

HOW CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE THEORETICAL REFINEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORIES?

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ABSTRACT

Much has had been said about the need for theoretical refinement in the field of organizational studies. One possibility of this being done is by applying the technique of conceptual analysis. This article aims to discuss the conceptual analysis in light of the variables investigated in organizational theories in general and organizational behavior in particular. The attributes of each variable must be decomposed according to the degree of contribution of the same explanation in the associated construct. The level of analysis of the construct needs to be considered. The hierarchical organization of the construct in terms of its constitutive properties must be considered in the hypothesized theoretical models. It is hoped that the techniques presented here are indeed applied, promoting greater accuracy and precision in the definition of variables in Brazilian and international organizational studies.

Keywords: Conceptual Analysis. Organizational Theories. Organizational Behavior. Epistemology of Science.

1. INTRODUCTION

International and Brazilian studies about organizational theories in general and organizational behavior in particular have produced an extraordinary variety of concepts and theories. These, at times, do not guarantee uniformity of status in scientific research about a determined variable. This lack of uniqueness generates uncertainty, and results from multiple theoretical perspectives adopted by researchers from different areas, including, for example, psychology, administration and sociology. Each of these fields is endowed with a series of epistemological paradigms that culminate in a certain absence of ontological conformity in organizational studies.

This absence originates in the epistemology of organizational theories, and seems to exert a decisive influence on the adoption of multiple definitions or diversified perspectives for the same construct. Consequently, this affects the construction of different scales or different measures for each of these definitions, thereby restricting the development of a wider and more consistent perspective in terms of its empirical understanding (Aguinis & Vandenberg, 2008).

This is not to say that a univocal epistemology is ideal or even feasible; however, the diffusion of theoretical methods, measures and definitions without any inter-relationship (even when these are contradictory to each

other) makes it difficult to consolidate the epistemological status of each of the variables under analysis (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lookwood & Lambert, 2007; Durial, Reger & Pfarrer, 2007). Perspectives are not compared, assumptions are not challenged, thus the knowledge produced becomes an “absolute truth”, given that the refutability of the theories is not questioned and these therefore become the explanation for everything.

This produces significant consequences. How is it possible to criticize the state of the art if such definitions and measures are built on conceptual bases which are often so different, independent and even antagonistic? The dimensions of the construct were built and are methodologically studied under the aegis of which particular underlying theoretical perspective? Without a standardized theory or even one that is more acceptable among researchers, how is it possible to compare the empirical results containing the particular findings of the innumerable case studies undertaken?

What reality do the hypothetical models in the field of organizational theories actually learn? Is it the discovery made by a researcher or the one that actually results from his/her day-to-day organizational work?

In this respect, how is it possible to judge the validity of a certain type of knowledge without a proper understanding of the origin, structure and methods used alternately in organizational behavior (OB)? These questions become even more relevant when an important section of available empirical reports about OB relate to case studies.

Furthermore, it is believed that major questions about OB theory and methods have basic problems related to conceptual demarcation, especially in relation to the operational differentiation between terms sometimes employed for the same variable. Conceptual investigations are seen as being as important to OB as factual research is to theory elaboration/propagation, especially since this area of knowledge, due to the psychological and social issues being studied, is generally tied to matters which are invested with a high level of subjectivity, thereby opening up different avenues of theorization and even speculation.

Day after day, new empirical evidence appears that relates to particular findings that are required to corroborate existing theorization (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). It is clear that conceptual investigations are relegated to a second plane, creating a real imbalance in the epistemological development of an OB in relation to the quantity of empirical evidence produced (Scandura & Williams, 2000). This is the logic that is criticized here – the focus given to the production of knowledge without any real understanding of the organization, function and possible relationships that certain variables establish with others that are related and correlated.

It is not uncommon for Brazilian scientific output to refer only to international literature, or even for research groups to endogenously cite only their peers, thus avoiding, for some reason, any mention of other authors who have produced studies on the same construct. Based on this introduction, the question is: what state-of-the-art is this? Does this truly reflect all the possibilities of an empirical analysis of the variables being studied, or does this only refer to certain ideological positions that do not, in fact, have anything to do with consolidating the subject of research? This leaves many questions open related principally to the *status quo* of the research work developed to date and if, in fact, theoretical-methodological clarity exists that is capable of characterizing a scientific *corpus* in relation to all of its possible empirical understandings.

