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## Organizational Fields and the Structuration Perspective: Analytical Possibilities<sup>(1)</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The concept of the organizational field has been greatly dealt with in the literature on institutional theory in recent years. As the concept of field involves a relational and symbolic dimension, we propose that the theory of structuration, based on the logic of recursiveness between agency and structure should be adapted to the understanding of the field dynamically. In this way, the objective of this theoretical essay is to deal with the dynamic of the organizational field using structurationist logic, allowing that from this logic we recall both the importance of the practice in the structuration process of the organizational field and the historical and recursive character which may constrain or enable the actions of social actors. To this end, we revise the concept of field in different perspectives of analysis, reflecting on the implication of the theoretical presuppositions of each approach and then discuss in a critical manner the theoretical foundation of the structuration process of organizational fields based on the structurationist approach. We conclude the paper with propositions pertaining to the revision of the concept of field from a multiparadigmatic viewpoint in which structure and agency are recursively implied.

**Key words:** institutional theory; structuration theory; organizational fields; social structure; social actors and agency.

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## INTRODUCTION

The relations between organizations and other social actors do not represent only a structure resulting from its activities but also define and delimit its possibilities for action in a more interactive and reciprocal perspective of the process of institutionalization. In this line of reasoning, the treatment of the concept of organizational field based on the notion of structuration allows for a logic of recursiveness to be incorporated into the analysis of the relationship between agency and structure in a spatio-temporally delimited context. Furthermore, it allows for not only the relational dimension to be taken into consideration but also the symbolic dimension in the organizational field.

In this sense, this paper is characterized as a theoretical essay whose objective is to deal with the dynamic of the organizational field with structurationist logic. We admit that from this logic the importance of the practice in the structuration process of the organizational field and its historical and recurrent character, which can constrain or enable the actions of social actors, is redressed.

As will be seen as the article unfolds, the approach that we have adopted presupposes a model of recursive and non-teleological social activity, which intends to reposition the notion of field in organizational studies and avoid falling back into epistemological and theoretically favorable imprudent acts of: (i) **onthologization** of the field while reality of fact and complete (radical realism); (ii) **reification**, attributing an independent existence to the field; (iii) **voluntarism**, supposing that the field is an exclusive product of human action; (iv) of **functionalism**, understanding that the field and its relations result from the functional needs of social actors; (v) **normativism**, viewing the field merely as a social representation of reality that imposes parameters for action, characterizing the supersocialization of the actor.

The analytical approach of this article is supported by the concern of authors such as DiMaggio and Powell (1991); despite the new institutionalism, in comparison with the first studies of institutional theory, having raised the level of formal authority and capacity of the organization in the environment of local elites to higher levels, this macrosociological view appears to lie in little explained microsociology. This microsociology is based on a cognitive theory, which emphasizes the routine ways of typifying plus culturally sustained and conceptually correct behaviors from the social point of view, in addition to the notion of agency in the institutionalization process. This relation indicates the need to work with multiple levels in institutional analysis, since symbolic systems, such as rules and concepts are, in principle, “ideas or values in the heads of organizational actors” (Scott, 2001, p. 79).

To this end, the article is organized into two large sections: in the first, we present the concept of organizational field based on different perspectives of analysis, reflecting on the implications of certain theoretical presuppositions for the adopted institutional explanation; and in the second we discuss critically the theoretical grounding of the structuration process of organizational fields based on the structurationist approach. We conclude with propositions for the revision of the concept of field from a multi-paradigmatic and integrationist viewpoint in which structure and agency are recursively implied.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL FIELDS

The concept of organizational field has emerged as a “critical unit bridging the organizational and societal levels in the study of social and community change” (DiMaggio, 1986, p. 337), making it possible to work the complex interrelation between the environments of material, competitive and institutional resources in a more suitable way than preceding population models (DiMaggio & Powell, 1982; Scott, 1991, 2004). Nevertheless, since his initial definition, a wide ranging debate has been

taking place on this subject and different meanings have been presented in the attempt to improve the concept and its operationalization.

The recognition of the multiplicity of approaches on the theme, in some cases with subtle differentiations, has led us to the classification of six theoretical perspectives on organizational fields, as can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Theoretical Perspectives on Organizational Fields**

Theoretical Perspective	Authors	Key Elements	Description
Field as the totality of relevant actors	DiMaggio; Powell.	Signification and Relationship	Set of organizations sharing systems of common meanings and interacting more frequently among themselves than with actors from outside the field, thus constituting a recognized area of institutional life.
Field as a functionally specific arena	Scott; Meyer.	Social Function	Set of similar and different interdependent organizations that are operating in a functionally specific arena, technically and institutionally defined, in association with their exchange partners, sources of funding and regulatory bodies.
Field as a center of dialog and discussion	Hoffman; Zietsma; Winn.	Debate for Thematic Interest	Set of organizations, often with different purposes, that are recognized as participants in the same debate surrounding specific issues, plus those concerned with the reproduction of institutional practices or arrangements related to the matter.
Field as an arena of power and conflict	Vieira; Carvalho; Misoczky.	Domination and Power of Position	Field as a result of the dispute for its domination in a dynamic marked by (re)allocation of the resources of power of the actors and by their position in relation to other actors.
Field as an institutional sphere of disputed interests	Fligstein; Swedberg; Jepperson.	Power and Cognitive Structures	Constructions produced by power-holding organizations that influence the rules of interaction and dependence in the field owing to their interest which, in turn, are reflections of their position in the social structure.
Field as a structured network of relationships	Powell; White; Owen-Smith	Structural Articulation	Set formed by relational networks that are commonly integrated and intertwined, emerging as structured and structuring environments for organizations and individuals revealed from topological and structural cohesion studies.

Source: Specialized literature on organizational fields

## Field as the Totality of Relevant Actors

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) define the organizational field as “those organizations which, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (p. 148). In this light, as a recognized area of institutional life, organizational fields represent the totality of relevant actors, i.e., “a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside of the field” (Scott, 1994, p. 207-208). As pointed out by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), a structured field corresponds to a complex of organizations responding to an environment of organizational responses in that they structurally represent their relations while they delimit the actions formulated in their relationships.

Understood thus, a relational component between the social actors and the presence of common institutional structures are inherent to the concept and these are constructed according to a structuration process. As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain, in a field, this process is characterized by the tendency towards structural isomorphism, resulting from the interaction between organizations and the volume of information with which they must contend, the development of interorganizational domination structures and patterns of coalition and the mutual recognition between organizations that are involved in a common undertaking.

Therefore, in terms of their reach, organizational fields should not be treated simply as aggregative constructs, but rather as meaningful constructs for the actors involved (DiMaggio, 1991), with boundaries defined by the way they are perceived by them, which, at the level of action, affect not

only the organizational practices but also the representation of the field itself. DiMaggio (1991) exemplifies the use of this perspective in research done into the development of the field of North-American art museums from 1920 to 1940. Mazza and Pedersen (2004) also adopt this perspective in a recent study into the development of the field of the press (newspapers and magazines) in Italy and Denmark.

### **Field as a Functionally Specific Arena**

Understanding the organizational field as the totality of relevant actors raises a question that is hard for institutional analysis to solve: the definition of boundaries. This problem is inherent to the very definition of field since certain constituent aspects are allowed: the recognition by the actors of the relevance of the relationships, the existence of a multidimensional system of relationships (an environment of replies to replies), the mutual constitution of actors and relationships in a structuration dynamic, among others.

The numerous operationalizational difficulties have led some researchers, such as Scott and Meyer (1983, 1991) and Scott (1991) to opt for the reemergence of the analysis of organizations which have the same function, which is an arbitrary demarcation of the boundaries of the field. As a resource, this option may help in that it makes research more feasible; however, it becomes risky to attribute the real status of the organizational field to any field of research as this presupposes contemplating its totality.

