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Social Management: Epistemology Beyond Paradigms

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Abstract

The objective of this theoretical essay is to propose a new path for the epistemological debate in the field of social management that goes beyond the paradigmatic boundaries. Based on studies that deal with social management from different perspectives, a comparison was made between models based on the thesis of incommensurability by Thomas Kuhn – such as the Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan diagram of sociological paradigms – and an alternative to break away from the paradigmatic mentality: the circle of epistemic matrices. The study demonstrated that the logic of incommensurable paradigms is not adequate to guide social management studies due to its complexity and plurality. This was proven by the identification of multiple sociological approaches adopted in field studies, including hybrid approaches. In this sense, the circle of epistemic matrices proved to be more appropriate, because instead of impenetrable boundaries, it allows transit between the matrices and enables a dialogue between different sociological approaches.

Keywords: social management; public administration; paradigms; paradigmatic incommensurability; circle of epistemic matrices.

Introduction

Social management is an emerging field of management knowledge and practices, whose main points include social participation and collective decision-making, guided by ethics and solidarity principles oriented towards the social (finality) and by the social (process) (Boullosa & Schommer, 2008; Fischer & Melo, 2006; França Filho, 2003; Schommer & França Filho, 2008; Tenório, 2005, 2006). Its purpose is to create more effective administrative organizations, with

autonomy to operate in favor of the non-state public interest and for the realization of the common good, systematizing alternative knowledge, seeking the emancipation of the human being, and strengthening the public sphere (Caçado, Pereira, & Tenório, 2013; Caçado, Rigo, Iwamoto, & Pinheiro, 2019; Caçado, Tenório, & Pereira, 2011; Paes de Paula, 2005).

According to França Filho (2007), the fact that social management is defined in advance by its finality, encompassing the organizational and corporate dimensions, contradicts the entire management development tradition of administration focused on economic interest. Similarly, Tenório (1998) believes that social management is opposed to strategic management as it is an alternative to technobureaucratic and monological management that favors a more participative and dialogical form, in which the decision-making process is exercised by different social actors. Therefore, it is a complex and interdisciplinary field of knowledge whose genesis lies in the field of organizational studies, whose researchers maintain a close dialogue with several areas, such as administration, public administration, social service, political science, sociology, and others (Alcântara, Pereira, & Silva, 2015; Justen, Moretto Neto, & Garrido, 2014; Paiva, Alcântara, Cruz, & Andrade, 2018).

Scientific production about social management has been growing in Brazil in the last few years. However, its consolidation as a field of scientific knowledge seems to be distant, as there is still no consensus in the field's epistemological debate. Precisely due to its complexity and plurality, many researchers have faced difficulties and uncertainties in their attempt to position social management within the Kuhnian logic of immeasurable paradigms. This is a problem that has been debated by researchers in the area of organizational studies for at least four decades. In the midst of polarized and often heated debates, in what has become known as a "paradigm war," several authors have presented criticisms exposing the limits and weaknesses of this mentality, especially regarding the incommensurability thesis. However, these debates have not advanced towards a rupture, in other words, they have not resulted in alternatives that definitively overcome this logic (Oliveira, 2018). However, in her book *Repensando os estudos organizacionais: por uma nova teoria do conhecimento*, Paes de Paula (2015) proposed an alternative: the circle of epistemic matrices. Basing her proposal on Jürgen Habermas (1968/2014), the author defends the thesis of cognitive incompleteness, suggesting that sociological and organizational knowledge is developed through epistemic reconstructions.

From this perspective, the objective of this theoretical essay is to propose a new path for the epistemological debate in the field of social management that goes beyond the paradigmatic boundaries. The lack of studies in this sense was identified by Pinho and Santos (2015) and Alcântara and Pereira (2017), who drew attention to the need to deepen the epistemological debate in the field of social management in the search for epistemic-methodological reconstructions that integrate technical, practical, and emancipatory cognitive interests. In the same sense, Caçado, Pereira, Tenório, and Vilas Boas (2015) and Caçado, Rigo, and Pinheiro (2016) indicate that the field of social management demands studies that open up new epistemic perspectives and provide a discussion about the (im)possibility of including social management in the paradigmatic mentality. With the intention of narrowing these gaps, the contribution of this essay starts from a counterpoint made between paradigmatic models and the circle of epistemic matrices in the social management context.

To attend to what is proposed, the next section presents the implications of the social science paradigms in the field of social management, drawing attention to their inconsistencies and weaknesses. In the third section, a brief description about the circle of epistemic matrices is given. The fourth section presents the position of studies about social management using several sociological approaches within the circle of epistemic matrices. Finally, in the fifth section, the final considerations are presented.

The paradigms of social sciences and social management

Thomas Kuhn (1962/1997) introduced the concept of paradigm in his book *The structure of scientific revolutions*. In this publication, Kuhn describes his theory on development of knowledge, raising some important concepts that have influenced contemporary scientific thinking, such as normal science, scientific revolution, and incommensurability of paradigms.

According to Kuhn (1962/1997), it is from frequent and profound debates regarding the methods, problems, and solutions (pre-paradigmatic period) which involve the new discoveries of scientists that a paradigm is constituted. For this author, paradigms are universally recognized scientific achievements that, for some while, provide problems and exemplary solutions for a community of science practitioners. These achievements, when accepted by the scientific community, become a mandatory reference for researchers in a certain field of knowledge.

Regarding normal science, the author believes that scientific practice is the attempt to force nature to fit pre-established limits for a paradigm. In this case, the emergence of new theories would be possible only when there was a scientific revolution, that is, when “anomalies” were perceived in the dominant paradigm and it was replaced by another one.

This transition would be based on the principle of overcoming the incommensurability between rival paradigms (the old and the new): the normal scientific tradition that emerges from a scientific revolution is not only incompatible, but also incommensurable with the one that preceded it. The essence of Kuhn’s incommensurability thesis is that there is no common measure or universal language in which the paradigms can communicate with each other.

