

Pop-Management: 15 Years Later – the incorporation of pop-management in the work of executives of big companies

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Abstract

This article analyzes how corporative executives construct their arguments to justify incorporating elements of pop-management literature into their work. To reach our goal, we review the literature on pop-management and criticism directed at this phenomenon. Regarding the procedures, we interviewed 12 executives using argumentative analyses. Our analyses recognized four argumentative lines used by the interviewees: (1) Pop-management is a tool to support decision making; (2) Pop-management offers practical guidelines to achieve results; (3) Pop-management is a tool to disseminate knowledge for the relationship networks; (4) Pop-management is a source for personal improvement. Our findings point to directions on how executives incorporate the knowledge obtained from pop-management literature into their activities as well as the implications in these processes. Managers and executives might use the contributions of this study in their decision making on the use of pop-management literature in their work.

Keywords: Pop-management literature. Executive work. Argumentative analysis.

Pop-Management: 15 anos depois – a incorporação do pop-management no trabalho de executivos de grandes empresas

Resumo

Análise sobre a forma como os executivos de alto escalão de grandes empresas nacionais e estrangeiras atuantes no Brasil, de setores variados, constroem seus argumentos para justificar a incorporação de elementos da literatura de *pop-management* no seu trabalho. Para alcançar nosso objetivo, revisamos a literatura sobre o *pop-management* e as críticas dirigidas a esse fenômeno. Quanto aos procedimentos de pesquisa, realizamos entrevistas com 12 executivos e empregamos a análise argumentativa. Nossa análise identificou quatro linhas argumentativas: (1) O *pop-management* é um mecanismo de apoio à tomada de decisão; (2) O *pop-management* fornece orientações práticas sobre como alcançar resultados; (3) O *pop-management* é uma ferramenta para disseminar conhecimentos às redes de relacionamento; (4) O *pop-management* é uma fonte para aprimoramento pessoal. Nossos achados oferecem pistas sobre como os executivos incorporam o conhecimento veiculado na literatura *pop-management* na realização de suas atividades, bem como sobre suas implicações. Com base nessas informações, gestores e executivos podem tomar decisões a respeito da utilização dessa literatura no seu trabalho.

Palavras-chave: Literatura *pop-management*. Trabalho executivo. Autoajuda de negócios. Análise argumentativa.

Pop-Management: 15 años después – la incorporación del pop-management al trabajo de ejecutivos de grandes empresas

Resumen

Considerando las organizaciones como espacios de creación y reproducción simbólica, en esta investigación establecemos el objetivo de analizar de qué forma los ejecutivos de grandes empresas construyen sus argumentos para justificar la incorporación, a su trabajo, de elementos de la literatura sobre *pop-management*. Para alcanzar nuestro objetivo, revisamos la literatura sobre el *pop-management* y las críticas dirigidas a ese fenómeno. En relación con los procedimientos de investigación, realizamos entrevistas con 12 ejecutivos y utilizamos el análisis argumentativo. Nuestro análisis identificó cuatro líneas de argumentación: (1) el *pop-management* es un mecanismo de apoyo a la toma de decisiones; (2) el *pop-management* provee orientaciones prácticas sobre cómo lograr resultados; (3) el *pop-management* es una herramienta para diseminar el conocimiento en redes de trabajo (4) el *pop-management* es una fuente de crecimiento personal. Nuestros resultados ofrecen pistas sobre cómo los ejecutivos incorporan el conocimiento difundido en la literatura *pop-management* a sus actividades; así como sobre sus implicaciones. Con base en estos resultados, gestores y ejecutivos pueden tomar decisiones con respecto a la utilización de esta literatura en su trabajo.

Palabras clave: Literatura *pop-management*. Trabajo ejecutivo. Análisis argumentativo.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 1980s, there has been an increase in the interest in knowledge about management in the western world (FURUSTEN, 1999) and about managers training (LUCENA, CENTURIÓN and VALADÃO, 2014; PEREIRA et al., 2015), that was followed by the popularization of managerial literature. In Brazil, during the 1990s, the search for books related to business increased in bookstores, a phenomenon that allows the propagation of the theme among executives and other professionals, such as professors who work with subjects related to business (PAULA and WOOD JUNIOR, 2003). This phenomenon reached an importance where contemporary society began to intensely consume pop-management literature, as named by Wood Junior and Paula (2002a, 2002b), which leads to question its consequences (CLARCK and GREATBATCH, 2004).