It is in this light that Scott (1991, 2004) suggests the concept of societal sectors; later he reorganizes it for the functional organizational field. A societal sector is a “collection of organizations operating in the same domain, as identified by the similarity of their services, products or functions, together with those organizations that critically influence the performance of focal organizations” (Scott, 1991, p. 117). The adjective societal indicates the deregionalization of the boundaries, not as geographically defined, but functionally (around some specific activity), considering elements of the technical and institutional environment in the definition of the characteristics of the sector, in addition to the relations between these characteristics and the properties of the organizations that operate within it, which could be functionally different. In this line of analysis, this concept is more inclusive than the notion of industry, which suggests a focus on a specific economic activity, and also that the notion of interorganizational field identified by Warren (1967), broadening the scope of the horizontal and vertical relationship patterns between organizations. Therefore, a functional organizational field is a set of “similar and dissimilar interdependent organizations operating in a functionally specific arena together with their exchange partners, funding sources and regulators” (Scott, 2004, p. 9).

Although it does not represent the totality of the field, this perspective attempts to maintain coherence with the conceptual logic proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Furthermore, it represents some advantages for carrying out analysis as it delimits the environment of an organization whose structure or performance is being assessed under an institutional lens and defines an intermediate unit that is more practical for macrosociological analysis. Nevertheless, the definition of the degree of relationship for consideration of an actor in a field, the specification of a criterion for the evaluation of functional similarity, the delimitation and the access to cultural patterns and the diversity of fields in which the same organization might participate are some of the methodological difficulties that remain present and which may limit the possibility of research into organizational field (Scott, 1991). One interesting study under this lens is that of Scott, Mendell and Pollack (2000) concerning the field of medical care, in which they have approached the logics of action, schemes of exchange, variations in the relationship and not only isolated organizations but also different populations and organizational sets belonging to the sector.

### **Field as a Center of Dialog and Discussion**

A third model of the organizational field is linked to the notion of issue or subject, perhaps event. In a study on environmentalism, Hoffman (1999) proposes that “the field should be thought of as the center of common channels of dialogue and discussion [...] which bring together various field

constituents with disparate purposes” (p. 4). In this perspective, the attention is concentrated on a central theme with the potential to put different agents into the debate, generally organized collectively into coalitions, which do not necessarily share isomorphic dialog, expressed in a common rhetoric; on the contrary, they dispute different interest, but interests that are relevant for achieving their specific goals. In consequence, the field is the result of **negotiation** through interpretations of the elements of the central issue in question, i.e., their institutional structure (Hoffman, 1999, 2001).

To Hoffman (1999) the emphasis on themes allows for a more complex approach than that of networks in the explanation of the formation and development of a field and nor does it compromise the conceptual logic of the original definition of DiMaggio and Powell (1983). The structure of a field becomes organized as the interactions and exchanges of information between certain organizations develop and they begin to be recognized as participants in the same debate, even if this does not imply a tangible relationship pattern.

In this sense, Zietsma and Winn (2005) explain that the definition of issue-based organizational field allows for the analysis of their dynamic and long term change. However, the authors point out that in more stable fields, where the struggle over themes is not intense, owing to the occurrence of institutional logic that is better defined and more legitimate, its applicability is made difficult. Therefore, they suggest that the definition of field should account both those organizations that are more intensely involved in the debate and those concerned with the production and reproduction of a specific set of practices or institutional arrangements related to the focal issue.

Subjacent to this analysis is the consideration that an organizational field is a dynamic entity, constituted as arenas of power, where the difference and range of interests in the debate on the issues under consideration is evident during its structuration (Brint & Karabel, 1991). A certain amount of structural decoupling from institutional patterns is allowed in the sense of revealing a greater degree of autonomy of the social actors in search of their interests. As far as we can see, this definition of organizational field assumes a political economy perspective linked to a pluralist vision of power.

## Field as an Arena of Power and Conflict

A fourth perspective on organizational fields is based on Bourdieu, especially on his idea that the central category for the comprehension of relationships between agents in social fields is power and its reproduction. As explained by Everett (2002), in this light “when one comes to think in terms of field, one comes to focus on power, domination, and class” (p. 60).

According to the reading of Vieira and Carvalho (2003), the field is then the result of the dispute between organizations for its dominion in a dynamic marked by the (re)allocation of power resources of the actors and their relative position compared to other actors. Similarly, Leão Junior (2001) locates organizations in a field of power understanding that this structure **determines** values and beliefs in an organizational field. He therefore assumes that organizations operate in a social space of struggle and dependence relationships, where interests that are implicit in discourses and actions, resources under the dominion of certain actors and socially acceptable rules define the game through control of those resources from which the result will be the structuration dynamic of the field. In the words of the author, “it becomes necessary to understand the social actors involved, their objectives and the ideological presupposed ideas in addition to their behavior throughout the process of constituting the field” (Leão Junior, 2001, p. 9).

According to this perspective, change occurs when the power arrangement of the field are modified and generate new institutions, which distinguishes it from the rest by considering power as a central causal element in the formation of an organizational field and which is structurally dependent on it. In this sense, such an approach explains why this category is not high profile in institutional studies which, according to its criticism, should analyze “positions of the agents in fields that are constructed through disputes between the holders of power resources as an essential condition for understanding the dynamic of organizational fields, now understood as spaces of force and struggles” (Misoczky, 2003, p. 170).

## Field as an Institutional Sphere of Disputed Interests

This version of the organizational field is linked to the institutional approach of the way it is treated by representatives of economic sociology, although it is not exclusively theirs. As with the previous one, this perspective attributes relevance to the notion of social field of Bourdieu, both for the recognition of the relational dimension and its association with the idea of power and interests (Swedberg, 2004a, 2004b). However, although these studies sharply emphasize political aspects of the institutionalization process, its authors seem to lighten the **determinist** nature of the power structure. Thus, the option was made to classify them as a separate category as they suggest that attention should be given to more active aspects of the actors, i.e., their capacities and creative actions associated to their performance on the institutional order in search of their interests.

The works of Fligstein (1991, 1999, 2001) represent this perspective. According to the author, the notion of field has to do with the form by which local orders, understood as patterns of interaction that are reproduced in the action, are established, maintained or transformed. To him, the construction of organizational fields is a cultural phenomenon that involves preexisting social practices, rules embedded in power relations between groups and cognitive structures which function as cultural frames (*habitus*). These elements operate in conjunction setting the context of collective actions. Nevertheless, as we are also dealing with systems of power, fields acts on the capacity of interpretation of actors, not only through the aforementioned cultural frames but also the positions occupied by different actors, positions which influence their purposes and interests. From this point of view, incumbent actors strengthen their positions through their ability to influence the rules according to which the field is structured. These rules, which constitute what Fligstein calls the conception of control, operate as cognitive structures for actors and organizations, reflecting the understanding that they have of the constitution of the field itself, as well as the sense that they attribute to the movement of other actors and organizations. Because of this, organizational fields contain all the relevant information from the point of view of the actors in any given organization, but without characterizing the structural determination of the action or underestimating the capacity of interpretation of the social actors (Fligstein, 1991).

As can be seen, rather than attributing importance to scripts and social norms, Fligstein (1999, 2001) suggests that attention should be paid to strategic action in organizational fields, introducing to this end the concept of social skills. According to the author, this is the skill to promote cooperation among actors in the sense of creating, contesting and reproducing rules for interaction in favor of their interests. In this sense, organizational fields would be constructions produced by the organizations that hold power, possess social skills and resources to influence the rules of interaction and dependence because of their interests which, in their turn, are reflections of their position in the social structure of the field. Organizations can control organizational fields through their relative size in relation to the others in the field and through the benefits obtained by their members in the formation of stable rules that guide legitimate actions in the field, which is related to the interest-based view of institutionalism described by Swedberg (2004b).

