Theoretical fragmentation: Origins and repercussions in Work and Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

The fragmentation problem has been a concern in WOP for jeopardizing the construction of good theories and the establishment of a solid theoretical field. In this article, we describe the theoretical fragmentation in WOP and map the main types and origins. We discuss the main conceptual problems currently observed in WOP. Then we discuss the role of political and ideological issues and structural factors of scientific development within the fragmentation process. If features of WOP, like splits and internal divisions, favor the emergence of fragmentation, we should also consider broader factors that permeate different fields of humanities and applied social sciences and reverberate on WOP in the same manner. Finally, we seek to differentiate two mainstreams: the fragmentation that weakens the field; and the multiplicity of approaches and concepts that constitute the scientific process. We reflect on the challenge of differentiating them, and on steps to reduce fragmentation.

Fragmentação teórica: Suas origens e desdobramentos na Psicologia Organizacional e do Trabalho

Resumo

Os problemas de fragmentação vêm sendo uma preocupação na POT por ameaçar a construção de boas teorias e a constituição de um campo teórico sólido. Neste artigo, descrevemos a fragmentação teórica em POT e buscamos mapear seus principais tipos e origens. Discutimos o que é um conceito e os principais problemas conceituais atualmente observados na POT. Em seguida, debatemos o papel das questões políticas e ideológicas e dos fatores estruturais do desenvolvimento científico no processo de fragmentação. Se de um lado a própria constituição da POT favorece a emergência de fragmentações, por outro devemos considerar fatores mais amplos, que atravessam diferentes campos e reverberam do mesmo modo na POT. Buscamos, por fim, diferenciar dois quadros: as fragmentações que fragilizam o campo; e a multiplicidade de abordagens e conceitos que compõem o fazer científico. Refletimos sobre o desafio de diferenciá-los, e sobre etapas necessárias para a redução da fragmentação.

La fragmentación teórica: Sus orígenes y desarrollos en Psicología Organizacional y del Trabajo

Resumen

El problema de la fragmentación ha sido una preocupación para la POT por amenazar a la construcción de las buenas teorías y el establecimiento de un campo teórico sólido. En este artículo, se describe la fragmentación teórica en POT y se busca mapear sus principales tipos y orígenes. Dicutimos respecto de lo que es un concepto y los principales problemas conceptuales que se observan actualmente en el POT. A continuación, debatimos acerca del papel de las cuestiones políticas e ideológicas y de los factores estructurales del desarrollo científico en el proceso de fragmentación. Si, por un lado, la constitución de la POT favorece la aparición de fragmentación, por otro, hay que tener en cuenta factores que abarcan diferentes campos, que repercuten del mismo modo en la POT. Finalmente, se pretende diferenciar dos cuadros: las fragmentaciones que debilitan el campo; y la multiplicidad de enfoques y conceptos que componen el trabajo científico. Se reflexiona sobre el reto para diferenciarlos, y las etapas necesarias para reducir la fragmentación.

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Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) has been the subject of criticism for not having a more comprehensive theoretical framework that links the area's knowledge production. Bendassolli, Borges-Andrade and Malvezzi (2010), in mapping out central themes of WOP that organize around themselves the phenomena of interest to be studied, identified splits and internal divisions that refer to different ontological and epistemological approaches. These divisions can also be identified as competing perspectives within WOP that transform the basic principles of differentiation into distinct positions, within a *field* of relationships, in which each position seeks to legitimize a way of understanding and producing knowledge, raising the right and the power to speak on behalf of that *field* [2] (Bourdieu, 1996, 1998). In addition, the different central themes also develop specific methods, which as discussed by Yanchar and Slife (1997), reduce the possibility of dialogue between the investigations conducted on the phenomena.

This scenario leads us to reflect on fragmentation issues that have been a growing concern in WOP for impeding the construction of sound theories in the area. We define theoretical fragmentation as the lack of internal unity in the explanation of a phenomenon, which weakens the knowledge produced, regardless of its epistemological affiliation. We argue that the theoretical fragmentation of WOP is not, by definition, a matter of epistemological choice, because it is understood that the object of the sciences (despite all the discussion of what science is, and of paradigm differences) is the concepts they produce and their theoretical construction (Garcia-Roza, 1977). The questions of delimitation of concepts and theoretical contributions are transversal to the epistemological paradigms.