In the early 2000s, this theme was researched by Wood Junior and Paula (2001), when organizations acted in a different social context from the current one, especially considering resources provided on the Internet and informational technologies. In this context, where technological communication resources provide different ways of generating and disseminating content, it is possible that the pop-management literature has influenced the public more comprehensively, considering the emergence of the phenomenon of social media and the potentialities of personal websites, blogs.

Although the ideas described by popular management books are constantly criticized, considering their content and congruence, the pop-management literature has had several bestsellers (PAULA and WOOD JUNIOR, 2003). This literature is characterized by self-help style, a form of literature that is known as self-knowledge and seen as an attempt to overcome problems since it is focused on emotional questions and dilemmas of management professionals. This kind of literature, oriented to business, grew by 700% between the 1990s and the 2000s (PICANÇO, 2013). In 2014, in Brazil, the 20 best seller fiction books related to business reached about 1,8 million copies, of which 422 thousand were pop-management literature (PUBLISHNEWS, 2015). On the one hand, 30 years ago it was a modest niche in the market, on the other hand, now it is a more complex business that has specialized publishers and companies focused on corporate events, accelerating the growth of an entire consulting area (PAULA and WOOD JUNIOR, 2003). Therefore, it is literature designed to be objective and immediately understandable, generating maximum impact and mass appeal (CLARCK and GREATBATCH, 2004).

In the daily context of executives, it is common to note competitiveness and conflict situations, as well as the burden of the individual responsibility for the organization's results. These executives are subject to continuous pressure from both their superiors and subordinates, dealing with internal contradictions, conflicts, and anguishes when trying to reach the balance between adapting to the context in which they are inserted and their aspirations of freedom, autonomy, and recognition (SARRIERA and SILVA, 2003). To face these challenges, executives search for advice disseminated in management gurus' literature, contributing to expanding the management industry (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2001).

Considering the visibility of the pop-management literature and its impact on executives' activities (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2001), and based on the understanding that executives incorporate pop-management literature into their activities, we resume, in this paper, the research carried out by Wood Junior and Paula (2001). As a starting point, we have the following research question: how do executives of big companies construct their arguments to justify the incorporation of pop-management literature elements into their work? Based on this question, we established that the general objective of this research is the analysis of how executives from big companies construct their arguments to justify the incorporation of pop-management literature elements into their work. To achieve this goal the research adopted a qualitative approach, carrying out semi-structured interviews with 12 executives that were analyzed using the argumentative analysis technique (LIAKOPOULOS, 2004).

After this introduction, we will present a review of pop-management literature. Then, we will describe the procedures of the research followed by the results and final considerations, presenting the contributions of the research and suggestions for future studies.

POP-MANAGEMENT LITERATURE: PHENOMENON AND CRITICISMS

The work of executives increasingly became an object of interest to theorists and practitioners, in the early twentieth century. The pioneers of this field were the engineers Frederick Taylor and Henry Fayol, who dedicated to studying industrial organizations, whether considering the analysis of work in factories or technical functions. Since then, several studies have been developed to describe and analyze managerial work (BARNARD, 1971; FOLLET, 1997; MINTZBERG, 1986). Mintzberg (1986), one of the pioneers on the approach of managerial activity roles, studied the work of executives and contrasted myths (what business executives intend to do) with the reality, that is, how they use their time in daily work. The author deconstructs, some myths: 1) the executives make complex and reflective plans before acting; 2) they do not work in routine activities; 3) all their decisions are rational and based on concrete indicators.

Later, Mintzberg (2010) updated the research resuming his description of facts and myths. According to the author, the managerial work did not face significant changes, even with the use of technologies such as the Internet, since even email seems to reinforce the traditional characteristics of the work. Considering the ten managerial roles as a starting point (MINTZBERG, 1986), the author proposed a general management model, considering an integrated analysis of management roles in management competencies.