The idea developed in this paper is that conceptual problems are logically related to one another (Laurence & Margolis, 2002), and better refined OB variables will surely result in epistemological strengthening. In fact, the philosophy of language reflects on the bases by which nomenclatures attributed to variables correspond exactly to their group of intrinsic characteristics. To what extent does the name of a variable synthesis its attributes? To what extent does the construct legitimately represent all the possible occurrences of the phenomenon, and which can be scientifically analyzed in a working context?

This epistemological strengthening of organizational theories and organizational behavior, as proposed by the current work, needs to pass through a process of conceptual problematization, and is an indispensable item of analysis in the research agenda in the vast majority of variables investigated under OB. Since the OB object of study is very often defined on the basis of everyday language (Aguinis, Pierce, Bosco & Muslin, 2009), efforts should be made to refine and have a better understanding of these concepts, which can certainly bring benefits to the discipline as a whole (Block & Stalnaker, 1999; Bryman, 2008; Davis, 2010). The use of everyday language already determines how these are widely absorbed by accepted knowledge, so that scientific theories need to decompose the mechanisms or stages that typify these concepts so as to give them scientific status.

The hypothesis of the current research proposes that the epistemological strengthening of any scientific field goes through a process of conceptual discussions that are in accord with analysis techniques (Klein, Dansereau & Hall, 1994). Having said that, the current research work aims to propose conceptual analysis techniques applied in the context of variables that typify OB studies. The idea is that the techniques presented further on, may be useful to the critical problematization of definitions established in this area, leading to greater clarity and a conceptual demarcation of this field. The basic assumption made here is that every concept needs to be analyzed in terms of its similar and discrepant characteristics, since the fact that different approaches outline the same concept in completely different ways has resulted in blurred inter-theoretical dialogues.

Critical-analytical skills are essential for any researcher, making it easier to grasp and disseminate valid and extremely generalized knowledge in the field of science (Hupcey, 1998). It is hoped that, based on the space for conceptual debate provided here, after reading this document, researchers will have greater clarity and understanding of how to apply the main techniques presented here and will be able to re-think, in a more critical and systematic manner, the definitions and theories that they use to support and give scientific value to their empirical findings. This will enable them to have a better understanding of the reasoning and guidance derived from OB knowledge and even contribute towards constructing a better defined epistemology which can lead to scientific progress in this area.

2. WHAT CHARACTERIZES A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS?

A vast amount of literature exists about the nature of these concepts and their relationship with the construction of knowledge (Enders, Brito & Monteiro, 2004; Yablo, 2000; Maculan & Lima, 2011). Concepts form the basis of theoretical constructions of this practice and assume a fundamental role in scientific thought. However, these concepts are sometimes badly used or not fully understood due to the use of confusing terminology or the way that these were constructed, making it necessary to create strategies to help refine these so that they are clearly reliable and can represent the reality they propose (Papineau, 1993; Pottz, 1999).

In this respect, it becomes essential to delimit the term concept itself, above all because one or another approach provides different epistemological guidelines that result in conceptual analysis methods and techniques that are also different (Gabriel, 2010). According to Walker and Avant (1995) a concept is a symbolic representation of the objective world, which makes it possible to separate it from its own experienced reality; however, according to Wilson (2005), symbols, such as words, do not directly represent reality but, first, the form by which individuals are able to abstract themselves by means of images and mental schemas.

On the other hand, a symbol, or a word, represents the principle unit of a conceptual analysis since it is imbued with linguistic significance used to ensure that concepts may be expressed and specifically understood by a particular sector of the scientific community.

Thus, a conceptual analysis is characterized by focusing, essentially, on words and their meanings (Hargreaves & Grenfell, 2003; Oliveira-Castro, 1993). Unlike conceptualization, the purpose of which is to represent a certain phenomenon in an abstract form, based on an active theoretical thought (Kim, 1983), a conceptual analysis serves the purpose of identifying the attributes that then define concepts as abstractions of reality.

In this way, a conceptual analysis is a critical evaluation of a structure or type of adopted conceptualization that, in the case of quantitative research, is aimed at describing and defining operational indicators related to its measurement (Fernandes, Nóbrega, Garcia & Macêdo-Costa, 2011). Bearing in mind that linguistic meanings vary due to the absorption of new data, experiences, etc., a conceptual analysis is a task that should be part of daily scientific research (Mota; Cruz & Pimenta, 2005). Valid theoretical and empirical operational measures that abound in the area of OB, do not necessarily guarantee that there will be a connection – between concepts and reality - , even though from the point of view of coherence these remain static over a much longer period of time.