In this sense, for the discussion of theoretical fragmentation, it is important to resume the reflection on what, after all, is a good theory (Dubin, 1978; Whetten, 2003). Despite the current tensions, there is some consensus that a good theoretical contribution must answer four basic questions (Bacharach, 1989; Dubin, 1978; Whetten, 2003) to explain a phenomenon: (a) what factors, concepts, variables, constructs need to be considered (answering the question "**what**"); (b) **how** are these factors related to one another (causal relation, dialectical, etc.); (c) **why** are these factors related, that is, what philosophical project, which theory of knowledge, which logic, which *Weltanschauung* [3] justifies the choice of these factors and their relationships; and (d) **when**, i.e., which conditions limit the scope of the proposed theory.

Understanding that advances in knowledge production in WOP need to be anchored in a critical reflection on the research conducted in this field, the objective of this article is to discuss two issues related to the theoretical fragmentation in WOP: (a) that which stems from conceptual problems, that is, referring to the very definition of a concept that, as Bacharach (1989) puts it, is constituted in large part from the criticisms leveled at organizational theories; and (b) the fragmentation that is sustained in a field of forces protecting schools of thought and hegemonic theories. In discussing the plurality of schools of thought, our intent is not to argue that this plurality is responsible for the fragmentation. On the contrary, as stated by Burrell and Morgan (1979), there are different paradigms used in the production of knowledge, which explicitly or implicitly guide the way to understand the nature of the social world and how to investigate it.

We understand that plurality is a characteristic of the path to knowledge production, and the choice of ontological and epistemological assumptions by the researcher is inevitably intertwined with the nature of the object to study. However, despite this existent plurality, intrinsic to scientific work, in this text we discuss the presence of strategies for protecting schools of thought and maintaining hegemonic theories, and we argue that these strategies do indeed perpetuate theoretical fragmentation. We begin by describing the theoretical fragmentation in WOP, taking a few examples to illustrate the conceptual problems that exist. We then point out some theoretical fragmentation problems arising from political and ideological issues that characterize the field. Finally, we present some reflections on the consequences of this fragmentation for a greater conceptual delimitation in WOP.

Theoretical fragmentation in WOP arising from conceptual problems

A primary difficulty is, in principle, to understand what a concept is. Osigweh (1989) explains that concepts are classifications loaded with meanings and amenable to taxonomic decomposition. Minayo (2010), in turn, states that concepts are the "girders" that support a theoretical construct. She also states that concepts are "units of meaning that define the form and content of a theory" (p. 176). On the other hand, concept is understood as a unit of knowledge, as Dahlberg (1978) proposes, including the definition as an element essential to the establishment of the concept. Definition, understood as a statement that explains what a term, word, phrase, or symbol means; it is a delimiting of the concept that contains the description of the essential characteristics of the entity (object) being referenced, allowing one to differentiate it from other concepts. Although the definition enables the delimitation of the concept, specifying what the concept is not, there are categories that are distinguished both in complexity and in extent. Dahlberg (1978) says that the concept related to a referent (real or ideal) is established when three elements are present: the referent/object, its properties, and a term that synthesizes it.

On the other hand, if we consider the definition of concept on the basis of philosophy (Freitas, 1997) we find that concept comes from the Latin *conceptus*, from *concipere*, which refers to "the result or term of a mental conception" (p. 1077). That author, in defining the term concept, affirms that it has its origin in the course of a cognitive process and is constituted as a "unity or synthesis predicable from a being or group of beings covered by it" (p. 1077). Although related to objects or referents, the concept amounts to an "intellectual and abstract grasp or representation of the quiddity (essence) of an object" (p. 1078). In this sense, it is distinguished from a construct, understood as a theoretical proposition, operationalizable through observable indicators aimed at ensuring its measurement (e.g., intelligence, aptitudes in general, performance, etc.).

Kant (1994), in his transcendental Analytic (which sets out the elements of knowledge without which no object can be thought at all) states that there are two kinds of concepts, empirical concepts, which designate phenomena (impression or representation related to an object, refers to what appears, to what is denominated as real sensible manifestations), and pure concepts, which subordinate the phenomena to categorizations or schemes aimed at making them intelligible. Taking into consideration the different definitions

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[2] *Field* is understood according to Bourdieu's proposition (1996, 1998) as a structure of objective relations, with specific objectives and a particular operational logic. In this paper we assume that WOP is a field of practices and theories, which is subject to a multiplicity of ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological perspectives, and taking on the challenge, ultimately, of understanding man's relationship with work.

