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# An essay on the constitution and evolution of the conception of managerial work based on different theoretical currents

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## Abstract

This essay synthetically presents an overview of the constitution and evolution of the concept of managerial work based on two different theoretical currents. The first is the “School of Daily Activities,” grounded on references from the classic heritage. It is an epistemological perspective of an empiricist and rationalist nature, where the managerial work – at the intermediate level – is determined from its position in the hierarchical structure. Also, the managerial work has the role of transmitting the objectives defined by management to workers of the so-called “operational scope.” The second current is guided by the legacy of the francophone tradition, which brings together the connection of contents of social science and ergonomics and work psychology, and activity ergonomics, privileging real work situations. The essay offers elements to subsidize further research on managerial work, including the management of productive space and services and team management.

**KEYWORDS:** Management. Managerial work. Manager.

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## Um ensaio sobre a constituição e evolução da concepção do trabalho gerencial à luz de distintas linhagens teóricas

### Resumo

O presente ensaio propõe apresentar, de forma sintética, um panorama sobre a constituição e evolução da concepção do trabalho gerencial sob a ótica de duas diferentes linhagens teóricas. A primeira ampara-se nas referências da herança clássica, denominada Escola das Atividades Cotidianas, sob uma perspectiva epistemológica de caráter empiricista e racionalista, em que o trabalho gerencial, no nível intermediário, é determinado por sua posição na estrutura hierárquica e tem o papel de transmitir aos trabalhadores do chamado “âmbito operacional” os objetivos definidos pela direção. A segunda pauta-se no legado de tradição francófona, que congrega a articulação de conteúdos das ciências sociais com a Psicologia do Trabalho Ergonômica e a Ergonomia da Atividade, privilegiando as situações reais de trabalho. É um ensaio que tem como objetivo fornecer subsídios e pistas que fundamentem investigações envolvendo o trabalho gerencial, incluindo o gerenciamento do espaço produtivo e de serviços, assim como a gestão de equipes.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Gerenciamento. Trabalho gerencial. Gerente.

## Un ensayo sobre la constitución y evolución de la concepción del trabajo gerencial a la luz de distintas líneas teóricas

### Resumen

Este ensayo propone presentar, de forma sintética, un panorama de la constitución y evolución del concepto de trabajo gerencial desde la perspectiva de dos líneas teóricas distintas. La primera se basa en las referencias del patrimonio clásico, denominada Escuela de Actividades Cotidianas, bajo una perspectiva epistemológica de carácter empirista y racionalista, en la que el trabajo gerencial, de nivel intermedio, es determinado por su posición en la estructura jerárquica y tiene el papel de transmitir a los trabajadores del llamado “ámbito operativo” los objetivos definidos por la dirección. La segunda se guía por el legado de la tradición francófona, que aúna la articulación de contenidos de las ciencias sociales con la Psicología Ergonómica del Trabajo y la Ergonomía de la Actividad, privilegiando situaciones laborales reales. Es un ensayo que pretende proporcionar elementos que fundamenten las investigaciones referentes al trabajo de gestión, incluyendo la gestión del espacio productivo y de servicios, así como la gestión de equipos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Gestión. Trabajo gerencial. Gerente.

## INTRODUCTION

With the development of the capitalist mode of production, the function of directly and continuously managing and supervising the workers and/or teams is delegated by the capitalist to a worker that makes up a special group, made up of senior officers and sub-officers (MARX, 1988), who sells his labor power to be the representative of capital.

The capitalist expansion reinforces the insertion in the logic of an intermediate level of the organizational structure, by generating new demands of work organization, whether in relation to production itself, by the increase of production techniques, in its great majority extracted from the engendering of the workers' knowledge and the scientific development applied to the productive processes, in the sense of articulating the task fragmentation system to promote productivity.

The systematic study of managerial daily life is crossed by the historical constituents, the present productive forces, and the changes that have been occurring in the "worlds of work" (HOBBSAWM, 2015) as a consequence of the profound transformations that capitalism has been undergoing, both in its productive structure and in the universe of its values and ideals.

The different theoretical references that address the theme of management are associated with the movement of the capitalist system, both in its advances and its new configurations. The systematization of rational labor management practices, despite England being the forerunner of the Industrial Revolution, will be effected and expanded in the United States, considering the emergence of that country in the qualification of its industrial workforce, which expanded in the following years after the Secession War and became institutionalized in the professional engineering associations. This became known as the "works management movement". Following the path of the American movement, this framework was only institutionalized in industrial Europe after 1900 (VIZEU, 2010).