3. PROBLEMATIZING A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Various techniques and approaches for a conceptual analysis are mentioned in literature. The current research work presents techniques suggested by Wilson (2005) and Ryle (1970), together with typified examples of organizational behavior variables.

In order to carry out a conceptual analysis, it is first necessary to recognize that there are what are called 'language traps', such as a belief in abstract objects and magical thinking (Wilson, 2005). This author states that abstract object belief traps reflect a tendency to interpret abstract words as if these were objects, treating

concepts as is these were things that can be found somewhere in the world. This shows how difficult it can be to view words only in linguistic terms and not as a phenomenon or as a thing.

This trap leads to errors in formulating the research questions themselves in relation to the concepts that the research aims to specify, because, instead of examining the usage given to words, emphasis is given to finding the true meaning of the concept. It's as if a concept only has to create a single viewpoint. This can result in faulty analyses which are directed towards finding a single meaning, as seen in the following examples: What is motivation? Where is the quality of life in work? What is mental health? It is not the mistakes made in how questions are conceived that are important, but rather the way these questions are approached.

Concepts should always be analyzed based on their usage (Chalmers & Jackson, 2001). In magical thinking, natural objects and phenomena acquire their own free will, like living people or organisms. Statements such as "The memory of this organization is vivid", "my team is pretty strong and cohesive" and "this organization learns through its mistakes and successes", illustrate this line of thought.

According to Ryle (1970), when you make an assumption that magical thinking is right, then the whole conceptual analysis may be damaged, since this can lead to category mistakes. Category mistakes can be identified when concepts of one type are wrongly described as belonging to another category or type of logic (Chalmers, 1999; Duncan; Cloutier & Bailey, 2007). The anthropomorphization of analysis items exemplified above is a classic example of the category mistake made in OB studies.

These errors are generally made because mistaken or simplistic concepts have been applied, which do not take into account the derivations involved, levels of analysis (if these are individual, the result of team-work or organizational) and how this application is used in every empirical situation (Hupsey & Penrod, 2005). The constituent properties of the phenomena are sometimes unknown even to the researcher. For example, is it possible to apply the theory of motivation to any type of work scenario? Of any type, size, scope or purpose, with organizational values which are so unique and singular? Or even, is it possible that no other specific types of motivation exist that are related to aspects of an organizational structure, such as the area of business for example? Does motivation have the same meaning, while a construct, for situations involving individuals who work in public companies, private firms, in non-governmental organizations, in Brazil, India, Russia or in North Korea? For example, how are motivation theories influenced by the existing cultural characteristics of a Nation?

Nevertheless, even scientific theories can be wrongly developed, since the concepts used in these areas of knowledge are being aggregated in logical types, or categories, to which they do not belong (Ryle, 1970). This appears to be the case in the field of OB, where researchers appear to be asking the wrong questions (Coelho Jr., Gondim, Borges-Andrade & Faiad, 2012; Edwards, 2010; Newman, Lillis, Waite & Krefting, 2009). Mistakes made in the formulation of research questions result from conceptual confusion, mainly due to category errors in a field as multidisciplinary as OB. In fact, these anthropomorphizations or figures of speech need to be tested in practical reality, so as to prove their validity and to find out, in fact, if these actually make it possible to simplify typified occurrences.

When carrying out an analysis of concepts, the uses and definition of words should effectively be mapped out in accordance with their functions. This is the main challenge when applying a conceptual analysis in the scientific field of an OB: to establish the correct use of each concept leading to a critical theoretical analysis about their structures or fundamental attributes.

In fact, this is the first basic distinction underlined by Ryle (1970): to differentiate between theoretical knowledge (knowledge-that, derived from its scientific origin, which implies rules and theories), and a practical application (knowledge-how, considered to be common knowledge which sometimes precedes the theory itself and is separate from formal knowledge)

It is a *sine qua non* condition that each researcher establishes the difference between a conceptual analysis and a person's capacity to use these concepts. In truth, a conceptual analysis is closer to a theorization about how words are used, when the critical role of a researcher should be exercised based on looking through literature, formulating sample cases and by showing different incidents of the attributes of a given concept (Morse, 1995).