The paradigmatic issue in the epistemological debate on social management is not consensual among researchers in this field. There are authors who consider social management as a pre-paradigmatic field (Dowbor, 1999, 2001; Fischer, 2002; Vidal, Moreira, Costa, & Almeida, 2006) and others who have tried to circumvent the incommensurability thesis, suggesting that it is a multi-paradigmatic field (Araújo, 2018; Fischer et al., 2006). Furthermore, there are those who have made efforts to fit the field within the diagram of the sociological paradigms of Burrell and Morgan (1979), who inherited the incommensurability thesis from Kuhn.

According to Dowbor (2001), social management paradigms are still to be defined or constructed. In the same sense, Fischer (2002, p. 11, own translation) states that “the field of social management, or management of social development, is reflective of practices and knowledge built by multiple disciplines, **outlining a pre-paradigmatic proposal.**” However, in a later study, the author together with other partners states that “the field of social management, or management of social development, is a reflection of the practices and knowledge built by multiple disciplines, **outlining a multi-paradigmatic proposal,** of an interdisciplinary nature” (Fischer et al., 2006, p. 797,

own translation). Sharing the same difficulty in framing social management in the paradigmatic logic, Araújo (2012, p. 90, own translation) believes that “it still cannot be said that social management constitutes a paradigm, rather, it is itself multi-paradigmatic in its essence.” Despite these different positions as regards social management being a pre-paradigmatic or multi-paradigmatic field, none of these authors deepened the discussion. However, it is important to note that, in spite of Kuhn’s work (1962/1997) being widely cited in the social sciences, it has little relevance for their understanding, since the reasoning of normal science and scientific revolutions derives from the natural sciences, mainly from physics (Willmott, 1993). According to Kuhn’s logic, social sciences in general would still be pre-paradigmatic. This is one of the reasons that have led social scientists to adapt the paradigmatic mentality, assuming the possibility of coexistence of different paradigms to legitimize their epistemic positions.

In the book *Gestão social: epistemologia de um paradigma*, Cançado et al. (2013) made an effort to position the field of social management in what they called the central paradigms of the social sciences of Jones (1993) and in the diagram of sociological paradigms of Burrell and Morgan (1979). The authors state that in the book *Studying Society: Sociological Theories and Research Practices*, Jones (1993) understands that reality can be interpreted based on three central paradigms of social sciences – structural-consensus, structural-conflict, and interpretive – whose characteristics would be as follows:

- The **structural-consensus paradigm** is based on Émile Durkheim’s conception of science in which the nature of reality is objective and formed by phenomena in invariable causal relations. In this paradigm, knowledge of the laws of nature is only possible by collecting demonstrable evidence of its existence, that is, by quantifying causal relations;
- The **structural-conflict paradigm** is based on Marx’s historical materialism. In this paradigm the conception of reality is based on the understanding of how social systems work historically, mainly concerning the structure of inherent domination in an unequal society; and
- The **interpretive paradigm** is based on Max Weber’s scientificity in which social reality is not acquired through universal laws. In this paradigm, knowledge is based on the interpretation of action, which is only possible when knowledge is acquired about the meanings that support the actions, understanding the theories of the actors via qualitative evidence.

For Cançado et al. (2013), none of these three paradigms is sufficient to explain the complexity of social life, however they believe that important steps have already been taken, mainly in terms of social reality not being treated with Durkheimian objectivity anymore.

Likewise, the authors presented another model that is quite widely discussed by social science researchers: the diagram of sociological paradigms. In the book *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis*, Burrell and Morgan (1979) propose, in opposition to Thomas Kuhn’s “normal science,” the diagram of sociological paradigms using two dimensions: the assumptions about the nature of science that are contained in the objective approaches (realistic, positivist, deterministic, and nomothetic) and subjective approaches (nominalist, antipositivist, voluntarist, and ideographic); and the assumptions about the nature of society that are contained in the sociology of regulation (*status quo*, social order, consensus, social integration and cohesion,

solidarity, satisfaction of needs, and reality) and in the sociology of radical change (radical change, structural conflict, modes of domination, contradiction, emancipation, deprivation, and potential). These dimensions thus form a diagram with four paradigms in which each one contemplates a set of theoretical assumptions about the nature of social sciences, as shown in Figure 1.

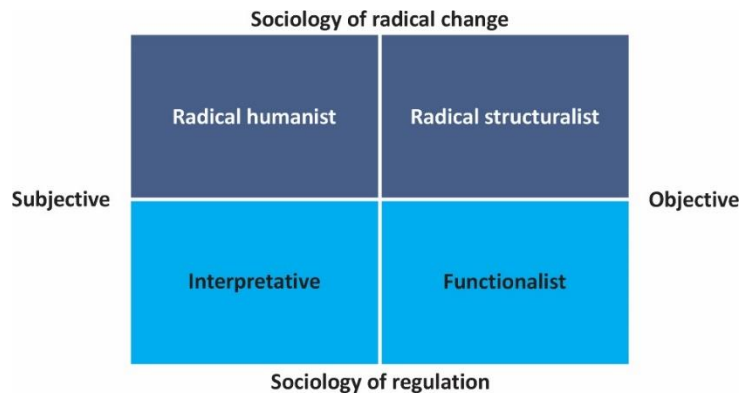


Figure 1. Diagram of sociological paradigms

Source: Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 22).

Functionalism and interpretativism are paradigms that have their roots in the sociology of regulation, the first being based on an objectivist focus and the second being based on a subjectivist point of view. Radical structuralism and radical humanism, on the other hand, are paradigms based on the sociology of radical change, where the former is rooted in an objectivist point of view and the latter is rooted in a subjectivist one. A summary of the characteristics of each paradigm can be seen on Chart 1.

Table 1
Summary of the characteristics of Burrell and Morgan’s paradigms

Paradigms	Assumptions about the nature of science	Assumptions about the nature of society	Emphasis	Lines of thought in social sciences and organizational studies
Functionalist	Objectivist	Regulation	To find solutions to practical problems.	Classical administration, bureaucracy, and systems theory.
Interpretive	Subjectivist	Regulation	To comprehend the fundamental nature of the social world, considering subjectivity.	Phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism.
Radical Structuralist	Objectivist	Radical Change	Structural change in society, focusing on the analysis of power and class structures.	Critical theories inspired by Marxism and structuralism.
Radical Humanist	Subjectivist	Radical Change	Phenomena of alienation and false consciousness, seeking human emancipation.	Critical theories inspired by anarchism, dialectics, and psychosociology.

