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Provocations

Who Is Management Research For?

A Quem Serve a Pesquisa em Administração?

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ABSTRACT

Objective: this paper was written as an essay in a proposition from Adorno, as well as a text influenced by critical and Philosophical hermeneutic. It presents a fundamental question that we have rehearsed: Who is Management research for? **Provocations:** we take as a basis the reflection on the discursive and social differences between the academic field and the world of meaning of management practitioners, to realize how contradictory our practices and institutionalized structures of communication become, as they do not meet the fundamental objective of science, that is, the transformation of the reality in which it focuses. **Conclusions:** the hermeticism of our area is not an unsolvable problem, it is enough to see that in other fields the applicability of scientific knowledge happens. Our community needs to wake up to this, before society realizes that, as it is, we are expendable.

Keywords: management research; academic community; managers; academic communication.

RESUMO

Objetivo: este texto foi escrito como um ensaio tal qual proposto por Adorno e atravessado por premissas da hermenêutica crítica e filosófica. Nele, somos norteados por um incômodo fundamental: A quem serve a pesquisa em Administração? **Provocações:** tomamos como base a reflexão sobre as diferenças discursivas e sociais entre o campo acadêmico e o mundo de significação dos praticantes da Administração, para perceber o quanto contraditório se tornam nossas práticas e estruturas institucionalizadas de comunicação na medida em que elas não atendem ao objetivo fundamental da ciência, qual seja, a transformação da realidade na qual se debruça. **Conclusões:** o hermetismo de nossa área não é um problema sem solução, basta ver que em outros campos a aplicabilidade do conhecimento científico acontece. É preciso que a nossa comunidade acorde para isso, antes que a sociedade se dê conta de que, da forma como está, somos dispensáveis.

Palavras-chave: pesquisa em administração; comunidade acadêmica; administradores praticantes; comunicação acadêmica.

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INTRODUCTION

The following provocation was articulated from a discomfort we believe should be brought to the debate in the Management academic community. This interpretive path formalizes anguish in language that only makes sense if shared, considering that we, the authors of this text, constitute ourselves and are also part of the same community to which the text is addressed. Thus, through the debate with our peers, we involve ourselves in this criticism and seek to open space for our mobilization: after all, who does Management research serve?

With the purpose of answering this question, many published academic texts have circulated at a certain time, and they address this issue with different arguments, such as the need for a complementary relationship between theory and practice in the Management field (Van de Ven, 1989) or the denial of this dichotomy (Bispo, 2021), the lack of dialogue and communicative connection between research in the area with practitioners and real local problems (Lazzarini, 2017), the impossibility of social sciences neutrality and the impact of 'neutral' scientific knowledge on society (Alperstedt & Andion, 2017), the importation of knowledge without reflexivity applied to the local context and its innocuous character (Bertero et al., 1999), the harmful impact of a subservience to the international context (Alcadipani, 2017), especially taking into account the need to solve local problems (Bertero et al., 1999; Goulart & Carvalho, 2008; Lazzarini, 2017), the social impact of an interdisciplinary configuration academic knowledge, which is constituted of an epistemological and paradigmatic pluralism (Bispo, 2022) that offers political conditions to integrate itself more closely with the society problems (Alperstedt & Andion, 2017). These are some of the positions taken in this debate on the role of Management academic-scientific knowledge.

Even recognizing the value of such efforts — especially regarding denunciation and the fight against productivism and its endogenous motivation (Alcadipani, 2011; Alperstedt & Andion, 2017; Godoi & Xavier, 2012) —, often the arguments and language used by such texts are so specialized that they become intelligible only to members versed into Management research. It happens because, from our communicative game, we build our dialect: an articulated and technically (re)produced academic rhetoric to convince only our reference group (Matitz & Vizeu, 2012), that is, the academics. It should be noticed that most journals considered of good reputation for this community and that supposedly encompass the visibility that promotes advances in knowledge through debate are not guides to management practices in organizations, especially in the case of magazines with little interest in local demands (Lazzarini, 2017); and even in Management studies that aim at 'social change,' such an intention becomes rhetorical as these texts are not written to guide practitioners of the studied reality, considering that their erudition and complex theoretical argumentation primarily meets the performative interest of the community to ensure the publication success in academic channels (Vizeu, 2015). Such a problem seems to be bigger and more serious than a simple question of pragmatic interests of academic bureaucracy.