Another author who appears to agree with this approach is Jepperson (1991) who has observed that action is associated with deviations from the institutional pattern rather than participation in its reproduction, so that the process of institutionalization is not clearly opposed to the interests of the social actors. In a similar vein, Lawrence and Suddaby (2005) introduce the term institutional work as a category that represents the formulation of intentional actions for the creation, maintenance or institutional rupture which, in the case of organizational fields, express the constant dispute over its boundaries.

Hensmans (2003) and Washington (2004) state that this political-cultural perspective reintroduces elements that would not be sufficiently dealt with, such as strategic quality of the agency of key actors in the structuration dynamic of organizational fields. This approach would be supported by the

capacity of certain actors to mobilize different logics and resources to meet their interests, which is in line with the observations of Seo and Creed (2002) concerning the process of institutional change.

### **Field as a Structured Network of Relationships**

A field, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), is a recognized area of social or economic activity in which the actors establish relationships among themselves, reconfiguring their action models and social structure. The organizations and other social actors are not involved only in exchange relationships but are positioned in a relational structure or network that configures their actions and delimits their possibilities (DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 1991).

Based on these aspects, several studies have sought to analyze the concept of field sustained in the notion of social network. Powell, White, Koput and Owen-Smith (2005) state that “this linkage between network dynamics and the evolving structure of fields needs to be made in order to make progress in explaining how the behavior of actors or organizations of one kind or another influence the actions of organizations of another kind” (p. 4). Mohr (2000) believes that the concept of field, since its formulation by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) brings a metaphor of topological space where the interaction occurs, which has naturally attracted interest in studies into interorganizational networks, although it poses one relevant question: the representative nature of the field through network analysis.

In this perspective, fields would be networks of interactions “that emerge as structured and structuring environments for organizational and individual participants” (White, Owen-Smith, Moody, & Powell, 2004, p. 97), normally being organized in a more integrated and intertwined way and being able to be unraveled by topological and structural cohesion studies. Their definition comes from the empirical mapping of certain structural conditions from which institutional arguments may be utilized to complement their identification.

The notion of field as a relationship network recalls the role of actors and their capacity for agency in the structuration process. More recent studies (Powell et al., 2005; White et al., 2004) based on this perspective seek to understand the mutual influence between structure and field dynamic through the analysis of their configuration at different moments in time and their influence on decisions of the actors involved. The relational configuration between actors influences the parameters for subsequent decisions and the field trajectory. However, despite the importance of these longitudinal studies on structural configurations, the focus in the relational dimension cannot infer abandoning the symbolic dimension. It is worth pointing out that the contexts of simultaneity and recurrence are not restricted to relationships but also are extended to the notion of spatio-temporally delimited meanings.

### **Brief Considerations on Theoretical Perspectives**

We have verified that from the concept originally formulated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) to the subsequent versions, certain aspects are recurrent while others are specific to a line of investigation. The different conceptual alternatives presented suggest not only a variety of emphases on the understanding of the organizational field but also theoretical preferences and analytical peculiarities which, in certain cases, are not excluding among themselves.

What is common among them is the tendency to stand out more of the relational/structural dimension in the organizational field than the symbolic/of-meaning dimension which, to a certain point, may result from the definition itself established by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Here it is evident that there is a reference to the notion of field as communicative space among different social actors, which delimits values, social norms, sanctions and other aspects owing to the relational configuration between them (Mohr, 2000). In practical terms, the symbolic dimension of a field combined with its material facet under the lens of the actors ends up defining an arena of interaction from which their notion of position in the field is derived, understood as their reference in relation to the other actors (sense of one's place and the other's place) plus the parameters for action.



As an articulated relationship space, the notion of field favors a more structural approach, based on the analysis of patterns and intensity of relationship. However, one of the aspects that we sought to highlight throughout the article is the fact that besides the material consideration of the relations between actors, the symbolic order surrounding the meaning of these relationships needs to be observed. In any explanation of the collective actions, rational ends make no sense without considering cultural categories such as values and beliefs, located in a certain historical context. Social networks must also be understood as phenomenological entities since they constitute networks of meanings (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Friedland & Alford, 1991).

When it comes to the constitution of an organizational field, there is always a set of presuppositions concerning its structuration, among which those of two approaches stand out: one of them is sustained in Bourdieu and the notion of social fields; the other in Giddens. Both are found in the base of the concept of the organizational field of DiMaggio and Powell (1982, 1983). Both presuppose the analysis of duality/dualism between meaning and social structure. Nevertheless, although they have shared aspect, their premises are not equivalents (Mohr, 2000). One of the points of distinction between them is in the way in which power, conflict and social position are introduced in the structuration process.

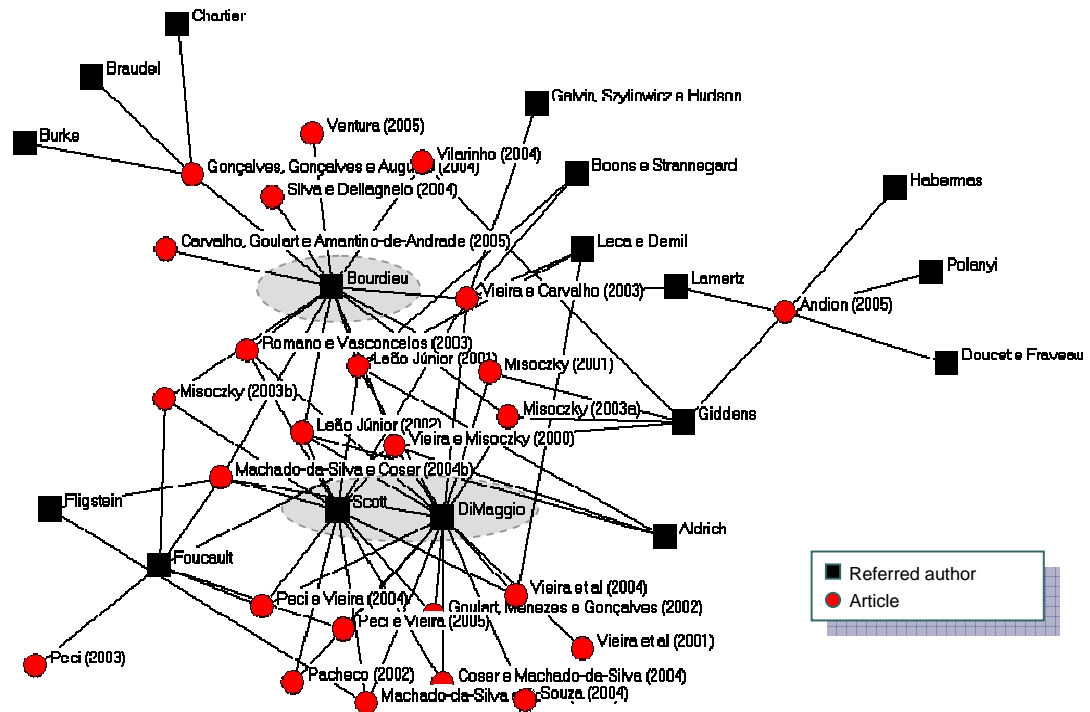
According to Bourdieu (1989, 2003) power relationships structure society and are in the essence of the dispute for capital by actors who wish to sustain or transform their position or social structure in a certain field, influencing the meaning of relationships which assure them legitimacy. In Giddens (1978, 2003) the social dynamic is dealt with differently, with power and social position being linked to practice, not in the sense of strategic competence but as part of the dimensions of interaction. Thus, the notion of structuration shows the ongoing reproduction/reconstruction of the social structure by reflexive actors in contexts of typifying practices. It is interesting to note that, even being frequently quoted as fundamental for the cultural-cognitive approach of institutionalism, this idea of structuration has not yet been greatly explored in the sense of defining the outlines of a theoretical and empirical articulation that better establishes an analytical frame for the study of organizational fields (Frumkin & Kaplan, 2000; Munir, 2005).

