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BAR, Curitiba, v. 7, n. 2, art. 3,
pp. 155-171, Apr./June 2010



The Managerial Reduction in the Management Technologies Transposition Process to Public Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the phenomenon of the implementation of technologies designed in the management business, with emphasis on relations with public organizations. It proposes a reflection on the concept of sociological reduction by Guerreiro Ramos, recovering its roots in Husserl and Heidegger and their relationship with the concepts of creative adaptation and the translation of managerial issues. Contextualized in the paradigm of new public management and the list of values and assumptions on which this movement is based, the analysis of the reproduction of practices known in private organizations by public ones seeking their legitimacy has revealed the formality and ceremonial aspect of this contemporary phenomenon. The importance of bringing knowledge from the organizational field that subsidizes management as well as the coherence of these cultural objects in terms of concepts and assumptions of organization are highlighted here. The process of transpositions, contrasting with reproducible traits of Brazilian managerial culture that are historically constructed but consistent with the notion of sociological reduction, requires a critical, conscious and engaged attitude on the part of members of the organization not only regarding the relevance of the imported content but also giving new meaning to the concepts underlying the management technologies.

Key words: management technologies; sociological reduction; public organization.

Received 10 February 2009; received in revised form 20 July 2009.

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INTRODUCTION

The combination of forces shaping the present public administration scene in Brazil uncovers a strong and unprecedented tendency towards the adoption of managerial practices that are usual in the enterprise field. Motivated by pressures that are at the same time endogenous to its organizations and exogenous with a multifaceted content, this transformation movement has assumed highly specific expressions, most notably because of the diverse interpretations according to which its content has been perceived by the different actors of the field. In particular, the tensions outside the combination of organisms that shape public administration are derived from different sectors of society, which start to offer or to demand more and better public goods and services, and also from influential multilateral external foment and financial assistance organisms.

The fact is that public organizations have been promoting processes to appropriate managerial technologies as a way of legitimizing themselves before society and other agents; furthermore, such processes do not always present the expected results. Studies about the ascension of these managerial innovations reveal the partial character of this appropriation, either in private organizations (Caldas, 1997), or in public organizations (Guimarães, Cavalcanti, & Affonseca, 2004), indicating formalistic practices with emphasis on the format predominating over the content. The efforts of the mimetic appropriation of managerial concepts and technologies as a whole – in the form of standard, or even adapted, models (despite preserving their original format with the purpose of being precisely identified as such, and, as a consequence, of fulfilling their legitimating function) – through a direct transposition, favors the co-existence of traditional and innovative managerial elements and practices; these often co-exist as strange elements in the organization's management system. In this case, different aspects might contribute to understanding the reasons by which a **formalistic** (Ramos, 1966), **ceremonial** (Meyer & Rowan, 1992) or **just-for-show** practice (Caldas, 1997) manifest. The purpose here is to emphasize the lack of critical reflection that sometimes characterizes the processes of transposition of these managerial contents to public organizations.

Coherently with that, the goal of this essay is to contribute to reflection on the process of adoption of these managerial technologies by public organizations, with an emphasis on the perception of compatibility of the assumptions and on the assimilation of the concepts underlying such technologies. It is suggested that there is a need for identification and subsequent critical reflection involving the assumptions and concepts that support these managerial technologies throughout the transference process. This effort grows in importance when this relationship processes between public and private organizations, less because of the instrumental assumptions that support these organizations – which are compatible – and more because of significant differences in terms of purposes regarding the organisms that work in these environments. The theoretical treatment of this theme is essentially based on the concept of sociological reduction (Ramos, 1996), especially that of creative adaptation (Caldas & Wood, 1999) and translation (Morris & Lancaster, 2005). A recovery is proposed, following what is signaled by the creative adaptation, of the sociological reduction concept and a deeper incursion so as to reach the possibilities of its particular interpretation in the management field.

This introduction is followed by a brief approach of the foreign production influence on the management field formation in Brazil and the formalism phenomenon as a strategy of overcoming the resulting contrasts. In this section, there is also a discussion on the appropriation of managerial technologies by public organizations under the perspective of fashions as a legitimating resource; these technologies are incorporated basically through mimetic and normative isomorphism processes. In the next section, the aforementioned sociological reduction, creative adaptation and translation concepts are explored, underlining their articulation and the possibility of generating a new perspective focused on management, which is discussed in the next section. Finally, some comments are made as a conclusion about the subject and some lines for debate and profound study are indicated.

VALORIZATION OF THE 'FOREIGNER' AND MANAGERIAL INNOVATIONS

Fischer (1984a); Bertero and Keinert (1994); Caldas (1997, 1999); Vergara (2006) and Caldas and Alcadipani (2006) have demonstrated, especially regarding the theoretical inspiration and the orienting themes of studies involving the knowledge production phenomenon and, particularly, the transfer of managerial technologies, the significant dependence of national production on foreign sources (reference authors) and the differences between publications that contemplate imported content (delay in time). Furthermore, they point out what can be considered still more serious – the lack of originality – promoting, with honorable exceptions, what Caldas (1997, p. 89) indicated as a consequence of “our obsession with what comes from outside, from the other”: the segregation from ourselves. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to recover and to articulate national authors, from past and present, without disregarding the foreign contribution as accessory, according to Ramos (1996), in the law of the subsidiary character given to foreign scientific production as a basis for the sociological reduction concept.