The context, with the emergence of large North American companies and large trusts, favored the rise of the administrator as a salaried professional inserted into this market. These conditions were highlighted by Chandler (1998), who, through his investigations, structured the so-called large company theory (CHANDLER, 1998), considering that the railway industry, as a result of the railroads, became the first of the large corporations. This was the first segment to develop the bureaucratic business management model; then, consumer goods industries also began to design complex management systems due to this growth (VIZEU, 2010). As the industrial development was broadening, diversifying products, and expanding the distribution capacity of the companies' departmental and commercial structures, new divisions arose to articulate the different attributions, which required a greater need for coordination of the various productive divisions. In the course of the constitution of a very complex organizational system during the American industrial expansion, the administrator – a salaried professional – is positioned as the coordinator of the respective divisions and the general management of these large business groups (VIZEU, 2010).

The managerial function will have the task of producing mediations between a diversity of elements, with a view to favoring the integration between more or less contradictory functional logics (GAULEJAC, 2007). This is a process that involves tensions between the demands of profit and the improvement of living conditions at work. Depending on the historical, political, economic, social, and cultural movements, the transformations in organizations, their repercussions on the

hierarchical model and the structure of the chain of command; the type of business; the professional category, with its histories and forms of organized representation – among many other elements – can create extremely specific contours for the work of the middle hierarchy (MASCIA, 2007). Therefore, managerial performance is in the link between the operational work in the industry and the guidelines and requirements arising from the direction and/or from the higher hierarchical management. This is a function linked to planning, objectives, budgets and indicators, and structured relationships in the daily “make-do”, crossed by the variability of work situations, creating channels of dialogue with the higher organizational structure, with peers and professionals of the team itself. It is about managing a network of players, often extremely distinct, with different qualifications and demands, such as: shareholders, management, functional services, and customers, and with a wide range of interests, not necessarily convergent.

The denomination given to the intermediary hierarchy has historically carried different words and meanings, as a result of a managerial process that has been configured and that includes economic, technological and social aspects, leading to different interpretations according to the adopted referential. This “terminological imprecision” is also a legacy of the Taylorist model of work organization, characterized, among other forms, by the hierarchical division of labor. However, over time, social-organizational transformations have taken place, which have generated, in turn, changes in the boundaries and boundary elements associated with this hierarchical level. This heterogeneity is significant according to the activity sector, the professional, organizational or statutory category, the activity field or the work content. As the managerial process has taken shape, the term has taken on different names. In English-speaking countries the terms supervisors, first-line managers or middle management are used, and in French-speaking countries, encadrement de proximité, encadrement de premier niveau, agents de maîtrise, cadres encadrants, contremaîtres and gestionnaires de premier niveau.

Based on two theoretical currents, this essay aims to present some investigations involving managerial work in relation to the middle hierarchy, especially with regard to the professionals who daily manage the industrial productive processes, which include production management, the approach to support services necessary for the organization of work, as well as the management of workers. The first theoretical current is structured on classical references, of empirical tradition, called the School of Everyday Activities, which seeks to break with the prescriptive character of studies on the work of managers, while being supported by a rationalist and functionalist epistemological perspective. The second of the francophone lineage, is based on research within real work situations, in which the managerial dimension of work brings into question the gap between the prescribed work and the activity (GUÉRIN et al., 2001). Therefore, one of its main characteristics is in not conceiving work as a simple technical execution of a prescription (of a norm, procedure, or protocol), even if this regulation is the result of a scientific heritage built over time. This characteristic signals the existence of an irreducible gap between the prescribed task and the “real” activity, since regardless of the material conditions of existence, the material or immaterial means of work will always be insufficient to perform the tasks, even those classified as extremely operational.

## STUDIES ON MANAGERIAL WORK BASED ON CLASSICAL REFERENCES

The history of the study of intermediary hierarchy gains prominence with the movement of work rationalization, inspired by the taylorist principles of Scientific Management (TAYLOR, 1990), by breaking with the structure of trades to advocate the division between who prepares and who performs the work. The principle of task division is incorporated into organizations with the goal of making work more efficient; consequently, it creates departmentalizations and different intermediate levels, whose main focus is the control and coordination of work.

In this track, we highlight: the investigations conducted by Fayol (1968), which originated the so-called General Administration Theory, one of the main theoretical references for the discussion of managers' work; and the research of the Australian psychiatrist and industrial relations specialist, Elton Mayo (1977), between 1930 and 1940, which shows the influence of social relations in the work environment, so that the search for the desired productivity, besides economic issues, is also related to symbolic rewards and the need to humanize administration.