On the Brazilian academic scene, what can be seen concerning studies into organizational fields is the reference to three central authors: DiMaggio, Scott and Bourdieu, with the latter being the most referred to. In Figure 1, we show the relationship between twenty-five analyzed articles and the authors referred to therein in their concept of the organizational field. These articles were selected from Brazilian periodicals classified as Concept **A** or **B** by Capes and from annals of several editions of EnANPAD and the EnEO from the period of 1998 to 2005<sup>(3)</sup>.

From a total of 149 references to field, Bourdieu was quoted 46 times (30.9%), DiMaggio 33 times (22.1%) and Scott 25 times (16.8%). The three authors together have a total of 104 references, i.e., 69.8% of all references to field are attributed to them, corroborating the visible centrality in the network shown in Figure 1.

Although some studies have mainly reported the field approach as a totality of relevant actors (Coser & Machado-da-Silva, 2004; Machado-da-Silva & Coser 2004a, 2004b), based essentially in the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), we see that Brazilian authors refer mainly to the texts of Bourdieu (1983, 1990, 1992, 1996, 2003, 2004) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) for the construction of field, and this also serves as an analytical framework. This preference of researchers favors the approach supported in the view of the field as an arena of power and conflict, which is highlighted in the Brazilian context.

Figure 1: Networks of Articles versus References (\*)



Source: Articles published in domestic periodicals and annals of EnANPAD and EnEO, from 1998 to 2005.

(\*) The polarity of relationship in which the ideas of a certain author are shown to be positively or negatively dealt with in the selected article was not taken into consideration.

To Bourdieu (2003) power is a central variable in the conflicts of interest within a field. The field is understood as a configuration of relationships between positions that are

objectively defined in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of distribution of species of power (or capital), whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97).

Therefore, a field is considered a structured space of position, an arena of dispute for legitimacy, in which agents struggle for the redefinition or appropriation of specific capital that is unequally distributed. This inequality defines the structure of the field, where the dominant and the dominated are found and reflects a relationship of forces that are historically engendered by a system of incorporated dispositions which not only allows for action in this **game** but also the recognition of its importance in a type of objective complicity beyond the struggles and in favor of the very existence of the field (Lahire, 2002).

In the view of Thiry-Cherques (2006) the research object of Bourdieu is to know the structures and how they **determine** the internal relations to a social segment, at the same time that they are determined by these relations, i.e., they are structured. The author states that Bourdieu follows, in general terms, the protocol of structuralist research, but that the epistemological founding is Bachelard's **rational materialism**.

Bourdieu (1985, 1989, 2003), however, defines his approach as constructivist structuralism or structural constructivism, meaning the understanding that it is organized so as to overcome the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism. He understands that sociological analysis must take two complementary matters into account. The first concerns the analysis of social space, considering the relative position and objective relations between the agents, in which the differentiation depends on the volume of capital of the agent. As the type of capital that defines positions becomes clearer, a special field of power is created and this results from the active role of the types of capital and political struggle as assets in the building of social space. In turn, the second matter for sociological analysis must deal with the social perception of the world, in which the notion of *habitus* is relevant, expressing through schema of perception and appreciation the social position in which it was arranged. As he explains, *habitus* is a product of the internalization of structures, configuring mental schema for the apprehension of the world. “We have inscribed in ourselves the generating and organizing principles of new practices and representation of our actions and thoughts. [...] We perceive, think and act within the narrow liberty given by the logic of the field and the position that we occupy within” (Thiry-Cherques, 2006, p. 34). This places *habitus* as a mechanism of social reproduction whose degree of opening for change is a matter of controversy among social scientists (see: Lau, 2004; Lizardo, 2004). However, to Lizardo (2004) there is nothing in the concept of *habitus* that makes its use impossible in a non-determinist way. He states that many critics attack the force of the *habitus* in social reproduction but ignore the possibility of its use in a more flexible way, awaiting purposeful and creative actions.

Meanwhile Everett (2002) understands that a certain social determinism is implied in the perspective of Bourdieu. The actors have little freedom of action, delimited by social structures, with little space for reflection and change. Furthermore, he identifies problems in the universalization of Bourdieu’s notion of class, which combines Marx’s concept of economic class and Weber’s status group. The author also questions the weakness in the limitation of a field since it is hardly known what is or what is not within the reach of its boundaries. He states that in Bourdieu’s approach (i) the analysis of objective structures is logically conducted by the analysis of objective dispositions, (ii) and this relation fulfills political functions, which makes the symbolic systems instruments of domination; and (iii) symbolic systems are social products that constitute social relations, which are capable of transforming representation in the world, revealing social power relations linked to symbolic goods which contribute to the reproduction or transformation of domination structures.

In a correlated line of analysis, Warde (2004) finds certain difficulty in identifying the activity that supplies the content and *raison d’être* for the existence of a field. According to him, the association of certain practices, generally conceived as typical activities, performed and contained in the *habitus*, with the existential content of a field leaves aside relevant aspects of the institutional dynamic. By understanding that this concept of field suffers from an excessively structural focus, he proposes its revision. He believes that for its effective comprehension, it is necessary to recognize both the level of institutionalization of the field itself associated with the relational structure founded on strategic action for the dispute of capital and the institutionalization of practices, dealt with more broadly as coordinated entities that exist through their effective performance in the action and resulting from historical processes of social interaction that are variable in space-time. He argues that in Bourdieu’s approach all relevant conduct for sociological investigation is strategic and competitive in such a way that the analysis of social fields does not allow the appreciation of a wide theory of practices. Furthermore, it may be suggested that this approach tends to give favor the competence of agents who are more powerful and structurally better placed in the struggle to assure their legitimacy and the dominion of the field.

In the Brazilian academic context, Machado da Silva, Fonseca and Crubellate (2005) believe that the problem of some formulations, supported in certain readings of Bourdieu is in the conception of power as fundamentally linked to the “single perspective of intentionality, [which makes it] come close to a rationalist presupposition; at least when it comes to its subjacent voluntarist guidelines” (p. 17). Therefore, social relations in the field take on a mechanistic form strictly based in the functionality of relationships.

## GIDDENS AND THE STRUCTURATION THEORY

The structuration theory, as presented by Giddens (1978, 2001, 2003), focuses its attention primarily on the ontological aspect, seeking to overcome the dualism that has long been present in the social theory concerning the conceptions of being human, doing human, social reproduction and social transformation. This dualism is essentially marked by the polarization between objectivism and subjectivism, reconsidering the theory of structuration as a duality of structure: “the structural properties of social systems only exist in that forms of social conduct are chronically reproduced through time and space” (Giddens, 2003, p. XXII-XXIII). Cohen (1999) explains that the structuration theory is a post-empiricist view without the intention to universalize any set of practices or processes of social (re)production but to (re)formulate their constitutive potentials. In this sense, the exposition of their main components becomes necessary to understand the arguments on organizational fields that will be presented below.

The key to understanding the structuration theory lies in the concept of social (re)production, contrary to the functionalist teleology and the dichotomy between the static and the dynamic. In this sense, any social situation is considered “a contingent achievement of the social actors and [...] a skilful production that is sustained under conditions of reflexive reasoning of action [...] as every act of reproduction is, *ipso facto*, an act of production in which society is recreated in a new set of circumstances” (Giddens, 2001, p. 152).

In this approach, Giddens (2003) understands that social systems are “relationships reproduced between actors or collectives, organized as regular social practices” (p. 29). As such, Giddens (2001) attributes to them a personal and spatio-temporal character in that they are continually created and recreated as the active achievement of agents. Whittington (1992) emphasizes that the concept of social system suspends the dualism between structure and agency, creating an interdependent duality. In this perspective, the analysis of the structuration process it is only possible through the study of the activities of the actors, who are supported by the rules and resources that are available in their context of action. Groups and collectives must be seen as systems of interaction, where the actors produce and reproduce this context, continually reformulating the social systems (Giddens, 1978). Thus, structuration is understood as “the reproduction of practices, [...] to the dynamic process by which structures come into being” (Giddens, 1978, p. 129), which is closely related to the duality of structure in social interaction.