Exogenous Managerial Content and Formalism

Caldas (1997, 1999) approaches the high value associated with the exogenous in detriment of home solutions as a strong cultural trait that inhabits the national imagination and is largely disseminated in local social practice. This foreign production, it should be stressed, identifies not only that generated in other countries but, in a broader interpretation, all knowledge that comes from outside a sector – the public, for instance – or even from the organizational borders.

Smaller communities and organizations in Brazil tend to look for foreign solutions, categories and “miracle-makers” from the so-called “best and greatest”, transplanting concepts without a better adaptation or resistance, in detriment of **local** reality or specificity; as if it were a sign of modernity, as if such references were not as “foreign” as those coming from other countries; as if this passive and non-resistant behavior of transplanting the foreign were not recurrent, unnecessary, and inappropriate ever since the Portuguese arrived in this country. In the government sphere, it is usual to look for solutions in private management and influence models, again, “foreigners” to their world (Caldas, 1997, p. 76).

Different foreign cultures have been revered over the country’s history, by adopting or adapting, at different levels of intensity, the production derived from distant countries and cultures according to perceived needs. With regard to the early cycle of Portuguese influence, in spite of a broader interpretation by Holanda (2005), Caldas (1997, p. 79) argues that a negotiated construction of a local society was not intended, but rather “a pure, simple, and truculent transplantation of the models and references brought from Europe”, which ignored the local specificities and cultural elements. The context of the period that marked the transfer of the Portuguese Court to Brazil can be seen as a time reference for the Lusitanian cycle declining process and the ascension of France and England as foreign references for Brazil. According to Caldas (1997), the interest for these new foreigners was established in the economic dimension, both because of the influence of bourgeois ideals and the importation of technologies and other forms of capital that drove the early stages of modernization and industrialization in Brazil. Under the impulse of interests also from the economic sector (foreign trade) and from international policy (power balance), the attention of Brazil turned to the United States of America, which assumes a hegemonic position as a reference foreigner (Caldas, 1997), and from which have been imported not only social patterns and consumption habits, but also technology, including the management type (Freitas, 1997).

Among the agents identified by Fischer (1984a, 1984b, 1993), Caldas (1997) and Bertero, Vasconcelos and Binder (2003) as inducers of the **outside**-oriented behavior is education, with emphasis placed on the role of universities. A significant part, not to say the entire management technology in Brazil “until the mid sixties, was just imported from outside” (Caldas, 1997, p. 85).

In the government area, the imports of management technology in this period are directly associated with the creation and acting of the DASP, starting from 1938. In the following years, the creation of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, including the EBAP (1952) and the EAESP (1954) consolidated this import process, through the formation of professionals that made use of references – and resources – brought from outside (Caldas, 1997, p. 85).

The organizational implications of this technological importation can be perceived through three investigative axes: a) in the teaching about organizations; b) in research and theorization about organizations; and c) in organizational practices. With regard to the latter, the heavy inspiration and influence of foreign technology stand out, which by mimetic adaptation strongly affects organizations in Brazil, and the formalistic reflections resulting from these practices given the complexity, ambiguity and plurality of Brazilian reality (Caldas, 1997; Machado-da-Silva, Guarrido Filho, Nascimento, & Oliveira, 2003). On this particular point, Nicolini (2003) also mentions the reproductivist character of management practices in Brazil based on inspiration assumptions that are clearly taylorist-fordist.

In the first dimension (historical), multiple and successive miscegenation, as well as the great diversity of influences we experienced during industrialization and later during the internationalization of economy, have an effect of complex hybridization within our organizations. While reflecting the influences – often contradictory – of this diversity, which interact and interpenetrate, our firms end up generating models that are different from each other and different from ideal categories that are normally accepted in the countries they were imported from or in the cultures that inspired us.

In the Brazilian case, the adoption of foreign technologies or values in a non-critical way often also means that we really do not know to what extent we import or just pretend: frequently (even inadvertently), we adopt imported, *ma non troppo*, management technology (Caldas, 1997, p. 88).

In this line of argument, the work of Ramos (1966) in relation to the formalism concept also stands out. Based on Riggs (1964), the formalism notion was deeply studied by Ramos (1966) in the Brazilian context. He describes it as a characteristic trait of this society, and one profoundly associated with the historical trajectory of the social, political and economic formation of the country, signaling it as a component of the national development strategy. To Riggs (1964, p. 123), the formalism

corresponds to the level of discrepancy between the prescriptive and the descriptive, between the formal power and the effective power, between the impression we are given by the Constitution, by laws and regulations, organizational charts and statistics, and the real facts and practices of government and society (Riggs, 1964, p. 123).

The phenomenon is particularly evident in those societies denominated prismatic, as we understand the social arrangements where it is possible to perceive a high level of heterogeneity resulting from the co-existence of the old and the new, the delayed and the advanced (Ramos, 1966). F. C. P. Motta and Alcadipani (1999, p. 9), in this same perspective, point out the aspect of dependence associated to the concept of formalism which - it is important to mention - should not be understood as restricted to the economic dimension, but also to the political, cultural, etc.