The interest for managerial work extends to pop-management literature, as called by Wood Junior and Paula (2002a, 2002b), which is a phenomenon that influences management practice and, therefore, has implications for the understanding of what and how executives work considering the performance of their tasks. This literature embraces magazines and quick-consuming books produced by business media. In general, this genre has both an emotional and a technical appeal, since it combines the concepts of self-help and management and, therefore, it seems to relieve the psychological tensions of people as well as using it as a guide to decision-making in the business field. Dealing with the difficulty of the modern person to face the paradigms of their day to day, self-help books involve a unique reality and seem to reproduce the reader's daily life, making everything look easy when actually, it is difficult for the majority (BERTUOLO, 2011).

The self-help movement had its first relevant recognition with the publication of the book *Self-help*, in 1859, written by the English political reformer Samuel Smiles (SINEMMA, 2008). Throughout history, the topics discussed by the self-help literature changed. The context changed from the individual and their duties, considering the moral and the character in daily work, to a type of self-actualizing person, which refers to an individual who lives in a group, cares about their spirituality, is responsible for their own path and impacts the reality in which they are inserted (RÜDIGER, 1996).

Contemporary culture has become a business culture (DEEKS, 1993). The management started to shape our social and cultural experience, progressively invading the fields of science and technology, art and literature (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2006). This concept differs from the definition of organizational culture since the culture of management permeates all organizations and consolidates through consumer objects such as books, magazines and other objects related to this field (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2006). There are also many businesses in public organizations, private institutions, third sector organizations, consulting, universities, colleges, training centers, lectures, congresses, travel, software, and hotels (COSTA, BARROS and SARAIVA, 2014).

The business world has been shaping our social and cultural experience progressively, and management is integrated into social life so closely that it may no longer be possible to think about management and society as separate entities (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2002a, 2002b). Since administration refers, simultaneously to the application of techniques, commercialization of products, exploration of knowledge and defense of ideologies, Costa, Barros and Saraiva (2014) argue that the construction and consolidating of management as a real industry is a remarkable phenomenon.

The books and magazines that compose the popular business literature that we will call “pop-management literature” in this paper, constitute mechanisms of management culture. This literature values the managerial figure through managerial discourses that have “[...] the prerogative of the market view, the obscuring of the ideological differences, the non-separation between public and private life” (ITUASSU and TONELLI, 2014, p. 198) and it aims to produce and reproduce ideologies that defend practices related to managerial interests.

The growth of this kind of literature attracted the attention of critics such as Wood Junior and Paula (2002a, 2002b), who state it as one of the pillars of the emerging industry: “[...] an emerging and successful industry, consolidated on four interrelated and mutually reinforcing pillars: (a) business schools, (b) consulting companies, c) business gurus and (d) business media” (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2002a, p.1).

Pop-management literature is used as a practical guide, a manual, orientation on how to act in society. According to the professional point of view, nowadays we have to deal with the high speed of daily life, therefore there is no time to waste building an identity, so buying advice on how to remain in the market appeals to and is assurance of a successful future (OLTRAMARI, FRIEDERICHES and GRZYBOVSKI, 2014).

By studying the theme, Furusten (1999) argues that many popular management books are developed considering standardization of concepts, models, and methods of work sold by the consulting companies. The author understands that there is a clear predomination of American concepts and standards about management in the content of popular management books. The texts present indirect utilization of similar structures used in child fables and fairy tales. Thus, this kind of literature follow sequential and predictable models: in the prologue, the challenge; in the development of the book, the fight for survival; then, the magical solution; in the epilogue, the success reached and the redemption (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2002a). As a result, pop-management books have been characterized as fairy tales for adults that help to promote sharing of the power fantasy and, therefore, reinforce the management process of the passions and subjectivity in organizations (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2002a, 2002b).

The authors of this type of book address several problems and indicate simple solutions using symbolical constructions, creating the impression that, using narrative and discursive resources that are similar to the reader’s reality, the comprehension of the question and the decision-making process become easier (CARVALHO, CARVALHO and BEZERRA, 2010). The consolidated characteristics of this genre are: mix of conceptions about personal power, spiritual and religious orientation, psychological orientation and techniques for behavior modification (RUDIGER, 1996), as well as stimulating the reader to act, suggesting that they feel as they own that content, that they are a coauthor (BERTUOLO, 2011), and go directly to the action, since this kind of literature has practical and prescriptive characteristics.