[3] Mannheim (1952) states that *Weltanschauung* are worldviews, i.e., general world concepts, pre-theoretical and intuitive, that act as substrate for all forms of knowledge and experiences in the world.

presented here, in this article we will consider the concept to be the product of a process of intellectual apprehension of an object/phenomenon and of its properties, forming units of meaning. Thus, the concept is an intellectual and abstract representation, and not the object/phenomenon itself.

Weick (1999) argues that there are studies published today in sufficient quantity to describe the main conceptual problems present in the area's research: (a) stretching or combination - concepts that have inflated to include more than one construct in their definition (Osigweh, 1989); (b) overlap - concepts that refer to the same phenomenon or parts of a single phenomenon (Martinko, Harvey, & Mackey, 2014); (c) tautology - an unfalsifiable conceptual proposition, since it includes as an attribute a redundancy of the concept (Martinko et al., 2014); (d) borrowing and domestication - concepts brought from other areas and, in the process of domestication, losing their original meaning (Oswick, Fleming, & Hanlon, 2011).

To exemplify the arguments discussed, some concepts will be presented, chosen from among so many possibilities, whose research agendas have come to be the stage for different problems and fragmentations in the field of WOP:

Conceptual stretching

Osigweh (1989) coined this term to discuss what happens when one seeks to broaden the conceptual scope to indiscriminately include different criteria within the same concept: inaccuracy, ambiguity, and amorphousness. The author used as an example the concept of commitment, due to a course that led to the inclusion of different types of bond (emotional, instrumental, normative) and different theoretical bases (attitude, behavior) on the same concept. The result was, in his evaluation, a confused and pseudo-universal construction: the studies indicated inconsistency when commitment dimensions were related in opposite ways with other variables. For example, job satisfaction was related positively to the affective dimension and negatively to the instrumental dimension (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Over the 27 years that followed, this criticism by Osigweh (1989) permeated the research agenda on commitment.

Researchers came in search of a deeper understanding of this stretching scenario, identifying other problems, such as the inclusion of antecedents (such as identification) and consequences (such as retention and motivation) within the concept itself (Klein, Molloy, & Brinsfield, 2012; Rodrigues & Bastos, 2010, Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008). The measure validated by Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982), which included behavioral items, was revised by Bastos (1994). The three-dimensional model by Meyer and Allen (1991), which includes the three types of bond, has been scrutinized by studies that seek to identify what is not commitment (Rodrigues & Bastos, 2010), understand the difficulties of generalizing this broad model to different cultural contexts (Wasti et al., 2016) and, finally, reduce its extent to a more accurate one-dimensional model (Klein, Cooper, Molloy, & Swanson, 2013).

While the concept of commitment, with more than half a century of existence, moves towards a greater definition, WOP still produces stretched concepts, such as the case of diversity, more recently. What becomes apparent from the various searches for a definition of what diversity may be (Hitt, Miller, & Colella, 2007; Nkomo & Cox Jr., 1999; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Torres & Pérez-Nebra, 2004, 2014) is that this concept refers to the grouping of two or more individuals characterized as belonging to groups identified as different in whatever relevant social dimension. These relevant social dimensions can be from different backgrounds and forms,

and are, by definition: cultural, functional (people with disabilities), racial, gender, demographic, institutional, professional, sexual orientation-membership, etc. However, it is important that this group identification is an important and socially relevant concern (Blaine, 2013).

Despite having this understanding, in numerous studies some theoretical perspectives consider different criteria, such as individual differences (personality, cognition, behavioral style, etc.) as dimensions of diversity (Nkomo & Cox Jr., 1999), which widens the extents of the concept (stretching), and makes it lose its specificity. Konrad (2006) argues for the importance of distinguishing these concepts (individual differences and diversity), demonstrating that only when one began to consider people based on their affiliation with socially distinct groups, issues such as career advancement, occupational status, for example, did they begin to be better understood. This stretching process has negative consequences, because the focus on personality differences, for example, can individualize questions whose origin is found in the distinctions that the organization makes of the different group affiliations, causing a group order phenomenon to be discussed as an individual dimension, leading also to a lower accuracy. In Brazil, these demographic differences and their impacts on obtaining employment and income are explicitly demonstrated by the government's statistics (Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego [MTE], 2014). These extensions and inaccuracies in delimiting the concept and its relations with other concepts, contribute to its lack of specificity, jeopardizing the possibilities for knowledge production.

