative discourse	***	Comprehensibility or well-formedness of symbolic constructs.

Source: Klein and Huynh (2004, p. 201).

In these terms, the critical paradigm sees individuals while they act within a matrix of intersubjective meanings. The process of comprehension, similar to the interpretivist paradigm, depends on the context, since the researchers are inevitably immersed and involved in their socio-historic contexts. However, it is argued that interpretation *per se* for this paradigmatic lens is insufficient, since it presents the view that the world not only is not symbolically mediated but is also shaped by material conditions of domination (CHUA, 1986).

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research strategy adopted by researchers should reflect their position, in line with their philosophical assumptions. Therefore, a research method is a tool or technique that is used during the consultation process. On the other hand, a methodology is an intricate set of ontological and epistemological assumptions that a researcher carries to their academic research. This view of philosophical assumptions facilitates review and criticism, and also underpins the results found.

On one hand, research may be dominated by deductive, objectivist and positivist positions – often leading to the selection of quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. On the other hand, research may be dominated by inductive, subjectivist, constructivist, critical or interpretivist positions, leading to the selection of qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. The sum and delimitation of these choices are

centered on the research strategy adopted. Therefore, the relevance of the substance of the discourse and the guidelines to deal with heterogeneous languages, in a certain sense incompatible, that reflect distinct concepts of the world and experiences and, nonetheless, antagonistic; in other words, distinct imaginaries are presented.

Thus, it is concluded that researchers should be cautious when deciding on their research methods and be aware of the consequences of positions inherent to selecting their research. For Pasian (2016), researchers should be aware, without explicitly exhibiting their philosophical position, provided they remain within an established tradition and a well-known area of research. Therefore, when they come close to the limits of their area of activity, they need to point out their conscious and appropriate choices. Being aware of their own positions about ontology and epistemology contributes to the correct methodological choices and facilitates defense of the results attained, and the readers' understanding.

However, Smircich (1983) observed that the objectivist vision tends to see the culture of an organization as something that the organization has and, on the other hand, the subjectivist vision tends to consider culture as something the organization is; in other words, as the result of a process of continuous social engagement. In this case, the theory and practice of the management are inclined to take organizational culture as a variable; in other words, as something the organization has, which could be manipulated and altered, in order to produce the result that the stakeholders desire. In this sense, the subjectivist point of view concentrates on explaining the meanings that an individual attributes to specific rituals and/or myths. These are associated to the phenomena that the social actors within an organization need to understand.

Thus, the need to update the epistemological typology to be incorporated in social science debates, with a view to increasing the definitions of objectivism and subjectivism and, therefore, add intersubjectivity into this mix, is highlighted.

This work aimed to contribute to researchers who wish to concentrate on projecting their research in line with philosophical assumptions; in other words, on the key ideas present in anthropology, ethnography, phenomenology and hermeneutics. On the other hand, it also seeks to contribute to researchers who intend to defend their work on the principles that are firmly based on philosophical assumptions. Therefore, the researcher will be supporting their paradigmatic position, justifying the results achieved; in other words, it intends to encourage reflection and debate on the peculiarity of the results obtained by researchers with distinct world views. Future research could make further explorations into the other paradigms not described in this work, in order to complement this contribution.

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