Therefore, scientific paradigms that exclude chance and conceive a deterministic reality are implanted, establishing a way of thinking that represents the world in a mechanistic and completely predictable way.

The School of Everyday Activities has been making efforts to overcome this exclusively normative bias, but its investigations on issues involving management still include a close relationship with classical theoretical references.

Among the scholars of this school, Chester Barnard was one of the pioneers to study the executive's roles in organizations, specifically with regard to decision-making processes, the types of relationship between formal and informal organizations, and their functions. This author, during forty years as a manager at the Bell Telephone Company, and with the publication of the book *The Functions of the Executive* (1938), exerted significant influence in his time (RAUFFLET, 2005). Barnard considered that one of the attributions of managers was the coordination of individuals, with a view to obtaining cooperation in order to achieve common goals in relation to issues on leadership, culture and values (RAUFFLET, 2005).

About seven years later, linked to this same School, the economist, psychologist, and teacher Hebert Simon (RAUFFLET, 2005) publishes the book *Administrative Behavior*, originated from numerous studies and productions, which deals with the relations of individuals with the organization and the decision making processes, involving the fields of Cognitive Psychology, Public Administration, Economics, Philosophy and Sociology.

Adding to this group of pioneers, we can also highlight, according to Raufflet (2005), the contributions of Sune Carlson (1951), Sayles (1964), and Rosemary Stewart (1967, 1976).

Carlson, over a number of years, regularly met with company directors in order to discuss general questions about business administration and management training. This process of discussion gave rise to a set of observations and also to the conception and application of a method about the daily activities of company presidents. Among the conclusions, we highlight the characterization of the fragmented managerial workday and the prioritization of verbal communications to the detriment of other modalities (RAUFFLET, 2005).

Sayles (1964) is another scholar who explored the work of middle-level managers, specifically in an American high-tech company. He used ethnographic methods, in which observations,

conversations, and interviews are highlighted, and concluded that managers rarely work alone and are always inserted in a network of mutually dependent relationships that act as a support base for them. With a significantly larger scope, Stewart's studies, involving 160 British managers (RAUFFLET, 2005), present results from the analysis of the daily work day, showing that the working time is guided by the circumstances and by the nature of the company's business, as well as by the way each one individually deals with different variables and demands in interpersonal relationships, since they systematically make choices and discuss ideas within a given work context. In this way, a greater knowledge was obtained about what management does, including the prescriptive detailing of the attributions linked to planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling. This also allowed the practices of recruitment, training, and development of managers in companies to give rise to a more effective career planning, covering the particularities of the problems faced by these professionals (RAUFFLET, 2005).

Still in the 1980s, research conducted by Kotter (1982) emerged. A renowned theorist of this school, known as the "guru of leadership", identified two challenges in the work of executives, namely: regarding the diversity and the significant volume of potentially relevant information; and the dependence that this professional has on a significant network of contacts.

Kotter (1982), when studying the reality of fifteen managers from fifteen companies, taking into account all the differences between them, ratified several conclusions previously obtained about the discontinuity of daily tasks and the time basically devoted to personal interactions. In his analysis, he took the nature of managerial work as a basis and built a model of performance in the position, with a view to meeting three focuses: a) the first establishes an agenda, which includes the personal strategy to achieve the goals set, seeking more information from others and structuring programs and projects in a more successful manner; b) the second, the construction of a network of cooperative relationships, internal and external, in order to obtain an effective performance; c) and the last one, the implementation of agendas, through which budget and information resources are used. He also adds that there are differences between administration and leadership, because in the change process, the second focus is the priority, for establishing guidance, developing a vision of the future, personal alignment, motivation, and inspiration. For him, administration is formed by attributes associated with planning and budgeting; the organization and recruitment of personnel; and control and problem solving (KOTTER, 1982).

Other authors, such as Gabarro (1987) and Hill (1992), when looking at the evolution of managers' individual and collective trajectories and their respective learning, conclude that work discussions are oriented more toward relational issues and less toward strictly descriptive task issues, thus prioritizing a procedural analysis path of routine issues.

An important reference is added to this body of work: the research of Mintzberg (1986). This author, despite basing his studies on the lineage of the classics, seeks to break away from traditionally adopted methodological paradigms by substituting the use of pre-established agendas and categories for direct observation of managerial daily life. In 1973, he carried out his first study, observing a week's work of five executives. The results obtained ratify research undertaken by the pioneering authors of this School, adding only that the routine and the daily rhythm of work are inexorable, marked by brief, fragmented performances and many interruptions. He finds that there is, preferably on the part of managers, a more direct performance with verbal communications than a more reflective performance with written material to access information. There is also a



demand for permanent reprogramming of the daily routine, since managerial time is regulated by the tasks to be accomplished and by the obligations to be performed via formal authority. Thus, he sought to structure the managerial daily life by grouping it into three different roles: interpersonal, informational, and decisional aspects (MINTZBERG, 1986).