Through the standardization of simple concepts, models and tools, the books have an imperative tone, and they disseminate pasteurized notions about administrative methods in ideological and prescriptive language (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2006; CARVALHO, CARVALHO and BEZERRA, 2010) to achieve success in the corporate world. The self-help discourse also emphasizes that it is the responsibility of each individual to create goals and objectives to be achieved since the management of oneself is their responsibility (GAULEJAC, 2007). By stating that the individual is responsible for managing their own life, pop-management manipulates the idea that the work alone is the way through which the individual can contribute to humanity (GRAEBIN, 2013).

There are a lot of criticisms and questions directed to this literature, such as Wood Junior’s (2003) texts. The author uses funny articles describing the backstage of the management industry, its gurus, and all the performative resources that constitute the spectacular staging of corporate life. Also criticizing, Micklethwait and Wolldrigde (1998) review texts about the industry of organizational theory and warn of the implications of the indistinct use of managerial trends propagated by an industry. Similarly, Carvalho, Carvalho and Bezerra (2010) reinforce their concern about the contamination of Undergraduate Schools of Administration, in Brazil, by pop-management literature, pondering the consequences of this literature in the education of executives and managers.

Analyzing the management industry in general, Costa, Barros and Saraiva (2014) critically reflect that the Administration is engaged, and it is necessary to problematize the understanding of an area that responds unthinkingly to the concepts of corporate “trend”, such as re-engineering, which was seen as a real “business fever” and destroyed thousands of jobs, based on the assumption of mandatory innovation. The authors understand that this problematization can implicate questions about the reasons for choosing certain ideas instead of others, the reasons for naturally reproducing historically constructed concepts and what leads individuals to have hegemonic discourses.

Considering the international context, in the late 1990s, when bestsellers spread in the area, pop-management literature started to interest several authors (HUCZYNSKI, 1993; KIESER, 1997; MICKLETHWAIT and WOOLDRIGE, 1998; GOLDMAN, 2012). Kieser (1997) discusses the implications of managerial trends disseminated by best sellers on the relationship

between theory and practice, arguing that the rhetoric is the main topic of managerial trends and it is, therefore, generally used to explain them.

Taking into account Brazilian gurus, specifically, Cooke, Macao and Wood Junior (2013) have identified that they differ in their practices from their international peers. This differentiation is evidenced, especially, by the congruence with the national culture and by its specific soft-HRM orientation (human resources management softly applied). Clark and Greatbatch (2004) conducted an international study focused on the process in which six works considered as best sellers in the area of management were produced. They conclude that pop-management literature has the same characteristics, that is, it is concrete, immediately understandable and, most importantly it must generate the maximum impact and mass appeal.

In Brazil, after Wood Junior and Paula (2002a, 2002b, 2008) and Paula and Wood Junior's (2009) researches, several authors studied pop-management, analyzing business media. Among them, Carvalho, Carvalho and Bezerra (2010) studied the differences of significant perception between pop-management literature, esoteric and self-help books. Costa, Barros and Martins (2012) investigated business magazines. They highlighted that the discourses of the business media generate impacts to the labor relations since they consider the search for professional triumph as something that moulds the human behavior in the world of work. Chacon and Magan (2007) examined the concept of leadership in James Hunter's book *The Monk and the Executive*, concluding that the book propagates alienation and massification as a guiding technique for leaders, pulverizing the problematic and obscuring the possibilities of social emancipation. The same work was researched by Germano and Sá (2013) who analyzed what they call a pastoral-managerial discourse. Oltramari, Friderichs and Grzybovski (2014) conducted a study of the discourse, published in the May 2011 edition of *Você S/A* magazine, objectifying to understand, on a verbal and non-verbal level, how the managerial model is presented, associating the relationship between career and family. Ituassu and Tonelli (2014) studied the discourses about success included in the *Exame* magazine, between 1971 and 1998, evidencing the process of diffusion of the management culture. Moura (2014) did a semantic analysis of the definitions of the organization identified in bibliographic research considering the best-selling books of *Introduction to Administrative Theories* used in the biggest and best Brazilian institutions of higher education.

