Editorial

Scientific Articles' Theoretical, Practical, Methodological, and Didactic Contributions

Contribuições Teóricas, Práticas, Metodológicas e Didáticas em Artigos Científicos

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■ **ABSTRACT**

The issue of how to use scientific articles to contribute to a field of knowledge and the possible types of contributions is crucial and needs further discussion. I am writing this piece with two objectives. The first one is to introduce a classification of the types of contributions (theoretical, practical, methodological, and didactic) from scientific research published in the form of scientific articles. The second is to present the articles' format for each type of contribution, using *RAC*'s typology as a reference. In the final considerations, I point out that most articles rejected at desk review (even some good ones) is due to lack of adequacy to the journal's expectations regarding contribution to the field, the format of the article, focus, and scope.

Keywords: theoretical contribution; practical contribution; methodological contribution; didactic contribution; scientific article.

■ **RESUMO**

Um tema importante que ainda carece de mais discussões é sobre como oferecer uma contribuição por meio de um artigo científico e quais são os tipos de contribuições possíveis. Eu tenho dois objetivos neste texto. O primeiro é apresentar uma classificação dos tipos de contribuições (teóricas, práticas, metodológicas e didáticas) resultantes de pesquisas científicas que podem ser publicadas no formato de artigos científicos. O segundo objetivo é apresentar os formatos dos artigos para cada tipo de contribuição tomando como referência a tipologia adotada pela *RAC*. Eu concluo dizendo que a maioria dos artigos rejeitados em *desk-review* (mesmo bons artigos) falha por falta de adequação ao que o periódico espera em termos de contribuição, formato de artigo, foco e escopo.

Palavras-chave: contribuição teórica; contribuição prática; contribuição metodológica; contribuição didática; artigo científico.

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WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM A SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE?

The main element that any scientific article must present and develop is its contribution to a field of knowledge (Bergh, 2003; Rynes, 2002). Readers must be clearly informed about the article's original contribution to the scientific community and, in some cases, contribution to society as a whole. Authors may pursue such originality by asking themselves:

. What is new or different about my article from others already published?

. What can people learn from this article that they did not know before?

. What theoretical, practical, methodological, or didactic advances does my article present?

. Why should people invest their time in reading my article?

Contributions can be modest or sophisticated. In general, sophisticated contributions are more likely to be published in prestigious journals – it is noteworthy that journals are usually clear about the types of contributions they are interested in publishing. Therefore, being published requires more than submitting quality scientific research. It is crucial to offer a contribution aligned with the journal's focus and scope.

The *Journal of Contemporary Administration – RAC* seeks to publish different types of scientific articles to offer multiple contributions to the field of administration. This strategy aims to rigorously and densely segment the possible scientific contributions based on the type of article published. I organized the types of possible scientific contributions into four groups: theoretical, practical, methodological, and didactic. My objectives with this editorial are, first, to introduce a classification of the types of contributions offered by scientific research published in the format of scientific articles. The second objective is to present the format of articles for each type of contribution, using *RAC*'s typology as a reference (theoretical-empirical article, theoretical essay, provocations, technological article, executive letter, methodological article, and teaching cases).

Recognizing that contributions from scientific research can be presented in different formats of articles helps to consider different writing styles for different contributions, reaching various readers. Figuring out how to connect with potential readers is one of the biggest challenges for authors, and the writing style plays a crucial role in overcoming this challenge (Gilmore et al., 2019). Writing a scientific article goes beyond specific knowledge; it requires proper communication with the target audience (Aitchison & Lee, 2006).

A CLASSIFICATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ARTICLES

Recognizing that scientific research can contribute to a field of knowledge in multiple ways helps the processes of planning and organizing these studies, and disseminating their findings. An article is only one of the forms of disseminating science aimed at academics. Scientific contributions can be expressed and communicated through other formats such as documentaries, social media, training, courses, lectures, classes, opinion articles published in the mainstream media, business magazines, theater, and music. It is essential to understand that scientific contributions can be presented in other formats (Walker et al., 2008), perceiving the limitations of scientific articles as a space for dissemination and comprehension of how research may be communicated and used in broader contexts. I classify the many possibilities of the contribution of scientific research in the form of an article into four groups: theoretical contributions, practical contributions, methodological contributions, and didactic contributions.