Source: Adapted from Burrell and Morgan (1979), Andion (2012), and Paes de Paula (2015).

Looking to establish a position for the field of social management, Cançado et al. (2013) tried to bring together the paradigms of Jones (1993) and Burrell and Morgan (1979), as shown in Figure 2.

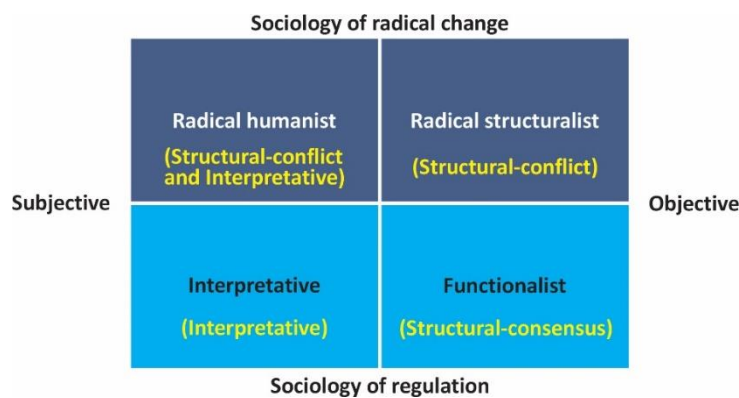


Figure 2. Comparison between paradigms of Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Jones (1993)

Source: Cançado et al. (2013, p. 81).

As can be observed in Figure 2, Cançado et al. (2013) distribute the three supposed paradigms of Jones (1993) within the quadrants of the diagram of Burrell and Morgan according to the converging characteristics of each paradigm. However, this attempt at approximation presents

some important inconsistencies. Firstly, Caçado et al. (2013) tried to circumvent the incommensurability defended by Kuhn (1962/1997) and maintained by Burrell and Morgan (1979). In the upper two quadrants of Figure 2, the authors simultaneously combined the structural-conflict paradigm with radical humanism and radical structuralism. Likewise, in the two quadrants on the left, they combined the interpretive paradigm with radical humanism and interpretativism. In addition, in the first quadrant, the authors combined Jones' structural-conflict and interpretive paradigms with Burrell and Morgan's radical humanism. It must be remembered that the Burrell and Morgan diagram is composed of rival and mutually exclusive paradigms. In this logic, there is no possibility of uniting paradigms and consensus is neither possible nor desirable (Paes de Paula, 2015). The authors themselves state in their work that incommensurability is defended as much from the perspective of Burrell and Morgan as from the perspective of Jones, and that the paradigms are mutually exclusive: "The paradigmatic incommensurability is emphasized in a very assertive way, that is, the paradigms do not communicate and the theories built inside one cannot be explained (and accepted) in another" (Caçado et al., 2013, p. 79, own translation). A little bit further on in the text, the authors try to justify bringing together the paradigms:

One could get the impression, at first sight, that Radical Humanism would be the proof that paradigmatic incommensurability does not proceed, as the paradigm would be the "encounter" between the Structural Conflict and Interpretive paradigms. A more attentive examination shows that Radical Humanism has characteristics of the two paradigms, but also differences from them, in order to configure a new paradigm. (Caçado et al., 2013, p. 82, own translation).

The problem here is that in his book Jones (1993) did not deal with social science paradigms like Burrell and Morgan did, but instead discussed several theories and sociological approaches¹, including the structural-consensus theory, the structural-conflict theory, and the interpretive sociological approach. The word "paradigm" does not even appear in the chapters devoted to discussing these theories and approaches². Furthermore, Caçado et al. (2013) used the terms "paradigm" and "approach" alternately in reference to the theories discussed by Jones, which creates uncertainty as to what the authors understand by paradigm.

Considering the above, it is possible to agree that the humanist approach (and not the paradigm), for example, can make use of some assumptions of other approaches in building its identity. However, for this to happen, there must be a rupture in paradigmatic thinking and the search for new ways to legitimize epistemic positions. In this regard, Boullosa and Schommer (2010) believe that the search for relationships and limits between the fields of social management and public administration could yield good results, helping to structure social management in depth and "shake off the dust" from conceptual and paradigmatic moorings. However, the epistemic discussion in the field of public administration suffers from the same uncertainties and difficulties inherent to the paradigmatic mentality. Some examples of this are the works of Keinert (1994, 2000) and Andion (2012).

The book *Administração pública no Brasil: crises e mudanças de paradigmas*, by Keinert (2000), presents a historical review about the evolution of studies in the field of public administration in Brazil, characterizing its paradigms as a function of the concept of "public." In her

analysis, the author states that until the 1970s, the territory explored (*locus*) for the field studies centered on “structuring the State,” and the theoretical perspective adopted (*focus*) was basically linked to “administrative science.” For Keinert, after the 1980s it was possible to advance with evidence of the existence of guiding paradigms of public administration studies in Brazil, which are: the paradigm of the “public as the state” or state-centered, which was predominant in the period from 1930 to 1979; and the paradigm of the “public as a public interest” or sociocentric paradigm, which became effective as of 1990. Keinert concludes her research by evidencing the advances in public administration studies in a brief comparison between the old and emerging paradigms. For the author, the first paradigm (state-centered) assumed the technical dimension, and the crisis that followed it emphasized only the political dimension. The emerging paradigm (sociocentric), on the other hand, seeks to create a synthesis between the technical and political. An important limitation of Keinert’s (2000) study is that the author identified predominant approaches in studies of public administration in different periods, and not paradigms in Kuhnian terms, which was enough for the work to receive criticism.