Overlap/ambiguity

Overlaps are direct consequences of conceptual stretching. The resulting inaccuracy raises doubts about what, in the end, the concept really is, and opens room for confusion. In the process of conceptual definition of commitment currently underway, Klein, Molloy and Cooper (2009) discuss how this concept has become a large umbrella that brings together antecedents (such as exchanges, matching values, identification) and consequences (such as retention and motivation).

In the vocabulary of management, it is common to see leaders confusing commitment and motivation, despite their having quite different theoretical bases. Recently, the concept of engagement began to receive greater attention in studies in Brazil and, once again, we see growing confusion and difficulty among organizational actors in differentiating engagement from commitment. This stems from a behavioral expectation of engagement, also disconnected from its theoretical models, and even protects the overlap with organizational citizenship behaviors, something also present in the commitment agenda. As we will highlight later, the interdisciplinary nature of WOP means that it deals with the limits of Psychology and Management, for example. In the case of Management, the ode to applicability and innovation means that new concepts are always well received in the marketplace and in the scientific community, often without having been sufficiently scrutinized to see if, in fact, they are phenomena not yet studied.

Tautology

A tautology example can be identified in the concept of well-being at work as being the integration of job satisfaction, job involvement, and affective commitment (Siqueira & Padovam, 2008). By including commitment, satisfaction, and involvement as attributes, the concept of well-being at work informs that this phenomenon will be present whenever (generalization) and only if (precision)

the individual is satisfied, committed, and involved in the work. The scenario of confusion expands when, in the literature on bonds at work, researchers consider, test, and verify that psychological well-being is one of the possible consequences of commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). To draw a clear picture of the kind of confusion that we have here, we take the theoretical model from the study by Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2009), which considers commitment as a predictor of well-being, and we consider the construct of well-being from this model as the one defined by Siqueira and Padovam (2008). The result is a model that predicts the dimensions of organizational commitment as antecedents of well-being that, in turn, has as its dimensions commitment itself, satisfaction, and involvement. This tautological process leads to a level of redundancy that threatens the principle of falsifiability presented by Popper (1989) as the demarcation criterion of the scientific nature of a theory.

Borrowing and domestication

While these tendencies are especially observed in organizational and management theory (Oswick et al., 2011), the interdisciplinary nature of WOP in itself also leads to the importation or borrowing of theories originating from other fields of knowledge. Anthropology, Sociology, Critical Theory, Ergonomics, and many other fields have contributed greatly to the theoretical construction of WOP. The problem occurs when the borrowing generates a domestication that leads to a narrowing of the theory or the concept, due to the abandonment of whatever is not part of the domain of the new field of knowledge. An example to be considered is the concept of motivation. Without going into too much of the criticism received by the motivational theory of Maslow (1943), it is a fact that Management, in borrowing this concept, brought about a simplification of its explanatory model. Even today this concept is taught, discussed in application spaces, and even researched based only on the hierarchy of needs - one of the postulates among many developed by Maslow throughout his work, such as cultural impacts, multiple determination of behavior, psychological and cognitive elements, among others.

These postulates were ignored in the process of domestication and were reappropriated by WOP, divested of their complexity, leading to the weakening of the source model. It is important to note that, if on the one hand, domestication can be a negative process depending on how it occurs, on the other, the capacity of a concept to "travel" between fields of knowledge, or between different contexts, is a desirable property, as stated by Osigweh (1989). This is not about inserting the context into the concept (thus making it too specific or narrow), but about developing well-defined concepts, that serve as the basis for explaining the relationships between the phenomena in different contexts.

The fragmentation problems presented here are obstacles to a more consolidated theoretical construction in WOP. You cannot raise a solid theoretical construction if its "girders" have problems that can easily compromise all the possible explanations of how, why, and when a certain phenomenon happens. The fragmentation observed in WOP, however, is not limited to conceptual problems, as we discuss in the next section.

Other sources of theoretical fragmentation

On a superficial level, the proliferation of overlapping, stretched, borrowed, etc., concepts reveals a probable limit on the training of scientists in the field. No wonder Martinko et al. (2014) mention the need to include, in the basic curriculum of graduate courses, disciplines focused on the philosophy and epistemology of research, as a way to minimize theoretical weaknesses.

Another challenge is to distinguish between the cases of fragmentation originating from conceptual problems versus those that come from: (a) political and ideological clashes of the schools of thought and (b) the proper course of scientific development and its basic structure. The conceptual problems, indeed, must be combated. The rest should be placed under analysis to consider: the institutional actors, the modernity of the production, and the WOP boundary situation between different fields of knowledge (i.e., Psychology and Management).