In general, considering the results of the investigations, we note that in their critical analyses the authors agree that pop-management literature generates perspectives that simplify complex concepts and reinforce individualism, conducting the reader to behave as a perfect worker and considering them responsible for their success as well as that of the company. Among the authors, there is agreement that it is alienating literature, which presents the often erroneous idea that everything will end well and therefore suggests prudence in its use.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The study analyzed how the executives of big companies build their arguments to justify the incorporation of elements of the pop-management literature in their work. The approach adopted was the qualitative research using semi-structured interviews (FLICK, 2009), since it is possible to collect relevant descriptions of the social world based on the inputs from the subjects (DENZIN and LINCOLN, 2006).

For the delimitation of the number of interviews, we used the criterion of "exhaustion" or "saturation," a form of selection validation that is intentionally determined and used in qualitative research (THIERY-CHERQUES, 2009). According to this criterion, the researcher performs enough interviews to allow some repetitions of the information, guaranteeing a maximum of diversification and comprehensiveness for the reconstitution of the analyzed object, thus verifying the formation of a whole (TRIVIÑOS, 2008). According to Thiery-Cherques (2009), in management research, saturation occurs when the equivalent of a third of the interviews or observations do not add new elements. This information justifies the recommendation to perform at least 06 interviews or observations and at most 12.

Between June and December 2016, we interviewed 12 senior executives managing business units. We selected executives of national or multinational companies from the following sectors of the industry: financial, wholesale, industrial, and services since these are considered motors of the economy, they employ large numbers of people, they present command and

hierarchy, to which it is possible to apply pop-management literature. Considering the accessibility and representativeness, the selected interviewees work in companies located in the cities of São Paulo (SP), Belo Horizonte (MG), Fortaleza (CE), Mexico City (Mexico), New York (United States) and Uberlândia (MG).

Box 1 shows a summary of the profile of the interviewees. Fictitious names were attributed to each interviewee:

Box 1

Interviewee profile and interview data

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Function	Interview Time	Industry Sector
JUPITER	M	38	Director of Operations	48 min	Service
NEPTUNE	M	40	Senior manager	32 min	Service
MINERVA	M	45	Commercial Superintendent	45 min	Service
PHOEBUS	M	45	Director	By e-mail	Service
MERCURY	M	41	Director	By e-mail	Pharmaceutical Industry
JUNO	M	42	President	26 min	Chemical Industry
CERES	M	48	Director	By e-mail	Manufacturing Industry
DIANA	F	40	Director	By e-mail	Food Industry
VENUS	M	52	CEO	38 min	Wholesale
VULCANO	M	58	President	25 min	Financial Industry
MARS	M	30	Senior manager	45 min	Financial Industry
BACCHUS	M	52	Commercial Superintendent	39 min	Financial Industry

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Of the interviewees, five were directors, one director-president, two were presidents, two were senior managers, and two were commercial superintendents. Four interviewees worked in the service sector, one of them in the chemical industry, three in the financial institutions, one in the food industry, one in the manufacturing industry, one in the pharmaceutical industry and one in the wholesale industry. The interviewees' ages ranged from 30 to 58 years old, the interviews lasted from 25 to 48 minutes, totaling 103 pages when transcribed. The duration of each interview was according to the availability of the interviewee, observing it was enough time to cover the items considered relevant for the research. Some interviews were conducted without the presence of the researcher, by email, and their answers totaled 15 pages. The first interview happened in May 2016 and the last in November 2016. For the interviews via email, the date was considered the date of response.

After the transcription of the interviews, we started the phase of empirical material analysis, adopting argumentative analysis as recommended by Liakopoulos (2004). According to the author, the argumentative analysis is used to investigate the argument in the age of mass media and advertising that involves diversity and quantity of actors. In this research, we applied argumentative analysis to investigate how respondents justify the incorporation of knowledge linked to pop-management literature in their work.