Based on the criticism of Keinert’s work, Andion (2012) also makes an analysis about the different theoretical lines of thinking that make up the field of public administration in Brazil in her article “*Por uma nova interpretação das mudanças de paradigma na administração pública.*” The author believes that Keinert did not delve into the concept of paradigm and at the same time dealt with the paradigmatic analysis of public administration in an isolated manner. In an attempt to overcome these limitations, Andion bases her analysis on Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) diagram of sociological paradigms and on Kuhnian logic. This enabled her to infer that the functionalist paradigm predominates in the field of Brazilian public administration. Then Andion draws attention to the need to think about new paths, however her position presents an impasse: after describing Kuhn’s (1962/1997) work, which proposes the incommensurability of paradigms, as “celebrated,” and also stating that one of her objectives was to identify the paradigms in which the main lines of thinking in the field of public administration were anchored, the author suggests that public administration should be based on an epistemology that interrelates its constitutive dimensions and is inspired by critical and interpretive references promoting a dialogue between paradigms. As seen previously, this is not possible due to the incommensurability proposed by Kuhn (1962/1997) and which was maintained in the diagram of Burrell and Morgan (1979). As noted by Willmott (1993), the paradigms are not presented by Burrell and Morgan as a possible framework to evaluate “how” and “why” there are different forms of organizational analysis or even why these forms gravitate towards one or another of their polarized paradigms. However, the author strongly endorses restricting the analysis within the limits of four mutually exclusive views of the social world.

This uncertainty and difficulty in positioning the social management or public administration fields in the paradigmatic logic, as identified in the studies of Dowbor (2001), Fischer (2002), Fischer et al. (2006), Araújo (2012), Cançado et al. (2013), Boullosa and Schommer (2010), Keinert (1994, 2000), and Andion (2012), reinforces the thought that this logic is not suitable for social sciences and organizational studies (Paes de Paula, 2016).

In light of this difficulty, in a more recent study, Cançado et al. (2016) asked the following question: “will social management become a paradigm or does its complexity not fit into this structure?” (p. 72, own translation). From what has been discussed so far, it is possible to say that social management does not fit into this structure due to its complexity, because as noted by

Barbosa, Santos, Matos, and Almeida (2013), if on the one hand the paradigmatic mentality guides the production of knowledge in a certain scientific community, on the other hand, it produces negative effects, such as the imposition of cognitive limits for researchers and for scientific production, always keeping them within certain paradigmatic boundaries.

The idea of breaking down these boundaries has accompanied several researchers in the field of organizational studies who, since the end of the 1970s, have promoted heated debates that have resulted in an unconcluded “paradigm war” between isolationists, integrationists, and pluralists. Researchers who are guided by an isolationist perspective (e.g. Burrell, 1996; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Jackson & Carter, 1991, 1993; Scherer, 1998; Tadajewski, 2009) defend the legitimacy of different research paradigms within organizational studies and the incommensurability thesis as a way of preserving and perpetuating their specific scientific practices, as protection against the functionalist hegemony and the synthesis of paradigms. In contrast, integrationists (e.g. Donaldson, 1985, 1988; Pfeffer, 1982, 1993) deny the incommensurability thesis and believe in the synthesis or integration of paradigms based on functionalism as the dominant paradigm and they tend to see the diversity of research paradigms as the sign of a lack of scientific maturity. Lastly, pluralists (e.g. Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Hassard, 1988, 1991; Lewis & Grimes, 1999; McKelvey, 2003; McKinley & Mone, 1998; Reed, 1985; Schultz & Hatch, 1996) defend a multi-paradigmatic strategy that would be an intermediate position between the dogmatism of isolationists and the relativism of integrativists, accepting the incommensurability thesis while believing in the possibility of interaction (and not integration) between paradigms, simultaneously recognizing the contrasts and possible connections between them.

Despite the efforts of these researchers, the paradigm war has proved to be barren, as inherent problems in each of these perspectives still persist. For isolationists, paradigms are understood and adopted in a procrustian way, whereby complex and diverse notions are forced into an artificial and inadequate unit (Greenfield, 1991). The integrationists defend, although there is no common ground for comparisons, the development of a mutual understanding between paradigms, integrating them into the dominant paradigm. However, in reality, when a paradigm dominated a field of research, what was seen was the marginalization of other perspectives, rather than the ideal of mutual integration (Wang & Segal, 2014). In addition, as observed by Schultz and Hatch (1996) and Wang and Segal (2014), the research developed based on the integrationist perspective, often bases its arguments on abstractions of different paradigms without considering and understanding their ontologies and epistemologies, producing research results that are not very relevant or even misleading. Pluralists have also not achieved the expected success, since their discussions have moved much more towards a pairing of rival paradigms, than interaction or reconciliation of paradigms. Romani, Primecz, and Topçu (2011) and Wang and Segal (2014), for example, believe that the present multi-paradigmatic strategies and proposals are conceptually and methodologically vague, due to the limited understanding of the terms “paradigm” and “incommensurability.” This means that multi-paradigmatic research has not overcome the idea of mutually exclusive paradigms (Paes de Paula, 2015; Parker & McHugh, 1991; Romani et al., 2011; Wang & Segal, 2014). What actually happens is that for those who are not comfortable with the uncompromising character of mutual exclusivity, the idea of taking the diagram of paradigms as a heuristic device that circumvents the incommensurability is certainly attractive (Willmott, 1993). However, as mentioned by Wang and Segal (2014), denying the incommensurability is not enough to refute it.

Everything that has been presented so far demonstrates that incommensurable paradigms are not the best way to legitimize the epistemic position of social management, since it is a complex interdisciplinary field whose praxiological and epistemological dimensions are hybrid (Fischer & Melo, 2003; Justen et al., 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to discuss a new path in order to overcome the inherent provincialism of the paradigmatic mentality and establish that there are other forms of science besides the monological ones (Paes de Paula, 2014, 2015, 2016).

Epistemology beyond paradigms

Aiming to overcome the paradigmatic mentality, Paes de Paula (2015) proposed an alternative to the diagram of sociological paradigms of Burrell and Morgan. The author sought in Jürgen Habermas, more specifically in the book *Knowledge and Human Interests* of 1968, the parameters to explain how knowledge develops in the social sciences and in organizational studies. According to Habermas (1968/2014), knowledge is developed through the articulation between three cognitive interests: technical interest (empirical-analytical sciences), practical interest (historical-hermeneutical sciences), and emancipatory interest (critical sciences). Unlike the Kuhnian logic that establishes boundaries for the development of knowledge, for Habermas, the dialogue between cognitive interests is what makes up the unit of knowledge, that is, researchers must address these interests jointly. Thus, Paes de Paula (2015) presents the circle of epistemic matrices (Figure 3), which, unlike the diagram of sociological paradigms formed of quadrants of impenetrable boundaries, seeks to promote the conciliation between cognitive interests.