Mckinley, Mone and Moon (1999) define school of thought as an integrated theoretical framework that provides a specific view on organizations and certain phenomena. Schools of thought, as mini disciplines, develop their theoretical approaches, produce their concepts, and link to one another in order to protect their knowledge production, and thus ensure the ongoing reading - and advance - of their work. At this juncture, we can apply the concept of sensemaking to organizational theorists (Weick, 1999). That is, the paradigms take on a cognitive function by allowing the sharing of mindsets within a group in the scientific community (Bendassolli et al., 2010).

Hence the second source of theoretical fragmentations, when the schools of thought seek to sustain themselves while responding to political and ideological debates as a way of maintaining power and hegemony. These debates bring to the discussion arguments of incommensurability and are often anchored in axioms underlying their ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 2006). One example of such fragmentation occurs with the concept of work itself, which is taken, as Adam Smith does, as a social value, identifying manufacturing as an opportunity for production of wealth and abundance (Anthony, 1977), or from a diverse axiom, as Marx (1983) does, denouncing the accumulation of capital occurring in manufacturing and the transformation of the worker into a commodity. These perspectives are a small example of schools of thought that are anchored in different axioms and give rise to conflicts that have made it difficult to search for consensus and the construction of knowledge in a dialogic form in WOP [4]. This question of axioms leads us to think about the very nature of the knowledge produced by the Human Sciences which, unlike the hard sciences, for example, need to address the scale of values as a foundational issue of the proposed paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (2006) argue that the discussion about values (axiology) would be a possibility for consensus between several investigative models and, in the case of WOP, the answer to the question of "in the service of whom" the knowledge has been produced, could open up possibilities for dialogue between different epistemological and methodological approaches, minimizing the current fragmentation when it comes from political and ideological clashes.

In addition it is necessary to consider the proper course of scientific development and its basic structure. In Management, the search for applicability has led researchers to develop hypotheses after finding out the results of the study (Martinko et al., 2014), which also affects WOP as an applied field and with a rather narrow boundary with Management. This has been a way of subjugating the scientific conduct to a kind of academic publicity, which ensures the dialogue with expectations of managers under the aegis of the utility of the research. The culture of management, which values

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[4] We agree with Lincoln and Guba (2006) that the current challenge is to demonstrate where and how the epistemological paradigms demonstrate concensus, what are their approximations, distancings, and contradictions, rather than regard them as paradigms in dispute.

innovation, the emergence of pop concepts, and the discourse of best practices, ends up influencing research in the area. This pressure for applying knowledge is imposed on the time required for the maturation and consolidation of a concept. The emergence of solutions to problems makes professionals anticipate and seek to build actions to provide answers to everyday problems. For example, before you have clearly defined the concept of diversity and built a network of relationships with other concepts such as prejudice, discrimination, etc., the demand for diversity management in organizations presses for the construction and application of models.

Beyond these possibilities of theoretical fragmentation, we cannot ignore the fact that we live in a new phase of scientific development. Changes happen not only in technology, in the way we live and organize work; new phenomena arise, some existing phenomena change, and this inevitably leads to the change of concepts. Moreover, the same postmodernity that turned our conceptions of time and space liquid, and altered the way we access information, also led to changes in scientific practice. We can cite the increase in the volume of published studies, the increased urgency of publication, the reduction in expected time between the beginning of a study and the publication of its results. On the other hand, the growth of the scientific community makes it more difficult to establish "consensus" even around central concepts. The expectation is that consensus be built by intersubjective criticism, which often is affected by the increasingly accelerated dynamics of scientific production.

What does this have to do with fragmentation? Well, a structure is needed to keep this flow operating - scientific journals, publishers, performance metrics, etc. - that assume an institutional role in deciding what will be published, and what each publication is worth. To address these institutional pressures, to ensure that their studies are read, the researchers are organized in networks, alongside the proliferation of schools of thought. The schools need to sustain interest in their publication, and balance the continuity of their agendas with a level of innovation controlled enough not to threaten their initial premises. Simultaneously with these institutional challenges, their phenomena of interest are naturally undergoing transformations, a result of human progress itself over time.