Therefore, structure is conceived as “generative rules and resources that are both applied to action and are constituted as part of it” (Giddens, 2001, p. 145) in a structuration process that is extended over time and space, involving the communication of meaning (semantic rules), the exercise of power (unequally distributed resources) and the evaluation of conduct (moral or normative rules). In this light, rules and resources are properties of collectives, expressed in the production of social interaction, respectively, as structures of meaning, domination and legitimacy (Bryant & Jary, 2001; Giddens, 1978). As Giddens (2003) explains,

to say that structure is a **virtual order** of transforming relations means that the social systems, as reproduced social practices, have no **structures**, but beforehand exhibit **structural properties** and that structure only exists as a space-time presence in its exemplifying in such practices and as mnemonic traces the conduct of agents gifted with cognoscitive capacity (p. 20).

However, to consider structures as a set of rules and resources requires special attention. The rules of social life must be seen as techniques or procedures that can be generalized and applied to the performance/reproduction of social practices, being expressed at the core of cognoscitivity of human agents, especially in the practical conscience and, in a certain form, involved in the maintenance of ontological security of agents, as they are used in the constitution and reconstitution of encounters

(Giddens, 1978, 2003). In their turn, resources are accessible bases of power that supply the means to influence the course of interaction among agents, but which are not separated from the semantic and moral aspects (Cohen, 1999). Thus, structures are at the same time resources for the reproduction of the system, being associated with aspects of routine practice, to the constitution of meanings and to sanctions found in certain historical and spatial circumstances.

In social relations, the standardization of social interactions in space-time and the reproduction of localized practices as a **virtual** social structuration order recursively implicated in this reproduction are considered. The structure, therefore, must not be compared with coercion because it is simultaneously facilitating and constraining, not existing independently from the knowledge of the social actors concerning what they do in their daily activity, but “de-subjectified into the practices of a collectivity” (Bertilsson, 1984, p. 343). In time, Giddens (2003) uses the term social integration that which has occurred among actors in contexts of co-presence, where there is reciprocity between practices and integration of system and actors that are physically absent spatio-temporally.

More than this, the spatio-temporal context must be repositioned in the theory. To better understand this aspect, it is necessary to recognize that subject are agents before all else. This indicates that there is practical action in human conduct that cannot always be put into words, which does not mean that it is not done (practiced). Thus, the presupposed idea of the cognoscitive subject, which reflexively monitors its actions in the social system, also considers that part of this monitoring is not spoken of, but conformed as a practical conscience, not verbalized, and by itself is only part of the same set of actions. On this point, Cohen (1999) explains that “the characteristic quality of practical conscience is that the agents need to be only tacitly conscious of the skills that they have mastered, although it is generally possible to concentrate discursive attention when such an occasion arises” (p. 413). In other words, the agents possess an essentially tacit form of knowledge that guides them to act or **proceed** within the routines of social life. In these terms, in dealing with reflexive agents and those who move in space-time, the differentiation of contexts is associated with the guidance of these actions. Contexts are like scenarios for actions, to which the agents appeal to guide what they do and say to others. There is, therefore, a process of contextual indexability configuring scenarios of practical action, as made typical and inherent to the **stocks** of mutual knowledge, which agents make use of to produce a meaningful world (Giddens, 1999).

It is interesting to observe that mutual knowledge, as understood by Giddens (2003), presupposes its duration beyond the biography of any agent or group of agents, being extended over space and time. The traces of memory, present in the structuration process would be the basic instrument by which mutual knowledge is preserved by agents and transported to situations where the respective practices are reproduced. Therefore, mutual knowledge, analytically, represents that set of rules considered as structural property of a semantic and normative nature which, linked to resources, as means by which these rules are applied, make up the dimensions of duality of structure (Cohen, 1999). This, however, is not to say that in the structuration theory the principle of uniformity of social practices is accepted. As observed by Cohen (1999),

In the structuration theory, the kinds of resources to which the agents have access and the cognoscitive skills involved in the practices that they perform, like their discursive knowledge of broader social conditions always exist in the interior of certain historical and spatial limits [...]. The historical variability of the social praxis in ontological terms... refers only to the aspects of an object that exists where it wants to be found.... The theory of structuration supplies an ontology of potentials. It maintains that a potential held by social agents is the skill to produce historical variations in their own forms of conduct (p. 416).

This capacity is related to the power that is subjacent to human action, the power to make a difference. Action is equal to transforming capacity in the structuration theory (Cohen, 1999). In this sense, even if daily life involves a sequence of intentional actions, these acts lead to unforeseen consequences that may systematically be sustained by the constitution of unrecognized conditions of new acts.

## STRUCTURATION THEORY AND ORGANIZATIONAL FIELDS

Although Giddens does not mention the organizational field as a concept or unit of analysis at the moment in which he deals with social systems and their multiplicity, his ideas make it possible to fit the field analysis into an analytical structure that is supported in the structurationist view. Social systems are activities of human agents, reproduced in localized practices, but also standardization of social relations in space-time, which can be understood as an intermediary between agents and society, where the dimensions of social interaction (power, sanctions and forms of communication) are found. Therefore, “to analyze the structuration of social systems means to study the way that these systems, founded in the cognoscitive activities of localized actors, based on rules and resources in the diversity of contexts of action, are produced and reproduced in interaction” (Giddens, 2003, p. 29-30). Considering that, in organizational fields, agents interact with each other, (re)producing social structures through modalities of structuration, some considerations in this respect are required.

The idea of structure in interaction in social systems is opportune for a dynamic understanding of the notion of power, which seems to be more suitable to the ideas set out so far because, contrary to what readings based on Bourdieu suggest, power is not treated mechanistically or as an end for the members of a field. According to Giddens (2003), whether power has a connection with different sectional interests is not equal to its definition. Thus, power is not seen as an obstacle to freedom; however, its coercive character cannot be ignored. Power as a dimension of interaction supposes that domination structures are reproduced in time and space. However, as mentioned above, domination structures are embedded in contexts of meaning and legitimacy, i.e., they do not arise in a vacuum as a restricted product of social positions, but as a means and product of the construction of meaning and legitimacy in contexts of interaction. This kind of formulation necessarily presupposes a dialectic of control in which the generation of power is not exclusive to dominating groups. It is an effect of relationship and the situation shared between the dominators and the dominated (Bryant & Jary, 2001).

The duality between structure and agency allows us to understand that fields are relatively closed systems, which does not imply stating that they are socially cohesive, whose dynamic of interaction, although marked by localized structural references, does not make possible the creation of new patterns. Nevertheless, to speak of duality of structure as a reproduction of structural properties from the praxis of cognoscitive actors is to accept that they are capable not only of reproducing but of producing new patterns of interaction, endogenously altering the field structure. It is believed that, in this sense, the structuration theory provides better comprehension about the agent as a reflexive being and capable to become an instrument of change as well as to the practice of these agents within the field. To understand that only structurally privileged agents are strategic in the action, as is the case of some interpretations of the author, would be to treat agency in a stratified way, being incoherent with the transforming notion outlined so far.

When it comes to the field and its delimitation, the elements of the structuration theory allow us to make other comments. Starting with the principle that there are several organizational fields in addition to that which is of interest for analysis, we also assume that competent agents can acquire and use knowledge in different fields. Therefore, the scope of an organizational field is not restricted to endogenous influences or, more properly, self-referring properties. In reality, it can be said that, as a social system, it has internal logic that serves as a reference for actions, judgments, pondering and identity, yet without conferring full autonomy or isolation of wider social processes of which it is part. Thus, social integration and integration of system are implied in the structuration process and field analysis.