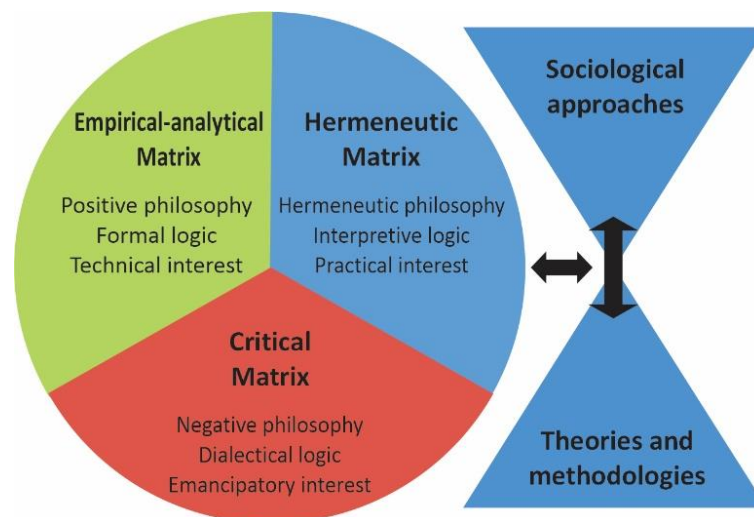


Figure 3. Circle of epistemic matrices, sociological approaches, theories and methodologies

Source: Paes de Paula (2015, p. 116).

The circle of epistemic matrices is composed of empirical-analytical, hermeneutical, and critical matrices. According to Paes de Paula (2015), the matrices have the following characteristics:

- The **empirical-analytical** matrix is characterized by its alignment with positive philosophy, the use of formal logic, and a preference for technical interest. Its

epistemology derives, in large part, from the positivist sociological movement, which is marked by empiricism and formalism, emphasizing causal explanations and axiological neutrality, which leaves room for technical interest and instrumentality.

- The **hermeneutic matrix** is characterized by its alignment with hermeneutic philosophy, the use of interpretive logic, and a preference for practical interest. Its epistemology derives from sociological movements of a hermeneutic nature and its philosophy gives rise to a hermeneutic science, which is mediated by interpretative logic.
- The **critical matrix** is characterized by its alignment with negative philosophy, the use of dialectical logic, and a preference for emancipatory interest. Negative philosophy is exactly the opposite of positive philosophy, since it does not seek to achieve maximum rigor in the sense of propositions using formal logic, but rather to achieve the content of propositions using dialectical logic.

According to Paes de Paula (2015), the circle of epistemic matrices is the *locus* that guides the sociological approaches and in which epistemic matrices represent points of reference. In this sense, these matrices should not be taken as instances that imprison sociological approaches, but as constituent parts of an integrated whole in the production of knowledge:

Knowledge in the social sciences and in organizational studies does not develop due to paradigmatic rivalries, incommensurability, and scientific revolutions, but because in the investigation of social phenomena, **cognitive incompleteness** occurs that leads researchers to seek other theories, methodologies, sociological approaches, or even other epistemic matrices. (Paes de Paula, 2016, p. 38, own translation)

Thus, the author replaces incommensurability with cognitive incompleteness, and scientific revolutions with epistemic reconstructions. Unlike the rigidity imposed in the diagram of sociological paradigms of Burrell and Morgan (1979) and in Kuhnian logic, in the circle of epistemic matrices it is possible the transit between different sociological approaches.

In her research, Paes de Paula (2015) identified six sociological approaches commonly referenced in the area of organizational studies: functionalist, interpretive, humanist, structuralist, post-structuralist, and critical realist. The author emphasizes that the delimitation of these approaches does not mean that there are no others. On the contrary, there are no limits on the number of systems of knowledge production. Among the approaches identified, Paes de Paula found that some are pure and others hybrid.

Pure sociological approaches are situated in only one of the matrices: this is the case of the functionalist (empirical-analytical matrix), of the interpretative (hermeneutical matrix), and of the humanist (critical matrix) approaches.

Functionalism is a sociological approach associated with the work of French sociologist Émile Durkheim. In his book *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, Durkheim sought to consolidate sociology as a science demarcating a sociological method adapted to the particular nature of social phenomena. Its sociological conception was structured under the influence of Auguste Comte's positive philosophy, with the main characteristic of observing social facts based on rigid and

objective methods (Durkheim, 1895/2007). Functionalist sociology imposes the adoption of a rigorous and systematic methodological posture for the elucidation of social phenomena using empirical-analytical methods practiced by scholars of the natural sciences, mainly physics and biology (Cabral, 2004). The adaptation of the positive model of the natural sciences to sociology is evident in Durkheim's work "insofar as he used an analogy to compare society to an organism, whose parts should function in harmony, showing 'objectivity' and positivist 'goodwill'" (Paes de Paula, 2015, pp. 143-144, own translation).

Interpretativism is an approach that has two more frequent epistemological variants: hermeneutics and social constructionism (Castañón, 2004; Woolfolk, 1992). According to Gergen (1985), social constructionists are concerned with apprehending the processes by which people explain, understand, and describe the world they live in, including themselves. In this way, the constructionist approach seeks to overcome the epistemological dichotomy between realism and subjectivism constructed by positivist and idealistic researchers (Brito, Silva, & Muniz, 2010; Marra & Brito, 2011). With regard to hermeneutics, according to Gadamer (1960/1997), its purpose is to search everywhere for the experience of truth, going beyond the control field of scientific methodology, and, at the same time, to inquire about its own legitimation, wherever it is found. According to Woolfolk (1992), the essence of social science lies in the comprehensive interpretative analysis of action (praxis) or human behavior, which must do more than simply map the causal relations between human actions. In this sense, meaning is not only discovered, but also negotiated between social actors and researchers in the act of interpretation (Marra & Brito, 2011).