As an engine of the reflections enunciated here, we were inspired by the conception of understanding and communicative interaction as defined by the critical hermeneutics of Ricœur (1999) and by the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer (2002). Therefore, we support the assumption that human experience is built on language, which leads us to discuss the problem of communication between the academic field and the Management practitioners' field.

REFLECTING ON ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION

This way of establishing communication among members of the community, characterized by many citations of renowned or scholarly authors (citationism) or by complex conceptual plots for the formulation of general principles (conceptualism), makes a well-versed academic have a great chance of placing impact texts within the Academy itself. However, this form produces texts that are not always meaningful to management practitioners. With the professionalization of paper composition, this problem is intensified since the scientific method disputes space with good academic composition method, valued mainly for its ability to achieve the formalisms, the classical structure reflected in the submitting templates that shape (if not distort) the practitioners' language. The publications' dialect reflects the specialized lexicon of the academic field (Matitz & Vizeu, 2012).

This established language would not be uncomfortable if we took into consideration that the science of management should effectively communicate with management practitioners and other members of organizations — and not keep its knowledge understood exclusively by members of the research community. If our speech shall influence the transformation of administrative and organizational reality in the direction of a different destiny for society, then we have failed. And it is not due to the lack of evidence or to an inability to identify problems that need to be solved. In our critical research, mentioning just one example, we have drawn attention to many problems, such as the illness of workers, subjective controls, gender violence, and the impact of business actions on the environment, among other topics present in the sessions of Management academic events. But to what extent are these denunciations, translated from deep

theoretical and methodological analysis, actually useful for those in need? If we offer these texts to individuals depicted in the research, will they be able to understand them and be sensitized?

Academic language demands handling skills. It is no wonder that in the academic environment, we are increasingly persuaded by free courses that promise paper production techniques, despite any commitment to solutions or answers to management problems. This is how the workshops for publishing are expanded, the PDW (Paper Development Workshop) meetings where prestigious editors 'teach' the way to achieve success in publishing. We have pointed out some elements of this path, which are not always mentioned in such development programs, but which are effective for this purpose: (1) cite authors, theories, and references that please reviewers and editorial board; (2) adopt the structure and aesthetics legitimized by the Academy; and (3) support the epistemological assumptions of the predominant academic chain prevailing in the journal that is the target of the submission (check who the editors are and what their academic affiliation is). It is not noticeable in such systematic writing guidelines that the intention is to promote the articulation of the text with those who can use the knowledge about management practice, which is proposed to be presented in the paper. It happens because it was not written for those who practice it; it was written for the Academy's own consumption, it was written and properly formatted to make the author have a good transit in the academic world, whose consequence is to turn the text into an artifact that will remain isolated within that world.

As the philosophical approach that inspires us indicates, language is a compulsory gift. If we do not get into it, we cannot even exist. It is in language and by language that we are and we become able to recognize who also are (Gadamer, 2002). It is in language that we can recognize ourselves as academics and it is also by language that we recognize who also belongs to our group — i.e., it is in language that we recognize ourselves as an academic community and it is through language that we can be a society. However, as a group integrated into society, our community of Management Science should support itself with a very proper function, that is, promote the advancement of the knowledge that is involved in the practice referred to guide the best social practices (Dewey, 1927). However, our identity bonds have been established in such a way that we have been able to exist apart from our surroundings, we have been able to survive as a research community quite autonomously, without connecting or even justifying ourselves as necessary among those who exercise the practice object of our research (Management). Among possible reasons, we point out the knowledge circulation mechanisms built in this community.

THE RITUALISM OF COMMUNICATION IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD

As every community has its rituals, so do the scientific communities. It is a condition to be a community. The Academy has its own language, symbols and rituals of consecration, among other elements, that make it self-sufficient. By constituting ourselves within the field, we have enclosed ourselves in the rules that order the relations of the members who belong to the same 'parish,' which led us to refined mechanisms of legitimation, for which we even have a method: writing papers that keep us employed, that ensure the good evaluation of our *stricto sensu* programs, and that guarantees the possibility of maintaining our agendas and research groups.