This is why the basic assumption of a conceptual analysis is to decompose ideas or concepts so as to identify their essential elements and to see how these are related, mainly in virtue of the fact that concepts have innumerable meanings that are similar in form. Clarification should be sought for the meaning of words (Strawson, 1992).

The main problem is that a researcher does not necessarily master the techniques needed to carry out a conceptual analysis in a critical way, which can make it difficult to formulate an explanation about the nature of the research, its hypotheses and scientific categories. The problem becomes even greater when the references cited do not in fact match the complete state of the art in relation to its variable (or because of endogeneity or because it was not being cited by other national researchers).

A conceptual analysis makes it possible to check the applicability of terms, statements and categories that come within the scope of scientific activity. Investigations carried out on language by conceptual confusion sources frequently come across different terms that are common in the field of OB, such as motivation, humor, satisfaction, quality of life and well-being. Such concepts are by nature abstract, and offer enormous challenges in the case of a conceptual analysis since, not only are these terms characterized by their diverse usages and meanings, but applying these to everyday language is in itself variable (Hacker, 2000); these terms are potentially complex.

Different ideas associated with the same concept can damage the way they are treated as an empirical category. Neologisms are created (for example, demotivation) in relation to mental states which, together, give a name to some phenomena. In other words, does one investigate the motivation of a factor that is inherent of the human condition or investigate the motivational behavior that comes from such facets as a person's relationship with their boss, their salary, the nature of their work or other factors which, brought together, are called motivation?

When does a person become motivated or is directed towards an object, or is the individual capable of motivating him/herself without having a well-defined proposal or goal? Motivations assumes an adverbial function in this case, that is to say, these require a complement that qualifies the act of becoming motivated. What is the set of common factors referred to in everyday language and in scientific theories about the act of becoming motivated? Is there a consensus in the matter? Is motivation treated while it is an object or when categories which, when assembled together, mean a person is or is not motivated?

The questions proposed bring to light five of the major and most established techniques used to carry out a conceptual analysis, which are as follows: correct responses; isolate questions related to concepts; case models, counterexamples and borderline cases. These techniques will now be applied in the context of variables typically investigated in OB.

4. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Before these techniques can be applied, it is essential to select an appropriate concept to refine and identify one or more aims of the conceptual analysis. In spite of the conceptual differences that exist in organizational theories in general, and in OB in particular, this is not an easy task, especially because of the category mistakes typically committed by OB researchers. Concepts that are apparently well-defined are not always supported by appropriate empirical foundations, making this selection process a confusing and complex task.

The sample selected here refers to the concept of work satisfaction, for which there is an abundance of theories, models and scientific measurements. The objective is to revise the operational definition of work satisfaction taken from a scale that is available in literature related to the subject.

One of the techniques is known as correct responses. According to Wilson (2005), this is implied in the understanding that a concept cannot have a static or single meaning, but neither is this entirely malleable, being limited only by the personal likes of those who use it. Even though the frontiers that delimit concepts are not totally clear, it is possible to identify these by approximating a concept by comparing it to other words, and thereby better visualize the nature of the concept. It is not our intention here to encourage the arbitrary use of certain concepts; the important thing is to make it clear that in certain cases it is better to use these for their original intended purposes.

Going through literature on the subject to find out ways the concepts selected have been applied is one alternative open to a researcher, who should, in fact, analyze how a concept currently in vogue is applied in other fields and areas of knowledge. Articles, books, articles, dictionaries and other sources of information may be consulted at this time, though this should be seen as only one stage in the conceptual analysis process rather than as an actual technique in itself (Walker & Avant, 1995)

This initial process will certainly meet the expectations of researchers who want to find a single and definitive answer to the whole question of concepts. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that there is no such thing as correct responses, but instead investigations that are carried out with proper commitment and care. Pasquali (1997) defined this procedure as an attribute of an operative definition about the constitutive definition referred

to in literature. An operational definition is established when researchers adopt a position and outline how a certain concept will be understood for the purpose of employing empiricism in their research.

Thus, there is no such thing as an operational definition that is more correct or valid than any other. Nevertheless, this definition cannot be given in an arbitrary way or be hampered by a prior scientific body justifying its use. Part of the ethics of research is that a researcher takes care when raising current state of the art concepts and establishing a position in terms of carrying out his/her research work, coming from or going to meet (and justifying this scientifically) that which the state of the art concept represents.