Humanism is a subjectivist-objectivist sociological approach, in which reality is observed through human and social action, with man himself being the transformer of this reality (Paes de Paula, 2015). For humanists, the human being we study is a living entity that thinks, acts, and changes, and therefore "subjectivity and intersubjectivity are integral parts of the real and the objective with regard to people" (Lapierre, 2005, p. 110, own translation). They consider man to be a self-determined, self-conscious, autonomous subject, endowed with historicity and naturalness, who is able to reflect on his reality and make choices (Leitão & Lameira, 2005; Paes de Paula, Albuquerque, Barreto, & Klechen, 2010). From a humanistic perspective, life's questions cannot be understood through prefabricated answers, since man is not just a means to reach an objective, but also an active being who carries within himself his own purpose, not only individual, but of participation in history (Aktouf, 2001). Humanist scholars are interested in discussing the issues of humanity in multiple aspects, whether physical, moral, psychic, affective, sexual, intellectual, social, political, cultural, aesthetic, religious, professional, scientific, or economic (Bittar, 2016).

The dynamics between functionalist, interpretive, and humanistic approaches can be better observed in Figure 4.

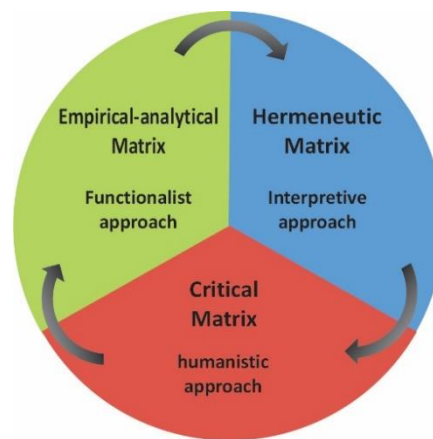


Figure 4. Dynamics of functionalist, interpretive, and humanistic approaches

Source: Paes de Paula (2015, p. 177).

According to Paes de Paula (2015), pure sociological approaches approach the boundaries of other epistemic matrices, making embryonic epistemic reconstructions that seek to overcome cognitive limitations and develop knowledge. The functionalist approach seeks to achieve practical interest, generating theories and methodologies that are on the boundary with the hermeneutic matrix. The interpretative approach, on the other hand, moves from phenomenology and linguistics towards theories and methodologies belonging to hermeneutics, and, as it approaches it, it borders the critical matrix, since it includes emancipatory interest. Lastly, the humanist approach has the challenge of transcending its theoretical limits and includes technical interest in its theories and methodologies, moving towards the boundary of the empirical-analytical matrix. For the author, the transit of these theories and methodologies can also lead to advanced epistemic reconstructions that give rise to hybrid sociological approaches.

Hybrid sociological approaches are those that have the property of transiting between epistemic matrices and combining them. This is the case of the structuralist (empirical-analytical matrix and hermeneutical matrix), the post-structuralist (hermeneutical matrix and critical matrix), and the critical realist (empirical-analytical matrix, hermeneutical matrix, and critical matrix) approaches. As shown in Figure 5, hybrid approaches are located at the intersection between pure sociological approaches.

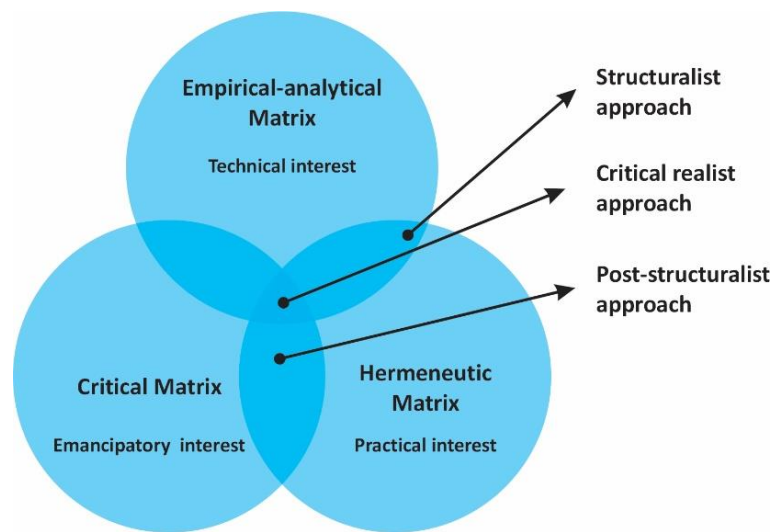


Figure 5. Hybrid sociological approaches

Source: Paes de Paula (2015, p. 178).

The structuralist approach is a theoretical construction initiated by the ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss based on field research that sought to reconcile theory with practice, distancing itself from speculative reasoning, that is, “something other than the simple description of the immediate empirical, which did not slip into daydreaming, into pure abstraction” (Thiry-Cherques, 2006, p. 140, own translation). Structuralism considers phenomena or elements with reference to a totality, that is, to the relationships of the parts in the constitution of the interdependent whole, excluding the sets whose elements are related by mere juxtaposition or those existing independently of a structure (Motta, 1970). For Thiry-Cherques, the central idea of structuralism is that the structure (set of relations) is the determinant in the explanation of the objects, distinguishing itself from historicism, logical positivism, and phenomenology, and moving away from the idea that knowledge can only be obtained through conceptual clarification. According to Paes de Paula (2015), structuralism claims scientific status for the social sciences in the midst of the expansion of subjectivist approaches in the face of the monopoly of positivist methods.

The post-structuralist approach, also discussed in the literature based on the terms “neo-structuralism” and “super-structuralism,” is a movement of complex interdisciplinary thinking that embodies different forms of practice (Peters, 2000). According to Mendes (2015), post-structuralism differs from structuralism by adopting an anti-foundationalist and deconstructionist position, besides questioning the rationalism and realism that structuralism had retaken from positivism. For this author, post-structuralists understand “the entire effort of conceptual delimitation as something always fated to incompleteness, since the search for objective interpretations only leads us to generate other interpretations” (Mendes, 2015, p. 51, own translation). Thus, “post-structuralism cannot simply be reduced to a set of shared assumptions, to a method, to a theory, or even to a school” (Peters, 2000, p. 29, own translation), since it is a web formed of different lines of thinking.