Formalism occurs in prismatic societies owing to the fact that they depend on the diffracted ones and are compelled to implement their structures (social, political and economic), that is, the relationship of subjugation of the diffracted societies over the prismatic ones causes the latter to implement the structures. Formalism takes place because the structures of diffracted societies do not correspond to the everyday reality of the prismatic ones, with such incompatibility implying the impossibility of total application of the implemented structures (F. C. P. Motta & Alcadipani, 1999, p. 9).

The alluded contrasts, to Ramos (1966), are expressed both at the technological level and in people's attitudes and behavior, possibly resulting in conflicts involving different criteria of evaluation and individual action. This aspect identifies the formalism with the phenomenon of (re)interpretation of

norms in the organization's ambit, as a reaction to the perception of conflict between the real and the prescribed.

Ramos (1966), at the same time that he describes and identifies the formalism phenomenon, also characterizes it as an inherent element to Brazilian society (to prismatic societies in general, according to the author). Thus, to the author, aspects that are to be uprooted from the national social arrangement, and that are projected in the public administration, are properly contextualized as characteristic traits of a given development stage:

Formalism is not a bizarre characteristic, a trait of social pathology in prismatic societies, but a normal and regular fact, reflecting the global strategy of these societies in the sense of outdoing the stage they are at. ... the formalism in prismatic societies is a strategy of social change imposed by the dual character of their historical formation and the particular way they articulate with the rest of the world (Ramos, 1966, p. 365).

Vieira, Costa and Barbosa (1982), who also approach the limitations of the phenomenon of managerial technologies transfer as an administrative advance resource, point out the limitations of the formulation of Riggs (1964), especially with regard to the subjacent belief in the existence of a *continuum* of development between societies based on the traditional-modern dichotomy, with prismatic societies being an intermediary stage of the model. Formalism, according to Caldas and Wood (1999, p. 35), "demonstrates that, if we are considerably open to foreign models, to them only we will submit in the form". Associating the institutionalization process with the emergence of formalistic practices, Carvalho and Goulart (2003), in a study focused on transformations experienced by university libraries, and here the phenomenon in public universities is emphasized, point out that the negligence regarding specificities that particularize the local realities, in a modernization context, strengthen the formalism in the structures, generating what the authors denominate make-believe transformations.

Derived directly from the notion of formalism is what Ramos (1966) points out as the *jeito* (way) sociology. The *jeito*, as a category typically associated with Brazilian culture, consists of a "genuinely Brazilian problem-solving process, in spite of the content of norms, codes and laws" (Ramos, 1966, p. 380). Essentially, the *jeito* concept can be associated with the movement of biased reinterpretation of the norm. It stands out, thus, as the effort to broaden the structure guidelines, reinterpreting them according to specific needs.

The *jeitinho* occurs when the determination that would make the intended action impossible or difficult by a given person is reinterpreted by the person responsible for its fulfillment, who starts to prioritize the peculiarity of the situation and permits the non-fulfillment of the determination, thus causing the person to reach his or her goal (F. C. P. Motta & Alcadipani, 1999, p. 9).

The *jeito*, seen as a cultural resistance resource (Caldas & Wood, 1999), and the formalism as well, in spite of its sociological content, can also be interpreted from the strictly administrative perspective, as a consequence derived from the incompatibility of managerial technologies with the organizational reality, making it the substance-image distance proposed by Caldas and Wood (1999) evident. The organizational answers that reject the creative adaptation result in what Caldas and Wood (1999, p. 30) denominate appropriation of managerial "just-for-show" technologies or "denial". The just-for-show adoption:

It is the most typical Brazilian organizational behavior in the face of the importation of concepts. A close observer can perceive it in official speeches and shareholders' reports. In practice, it consists of partially and/or temporarily adopting the technology in question, to placate adoption pressures, but without promoting significant changes or damaging what is considered untouchable in the *status quo* (Caldas & Wood, 1999, pp. 39-40).

As stressed by Caldas and Wood (1999), this phenomenon is also described in the new institutionalism theoretical field as the ceremonial (Meyer & Rowan, 1992), which involves assuming a practice that is incompatible with the internal attributes of the organization.

In these cases, the organization may ceremoniously submit to rituals and elements that symbolize the administrative innovation, without actually adopting it to the extent it was idealized. (...)

Whenever a behavior like this takes place, the external observer perceives a rhetoric and imagery layer, a *pseudo*-reality that seems to conform to globalized management models and references, but this is only in appearance. Below the surface – plastic and permeable to the new – the hybrid and diverse substance remains, only partially receptive to alien models. To the outside observer, the result of the organizational just-for-show behavior is the generation of a “late modernity” impression (Caldas & Wood, 1999, p. 40).

Meyer and Rowan (1992) approach the influence of the rationalized and ceremonial institutional myths on organizational structure, especially identifying the formation of rational myths not only as tributary of the bureaucratization process – formalization of organizations – but as determinants in the level of complexity and modernization of a society. According to the authors, “many elements of the formal structure are highly institutionalized and act as myths” (Meyer & Rowan, 1992, p. 25). Professions, programs and technologies are examples. With regard to these technologies, it is mentioned that despite the lack of knowledge about the efficiency increment derived from them, their utilization reveals “an adequate, rational and modern organization. Their use demonstrates responsibility and avoids negligence statements” (Meyer & Rowan, 1992, p. 25). The ceremonial attitude, in this context, is a consequence of adopting external criteria for the assessment of the organization’s structural elements, implying a practice of highly symbolical content, which is restricted to the esthetic and eminently formal surface level.