It is also necessary to recognize that the dynamic of relations between actors within and outside the field is simultaneous. In other words, by being in a constant structuration process, actions in different fields may converge simultaneously, even when the actors are not socially integrated. The implications of simultaneity of actions between actors in different fields may allow their relationship, at some

moment, consisting of a new potential for interaction which, over time, may result in a conformation process of boundaries (or scope) of initial fields. In this interim, the bankruptcy or integration of preceding institutional orders is a contingent of the process in action.

In the same way, as attempts are made to establish a new legitimate order on the configuration in preparation, despite the possibility of contradiction between structures from different fields, conflict will not necessarily occur. Giddens (1978) explains that the notion of conflict is closely linked to that of interest. In this case, conflict is the property of interaction, in the sense of active struggle conducted in the context of a clash of interests. Meanwhile, contradiction can be understood as a property of structures and is maintained in a contingent relationship of conflict. It is evident that these structural properties accept the stratification of interests at the level of social integration; however, the occurrence of conflict does not necessarily produce a contradiction of the system, nor is the existence of this contradiction expressed, inevitably, in an open field dispute.

This aspect has contradictory implications for the perspective of field as an arena of power and conflict, presented in the preceding section. By treating conflict and contradiction in a similar way, one leads to analytical inconsistencies, mainly when it is said that the difference of positions occupied by the actors in a field **determines** the nature of the conflict between them. However, the very concept of position must be seen with caveats.

Giddens (2003) observes that “the social positions are constituted structurally as specific intersections of meaning, domination and legitimacy that are related to the typifying of agents” (p. 97). Therefore, with the distinctions between contradiction and conflict, it is inconceivable to accept that the conflict between positions is a *sine qua non* situation and to accept that these conflicts are originated exclusively through the dispute of power between agents because, reducing the totality of actions of agents only to disputes of power is to ignore the elements of meaning and legitimacy embedded in the structuration process of social fields. As Friedland and Alford (1991) explain that “society is constituted through multiple institutional logics” (p. 243) which consider the intertwining of the individual, organizational and society levels and the institutional variation of relationship patterns in the consideration of symbolic elements and the recognition of their material dimension. “These institutional logics are symbolically grounded, organizationally structured, politically defended, and technically and materially constrained, and hence have specific historical limits” (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248-249).

Despite the ideas outlined so far, it is presupposed that field represents an intermediary level of social structuring, considered a mediating element between broader social and cultural structures and organizations, even there is not conceptually direct equivalence in the structuration theory. In this sense, it is important to observe that during the social transformations that led to the contemporary society, the organizations took on a substantive meaning in the broader process of social structuration. Nevertheless, according to Ackroyd (2000), when theorizing on an organizational society, it is common, especially in more recent social theories, such as that of Giddens, to find integration, indistinctly processes of society and organizational structuration. There are various implications but at least two deserve to be mentioned: the first is the ontological status of the organizational level and its implication for the agency and reflexivity on social structuration processes; the second concerns the recognition of organizations and, similarly, the organizational field as intermediary levels of structururations, measurers of the broader relations of society with individuals and the organizations themselves.

Following this line of reasoning, as is the case of Chia (2003), we consider that organizations, more than concrete entities, are **world-making** participating in an ongoing process of social construction of reality through routinization, formation and institutionalization of norms and codes of behavior. However, contradicting more radical conceptions of social constructionism, organizations cannot be reduced merely to these defined patterns of social abstraction, incapable of decoupling from the discursive context or that of the linguistic reality in which they are found. They must also be dealt with structurally.

Ackroyd (2000)<sup>(4)</sup> explains that considered structurally, organizations represent contexts for action in which parameters for effective human agency are defined. The organizational level is that in which the relationship between agency and structure is more visibly represented; it is where the “corporate agency emerges and reproduces and transforms the structural mechanisms through which social life is co-ordinated and controlled to establish a degree of, always contested, continuity and stability” (Reed, 2005a, p. 1635). According to this author, it is in this meeting of agency and structure that “dynamic tensions that will drive subsequent interactive chains of socio-historical change producing unintended and unforeseen consequences for all those involved” are created (Reed, 2005b, p. 1669). At this level, organizations are experimented as real. At the same time that they are actively constituted by their members, being seen as means to economic and social power and the power to struggle for the sustaining of certain social relations, they also structurally shape constrain and facilitate the influence of individuals on society. Thus, “organisations contribute to and also alter reflexivity in ways that encourage the active engagement of participants in organisational processes, but at the same time entail a generally low level of affective attachment to them” (Ackroyd, 2000, p. 102).

Similarly, the concept of field is dealt with as a mediator in the process of organizational constitution, its historical structuration being considered logically before that of institutionalization of organizational forms (Scott, 2001). In this light, the effects on organizational systems do not act directly; they are mediated by processes and structures operating at the level of the organizational field (Davis & Marquis, 2005; Scott, Mendell, & Polack, 2000). Consequently, their relevance to organizational studies is not only theoretical, but also of a practical order in the social structuration process, having causal influences, although not determinist, on organizations<sup>(5)</sup>. As intermediary level of social structuration, according to Reed (2005a), the field can be conceived of as conceptual space and ontological domain, where subjacent generative mechanisms act in organizational (re)constitution and social reproduction. To understand it in this perspective is not trivial and, therefore, requires some clarification based on structurationist logic, in which the notion of field may be a reference both to process and structure.

As a social system it is a structure by being previously constituted, in a structuration process which, temporally, precedes the present moment. And thus it has structural properties that can be reproduced and/or transformed consciously or tacitly. The existence of the field as a social form independent from its identification (transfactuality) is admitted. That being the case, it is supposed its historicity both in the sense of its being elaborated through specific relations and rules in a dependent context (path dependence) and also by remaining dependent on socially constructed concepts in the social dynamic (interpretation).

Evidently, the conception defended here does not consider individuals as if they were cultural dopes but as agents whose temporality of actions must be considered in the analysis (Acroyd & Fleetwood, 2000; Schmidt, 1997). In this light, it is seen that the field has causal influence. It is not only a representation of structure as culturally sustained rules and resources, but rather a system of relationships and social position<sup>(6)</sup> (position-practice) that is pre-existing and has potential to influence actions. On this point, it is believed that the relationships in a social system, once established, have causal influence on subsequent attention to rules and resources in structuration (Mingers, 2003; Porpora, 1998). In other words, properties of interaction are associated with positions in social relationships which, in their turn, can facilitate, constrain or motivate the actions of agents<sup>(7)</sup>. As a structure, fields are not considered epiphenomena of human behavior intermediated by organizations, although they are recursively the product of the human agency. Or yet, as Reed (2000) explains, “organisational forms [...] are structures by virtue of the fact that they have spatially, temporally and socially enduring institutional properties that are irreducible to the activities of contemporary agents” (p. 57). In this sense, the social nature of the field is considered to be pre-structured, characterizing asymmetry in the structurationist relationship between agency and society (Bhaskar & Lawson, 1998) and therefore, to possess a causal potential on intentional human agency and the empirically observable happenings (Bhaskar, 1998).

Cohen (1999) explains that this is an ontology of potentials in which “the ontological element of the scientific theory can be understood as a series of internally coherent perceptions in the trans-historical



potentials of the phenomena which make up a field of research, i.e. the fundamental processes and properties that can be activated or carried out in numerous different ways and on different occasions” (p. 401). Also according to this author, this view is compatible with structurationist ontology that is “dedicated exclusively to the constitutive potentials of social life” (Cohen, 1999, p. 402). These potentials are possessed but are not always carried out by social agents, making the historical determination of events and processes impossible.

In these terms, the notion of field must also be recognized as a recursively structured process. Agents do not create the field out of nothing. They recreate, reproduce or transform it from pre-existing structures that make their actions potentially possible. Nevertheless, even though they are considered pre-existing, these structures only continue to exist through the reproduction and/or transformation of other structures that the agents find in their social actions in a specific combination of praxis and structure, historically and temporally localized (Acroyd & Fleetwood, 2000; Mingers, 2003).