Later, Mintzberg (2010) starts to corroborate conclusions presented by Kotter (1982), by understanding that it is not possible to talk about leadership without conceiving managerial work as “[...] a practice, learned mainly with experience and rooted in the context”, so that everyday management depends more on the “art”, because it produces “understanding and vision based on intuition” (MINTZBERG, 2010, p. 23). “There is no best way to manage; everything depends on the situation” (MINTZBERG, 2010, p. 24). For this author, it is necessary to recognize the manager’s work as a vocation and not as a science and profession, contradicting conceptions adopted by other authors of the classical lineage, such as Drucker (1996), for whom the managerial work based on intuition had no possibility of thriving.

Mintzberg (2010) also calls attention to the fact that there should not be a concern in establishing differentiation between the conceptions of managers and leaders, but rather seek to identify managers as leaders and leadership as the effective practice of management. According to the author, the emphasis given to leadership creates positions of mistaken arrogance, since the leader is placed on a pedestal, transforming a social process into a personal one, which leads to the creation, consequently, of a relationship of followers that do not constitute a stimulating path of cooperative effort, because “[...] instead of just leadership, we should be promoting communities of actors that work on the joint composition of the concepts of leadership and management” (MINTZBERG, 2010, p. 23).

He also considers that this is an old and current issue, because the leader is the one who can organize the experience of the group at any hierarchical level, regardless of its size, as long as he takes advantage of everyone’s strength, because he understands that “the leader makes the team” (MINTZBERG, 2010). In other studies, he ratified observations already highlighted in Sayles’ (1964) research that “novice” managers consider managerial control to be sufficient for the team to perform the work prescribed by the higher hierarchical echelons (MINTZBERG, 2010).

In this trajectory, Mintzberg (2010) tries to advance in the discussion by presenting a proposal for a model that he called “managing” and that, in translation into Portuguese, came to be called “balanced management” (MINTZBERG, 2010). This modeling approaches the managerial work by including three levels simultaneously: (a) information plan linked to the classical view of management in promoting communication – through the flow of information, to all directions, including processing, transmission and sharing – as well as control, via the use of information to motivate behavior and lead people to achieve goals; b) involving people by substituting information for influence, although control remains in the hands of the manager, since the space for participation is granted according to his or her decision; c) direct action by the manager, in a more active and concrete manner within his or her area, either by coordinating or participating in projects with the intention of learning, demonstrating or encouraging others in relation to the way of acting, taking into account that this level is also – and most of the time – linked to apprehension with the results.

Thus, ratifying his own conclusions about the understanding that managing is not a profession, because it is not possible to teach it before practice and out of context, Mintzberg (2010) understands



that one should place confidence in the manager who has never stepped foot in an administration classroom, and place under “suspicion” those who have spent two years in it. These are observations that reinforce the concept that managerial work is based on tacit knowledge, which is difficult to access, learned during the practice itself, developed in the context, in the situation in question. This means that it refers to a learning process that does not have easy transmission, whether from one managerial position to another, between functions, within the same organization, and much less between different sectors of the economy. For this author, the manager who thinks he knows more, ends up hindering his own way of acting, because this consists mainly in facilitation. “The manager needs to help realize the potential of other people so that they can have better knowledge, make better decisions, and act better” (MINTZBERG, 2010, p. 26).

Even today, idealized demands are created that managers have the expectation of the realization of the myth – of planning and organization folklore, among others – in the context of the daily reality of managerial work. However, studies show that there is an effort to try to advance on the issues that involve the daily life of these professionals in the most different business segments (MINTZBERG, 2010).

Despite the different investigations on managerial daily life over the decades, it is possible to observe that the ideas presented are based on the classical references of management, still fixed on the description of tasks, standardization of procedures and processes, definition of principles, models, and roles, and the transmission of instruments and tools.