These different interpretation strategies contribute to explaining something what may be considered a common sense element – the reactions observed during the introduction of managerial technologies in public administration organisms, especially in the direct administration. In this perspective, the contrast pointed out by Paula (2005) is evident, involving what he denominated management systems and administration systems. According to the author,

the ideas and tools of enterprise management are not always efficient and, when transferred to the public sector, present limitations regarding the integration between the **management** systems and the administration systems, i.e., they do not touch the sociopolitical dimension of management (Paula, 2005, p. 89).

The sociopolitical dimension of management is inherent to the organization. Therefore, regardless of their nature – public or private – organizations are power spaces. But would managerial technologies be intrinsically incompatible with public organizations?

Therefore, an in-depth reflection about the phenomenon of managerial technologies transfer between organizations of these different fields is useful. The immediate assumption is that, in spite of the significant differences that delimit public and private sectors, the potential appropriation of the conceptual essence of these managerial technologies with a view to the production of ideas that are coherent with public administration specificities cannot be completely discarded.

Managerial Technologies in Public Administration

In the public administration field, especially in the new public administration context – NAP (Ferlie, Asburner, Fitzgerald, & Pettigrew, 1999) the **managerial technologies** – the use of concepts as tools – have to be understood as a particular category of managerial content, differing from others such as **assumptions, concepts**, and policies, despite the non-existence of rigid borders between them (Figure 1).

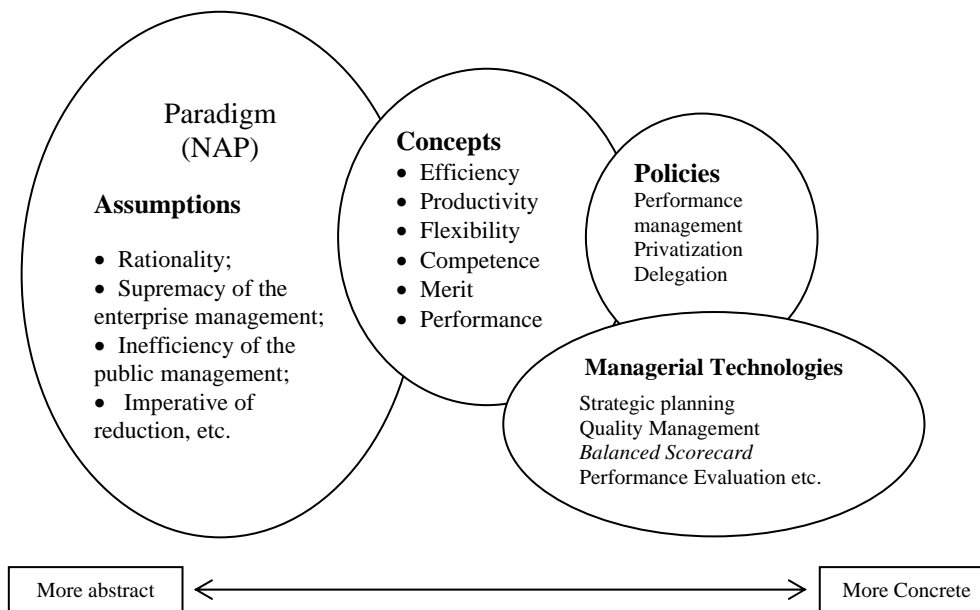


Figure 1: Assumptions, Concepts, Policies and Managerial Technologies

The mimicry of managerial practices legitimized in the private field, treated in the institutionalism theoretical field, can be more specifically understood in the light of the so-called managerial fashions – **fads and fashions** – a category that suggests a collection of better managerial practices available to organizations (Abrahamson, 1996; Benders & Van Veen, 2001; Caldas, 1997; Newell, Swan, & Kautz, 2001). Produced and disseminated by different agents, the managerial fashions tend to be temporary (Abrahamson, 1996), while the concepts that support them can be considered to be more lasting, and even to inform different technologies over time (P. R. Motta, 2001). Thus, the transitory character of a managerial innovation in relation to the idiosyncratic values that shape the organization's management system is the attribute that confers a given technology the character of **fashion**.

Abrahamson (1996), opposing the conventional perspective – which implies the perfect rationality of the agents based on the belief that organizations take technologies from the environment, acting in an independent way, and that this adoption is coherent with goals clearly defined by the organization – proposes that the choice of technology by the organization is actually heavily influenced by other organizations, and that the organization is not completely sure about the goals of these technological innovation processes. Therefore, coherently with isomorphic practices of a preponderantly mimetic nature, the organizations tend to converge to an appearance of rationality, or ceremonial assimilation of elements legitimated in the field (Meyer & Rowan, 1992). Institutional isomorphism, according to Meyer and Rowan (1992, p. 30), “promotes the organization's success and survival” through the incorporation of institutionalized elements of the environment, which also operate as rationalized institutional myths, creating and supporting a variety of organizational forms (Carvalho & Vieira, 2002). Meyer and Rowan (1992), refer to rational myths as many elements in the formal structure of organizations, such as the professions, the organization's functions, the languages, and the managerial technologies.