The capacity for transformation inherent to the logic of structuration, as the ability for reflexivity of agents and the organizational level as an intermediary in social structuration is allowed, reinforces the need for attention to the potential of the agency. To understand agency as a capacity to make a difference (Giddens, 1978, 2003), setting the relationship between power and action preceding subjectivity, does not imply rejecting the possibility of regularity in the conduct or conception of trans-historical uniformities (Cohen, 1999). It implies the rejection of a radical determinism and exaggerated voluntarism so that the discussion in this respect contemplates the historical and contextual circumstances in the sense of recognizing the asymmetry in access to resources, establishing a dialectic of control as well as rules and resources in the definition of the scope of practices that can be carried out by an agent (Cohen, 1999).

According to Friedland and Alford (1991), it is not a matter of specification of the rational or irrational. It is an examination of varied transrational orders, in which the formation of preferences and utility is historical and institutionally structured and defined. According to Beckert (1999), agency and institutional patterns can be seen as two interdependent forces that are destabilized but which act as coordination mechanisms in a social system. At the same time that agents strategically pressure institutionalized structures, social norms or rules that are legally sustained, paradoxically, influence the modes of action and the bases for the evaluation of alternatives (Beckert, 1999; Scott, 2001).

For further clarification, it is worth revisiting the analysis of Ackroyd (2000) concerning organizations, in which he states that they also represent a type of institution of contemporary society experimented as real. If this reasoning is coherent, they gain ontological status and participate as a means and result of social structuration. As they become objective, their properties and relations begin to represent parameters for action, at the same time in which, by being considered thus and by the capacity for mobilizing that they represent, they become means through which social structures are modeled or reproduced. Assuming the preceding discussion on field as structure, all the logic of social relationship must be considered, both in the direction of establishing a position-practice system and in being the reference point or parameters for organizational actions. Thus, it is viable to consider that organizational relationships of field structuration are constructed in a certain sense in which they are relevant to agents, who choose the nature of the relationships and, consequently, of the resulting networks of relationships.

Furthermore, under an ontology of potentials that is coherent with the structurationist approach, trans-historic or universal priority is not attributed to the specific practices or processes of social reproduction (Cohen, 1999). At the same time, the presupposed idea of an ontological necessity is admitted, necessary but sufficiently flexible to accept transitive-contingent knowledge directed at the object in question and constructed through scientific analysis and research (Reed, 2005b). Understood thus, the perspective of the analysis of organizational fields requires cares that go beyond theoretical preferences, since it is in the area of presupposed ontological ideas and epistemological commitments.

In this way, a certain possibility for epistemological relativization is admitted in that acceptance of substantive theories which, as a body of historically contextualized knowledge, are subject to empirical refuting. However, more basically, they focus on the elucidation of generative (potentials) mechanisms or structures that constitute social processes and events which are generated or transformed from a wide range of empirically perceivable possibilities (Cohen, 1999; Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1996). As Ekstrom (1992) notes well, in this type of analysis, the central concern is to explain, not to predict:

causes are neither events nor objects but properties [...] effective/productive and lie behind the sequences of events and constant changes that can be observed in the real world [...]. These operative properties that causal analysis attempts to uncover exist by necessity relatively independent of their effects, but the relations between these properties and the observable effects are contingent inasmuch as that they are dependent on the specific context that we are studying (p. 114).

## CONCLUSION

Explanation is the fundamental aspect of social analysis. This statement implies recognizing that the double hermeneutic inherent to social research as referred to by Giddens (1978, 2003) is present and involves the fact that, as social scientists, we utilize concepts to explain other concepts so that as we are not in a privileged position in relation to other actors, the implications surrounding the knowledge of reality are linked to the idea of ontological need and epistemological limitation (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2000; Zeuner, 2001). This limitation means, in the words of Reed (2005b, p. 1665) that the science and knowledge it produces cannot provide an absolute and universal guarantor of the complexity of processes and real things, but can specify a validity criterion for the argument, analysis, experimentation and explanation which, in turn, serve as a basis for the counterposition between rival explanations.

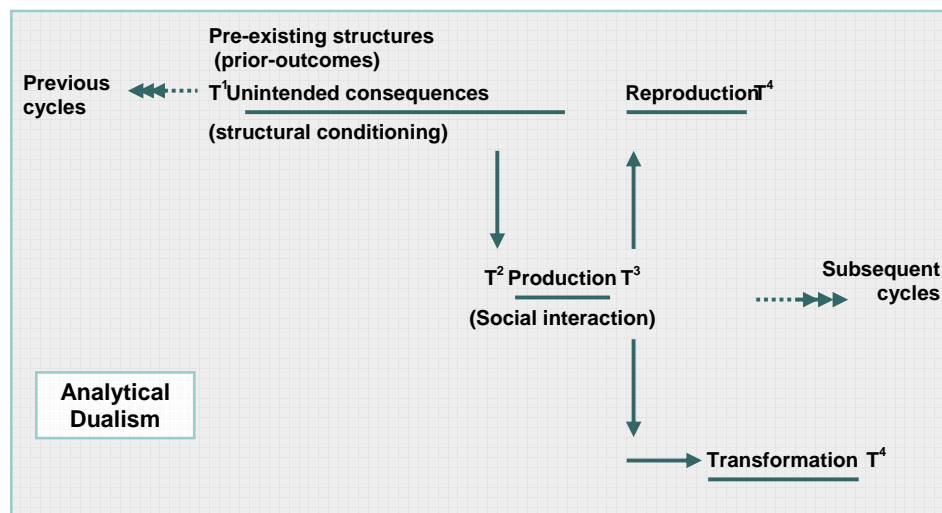
In this way, analysis involves the possibility of revision of concept which, in turn, also implies the way we see the world, reconsidering structures, mechanisms and relationships that condition and, at the same time, are a product of human agency and provide a causal influence to the structuration process of organizational fields.

Returning to the different theoretical perspectives of organizational field that have been dealt with in this essay, we may assume two positions in terms of their evaluation: (a) analysis of their explicative power; or (b) epistemological relativization. The former begins the debate, but creates a search for prominence, in logic of exclusion. The latter suggests that each of the perspectives indicates a direction in social relations, which could express their partial facet but more than that: the organizational field construct constitutes a body of knowledge that is permanently developing, introducing an intransitive dimension ontologically; thus, the alternative approaches operate at the scientific level of knowledge (of interpretation of generative mechanisms) and are not necessarily excluded, but define their provisional and contingent character. In this line of reasoning, any statement on a prominent **sense** of the relationships that define the degree of structuration of a field would be arbitrary.

Therefore, in agreement with the ideas of Bhaskar (1998), we affirm that the analysis of organizational fields must presuppose the rise of pre-existing structures or mechanisms, with generative properties that make observable events possible, which, in their turn, may be experimented empirically. Each of these analytical dimensions is dialectically related to the others and one cannot be reduced to the others. Furthermore, in this way, such considerations can only make sense owing to the relational nature of the social systems and the idea of potential ontology. Thus, the duality of the structure concerning the mutual constitution between structure and agency and the duality of praxis as a proposed production and unconscious (re)production of the structural properties of society<sup>(8)</sup>, are aspects that are found in the proposed analytical framework.

One of the consequences of this approach is that fact that it does not found agency or structure, opening a temporal window for analysis – an analytical dualism (Archer, 1982, 1998) as shown in Figure 2 – which allows for research and makes it viable without abandoning the structurationist recursiveness. The stratification of levels of reality (structures, observable events and empirical experience) outlined above involves a temporal analysis component of the field. Thus, the effort to explain the structuration of the organizational field allows for an analytical starting point made up of structural conditions (Archer, 1982, 1998) or pre-existing standards and mechanisms, including rules, resources and relationship structures or systems of position-practice that have causal implications for a later moment of social interaction in which production or social restructuring is promoted by agents, given the nature and pre-existing structural conditions with which they interact.