Theoretical contributions focus on presenting new concepts and theories or reviewing, expanding, and refuting existing theories (Bispo, 2022; Cunliffe, 2022; Faria, 2023; Swedberg, 2014). Theoretical contributions can arise from reflections and elaborations from existing theories (also called meta-theories) or analyses and reflections based on empirical data. **An important observation about theoretical contributions is that they are not limited to a compilation of existing theories or the mere description of empirical phenomena**. It is necessary to present something theoretically different, an endeavor carried out and presented in multiple ways (see Cunliffe, 2022; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021). In general, the leading international journals in administration are looking to publish theoretical contributions, assuming that theory is responsible for improving both research and practice (Bispo, 2021; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017; Swedberg, 2014).

On the other hand, practical contributions seek to offer solutions to concrete problems. However, it is common to observe two misconceptions in this type of contribution. The first is to understand that the mere replication of widely known models and scales – even when adopted in a specific context or type of organization – is not enough to characterize a practical contribution to be published in the format of a scientific article. The second is to believe that theoretical-methodological rigor can be relaxed because the contribution is oriented toward a practical question.

Practical contributions must come from rigorous scientific research (Motta, 2022). The difference between a theoretical and a practical contribution is not in the research process but in the end contribution. While scientific research offers theoretical contributions toward theoretical advances, the research offering practical contributions aims at presenting new technologies for new complex practical problems or problems not yet solved or partially solved. Therefore, good scientific research is the source of theoretical and practical contributions. These types of contributions do not oppose. They present different focuses on the relationship of symbiosis (Bispo, 2021). In some cases, practical contributions can also come from personal experiences that help identify practical problems or provide clues to how to solve them through science.

Methodological contributions seek to offer new – or adapt existing – research techniques or scientific methods, obtaining new methodological perspectives. The scientific methodology works as a map that guides the research steps toward achieving giving objectives. Therefore, methodological contributions should help researchers to find increasingly consistent ways to improve scientific research.

Didactic contributions are less discussed and considered in scientific articles in general. However, they have a high potential to improve the training of both researchers and managers. Didactic contributions are oriented to teaching and learning processes, helping to advance scientific knowledge and prepare scholars and practitioners based on a reliable and robust scientific base. For example, articles focusing on teaching (tutoring) researchers in complex and little-explored techniques or methods in a given area show a combination of methodological and didactic contributions. Didactic contributions through articles are a way of structuring knowledge capable of improving the quality of training and avoiding mimicry without an adequate theoretical basis.

It is crucial to observe that the same research may offer all types of contributions mentioned above. However, authors must be aware of the journals' requirements regarding the size of the articles and the publication's focus and scope. Understanding these limits is essential to organize and write the article consistently and with the right density.

CONTRIBUTIONS, FORMAT OF THE ARTICLE, AND WRITING STYLES

I am calling 'article' all scientific writing published in a scientific journal. An article can assume different types of structure and writing styles according to the contribution it seeks to offer. At *RAC*, we adopt a classification of scientific articles into theoretical-empirical articles, theoretical essays, technological articles, methodological articles, and teaching cases. In addition, some specific contributions are designated provocations and executive letters.

The theoretical-methodological article is structured on the combination of theoretical influences and empirical evidence. At *RAC*, this type of article is focused on texts that offer consistent theoretical contributions. The submissions must go beyond the presentation of a valid statistical model in the case of quantitative research or detailed empirical descriptions in the case of qualitative research. The journal expects authors to present theoretical novelties through new concepts, new theories, the refutation of a theory, or the relevant increment in existing theory. Theorizations about empirical evidence that can dialogue by approximating or distancing existing theories are also welcome.