We can describe, in summary, the following flow chart: the changing of phenomena presses for conceptual changes or new theoretical constructs; information overload impedes the dialogue between studies developed simultaneously by different schools, albeit with the same objectives; parallel theories and concepts are born (which, as representations of the phenomenon, are also a cognitive product or schemes of the researchers involved in their elaboration); inevitably, overlaps, stretching, borrowing, and domestication take hold. When we turn our gaze to the role of the schools of thought in the fragmentation of the field, we conclude that the conceptual problems or training failures are only one part of the problem. However, if on the one hand the schools, within a larger disciplinary field, legitimize the concepts and methods that they themselves use, on the other they need to respond to the pressures from external agents. Here, yes, we have a circularity in which the theories and the scientific method developed by the disciplinary field compose the examinations for vetoes or permissions of publications, and these in turn exercised by the publishers who, in a way, pressure the schools, toward the use of a research method, for example.

The publishers also respond to major institutional pressures and to criteria established by performance evaluation staff in universities, that ultimately reveal concerns of the scientific community of a country - in the case of the peripherals, the demand for

internationalization, as a strategy to drain domestic production, and place their specific context under the magnifying lens of understanding of phenomena; in the case of the hegemonic, the demand for proof of the generality of the concepts developed and results found thus far. The subtle challenge, in this second case, lies in reaching different contexts, different cultures, and at the same time ensuring the survival of their theoretical models. And when, upon "visiting" specific/peripheral contexts, theoretical models developed in hegemonic countries encounter whole conceptual bodies constructed to explain a similar phenomenon? Is it possible, then, that the criticism of fragmentation is also used to protect the schools and the hegemonic theories? And when, in search of internationalization, researchers from peripheral countries submit research on concepts studied extensively in their own countries to international journals? Üsdiken and Wasti (2009) do an analysis of research in peripheral countries, reflecting on the consequences of American influence on the scientific development of Turkey. Is it possible that successive refusals guided by the criticism of fragmentation increasingly lead researchers from peripheral countries to abandon their theoretical models and conduct studies decontextualized from their reality in favor of a greater adaptation to the hegemonic models?

In this case, the discourse on fragmentation is not a result, but a cause of fragmentation. It is as if we were facing a tautology of fragmentation - it causing itself. Thus, it is also necessary to consider the set of interests that are in tension in the process of choosing the research object, of choosing the paradigm, the method, and in the process of publishing and disseminating knowledge. The role of the publishers, the universities, and the organizations and managers in the case of WOP. All these aspects play an important role in the theoretical construction and the definition of what is "researchable" or not in a given historical context.

As shown throughout this article, there are several limits placed on the construction of knowledge when the fragmentation of a concept is identified; for example, the inaccuracy in the characterization of a phenomenon, the difficulty in identifying the specific attributes of the phenomenon being studied, its overlap with other concepts. In addition, fragmentation limits the investigation of the nature and intensity of relationships with other concepts, with variables or categories of analyses considered antecedents and that have a moderating effect on the phenomenon, with variables or categories of analyses considered consequences, and with variables or categories that can help in understanding how two phenomena are related (mediations). The possibility of knowledge production is realized only when a concept is clearly defined and generalizable.

It was not the objective of this article to present specific guidelines for reducing fragmentation, but to clarify its origins and promote reflections on necessary precautions. This is because the reduction of fragmentation is not the result of a single study, nor can it be resolved by a single researcher. In closing, if we return to the example of commitment, we note that the course of conceptual delimitation has been made possible from a combination of factors: concept scrutiny based on the repetition of the discourse and arguments on fragmentation by an increasing number of researchers (therefore reducing the veto power of the hegemonic theory); a maturing in the academic training of the researcher, and thus higher quality of research (measures validated more carefully, more complex studies allowing a better understanding of the limits); conquest of space to discuss and clearly identify all that the concept is not (from the understanding of overlap, stretching, etc.); and, finally, the appearance of alternative proposals of definition, which are gradually becoming stronger and creating a set of dissidences, more or less coherent among themselves, from what was once the

hegemonic model. Certainly, one next step will be the alignment of the alternatives presented here, accompanied by the maturation that will lead to new trends of studies, methods, and objects within the commitment research agenda. It is important to emphasize the fact that this path of delimitation spans nearly three decades, reflecting also the barriers and veto that protect the concepts, even those with evidence of fragmentation.

We understand, therefore, that theoretical fragmentation is a weakness, because it limits the generalization of concepts and the possibility of dialogue between researchers and paradigms (depending on the concepts themselves and the different interests in play). It should not be confused, however, with the coexistence of multiple voices, with the diversity of paradigms and the possibility of different theoretical constructs, with properly defined concepts to explain given phenomena. The diversity of paradigms is part of the knowledge building effort and plays the role of refuting an absolute truth being pursued.

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