The argumentative analysis aims to evaluate the robustness of the statements and to document how they are structured within a discursive text. Argumentation is understood as an activity composed by many statements with the purpose of justifying or refuting an opinion, in order to persuade an audience and it can be constructed in the form of debates between people or within a text (PINTO 1998; LIAKOPOULOS, 2004). In this article, we consider the interviewees' arguments to justify the use of pop-management literature elements into their work. The transcript of the interviewees' dialogues resulted in texts which were then analyzed.

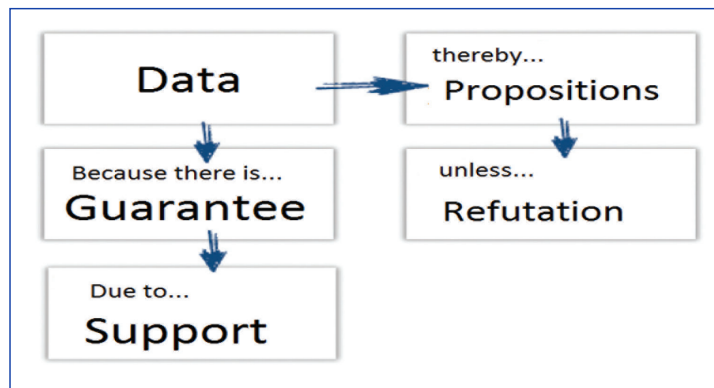
For the operationalization of the analysis, we applied the five steps suggested by Liakopoulos (2004): (1) selection of parts of the responses of executives interviewed that are significant for incorporating their points of view; (2) synthesizing the main points of the narratives; (3) identification of the parts of the argument; (4) to do the comparison of the parts of the argument in a schematic table; (5) presentation of our interpretation considering the overall context.

Considering the parts of the argument, Liakopoulos (2004) highlights five topics to be considered in the analysis: (a) data: facts or evidence that are available to interviewees, which may refer to past events or to present situation, action or opinion, articulating with the information that is related to the central proposition of the argument; (b) propositions: statements that respondents present as a result of an argument supported by facts. Considering this element, we focus on the central propositions that are part of the structure of the executives’ argument; (c) guarantees premises consisting of reasons, authorizations, and rules used to argue that the data are legitimately used to support the proposition. We understand guarantees as the logical step that results in the conclusion of the interviewees’ argument; (d) support: premises that are used to ensure the acceptability and authenticity of the reason; (e) refutations: these do not necessarily exist in every process of argumentation, since they demonstrate the exception of the rule, which is affirmed in the argument, or the conditions that demonstrate that the argument has no legitimation.

A graphical representation of the argument structure is presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1

Structure of the Argument



Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Liakopoulos (2004).

Pinto (1998) observes that the process of argumentative analysis includes the following moments: the exposition of the author’s solution; the identification of the main heuristic techniques used; the recognition of the main argumentative schemes used to justify specific points of the presented solution, which are the argumentative tactics; and the analysis of the general points of the argument applied to expose and justify the solution found, which are the argumentative strategies. According to the author, these moments are independent and can occur interactively, that is, they do not follow a specific schematic order. With the support of the summary tables (Figure 2) we identified the parts of the argument – D - data, P - propositions, G - guarantees, A - support, and R - refutations – for each one of the arguments of each interviewee.

Figure 2

Summary-sheet used for analysis

	PARTS OF THE ARGUMENT				
	D	P	G	A	R
Argument 1					
Argument 2					
Argument 3					

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Liakopoulos (2004).

RESULTS

During the interviews, we observed that the argumentative construction of the interviewees to justify the incorporation of pop-management literature elements in their work could be consolidated into four topics of argumentation. They are: (1) Pop-management literature is a mechanism to support decision-making; (2) Pop-management literature provides a practical orientation of how to achieve results; (3) Pop-management literature is a tool to disseminate knowledge throughout networks; and (4) Pop-management literature is a source for personal development. We will discuss these four topics below.