In a theoretical essay, authors offer a theoretical construction based on existing literature, combining it with their own experiences and perspectives. As in the theoretical-empirical article, the expected contribution is also theoretical. This essay cannot be confused with a literature review in which the text looks more like a summary of what has already been produced on a given topic. In theoretical essays, authorship is essential (Faria, 2023). It is necessary to identify the author's original theoretical contribution in the text, and their stance on the subject addressed. The essays do not have a specific writing style, so authors are free to express their assumptions in their own way (Meneghetti, 2011).

The technological article offers practical contributions (Motta, 2022). This type of article has to present consistent theoretical and methodological elements to support its practical contribution. It cannot be reduced to the application of a widely recognized model to solve a trivial organizational problem and has to present a scientifically supported technology to address complex problems. A good technological article describes the case studied, the theories used, the methodological process used, and the results of the technology developed. Unlike the theoretical-empirical article, which at the end of the text seeks to develop the theoretical contribution, the technological article presents practical contributions arising from the research process and how it can be extended, concretely, to other organizational realities.

In the methodological article, there are two possible contributions. A methodological contribution offers researchers new techniques or methods (or improving existing ones) to enhance the scientific research process. The author is expected to justify the need to create or improve the technique or method, explain the philosophical-theoretical assumptions supporting the proposal, justify the proposal per se, and provide examples of the techniques or methods discussed, illustrating their operation and potential. The second contribution of a methodological article is presented

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using a 'tutorial' style. It is a didactic contribution of how researchers can understand the use of a certain technique or method that is little known or used in a certain field. This type of article needs to show the relevance of the technique or method and develop a didactic explanation of how researchers can use the content. As observed in the case of the methodological contribution, the didactic contribution requires the author to offer examples of how the technique or method works.

The teaching case is a type of article that offers a didactic contribution. In the case of *RAC*, this article needs a scientific basis to provide credibility to the teaching proposals designed based on the case. The teaching cases seek to contribute to the training of managers and researchers through concrete experiences raising dilemmas around solutions for problems found in the real world (Alberton & Silva, 2018).

As for provocations, they consist of articles written to stimulate a call to practice, whether academic or non-academic. In the academic context, the provocations are practical and, when published, may inspire future studies with theoretical, practical, methodological, or didactic contributions. These are texts written by experienced scholars who can launch new debates or revisit unresolved debates within the academic community.

The executive letter has a similar function to that of the provocation. However, it starts from an eminently organizational provocation so academics can guide their research toward the practical problems the letter raises. It is a provocation toward practical contributions that emerged from scientific research since they are written by authors who occupy or have occupied leadership positions in organizations and have some affinity or knowledge about academia. The executive letter is a type of article that calls for an expansion of the dialogue between academia, the market, and society in general.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our contribution to scientific research must be well understood and clearly written in a scientific article. Any contribution an author wants to offer (theoretical, practical, methodological, or didactic) must be demonstrated rigorously and densely. As all contributions presented in this editorial are derived from scientific research, the basic criteria for good research must be found in all types of articles. The elements differentiating the articles are the contribution type and the writing style that best suits such contribution. An important point that few authors consider when writing an article is knowing what types of contributions and articles the journals are willing to publish. *RAC* has a broader scope in this sense, open to publishing different types of contributions and accepting various writing styles, but this is not a reality for most journals in the field of administration.

Likewise, although journals may accept different types of contributions and articles, it is essential to keep the publications' focus and scope in mind. These limits guide which themes and debates the journal is willing to address and offer contributions. Therefore, submitting an article to a journal involves a combination of types of contributions and articles accepted for publication, combined with the journal's focus and scope. When one of the two conditions is not satisfied, the article will likely be rejected in the desk review phase. In *RAC* specifically, most rejections in desk review happen because:

- theoretical-empirical articles do not offer a consistent theoretical contribution;

- technological articles not aligned with the journal's focus and scope or do not present practical contributions in the parameters presented in this editorial;

- the teaching cases do not address themes aligned with the journal's focus and scope or do not offer sufficient didactic contribution.

I hope this text will be a didactic and practical contribution for authors who still seek to understand the dynamics of publication in leading scientific journals in general, as well as those who specifically intend to submit their contributions to *RAC*.

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The author have stated that there is no conflict of interest.

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