## INVESTIGATIONS ON MANAGERIAL WORK FROM THE FRANCOPHONE LINEAGE

Investigating about the managerial daily work in the light of theoretical and methodological references that go beyond the classical approaches initially refers to the studies of Faverge (according to OUVRIER-BONNAZ, 2009), one of the first to identify “[...] the interest of the clinical method in the analysis of the mode of acquisition of experience and the analysis of tacit or incorporated competencies”, in order to note that “no activity is similar to another”. Faverge (1966), thus, proposes an analysis of work with the objective of identifying the different forms of regulation adopted by workers in facing real work situations. Among these, the ones performed by the team leaders in the division of tasks in the course of the various activities stand out, requiring occasional changes in order to guarantee the balance of production and safety. Also, at the same time, it highlights the importance of the work of the managers in playing the role of a link between opposing demands, derived from different hierarchical levels or distinct organizational groups that operate interdependently, in order to maintain the organization.

Instead of following an alternative of deepening, the studies on managerial work between the 1960s and the 1970s lost steam, mainly due to the fact that these professionals were not considered workers like the others, since their image was only associated with the role of representing and defending organizational interests, and also because they were part of a category called “cadre,” which constituted an identity principle that separated them from the condition of workers.

It was only in the 1980s that Boltanski (1982) began to rescue the studies of these professionals, through the research conducted by Benguigui, Griset, and Monjardet (1977), by understanding

that it is a work of mediation and framing, taking into account its intermediary and relational character, with two apparently contradictory dimensions. On the one hand, the category “cadre” has an identification with the representation of the civil service, for establishing relationships of trust founded on ideas such as loyalty and alliance, giving them distinct salary status, job security, and an upward career perspective. On the other hand, it refers to a volatile group of variable boundaries, in which trust is subject to a permanent tension between the logic of subordination and the logic of autonomy (BOUFFARTIGUE, 2001). This is a condition of autonomy called by Bouffartigue and Bouteiller (2006) as utopian, by virtue of being something assumed by managers, since it is linked to the idealization of a previous managerial status that no longer portrays the past reality, because it is effectively based on prescriptions, goals and deadlines.

In this context, researchers in administration have gradually left aside the orientation that it was possible to structure a model based on planning, instrumentalization, and predictability, which could predetermine all managerial tasks, since the work of organizing is rooted in the activity and interaction between different actors who produce new informal rules to deal with the gaps in the formal rules (MOISDON, 1994), in an articulated manner, building new effective rules. In this way, it induces to “[...] imagine new forms of instruments that attempt not to fill ‘the gaps’ but, on the contrary, to leave gaps, to anticipate the space ‘that management tools’ must occupy, to adapt to the necessary uncertainty of work” (MOISDON, 1994, p. 18).

In 1994, Dejours and Jayet, in a study carried out at a nuclear power plant, identified that middle line executives adopt a changing position, which oscillates between two extremes. On one hand, confrontation with the higher hierarchical level, total technical mastery of the process, aiming to reach production rates; on the other hand, the daily experience of the necessary empirical adjustments, adoption of practices and regulations required in face of the events that unbalance the prescribed organization. Facing superior pressures, these executives tend, in relation to the operators, to adopt the tactic of secrecy, generating, consequently, distrust in the team itself. In parallel, they are confronted with the discourses of the higher hierarchical level dominated by conceptions according to which the system is fully controlled by virtue of the total and successful adequacy between the productive process and the performance of the work; thus, any eventuality, accidents or incidents are attributed to causes related to human factors. This is a condition of constant confrontation between the perfect technical mastery of the process and the empirical adjustments necessary to get the job done, which confirms the daily experience of the use of “troubleshooting” practices. The cost of this condition is the experience of fear, due to the possibility of an accident, since the exclusive observance of the prescribed organization is not possible to be perfectly respected.

Ergonomic studies will show that the diversity of sources of prescription, often contradictory, requires a work of self-organization (ROGARD et al., 1997), because the work situations are places of knowledge production, common and unpublished, and managers, as workers, are the protagonists of this construction. They will also make explicit several constraints arising from this work, such as the length of the work day, constant changes, incorporation into private life and psychological unfoldings (ROGARD et al., 1997).

As of the 1990s, especially in Labor Sociology, there has been a resumption of several studies on the managerial theme, contemplating the processes of productive restructuring, the issues involved in labor, the political and economic forces that have been impacting it, as well as the contradictions between the technical-rational sphere and the intricate and complex issues involving the activity. In

this scenario, working hours intensify, layoffs disguised as agreements, loss of status, among many other repercussions. It exposes a fracture, a rupture, due to the fact that managers no longer feel included in an elite social category, since only those considered to be “high potential executives” are now recognized for their value and new professional perspectives (BOUFFARTIGUE, 2001).