All this is legitimate and necessary, but it has diverted us from our purpose of existence as a community — to produce relevant knowledge for society and, particularly, for Management practitioners. This makes us direct our efforts to feed back the criteria of the academic bureaucracy, which is increasingly shaped to develop metrics of impact on the Academy, not necessarily on society and on the community of practitioners and stakeholders. Let us be redundant to avoid being misunderstood: to meet our rituals and our endogenous systems of legitimation, we conceal our social function, that is, to be useful to the practitioners of our object of study. Perhaps with the recent evaluation metrics of postgraduate programs in Brazil, where the idea of 'impact' begins to get detached from the result in the game of academic communication in favor of social impact, it is easier to discuss this need to connect more effectively with the demands of society. However, such an institutional movement still faces great resistance from members of the community who see this change as a failure of their already established production schemes.

Our criticism is about the way the scientific community of Management has established itself, i.e., as a purpose in itself. A good way to perceive this contradiction is from an editorial practice that has become increasingly common in the country. The compositions must go around in a foreign language, otherwise, either they will not even be eligible for some journals or they will not be considered worthy of awards. Therefore, year after year, the number of texts in English in Brazilian congresses is increasing, and they are presented in English by Brazilian speakers to Brazilian audiences (Alcadipani, 2017). Perhaps, if this academic community intended to guide practitioners who speak English, then it would be fine; but in Brazil, 5% of people are English speakers, and less than 1% is fluent in the language (British Council, 2014).

In addition, aiming to improve the chances of approval and circulation, compositions tend to be elaborated on the criteria that exclusively meet the proofreaders' view, which

does not always converge with the needs and meanings built by the practitioners. The power attributed to the evaluators is so relevant that their opinions are incorporated into the argument to ensure its approval. This subservience is so overwhelming that it would be acceptable for some evaluators to sign the text as coauthors, regarding the influence of their opinions on the final version to be published in the academic journal. This evaluators' hegemony and their preferences over the publication of the knowledge produced by the Management researcher, fed by the maxim 'publish or perish,' induces a vicious circle (given that evaluators are also authors) that creates an increasingly hermetic linguistic culture, which privileges the interests and formalisms of those who evaluate. This is how there is no lack of communicational performances to impress academics, just as there is little sensitivity to communicate with whom we should have the ethical commitment to do so: the practitioners.

EFFECTS OF ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION HERMETICISM

Despite all the criticism that has been made about the logic of academic productivism (Alcadipani, 2011; Alperstedt & Andion, 2017; Godoi & Xavier, 2012), here we would like to draw attention to a point that has not been noticed, the juggling of the specialized lexicon that results in a communicative performance that is increasingly refined and, for this very reason, distances itself from the thought reality. Academic composition acquires its own format, which is difficult to understand for those who are not versed in the verbal use of theories, abstract concepts, formulas, and sophisticated methodologies. Communicative specialization is of such order that members of the same management community do not adopt the same language rules! It is common to see texts published in sessions of a Management subfield that would be rejected if they had been evaluated by another subfield of this specialty area.

As a result, our field has trained researchers specialized in journals with great impact abroad, which identify Brazilian social problems to be explored in the light of analytical categories that are relevant to researchers from North Atlantic countries but that slip in the capability of translating this knowledge to members of Brazilian organizations (Lazzarini, 2017). This creates a paradox: we shape our text to meet the demands of international intellectual production and make it difficult for local and regional organizations to access the analysis about themselves in an intelligible way for the interpretative horizons of their practitioners (including direct research participants!). In the raw, we can say we use the administrative and organizational reality of our context only as sources of data for our consumption.

An objection that could be made is to the social transformation sought by the Brazilian Management Academy that occurs through postgraduate student development (Bispo & Davel, 2021).). However, considering that individuals access the language to which they are capable of attributing meaning based on their own life references, students who wish to enter the Management research field begin to acquire for themselves the meanings present in science communities characterized by coded writing and lexicon that are inaccessible to the general public. 'Complex writing' becomes a criterion of 'good performance' for these neophytes — at least, for the unversed. Moreover, for this intellectual elite, it is a rhetorical strategy to criticize the knowledge effectively learned by the practitioner as if it were naive, poor, erratic, or insufficient, without lifting a finger to make scientific knowledge reach them – a matter of translation effort.