Once the different applications of the concept have been confirmed and when the one most closely related to the research interests has been selected or proposed, a technique is used to isolate concept related questions. Questions that involve a concept analysis are often not clearly presented. Several issues can be approached, within the same subject, such as questions involving facts, beliefs or values (Wilson, 2005). It is therefore necessary to separate questions related to concepts from the others.

As an example, it's worth observing the following question which was formulated to measure an employee's level of work satisfaction: are employees happy when they receive guidance from their superiors in order to fulfill the demands of their job? Note that this question demands a definition (i) of the role expected from a boss in relation to advice given to a subordinate, and whether this is technical, material or psychosocial, for example, (ii) to what extent and how frequently should this behavior be exercised by the boss, and (iii) the type of need for monitoring required by employees. In addition, this involves making a distinction between questions about facts and supposed beliefs about what an employee considers to be relevant during this monitoring process because of their own performance needs, as well as the quality of judgment in relation to the roles carried out by their superiors, and if the employees consider these to be appropriate or otherwise.

As the idea here is to encourage researchers to adopt a critical position by using the tool of a conceptual analysis, it is necessary to correctly isolate the arguments of the analysis item so as to be able to adopt the correct approach, without entering into the merit values or into more than one category of analysis, guided by the parsimony and logical nature of the feedback concept and performance expectations. Note that the sample question, as well as carrying attribute values relative to beliefs, addresses three analysis categories - the role of management; amount of monitoring; the needs of employees.

Another procedure used in a conceptual analysis is that of the model cases. Studies should be undertaken into cases which are acknowledged to be typical of a given concept. Based on this, the aim is to then find all the principle characteristics of that particular concept to see if these are present during the majority of times this concept is used. From this observation it should be possible to identify the characteristics that are indispensable and helpful in defining a concept. This makes it possible to better outline the field of research. By eliminating all unnecessary characteristics and by analyzing all those which are indispensable, since most of these are transversal in the case of the model cases, a more reliable and true representation of the concept is obtained (Wilson, 2005).

For example, if I need technical support to carry out my job and I receive the necessary guidance from my boss, then this is an emblematic case of work satisfaction. With characteristics that are an essential part of the concept, there is the need for technical guidance shown by individuals followed by monitoring by my boss. After identifying these characteristics, the next step would be to construct other examples with the aim of observing which characteristics are repeated, so as to better delimit the concept of satisfaction.

Further to this, Wilson (2005) present the counter-sample technique, based on finding cases that are easily identifiable as an adverse use of a certain concept, thereby demonstrating its absence. In this case, in order to analyze the concept of satisfaction, situations where this does not occur are used as counter-samples in cases of management guidance.

In order to conceptualize dissatisfaction, the function of ordinary language is sought, and one of its possible everyday uses may be described in the following way: Not being satisfied because of personal issues which affect the performance of one's work. Thus, it should be considered that being satisfied implies that a person is not experiencing personal issues that interfere in their work performance. The concepts of satisfaction or dissatisfaction at work are conflicting and complementary descriptions, and their respective counter-samples descriptions are contained within their own essential characteristic property.

Based on this example, it is possible to highlight the characteristics capable of defining the counter-sample and, thus, to better delimit the frontiers of a desired concept. Other examples: well – to be at work is a bad thing – being is an adverse concept, since this relates to different mental states which, typified, are represented by particular behavioral evidence. The absence of well – being necessarily means bad – being? In which instances? Furthermore, does the absence of competencies related to work necessarily mean incompetence? When should an individual be considered competent? And incompetent? Does this depend on a person showing their competence, or is the context conditional? Upon what basis are the parameters of competence and incompetence given? Furthermore, when certain conditions are not satisfied, when is it possible to show a lack of quality of life at work? What does the quality of life or no quality of life represent or mean? For instance, does competitiveness necessary mean a lack of quality of life? And what about occupational roles, such as those in the area of sales, where individualism and an overly exaggerated pursuit of goals often encourage such competitiveness? What does the concept of competitiveness actually mean, and is it seen as being a negative or a healthy condition? Are mental events and behavioral events placed in the same category? If not, how are the relevant scales and measurements constructed in an attempt to reach the exact level where these associated concepts occur? Has all due care been taken to plan the research?