In this logic, the studies of Bouffartigue and Bouteiller (2004, 2006) on the impacts on health, related to time, the multiplicity of tasks performed, and the precariousness of work will identify a significant numerical growth referred to the professional “managers” through this new framework, guided by relationships dictated by well-defined objectives, procedures, goals and deadlines, evaluation of results and performances (BOUFFARTIGUE and BOUTEILLER, 2004). At the same time, it is highlighted the insufficient precision in the prescription of the tasks of these professionals that cover more closely objectives and results to be achieved (SIX, 2007), once it is emphasized the judgment of their work via subjective parameters of performance of their function and quantifiable in relation to the assumptions defined by the higher ranks. This evaluative process is individual and involves mobilization of implicit, hidden, diffuse and changeable criteria about the action performed, as well as about themselves, including their behaviors, appearance, posture and control over their emotions and health (FALCOZ et al., 2006).

The studies of Quéruez (2008) also analyze the managerial work focusing on the performance aimed at established objectives, as well as the embarrassment they feel in having to disseminate ideas that they do not endorse. In view of this, the authors place them in the condition of victims of work intensification compelled by administrative changes that determine management instruments. In this sense, these professionals are submitted to the daily exercise of articulating two different logics: the bureaucratic and the managerial. This condition brings significant tensions as a result of the imposed changes, the present non-differentiation, the increase in the pace of work, the implementation of the “urgency” attribute, the lack of recognition of efforts, the establishment of a competitive field among peers and the lack of collective discussions about daily issues.

It will be up to managers and executives to position themselves as the main support and disseminator of this new discourse, new ‘spirit’, of this symbolic system that reorders the positions and social relations (BOLTANSKI and CHIAPELLO, 2009). The managerial work mediates and translates the economic and financial interests into technical solutions, since its status no longer corresponds to the strict exercise of a command function, of relay in the chain of hierarchical authority, but already starts to receive influences from Anglo-Saxon references (BOUFFARTIGUE and BOUTEILLER, 2006).

Mispelblom-Beyer (2004) characterizes managers as trust workers, whose activity consists of consensus building and is the result of an effort of construction or “social invention,” both political and symbolic. This trust lies within a particular domain of the employer’s power over subordinate wage earners. The trust placed in managers is characterized by the sharing of the same conception of work and of the convergence of the company’s interests, given that they mediate between the directives received from the upper echelon and their respective applications with the group subordinated to them. Thus, trust defines both the organizational position and the content of the activity, since they are in the intermediary position (MISPELBLOM-BEYER, 2004). Despite the heterogeneity existing in this group, due to the empirical diversity of the tasks, the emphasis on the relational character, in all its interventions, is the central mark of the activity, according to Mispelblom-Beyer (2004).

Given that the tasks of command, monitoring, and coordination have been undergoing changes, the contours of managerial prescriptions have also been changing, according to the specificities of the business and market segments and the very transformations in the world of work. Thus, in addition to the issues involving the daily activities of these professionals, organizational restructuring also impacts the definition of managerial functions, often creating a field of overlap and/or intersection in relation to similar functions, such as managerial work and supervision.

Mascia (2007) observes that, despite the multiple tasks assumed by professionals at this intermediate level – supervisors and managers – it is possible to group them into four categories, namely: relational, management, technical, and commercial.

In the first category are the relational tasks related to the attention and coordination of the professionals on the team, who have gradually become more qualified, multi-skilled, and with a greater degree of autonomy. In the second category are the tasks related to the planning, organization, and management of the operations of a certain area, supported by computerized systems that feed, in turn, the information systems. In many companies, this hierarchical level also assumes the “management of human resources” of the team linked to it, also having as charges the evaluation of these professionals, the development of training plans, the definition of promotions, the dissemination of information relating to corporate policies, among others (MASCIA, 2007).

In the third, there are the technical tasks that no longer require so much proximity, because gradually the managers have become more distant from the operation. However, technical competence is still very present because it is the manager’s responsibility to organize the acquisition and dissemination of technical knowledge to the team (MASCIA, 2007). And finally, commercial tasks, which are more evident in the service segment, due to the close relationship with customers, considering that the managerial level also covers services (MASCIA, 2007).

In view of this multiplicity of tasks, the requirements for the managerial exercise congregate different needs of technical knowledge and, depending on each work reality, often can also refer to the latest technology. The management of a complex system implies a greater proximity of the management at the operational level (MASCIA, 2007), involving multiple relationships, both developing processes of integration and dissociation of heterogeneous elements, present more at the operational base, being established both through the development of commitments and the combination of technical criteria (efficiency, and reliability of production, quality, etc.), human (health, skills, safety) and social, and the unfolding of this multiplicity of dimensions markedly influenced by the internal and external contexts (MASCIA, 2007). It is an extremely dynamic reality, in which variability presents itself permanently, and still includes a certain degree of predictability, because it is a management associated with multiple factors relatively known by managers, depending on experience and time in the exercise of the activity.