To DiMaggio and Powell (2005, p. 79), “organizations tend to see as models in their field other organizations they perceive as more legitimate or successful”. They search for these elements and incorporate them as an attitude of strengthening their legitimacy in the field. Recent studies on this phenomenon, focused on public organizations, have signaled important limitations in managerial technologies transfer process both in its introduction and implementation stages and in the maintenance (sustainability) of technology in the organization (Guimarães *et al.*, 2004). Factors that strongly influenced the success of managerial innovations have been, according to Guimarães *et al.* (2004): leadership and communication. Which parameters have been used for this assessment? The

effective adherence of the technology to the management system from the assimilation of its maintenance concepts? This is an analysis direction that can be more deeply treated.

In short, the transfer of these technologies as exogenous cultural objects can be satisfactorily explained by the institutional approach, noticeably from the combination of isomorphic processes and their reflections. However, a plunging into the process through which organizations absorb fragments of these technologies in their management systems is required; as a suggestion, this can be processed from the analysis of concepts and assumptions subjacent to these elements.

CONCEPTUAL ASSIMILATION: TRANSLATION, ADAPTATION AND REDUCTION

Morris and Lancaster (2005) present the notion of **translation of managerial concepts**, approaching the way ideas originated in one context are appropriated in another. They argue that receiving organizations play an active role in the transfer process, promoting the **transformation or translation of ideas**, understood as a process through which a managerial idea is transferred and reinterpreted in a new context. In this process, both suppliers and receivers of the new concepts “cooperate to redefine or to privilege some practices and to disagree about others” (Morris & Lancaster, 2005, p. 207). Considering that technologies always incorporate one or more concepts, this approach seems to uncover the importance of an effort to focus on the translation of concepts in their more restricted sense. The cited authors underline the meaning of managerial ideas translation as an interpretative process through which new technologies are institutionalized in different fields by ideas that circulate distilled in abstract concepts. These notions of distillation and transformation are similar to the sociological reduction and creative adaptation concepts proposed by Ramos (1996), and Wood and Caldas (1999), respectively.

Pushing forward in the search for coherent references that may help understand the managerial technologies assimilation process, Caldas and Wood (1997) signal the contrasts between image and substance, resulting in three possible organizational answers: the adoption of this just-for-show **technology**, denial, or creative adaptation. The technology acquisition phenomenon, which can only be understood if contextualized in the historical process of the formation of Brazilian society, witnesses a behavior that is determined by different traits of the national culture: personalism, ambiguity (where the Brazilian *jeitinho* comes from), distance from power, plasticity and formalism (Caldas & Wood, 1997). Studying the processes of managerial technologies adoption by firms, Wood and Caldas (1999) indicate creative adaptation as the healthiest, even though it is the less frequent among the typical reactive behaviors. The authors point out, as a creative adaptation assumption, that,

if it is true that managerial technology imported from developed centers by emergent countries might not be directly adequate or applicable, it is also true that useful and important knowledge can be found in a good part of these references. ... The problem is that, in a pure state, a great part of this technology is not appropriate to the local specificities. (Wood & Caldas, 1999, p. 59).

For this reason, Wood and Caldas (1999) suggest the creative adaptation.

It is an unprejudiced practice with the conscience to guarantee the appropriate adoption – that is, adequate to local specificities – of foreign administrative technology that may bring useful knowledge to emerging countries. In this type of practice, the organization neither blindly adopts nor indiscriminately denies outside models. It reviews and reinterprets this technology to understand its basic assumptions. It deconstructs based on its own local specificities. Finally, it creatively reconstructs, catching the essence of the technology’s value and appropriately meeting its own singular purposes and local reality (Wood & Caldas, 1999, pp. 59-60).

This meaning given to creative adaptation indicates something that appears to be absent from the current managerial concepts transfer processes, especially in cases where the diversity is not restricted

to the national cultural standards, but to the marked difference between sectors as in the case of public administration. That said, it is suggested that the notion of creative adaptation is strongly associated with the concept of sociological reduction proposed by Ramos (1996), from whom the social science field received a significant impulse, especially regarding the critical concepts apprehension effort.

In a broader sense, reduction consists of the elimination of everything that, owing to an accessory and secondary character, perturbs the effort of comprehension and perception of an element's essence (Ramos, 1996, p. 71).

[...]

It is the vision that follows the rules and attempts to clean objects from elements that might hinder an exhaustive and radical perception of their meaning (Ramos, 1996, p. 72).

The sociological reduction requires the search for the concept's essence, understood as its nuclear content. The use of reduction in the fields of social science and organizational studies implies critical apprehension of concepts with the purpose of developing a given theoretical body, broadening their interpretative and explanatory power. The notion of purging should also be stressed, purging being understood as the effort to interpret a concept produced in another context and to extract its essence, carefully depriving it of the elements that connect it with its original source. It is worth mentioning that these peripheral elements are the obstacle to the appropriation of the essential concept outside its original context. The reduction process, according to Ramos (1996), should be radical, or in other words, should reach the roots of a meaning. It is also noticeable that even Ramos (1996) does not defend the placing of obstacles to the absorption of knowledge produced outside, but rather the necessary submission of this production to the filter of local reality and needs.

The sociological reduction implies neither isolationism nor romantic exaltation of the local, either regional or national. It does not intend to oppose to the practice of transplantations, but rather wishes to submit them to refined selection criteria (Ramos, 1996, p. 73).