With the increasing professionalization of research activity in this field, academics have begun to write their research reports from the parameters associated with good performance in academic communication channels. The main issue is the evaluation structure behind the journals becoming more and more endogenous to the field. Those who evaluate what is good work are also members of the scientific community, and their criteria are the ones they reproduce in their writing practices. From this point on, it does not matter what is said and the effects in the practical world of what is said in the texts; it matters only the shape and the discursive resources that please the peers, especially those who are at the top of the scale of academic success. Journal editors and editorial board members with excellence, coordinators and representatives of funding bodies area, and even members of the selection board who elect *stricto sensu* professors are those who stand out in this race to be in the best journals and publication points in the system. It is no coincidence that these actors control the resources in the field, the opportunities for growth, and reputation building.

Such a condition leads to an interesting feature of academic prose. Properly dealing with competitiveness among peers demands greater complexity to the specialized lexicon of the Management field. Competitiveness increases the aspects of language erudition and meaning, providing only the best-prepared individuals in this training path with access to the most selective evaluation processes. Especially in recent years and with the increasing influence of the social sciences and philosophy theoretical framework, we have a complex set of dense authors, sophisticated methodologies, and abstract concepts that are difficult to understand and are used as a bargaining chip to legitimize the academic text, allowing it to advance in the publication process.

It does not mean we believe that such academic references should be banished from administrative thinking. We agree with the premise that the complex reality of

organizations needs to be taken by theories capable of handling this complexity, which may justify the greater presence of other academic fields as guides of administrative thought. However, once we are under this influence, we put aside what instituted us in the origin: the connection with the social universe that is a study reference to us. Due to the autonomy — including financially — of the system that supports the academic career in Management, we are more concerned with meeting the parameters of the endogenous peer legitimation process than with the impact of our compositions and ideas in the world of practitioners. In this sense, the fact that journals of greater prestige are also the ones less (not to say never) read by non-academics is not an insignificant issue. Their language is hermetic and unintelligible to outcasts. Their arguments are put only to please the evaluators and their own criteria of what is good research. And these criteria are not restricted to the best argument (in the Habermasian sense of rational argumentation), but rather to the accomplishment of formulas considered necessary for acceptance in a particular journal in the area.

Only those who are versed in all stages of academic career development can fully access the academic text. It means that papers published in the most prestigious journals are unintelligible to individuals who have not passed through the doctorate rite. More and more, it is heard that the master's degree is a kind of initiation to academic practice, only doctors or doctoral students will, indeed, be able to produce good academic research (by good academic research, it is meant to 'publish good papers'). It brings damage even to the natural connection between Management researchers and future practitioners. Students who are at the undergraduate level — most of them are prospective practitioners — are unable to access high-level academic thinking. And a considerable amount of teachers-researchers who also work in the professional training of managers do not mind it; newcomers to master's and doctoral courses will be selected from the few students who occasionally understand their texts, ensuring the perpetuation of the academic profile that is uninterested in the language and meanings of practitioners.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Does this problem of academic communication hermeticism affect other research fields applied to specific areas of society? If we compare Management research to other fields, we cannot help facing disturbances: for instance, Medicine manages to guide clinical practice and practitioners who are prepared according to their development in the lexicon of researchers — most of them have conditions to do so because they need to follow the advances described in the publications of their area. Another example is Engineering, which develops studies and research capable of influencing their practitioners to achieve new techniques and/or technologies that guide the future of practices.

Finally, not even humanities schools fail to accomplish, with certain pragmatism, the practical orientation of their professionals (see Economics and Education areas). What about Management Science, how has it effectively participated in the lives of practitioners beyond the diploma acquisition that has its own functions in the bureaucracy of careers? Even considering the argument that the Management professional is not too adherent to denser readings, we shall consider the responsibility of the research area in Management and reflect on the need to get involved in the practice, even if it is critically positioning itself on the quality of the Management graduation process in the country, which is a problem indeed, partly based on the community, since the researcher in Management, in Brazil, is also a professor.

After all, to whom do we write? This question becomes fundamental and should be at the center of academic communication as a possible practice to change society from the Management practice. Therefore, it is for certain that, because of problems concerning a kind of language policy in the area, most in the academic field do not write for whom they should write. What if Management practitioners realize they can practice without our costly endogenous research structure?

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2nd author: conceptualization (supporting); formal analysis (equal); investigation (equal); supervision (supporting); visualization (supporting); writing – original draft (equal); writing – review & editing (supporting).

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