Finally, the case of borderline cases refers to dubious cases or those which are confusing, since these present features that are similar to the concept under analysis, though also show significant discrepancies. Thus, it is necessary to identify the characteristics that are at variance with the concept by comparing these to real cases, so as to distinguish the essential and central elements of these concepts, as opposed to those that are discrepant or dispensable.

These characteristics may seem strange and confusing when concepts are applied. For example: an employee requires technical guidance in order to carry out his/her activities and promptly receives this from their manager, carrying out the task they have been assigned in a satisfactory manner. However, even so, the employee expresses dissatisfaction at work as a way of showing their boss that his presence is not essential in order to do a good day's work, because they want to teach him a lesson.

It is necessary to compare this example with a model case so as to find out if it fits the concept of dissatisfaction at work. As in the satisfaction at work case model, it is possible to use the following as a comparison: an unqualified manager has caused his/her subordinates to become dissatisfied. When comparing both cases, it is seen that the borderline case apparently bears similar characteristics to the model case of the qualified manager, but certain discrepancies are also identified. According to Wilson (2005), identifying these differences helps to differentiate between attributes that are not required by a concept and those that are relevant in order to assign a meaning to a concept.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this article is to discuss the possibility of applying a conceptual analysis technique in view of the variables investigated in organizational theories in general and in organizational behavior in particular. We believe this objective has been achieved, in view of the fact that possibilities have been put forward to provide a more rigorous conceptual refinement in most of the variables investigated in these organizational studies.

Further research should be made into the origins of the organizational theory terms studied here and on the OB, and to compare their classical definitions (in politics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and in other fields of knowledge) with the definitions used in the field of organizational studies. How was the variable appropriated in the field of organizational studies? What changed in relation to its original conception? What adjustments were made when applying the concept to a work scenario?

Having said that, in view of the aspects herewith presented, knowledge about conceptual analysis is shown to be relevant for the whole science of OB. A scientist needs to know the precise dimension of concepts used in everyday life and how these are related to the theoretical concepts within his/her own areas of study.

The multiple uses of a concept in everyday language diversify their meaning, which can result in using the wrong words, since these create a distance between the concept and its basic characteristics. The terms need to be refined. For this reason we hereby seek to present conceptual analysis techniques that can be used to find the meaning of words based on their usage, both in everyday language and for the purpose of scientific theories.

The process of a conceptual analysis is particularly useful when researching concepts that are debated in the field of OB. Many of the concepts related to OB are framed on the basis of everyday words, as if each word used in a language is the same as a phenomenon, which can be transformed into an objective category. This

practice can create problems of a conceptual nature or even in the objectivation or reification of phenomena and categories.

An OB adopts a scientific paradigm to describe the phenomenon that it defines. This can lead to the erroneous idea that the concepts used are generally above criticism at a conceptual level of analysis, since these concepts represent scientific categories that have several empirical outcomes based on their wording.

Empirical research of a phenomenon does not make the concept that delimits it, necessarily adequate in epistemological terms merely because this was appropriate for scientific discussion. Just because an OB can operationalize its concepts in terms of categories which are subject to objective research, does not necessarily mean that the concepts have any form of immunity from conceptual errors. Category errors resulting from conceptual confusion are frequent in the field of OB.

This paper aims to challenge researchers in general to apply the techniques given in this article. Researchers themselves are sometimes prone to criticize the theoretical and conceptual framework of their work, instead of being more concerned about refining or attempting to better systematize available literature, so as to give greater meaning to their particular empirical findings. In this sense, a convergence between research agendas can only help to improve this field of study. Without a robust theory and one that is put to the test every time an empirical analysis is carried out, the field of organizational studies would have difficulty in attaining a consolidated epistemological status, and instead would tend to become isolated from other fields of knowledge in terms of models that explain concepts of reality.

However much methodological progress is shown, and even though research methods now benefit from the advance of new communication and information technologies, if reality cannot fully confront effective theories, we might well fall into significant phenomenological traps, such as a wide profusion of different concepts explaining the same phenomenon. It would be a question of more of the same thing, without any scientific rigor or criteria. The results of our work would thereby continue to reflect false assumptions about a reality which they should in fact, simplify.

Thus, gaps in research are not only found in possible - and expected - failures in methods adopted, but rather in the absence of an integrated critical theorization which makes it possible to learn about different realities. A conceptual analysis can help minimize the effects of this in organizational theories in general and in an OB in particular.

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