Added to this scenario, mainly, are the demands of relational nature, positioned as those that most influence the direction of companies in defining who will assume a particular managerial function (MASCIA, 2007).

As the complexity and instability intensify, the demands on this level of the hierarchical chain also increase, because the production management, the approach with the support services to the production itself, the maintenance, the technical specifications related to the quality process, among many others, become the responsibility of these professionals. At the same time, there is the expectation that they have a greater availability for the team, that they assume the coordination of

multidisciplinary groups and it is expected that they encourage the participation of technicians in programs that favor the suggestion of improvements (MASCIA, 2007).

Another important aspect is the border relation of managerial work, since this activity is positioned in the space between descending and emerging realities, that is, in the simultaneity between distinction and inclusion. Mascia (2007, p. 618), mentioning Morin (2003), states that “[...] it is on the frontier that distinction and connection, separation and articulation with the other take place,” because the manager treats descending information as execution norms, prescriptions, purposes, goals, etc., resulting from a transposition of the general objectives determined by the company’s management (MASCIA, 2007).

Therefore, the activity of the supervisor and/or manager requires the recomposition of diverse elements and of different natures, making compatible the heterogeneity of this set, in order to make it a totality and, thus, enable the production (MASCIA, 2007). It is an activity that presupposes the search for integration, a point of convergence, “[...] a search for regularity, for a constant state [...] of making the system stable in time and duration” (MASCIA, 2007, p. 619), and not only through management reports, since “[...] stability is, in reality, an unstable balance” (MASCIA, 2007, p. 619). The integration activity to be performed by management in relation to the team, at the most operational level, involves uncertainties and unpredictabilities of the most diverse natures and origins, which may involve internal and/or external events.

It is thus a determined, dynamic, and ephemeral stability, because each situation is unique and the need for reconstruction will not lead it to the previous state, but, in an evolutionary process, will lead to another situation that, in turn, also includes uncertainties, because other events may arise and destabilize the momentary and situational balance. The occurrence of events or unforeseen events intensifies the demands of managerial work, both because of the facts that destabilize the teams’ daily course, putting at risk the results to be achieved, and because of the treatment that needs to be given in order to seek the appropriate solutions, taking into account that the ongoing process is interrupted and, depending on the nature and severity of the respective events, there may be demands for displacements, communications, meetings subject to various restrictions, etc. It corresponds to a process that mobilizes various arbitrages and regulations triggered in the course of the relationships that are established with multiple interlocutors and in specific work situations (MASCIA, 2007).

For Carballeda (1997), management presupposes the elaboration of provisional and updated commitments to face the variability of the environment and the internal and external forces. Faced with the unavailability of an analysis of the daily problems, impressed by the characteristics of its activities, what is glimpsed is the non-appropriation of the returns of the experiences with the activities themselves, the capitalization of the results and the lessons that could enrich the reflection on the objectives (MASCIA, 2007).

Vannereau (2004) highlights, in his studies with managers in the industrial, service and health care segments, the growing distance between the discourse and the managerial practices, putting in question the paradox of management called by Le Goff (2003) as the “barbarie douce”. He refers to an increasingly “soft” discourse, as well as the project of a pure and perfect world of work that masks the methods of hierarchical domination and control, in which individual suffering and organizational violence are a vicious circle. He understands that it is necessary to rethink managerial activity as a field of debate and that sometimes a gap can be found between managerial rhetoric and



actual practices: the former tends to be organized around themes such as progress, performance, adaptation, autonomy, responsibility, creativity and well-being; the latter sometimes produces experiences of suffering related to new work relations (VANNEREAU, 2004).

The production of universal models is utopian, since everyone has their own time, and it is essential to understand the singularities and the real work situations. For this author, the four major objectives of the manager formed throughout history are the following: rationally organize production, motivate the individual, adapt the individual to the structure and its environment, and mobilize around a project, emphasizing that these are not issues of universal application, but linked to singular practices and inventiveness (VANNEREAU, 2004).