**Figure 2: Analytical Dualism**



Source: Archer (1998, p. 376).

In time, the idea of analytical dualism being proposed as a methodological resource does not imply stating that there is a relationship of empirical or mechanical causality between structure and agency, although the relationship and some degree of structural conditioning are recognized. As we have already stated, this should not be interpreted in an unhistorical, determinist light or in a sense of structural reification. The causal and analytical meaning of social structures in this approach must be understood as operating from motives and actions of the actors, intrinsically related to their capacity for agency, influencing, but not determining, their social activity in favor of the reproduction or transformation of institutionalized relationships, rules and resources (see duality of praxis and ontology of potentials discussed above). Fields and organizations can, therefore, be conceived as institutions (Ackroyd, 2000) or lasting structural forms that can be produced, reproduced and transformed from the social relations in practice (Reed, 2000) although, at the same time, they represent the process of social engagement to a system of position-practice that allows for this transformation or reproduction.

Considering that the members of a field are closely related to the others and that all have mutual influence in a social context, which defines the basis of meaning (Scott, 1987), it would not be going too far to say that the relationship networks as seen by their members can never be completely understood since the analysis perspective and the options menu for action are socially influenced. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 149) this involves recognizing structural conditioners which influence the scope of choice that actors see as rational or prudent. Through the lens of the Giddens' (2003) structuration theory "what the 'individual' is cannot be considered obvious. [...] History does not mean 'human practices with no master'. It is the temporal nature of human practices, modeling and being modeled by structural properties" (p. 258-259).

In light of this reasoning, one of the more contradictory aspects surrounding the study of organizational fields is having the means to be equalized. This is the problem of defining boundaries. Bourdieu (2003) states that, by being known a posteriori, a field is always considered a **particular case of the possible**. In the line of argument that we have adopted in this essay, this statement of Bourdieu converges with the notion that scientific knowledge is also always produced a posteriori and without being able to be equated with direct experience (Bhaskar & Lawson, 1998). He presupposes the existence of generative structures and mechanisms that are subjacent to the field at its most profound ontological level; however, by considering the analytical aspect, it is a logical question to accept the impossibility of this social reality being attained in all its complexity. Thus, any analysis is always a projection; in other words, it is epistemologically relative because of its dependence on constructed concepts and spatio-temporal specificity. Therefore, the definition of boundaries is always dealt with analytically because of the selected outline of research, and is therefore committed to the ontological presupposition and epistemologically limited as mechanisms or structures that explain certain regularities can be revealed.

When it comes to the debate on structuration in the perspective of Giddens or Bourdieu, the line of argument that we have developed in this paper considers structure not only as rules and resources but also as position-practice relationships. This understanding may lead to the erroneous notion of concluding that we are putting new dressing on Bourdieu's social fields perspective as he also emphasizes that appearance operates on relative positions of relationship spaces, even if they are invisible, and that they constitute first and last in reality (Misoczky, 2003). However, there is a caveat: the subjacent generative mechanism that guides these apparent position differences is linked to the distribution structure of forms of power, found in time and space. The focus that we have adopted is intended to supplant this perspective in two ways: (i) revising the power approach; and (ii) widening, in parallel, the possibilities of subjacent generative structures or mechanisms: rules, resources and relationships. We understand that the explicative capacity is greater in an ontology of potentials approach, supported by the broader notion of power, located in the agency. Although, from this viewpoint, the consequences introduced by Bourdieu in his explanation of social structuring are not rejected, they are placed only as a possibility in the complexity of the social world.

To round off, we have sought to restart the debate on organizational fields with the formulations presented in this article. According to the arguments examined, the implications go beyond theoretical preferences. The choice of one perspective or another of organizational fields may favor institutional lines of analysis which give preference to certain types of interpretation. In this way, when it comes to the purpose of this article, reflecting on the different analytical and methodological possibilities should constitute a concern that reaches the kernel of the institutional approach on organizational studies. The basic aspect to be considered is the plausibility of different concepts being used, depending on the research goals, with the risk of contradictions in the interpretations or incoherence between ontological and epistemological presuppositions and the adopted institutional approach.

The foregoing considerations on the organizational field suggest certain analytical principles, especially those associated with recursiveness and historicity. In the structuration process of an organizational field structure and agency are mutually presupposed. Thus, the intentional action, be it over dispute of power or the reach of goals, is included in a dynamic that does not separate different dimensions of social interaction. The relationships in a field, even when submitted in the first instance to those aspects associated with, for instance, resources or domination are not disconnected from other social orders connected to their legitimization or meaning. Furthermore, as a recursively defined institutional arena, a field has parameters for action, or a system of references that is constantly being elaborated that is meaningful to the social actors. Therefore, the whole set of possible relationships that could be represented through social networks also needs to be recognized while meaningful, which makes the acceptance of the perspectives discussed above difficult, at least conceptually since they all contribute in an isolated fashion and a priori, to the sense involved in social relations. Fields are historical phenomena and their spatio-temporal location is relevant to the longitudinal understanding of institutionalization processes, recognizing that within them lies creation of symbolic

orders and social relationship models and, therefore, without understanding this institutional and historical specificity, any analysis proposal is limited.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The early version of this article was presented and published in the annals of the EnEO 2006 - 4º Encontro de Estudos Organizacionais da ANPAD - Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Administração, (4th Meeting on Organizational Studies of ANPAD - The Brazilian Academy of Management) held in Brazil in June, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The authors would like to thank Charles Kirschbaum, João Marcelo Crubellate and Valeria Silva da Fonseca for their valuable comments on the early draft of this article. Despite the improvements resulting from these comments, the final version is exclusively the responsibility of the authors.

<sup>3</sup> The articles on the organizational field were selected from the annals of the EnANPAD (1998 to 2005) and the EnEO (2000 to 2004), in addition to the numbers of the following periodicals: RAC, RAE, RAE Eletrônica, RAUSP, REAd, Cadernos Ebape, Research into Administration at USP. The RAP was considered only during the period of 2000 to 2005, and the O&S only those available online. Twenty-five articles were identified, written by twenty-three different authors. Concerning the reference, seventeen international authors were quoted, with a total of 149 references in the twenty-five articles. To prepare the network illustrated in Figure 1, UCINET 6 software was used (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002) in the 2-mode format for networks between articles and specific references to the concept of field.

<sup>4</sup> The analysis of Ackroyd (2000) concerning the special character of the organizational level in social structuration is considered suitable for the aims of this article; however, we do not share his position on organizations in every detail.

<sup>5</sup> In the approach defined in this article, we recognize that isomorphism may be an indicator of the degree of structuring of an organizational field, but we do not consider it exclusively. The complexity and multiplicity of interaction in the field provide different reference contexts that influence each other mutually. Thus, more than promoting isomorphism, the relations within a field are contradictory in part, although they fit into logics of action that allow for some regularity and continuity.

<sup>6</sup> Giddens (1978, 2003) defines structure as generative rules and resources that are present in social interaction throughout their recursive (re)production in social practices. Thus, relations inherent to this structuration process plus the social position occupied are results of structural properties or principles of social systems. According to the criticisms of Cohen (1999) and Mingers (2003), and also certain elements of critical realism, we admit in this article, that the pre-existing relationships and those structurally represented in social relations act on the social (re)production process – of rules and resources made potential in the agency.

<sup>7</sup> Here we review a criticism of the structuration theory concerning its capacity to justify diverging behaviors in the social system. In the approach that we defend in this article, this occurs from causal influence of the system of established relationships which has potential for transformation, like interests, in the positions in social relations (see Porpora, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> According to Bhaskar (1983, p. 84), “It is because the social structure is always a given, from the perspective of intentional human agency, that I prefer to talk about reproduction and transformation than of structuration as Giddens does (although I believe our concepts are very close). For me structuration still retains voluntaristic connotations - social practice is always, so to speak, restructuration”.

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