The critical realistic approach arose from a growing dissatisfaction with the limitations of the post-structuralist epistemology and social constructionism, especially with regard to the anti-realist position (Reed, 2005). Unlike other forms of naive or empirical realism, critical realists accept that there is no neutrality in observation, description, interpretation, explanation, or theorization (Fleetwood, 2005). According to Reed, all theoretical descriptions, explanations, and evaluations are based on the generation of knowledge and the diffusion of processes, which are located temporally and spatially in historical and social configurations, making them fallible and liable to contestation and review. Although critical realists claim that there is more to the world than discourse, they do not suggest that discourse is irrelevant – they just do not believe that language is accurate for describing reality (Fleetwood, 2005). Thus, critical realism is committed to a causal-explanatory mode of inference, whose objective is to explain, and not to predict, describe, or deconstruct social behavior (Reed, 2005).

Epistemology beyond paradigms

Based on the analysis of some works, it was possible to confirm that social management does not fit into the structure of mutually exclusive paradigms, and that epistemic reconstructions represent a viable alternative for the epistemological debate that goes beyond paradigmatic boundaries. Figure 6 illustrates the transit of studies in the field of social management through several sociological approaches within the circle of epistemic matrices.

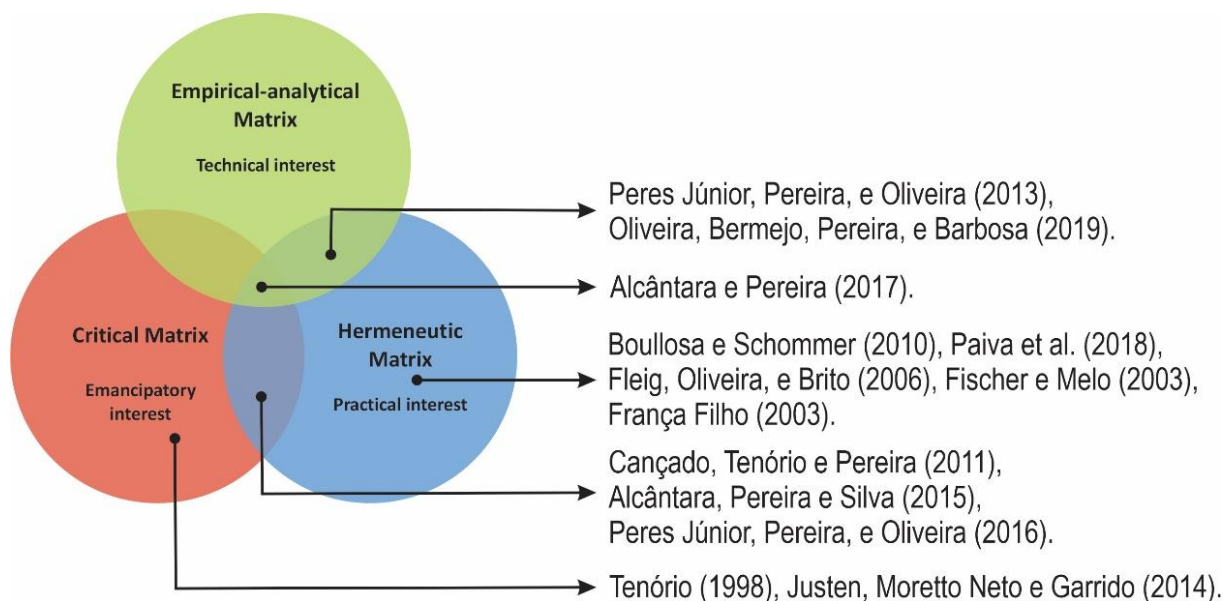


Figure 6. Distribution of studies on social management in the circle of epistemic matrices

Source: Developed by the author.

For Tenório (1998), the epistemological foundation of social management seeks to reconstruct knowledge through social production and not as a result of omniscient knowledge. For

the author, its epistemological basis must be intersubjectivity, dialogicity, and the confrontation between critical theory and traditional theory, which reveals a humanist approach (critical matrix).

Cançado et al. (2011) discuss the possibilities of the field of social management through incompleteness, dialogicity, and emancipation, in addition to framing the theoretical construction of social management as a Weberian ideal type. This reveals the transit between the hermeneutic and critical matrices, drawing closer to a post-structuralist approach (critical and hermeneutic matrices).

Boullosa and Schommer (2010) seek to analyze the nature of the concept of social management and the effective praxis of its actors in order to identify new possibilities for investigation as a field of innovative practices and knowledge. The practical interest of the study brings it closer to the interpretative approach (hermeneutic matrix).

Similarly, Paiva et al. (2018) discussed the contributions of the theories of practice to social management studies. The authors proposed an understanding of social management practices and an understanding of social management as a practice, that is, as an activity shared by the subjects involved (practitioners), which articulates different practices and praxis (reflective activity). This approach conducted under practical philosophy has greater proximity to the hermeneutic matrix.

Fleig, Oliveira, and Brito (2006) also used the interpretative approach (hermeneutic matrix) as a theoretical-methodological perspective when discussing the management of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the perspective of social movements and their role in consolidating democracy.

Peres Júnior, Pereira, and Oliveira (2013) proposed to indicate a new theoretical path for the analysis of social management based on Anthony Giddens's structuration theory, configuring a structuralist approach (empirical-analytical and hermeneutic matrices). However, in a later study, Peres Júnior, Pereira, and Oliveira (2016) sought to demonstrate the applicability of Giddens's double hermeneutics aligned with the second epistemological rupture from the science of Boaventura de Sousa Santos in the research on social management. Through empirical evidence, the authors sought to contribute to the deepening of debates on the relationships between scientific knowledge and common sense, mainly showing the emancipatory aspect that the phenomenon involves, which demonstrates the alignment with the post-structuralist approach (critical and hermeneutic matrices).