The extent of the definition of exogenous should be from now on relativized; it should be understood always in connection with its application context. Thus, it can be argued that permeability is not only valid but also desirable, both of the borders that still delimit the knowledge areas and of the several spaces, realities and cultures where knowledge in a general sense is produced, provided that the sociological reduction is put into effect. At this point, the law that gives foreign scientific production a subsidiary character (Ramos, 1996) stands out. Coherent with the sociological reduction notion, the assumption of foreign intellectual production as an accessory, or subsidiary, element requires the adoption of a conscious attitude regarding the need for a strong and systematic reflection capable of reaching the assumptions behind the exogenous content. The reduction means, thus, to seriously and deeply reflect on the assumptions that are subjacent to the concepts transferred, while making use of experiences and knowledge produced in other realities.

This essay is focused, therefore, on the proposition of analyzing the sociological reduction concept, which is conceived towards the reflection about the process of transplanting cultural objects between contexts with different sources and application, to the management area, with a special emphasis on processes of absorption of managerial technologies.

THE REDUCTION IN THE MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

Among the components that stand out in Brazilian public management, reflecting traits that shape the national culture, is the behavior that reproduces managerial practices conceived outside its borders and imported as models. The models are knowledge structures that have been typically used more with a direct application purpose and less as a set of references for reflection and production of new

knowledge. In these terms, the assumption of a finished model not only denies the singularity of an organization but also deprives it of the formulation of a coherent and particular management technology. This direct and non-critical application of what is produced outside has as a determinant value in the public sector the belief not only in the possibility of generalization of a content, despite the realities it comes from and in which it is used, but also in the apparent superiority of exogenous production (the enterprise reference).

Fundamentals of Sociological Reduction

Ramos (1996), when proposing the sociological reduction concept, coherent with a parenthetic attitude, does so based on the phenomenological reduction concept (*epoché* ou *epoché*) of Husserl (1996), developed in the philosophy field, at a highly abstract level based on the search for the essence of things. Heidegger, however, advances on Husserl's ideas, contrasting with this notion of transcendentality and marking the subject as a being-in-the-world. The reduction, in Heidegger, therefore, resides in the "suspension of referential relations that constitute the objects in the world, by the 'dehumanization' of the objects" (Ramos, 1996, p. 86). Inspired, thus, by these philosophers, Ramos (1996, p. 88) declares:

Without accepting the idealism of Husserl and Heidegger, nothing prevents us from taking in the methodical attitude conceived by them, which is essentially defined by a purpose of radical analysis of the objects in the world. Transferring this attitude to the social science ambit, it can be argued that each object implies the historic totality it belongs to and, therefore, is non-transferable, in the plenitude of all its circumstantial ingredients. It is possible, however, to suspend, or 'to put into brackets', the adjective historical notes of the cultural product and apprehend its determinants, so that, in another context, it can be used in a subsidiary character, and not as a model, for a new elaboration. The practice of sociological reduction opposes literal transplantation (Ramos, 1996, p. 88).

Ramos (1996) suggests, with the sociological reduction, that what social sciences in Brazil need is not to be isolated, ignoring what is produced outside, but rather to apprehend this production in a critical and contextualized way and in a subsidiary character, which includes identifying and understanding the processes that resulted in these exogenous contents. Thus, acknowledging administration as an applied social science that constitutes also (and sharply) a field with a growing incidence of managerial content from foreign origin, the importance of an assimilative attitude with this inspiration is more intense. Essentially oriented to social sciences in their beginnings, the theorization efforts of Ramos (1996) broaden their focus to contemplate the political and administrative dimensions (Azevêdo, 2006).

If during a given period of his trajectory Guerreiro Ramos was concerned with theorizing about Brazilian reality from the sociological point of view, and only him, we perceive that, little by little, this theorization is given the character of the political and administrative perspectives, which confirms an inclination of the author to imprint in his studies a constant preoccupation with action directives. The commitments of this stage of our author's personal and intellectual existence have generated works – and many of them. The apex of this production, it can be said, was a text written in 1958 – The Sociological Reduction (Azevêdo, 2006, p. 17).

In the quality of a critical-assimilative procedure, sociological reduction stimulates the search for the universal, subordinated to the particular – to the local. It does not oppose the appropriation of conceptual contents, but demands it be carefully done and subordinated to a conscious reflection involving especially and firstly the recognition of its assumptions (Ramos, 1996). The reduction, therefore, looks at the content in detriment of the format.

This practice would imply the agents' ability to produce these solutions, taking the external influence in a subsidiary character. This repositioning of the organization, both in relation to the exogenous content and to the agents with corresponding introduction processes, particularly stand out

if the specific field of organizational management can be perceived as intensely submitted to tensions caused by succeeding cycles of exposure to different management technologies, either if they are taken as fashions or not.