In the context of managerial pressure, individuals dissociate and value the logic of every man for himself and fierce competition. A fractionating of work collectives is observed: the whole is really conceived as a juxtaposition of pieces placed end to end, interchangeable and ejectable, installing positions of passivity and feeling of powerlessness. Horizontal, participative, and “sweet” management methods are replaced by vertical, directive and harsh methods of command and monitoring, increasing violence and relational experiences of suffering (VANNEREAU, 2004). Thus, this author proposes to understand the paradoxical dialectic between the “sweet” managerial discourse and the relations of force, conflicts, violent relational practices, and experiences of psychic suffering. The idea of well-being at work, of a harmonious relationship between the worker and the company carries a utopian scenario of “happiness” and of a work organization that would exclude contradictions, conflicts, and confrontations. This “dramatic” conception refers to a purified and perfect world of work, of a homogenizing company and standardized workers. Management, discourses, models, and methods have the function of trying to reconcile individual needs with business objectives, postulating a principle of non-contradiction between the two levels (VANNEREAU, 2004).

More generally, the purpose of this managerial conception, regardless of the forms of manifestation of organizational discourses, is an attempt to homogenize, normalize and control individuals (LE GOFF, 2003) in the company. Social peace is sought by trying to erase the contradictions that organize labor relations and circumventing these contradictions through indirect and “sweet” forms of power constituted by participative and situational management models. The management techniques of obtaining consent that constitute the “barbarie douce” show increasing difficulties in the direction of mobilizing and involving, without constraining workers to the goals of profitability, which amplifies professional stress, depression, and exhaustion.

Another study (VANNEREAU, 2008) was also conducted to identify central strategies adopted by managers who, faced with the complexity of organizations, develop managerial inventions seeking to overcome the contradictions, dilemmas, and daily conflicts of this activity.

In this trend, the studies undertaken by Detchessahar et al. (2015) only ratify the need to strengthen the theme of discussion spaces at work: one of the main objectives of the authors in the fight against psychosocial risks and for a quality of life at work. An investigation conducted by these authors, adopting a methodological process of research-intervention, highlighted the search for understanding the conditions under which the communicative dynamic takes place, so that the implemented process and the resulting actions generating spaces for discussion at work survive beyond the temporality of an intervention itself and are, in turn, incorporated into the processes of learning and transformation in a given organizational context.



The research-intervention process, in this view, adopts a conception of organization as a space to be regulated or mediated (DETCHESSAHAR et al., 2015) making use of the understanding that there is a permanent reworking of regulation against the contradictions of the real work and collective action. Therefore, the research-intervention methodology adopted by Detchessahar et al. (2015) has the purpose that the process of building the requirements for the institution of a new mode of operation implements the managerial conditions for the installation of an organizational routine, a renewed attention to the work and the context in which it is performed. It is a new way of managing, which enables learning on the part of managers and is based on a communication based on dialog, on a collegiate discussion method, and on the exercise of the role of authority structured by “subsidiarity”. This last principle is intended to promote and allow workers to express themselves critically, without being considered subversive. It is an alternative that allows discussion to be not only more decentralized, but above all delegated both “bottom-up and top-down” (DETCHESSAHAR et al., 2015). With this, it is emphasized the importance of including the discussion about the work in the vertical hierarchical line, not only to boost the dialogue in all hierarchical echelons, but mainly to allow the possibility of transformation of the organization and its rules through the debate about the activity.

Therefore, all the complexity of managerial work is guided by the logic of unstable and unpredictable situations of managerial daily life, which oppose the rationalist classical tradition foundations, linked to predictability, stability, and security, present and guiding this work context, whose objective is to reach productivity goals and results.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The business reality has been reinforcing the coexistence of different theoretical currents, which also support varied methodological perspectives that show multiple ways of apprehending and interpreting the phenomena and move between the global and the particular, considering the instances and the several dimensions that involve the real work situations.

The influence of the classical paradigm propagated by the Administration and Management Science literature, which adopts cognitive-behavioral references to approach questions related to the human being, is still very present in the investigations about managerial work, but, many times, they do not present answers that are satisfactory enough for the current scenario. In parallel, the studies that adopt theoretical references from the Francophone lineage have been expanding in order to seek a better understanding of managerial work, considering the recognition of the complexity of this activity inscribed in a reality guided by multiple factors and conditioning and by the new configurations present in the worlds of work.

There is, therefore, an enormous space for the production of knowledge based on ethical-epistemological assumptions developed by a lineage of thinkers who understand human activity, especially the activity of work, as a central category in the production, (re)production and transformation of society and men. It points to a potency of debates on a thematic terrain that still needs to be further explored, in order to put into dialectic different knowledge, whether those coming from an investigative heritage, or others coming from professional practice.

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