Oliveira, Bermejo, Pereira, and Barbosa (2019) tested the sentiment analysis method applied to social management through data mining on social media about topics related to public administration. The data analysis was conducted based on natural language processing in order to generate knowledge that would enable the incorporation of the opinion of civil society in political decisions of the State. The way in which the authors conducted the research based on technical and practical interests reveals an approximation with the structuralist approach (empirical-analytical and hermeneutic matrices).

Fischer and Melo (2003) provided a reflection on interorganizations oriented toward social development, aiming to contribute to the formulation of guidelines and programs for the qualification of social managers, characterizing a study with an interpretative approach (hermeneutic matrix).

França Filho (2003) provides a reflection on the idea of social management with the aim of suggesting a definition that is able to encompass the diversity of practices that can be grouped around this notion, thus also constituting an interpretative approach (hermeneutic matrix).

Justen et al. (2014) provide an epistemological reflection in order to contribute to social management not falling into the pathology of double consciousness idealized by Du Bois, that is, a form of management that is credited as normatively emancipatory, but that represents, in the materiality of life, in a contradictory manner, the continuity of an oppressive social reality. This reveals a humanist approach (critical matrix).

Alcântara et al. (2015) performed theoretical-conceptual approximations and delimitations between social management and public governance seeking in Alberto Guerreiro Ramos's sociological reduction a critical filter that would allow for the theoretical-conceptual articulation without transposing or distorting these concepts – which have different epistemological matrices. The way in which these themes were treated in the study reveals a critical and interpretive humanistic approach (critical and hermeneutical matrices).

Alcântara and Pereira (2017) sought to advance in the socio-epistemological construction of social management by proposing an analysis of the interrelations and tensions between world-of-life and system in the light of Jürgen Habermas. The authors propose that the *locus* of social management should be understood based on the intersubjective processes between the world-of-life and the system, as a way to overcome the dichotomous understanding that epistemologically and socially situates management at exclusionary poles, seeking more coherent, critical-reflexive, and fallible diagnostics of the instrumental and emancipatory forces present in everyday life that are intersubjectively shared. This reveals an approximation with the critical realistic approach (empirical-analytical, hermeneutic, and critical matrices). In addition, the authors themselves recognize that understanding the *locus* of social management requires epistemic reconstructions and articulations between cognitive interests, which is not possible through incommensurable paradigms.

Based on this brief analysis, it was possible to see that the epistemological debate in the field of social management passes through several sociological approaches, especially in the hermeneutic and critical matrices, indicating that the researchers are guided mainly by practical and emancipatory interests. These studies focus as much on pure sociological approaches (humanistic and interpretive) as hybrid ones (structuralist and post-structuralist), which are advanced epistemic reconstructions that definitely do not fit within the paradigmatic boundaries.

Final considerations

The objective of this theoretical essay was to propose a new path for the epistemological debate in the field of social management that goes beyond the paradigmatic boundaries. For this purpose, a counterpoint was presented between models based on the thesis of incommensurability by Thomas Kuhn – such as the diagram of the sociological paradigms of Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan – and an alternative proposed by Paes de Paula (2015, 2016) to break with the paradigmatic mentality: the circle of epistemic matrices.

The study demonstrated that, as occurs in the field of public administration, several authors face difficulties and uncertainties in framing social management within the paradigmatic logic, which reinforces the idea that this logic is not suitable for organizational studies. Specifically in the field of social management, models based on incommensurable paradigms are not adequate to legitimize its epistemic positions due to the complexity, plurality, and hybridism of their praxiological and epistemological dimensions. This was confirmed through the identification of multiple sociological approaches adopted in field studies.

In this sense, the circle of epistemic matrices proved to be more appropriate, because instead of imposing the choice of a static quadrant, the circle is an open and dynamic proposal that allows a dialogue between different sociological approaches, enabling transit between epistemic matrices. It is a new theory of knowledge development that replaces incommensurability with cognitive incompleteness and scientific revolutions with epistemic reconstructions, allowing for the creation of hybrid sociological approaches that can overcome that incompleteness. In this way, the circle breaks away from the paradigmatic mentality inspired by the thesis of Kuhnian incommensurability. It is worth noting that the circle of epistemic matrices does not eliminate the conflicts between groups that are guided by different approaches, but its way of seeing the world can mitigate clashes influenced by the political nature of intellectual activity. This is fundamental to the development of new ways of doing science. The difference between the two proposals is that while the paradigmatic model is static, monological, exclusive, and emphasizes divergences, the circle of epistemic matrices is dynamic, dialogical, inclusive, and emphasizes convergences.

It is important to highlight that the diagram of sociological paradigms of Burrell and Morgan was very significant, in the sense of legitimizing other ways of seeing the world besides functionalism. However, breaking away from the paradigmatic mentality is essential for the advancement of organizational studies. This is why researchers in the field must propose new ways of building bridges between approaches to and visions of the object of research, especially organizations and society.

Finally, it is unequivocal to affirm that a complex and comprehensive field such as social management does not fit into impenetrable boundaries of immeasurable paradigms. Considering that social management researchers have been confronting mainstream skeptics for decades, perhaps the time has come to abandon their epistemological patterns, otherwise everyone will have to continue submitting, as Cançado et al. (2015) would say, to “The Bed of Procrustes”³.

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Notes

1. In his book *Studying Society: Sociological Theories and Research Practices*, Jones (1993) discussed several sociological theories and approaches, such as structural-consensus theory, structural-conflict theory, action theory, feminist theories, interpretative sociology, structuralism, post-structuralism, modernism, post-modernism, as well as dedicating three chapters to the thoughts of Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, respectively.
2. In Jones' (1993) book, the word "paradigm" appears only in a small section entitled "The Anti-Positivism of T. S. Kuhn," on pages 156-158.
3. In mythology, it is said that, after inviting travelers who traveled the paths of ancient Greece to spend the night at his home, the robber Procrustes seduced them with a warm welcome. After they were overcome by tiredness, he forced his victims to lie down on an iron bed and cut off their feet when they exceeded the size of that bed, and stretched them with ropes when they did not reach the size. His objective was for them to be the exact measure of his bed (Lastres, Arroio, & Lemos, 2003).

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The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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