Thus, it is suggested that there should be an approximation of the sociological reduction concept, articulated with the other referenced concepts, in relation to the management field, making explicit the relevance of a managerial attitude with these characteristics (Bergue, 2008). An effort towards managerial reduction implies, therefore, the need to identify not only the assumptions that are subjacent to a given managerial technology, but also the influence of these assumptions on the construction of the concepts that support it. It implies, therefore, knowing the trajectory of the formation of the managerial concepts, in general rooted in other fields of knowledge, or disciplines, like Economics, Engineering, Social Sciences, Psychology, among other tributaries of organizational studies. To reduce a managerial technology to its essence would thus imply totally detaching it from the elements that connect it with its original environment for understanding, thereby extracting its nuclear contents, conferring upon it a coherent meaning as a destination context. This conceptual content, it should be stressed, is what gives structural support to technology, that is, it constitutes its essential elements – the **managerial concepts**. This reduced or distilled knowledge – perceived in its essence – can be used endogenously for the purpose of generating managerial technologies of its own and that are meaningful to the organization.

In this sense, to admit a critical perspective of the transformations that occur in today's public organization also means the establishment of conditions to a dialectic approach of the managerial phenomenon. Such an approach is understood, in short, as the effort of initial apprehension of a managerial content (the technology and its concepts), its reconstruction (new meaning) involving a reflection on its assumptions, and, finally, outdoing it and generating a new synthesis, i.e., a conceptual content with a technological format coherent with the context and specificities of the public organization. More precisely, with regard to management models in organizations, these elements can be represented by the initial contact with a managerial technology (exogenous), followed by the 'reduction' of this content with the purpose of meeting its essential elements (concepts) and critical reflection on the ownership of the assumptions and concepts that shape it – deconstruction and the new meaning. Finally, and as a consequence of new elements apprehended, it follows the construction of a new endogenous technology, which is coherent with the organization's singularity (Figure 2).

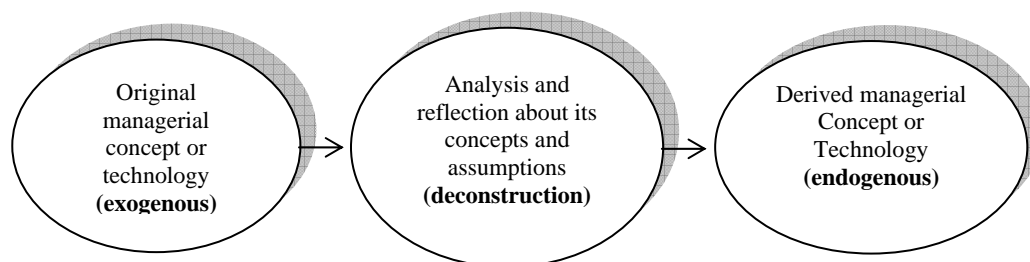


Figure 2: Critical Apprehension of Managerial Concepts and Technologies

For that reason, no managerial technologies produced and disseminated in the enterprise field are promptly rejected; quite the contrary, all should be an object of analysis by the managers and other members of public organizations, according to a reducer managerial attitude, with the purpose of identifying potential elements that might contribute to the consecution of its institutional goals – the public interest in the last instance.

Strategic Planning: Assumptions and Concepts

Strategic planning as a formal strategy practice in vogue in the enterprise field (Machado-da-Silva & Vizeu, 2007) has achieved significant penetration in public administration, even though elements such as planning and strategy cannot be considered new elements, nor strange to this field in conceptual terms. However, if models disseminated as packages in their conventional versions are taken, there is strategic planning as a managerial technology of an eminently instrumental nature and focused on the organization. In this format, therefore, it contrasts with the substantive designs of public administration, a more complex structure than any of the organisms composing it.

Although the planning in the public sector has a long trajectory and instruments consolidated in the constitutional and legal plans, it is necessary to perceive the emergent influence of the strategic planning based on enterprise models (Gouvêa, 2007; Pagnoncelli & Aumond, 2004; Poister & Streib, 1997; Rezende, 2004; Rezende & Castor, 2005). If in the private field planning is a capacity, in the public sector it is mandatory for the manager to provide it according to the different temporal horizons, in attention to the principles of legality, the guarantee of continuity of the provision of public services and the collective interest in the last instance. Broadening the more specific planning concepts in a strategic perspective as a process (Matias-Pereira, 2007; Oliveira, 2007), systemic and containing general macro-oriented guidelines (Wright, Kroll, & Parnell, 2000), it can be perceived that the effective adherence of the essential conceptual elements of this technology to public organizations cannot dispense with the search of their roots and seminal contributions in the private field (Ansoff, 1977, 1990). Understanding the impact of the enterprise-based strategic planning model on the public sector requires not only assuming its concept disseminated in the administration field, but also searching for its original fundamentals in the economic sphere, noticeably in neoclassical-inspired thought (Vasconcelos & Cyrino, 2000). These assumptions, incidentally, are the fundamentals of the organization.

According to P. R. Motta (1991, p. 85), under a strong influence of systemic and contingent perspectives,

strategic planning emerged at a time when the predominating vision in the administrative theory was still to explore as much as possible the management rational dimensions to dominate the ambiguities that appeared in the environment. This vision valued the refinement of rational methods of administrative action to produce greater efficiency and efficacy in anticipating changes.

Machado-da-Silva (2004, p. 251) points out as subjacent to strategy approaches in evidence the “rational-instrumental assumption”. This belief in the managerial action rationality, as a consequence, is projected in the planning processes. Thus it is perceived that in spite of not only the rationality limits, but also of the emergent discourse of complexity and subjectivity between other dimensions, this assumption of the instrumental rationality proves nuclear in the conventional models of strategic planning, since the intention is to identify final goals, unfolding them in intermediary goals followed by the rational allocation of resources for this accomplishment.

A core effort, coherent with the notion of reduction, requires the identification of concepts and assumptions that support strategic planning as a managerial technology, followed by a reflection on its coherence with the context in which public organizations belong. Penetrating the essential elements of strategic planning expressed (or not) in the specialized literature and, subsequently, the assumptions on which they are based, the following can be suggested in terms of concepts and assumptions:

Taking the managerial technology on different levels – from the surface to the nucleus – there are the **apparent** managerial **concepts**, which give form to strategic planning as a cultural object. Also in this sphere, but at a greater depth, there are the **essential** concepts, which constitute the conceptual content management technology is based on.

In the plan of **assumptions**, there are those denominated **instrumental** concepts, since they constitute the set of values that support the very sense of organization – an arrangement of resources

articulated and oriented towards the accomplishment of an institutional end. Notwithstanding this instrumental dimension, it can be perceived that there is a substantive architecture of organizational assumptions, even deeper. These substantive assumptions emerge from the interaction between local cultural traits, the sociopolitical dimension of the organization, the limits imposed by the formal organization, and even from the expectations of the actors in relation to the processes of change in the organization (based on similar past events derived from the cycles of fashions).

Initially, what can be perceived from explaining these elements that constitute the **managerial technology** and the **organization** is an identity in terms of instrumental assumptions and essential concepts. It cannot be affirmed, therefore, that the strategic planning taken as managerial technology is incompatible with the public organization. In these terms, despite the permeability of the organization to foreign content (Caldas, 1997), this content would not find obstacles to assimilation in the conceptual plan and in the organizational assumptions.

Resuming the question asked at the end of section Exogenous Managerial Content and Formalism: would the managerial technologies be intrinsically incompatible with public organizations? The answer: in terms of essential concepts and organization assumptions, no. The factors that contribute to formalistic appropriation, therefore, do not reside in the conceptual incompatibility of technologies, but rather in the form – process – in which they are transplanted. In the conventional transposition processes, the emphasis is placed on the force of the discourse (especially from the upper management and the agents of change – consultants), which is generally based on surface concepts (apparent) of the managerial phenomenon – Table 1.

Table 1

Strategic Planning Concepts and Assumptions

| Managerial Concepts | | Organizational Assumptions | |
|---|--|--|---|
| Apparent | Essential | Instrumental | Substantive |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Leadership • Holism • Valorization of people • Engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency • Efficaciousness • Formalization • Planning • Strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutrality • Control • Instrumental Rationality • Balance and Regularity • Hierarchy • Objectivity • Prescription • Determinism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalism • Individualism • Formalism • <i>Jeito</i> |

Note. Source: adapted from Bergue (2009, p. 208).

Broadening the direct transfer practices, which take technologies as packages, the conclusion is that sociological reduction can make an important contribution to this process of assimilating elements external to the organization. Once these fundamental components inherent to the objects that will be transplanted are identified, it necessarily follows to give a new meaning to these concepts – both the essential and the apparent – according to the organization's context. It is assumed, therefore, that a reducer attitude also in the managerial plan could contribute towards minimizing the effects of formalism (Ramos, 1966) or of ceremonial appropriation (Meyer & Rowan, 1992), which propitiate the *jeito* practice (F. C. P. Motta & Alcadipani, 1999), those acknowledged as substantive assumptions of the organization.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It has been established that managerial technologies taken as fashions disregard organizations as singularities. For that reason, the notion of reduction in the management plan is an imposition on the whole process of transferring technologies and concepts between organizations and between sectors, with an emphasis on the relationship between public organizations and private business organisms, in order to minimize the imposition of formalism, as defined by Ramos (1966), as a strategy for the survival and development of the organization.

With regard to the instrumental assumptions and essential concepts indicated, it has been noticed that it is not possible to contrast them with the organization, for even if not in an explicit way, they are inherent to organizations with a typically bureaucratic profile. As for the substantive assumptions – those derived from the interaction between the formal organization, its actors and elements of the local culture – they are, in turn, the cause and reflection of the introduction of exogenous managerial content promoted without critical reflection.

Among the obstacles to the transposition of managerial content exogenous to the public organization there seem to be, therefore, the appropriation of technologies as rigid and hermetical objects, and the low level of interest on the part of organizational actors in making an effort to reduce the technology to its essential elements. Without identifying these fundamental components – managerial concepts and organization assumptions – the managerial technology will not be acknowledged as an articulated and oriented set of concepts established in a specific context, whose transplantation demands their recognition, critical reflection about their pertinence, convenience and opportunity, and new meaning – Figure 2.

In short, this essay was aimed at the transplantation of the sociological reduction concept – inspired in itself – to the management field, in the belief that that it can make important contributions to dealing with the emergent managerial technologies transfer process, especially in the public administration field. As the core argument to support the imperative of the reduction process is the assumption that technologies are not effectively understood by organizations at the level of their constituting concepts. Thus, they are not apprehended by the organization's management system or, in other words, assimilated.

Besides future research, further points of enlargement on this effort at reflection and debate suggested are cases of other cultural objects, such as quality management, the balanced scorecard, management by competences, management by projects, among others with a growing appeal in organizations of the public sector. To investigate these technologies in their fundamental concepts and assumptions may reveal alternative forms to a consistent introduction of these elements in organizations.

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