(1) Pop-management literature is a mechanism to support decision-making

The findings for this topic are similar to what is observed in the literature. In the literature on the conceptions and nature of executive work, Mintzberg (1986, 2010) presented the facts and myths of managerial work, revealing the management's daily routine. Leite and Paiva (2009) observed in their research, reports of executives who expressed their daily search for information and effort to monitoring goals, results, and pre-established performance indicators, as well as mobilizing teams. These elements were corroborated in our study since the interviewees expressed these concerns and displaying the monitored indicators around the workplace, to better visualize them.

We identified that the executives interviewed understood that they should look for constant updating by reading the most relevant newspapers, reading and answering emails, and internal messages. Many of them expressed concern to be informed about world events in many areas: economic, political, and corporation. They understood that to be a good leader, it is necessary to be a person of reference, which means being aware of the events and have the ability to project future trends based on this information.

During the interviews, it was clear that, as affirmed by Wood Junior and Paula (2006), management culture permeates organizations and this was observed in the workplaces which had many objects related to this culture such as books and magazines. The interviewees showed and mentioned to have books, magazines, and other elements of management culture. They quoted moments from their lives in which they read them or mentioned lectures and gurus they knew. However, they recognized that despite the availability of these elements and culture that permeate the work environment, they choose whether to use them, and this decision is linked to the necessity of each person and the specific moment of their life.

Pop-management seems to be part of the executive's daily routine; however, they use it in specific situations related to factors (readings, previous experiences, current situation) that help in decision-making. The arguments of the interviewees contradict the idea that this literature alone is the key to success regarding entering and staying in the labor market as mentioned by Oltramari, Friederichs and Grzybovski (2014).

The findings confirm Demo's (2005) statement that self-help may create a dependency, which is a recipe that disturbs the individual's autonomy. Therefore, our corpus of research seemed to corroborate the idea that pop-management literature should be used carefully and with parsimony, and it may or may not be relevant to the decision-making process.

(2) Pop-management literature provides a practical orientation of how to achieve results

As for this argumentative topic, the interviews revealed statements corroborating the studies by Chies and Marcon (2008), who argue that the pop-management literature is characterized by the intention to offer quick and easy solutions. The interviewees also validate Germano and Sá (2013) when mentioned to use this type of literature as a way to unify understanding and simplify the language, sharing materials such as articles, book excerpts, and lectures as a way to transmit to their teams the means to achieve the expected results. According to the interviewees, when it is necessary to mobilize big teams, symbolic constructions can be useful as they facilitate public understanding. This is also the opinion of Carvalho, Carvalho and Bezerra (2010), who understand that authors of pop-management literature approach substantial problems and indicate simple solutions through symbolic constructions. This creates the impression that understanding the reality and decision-making are easy tasks.

Wood Junior and Paula (2002a, 2002b) understood that executives could be pressured to apply this type of literature when they feel outdated about the market when compared to their peers. According to our research – conducted fifteen years after Wood Junior and Paula’s studies – the interviewees considered that the books published nowadays, considering the speed in the knowledge production, may be already outdated or present obvious content (a contemporaneous aspect that challenges Wood Junior and Paula’s suggestions). Therefore, all respondents indicated other ways to keep up to date with business news, for example, reading articles and papers from renowned universities. This indicates that interviewees seek in science and the academy the solutions that were before provided by pop-management books.

It is possible to observe paradoxes in the speech of the executives interviewed. On the one hand, they understand that pop-management literature can help them, and therefore their arguments are according to the studies of Clarck and Greatbatch (2004), who found that pop-management literature is created to be concrete, immediately understandable and made to have maximum impact and mass appeal. On the other hand, they point out the uncritical use of books, corroborating scholars such as Wood Junior and Paula (2002a).

Chacon and Magan (2007) question about the fact that leaders know that by using pop-management literature (the authors emphasize the book *The Monk and the Executive*) they become part of a massification engine to keep the status quo. In this research, we noted that executives understand a certain utility in pop-management and they admit that this should not be the only guide for decision-making in organizations, since corporate decisions have a wide range, impacting on society.

(3) Pop-management literature is a tool to disseminate knowledge throughout networks

The interviewees indicated that they attribute responsibility to their development and the management of their lives, ratifying Graebin (2013) about the positioning of pop-management literature. According to the author, in this literature, the individual is committed to managing their life, which can transmit, in a manipulative way, the idea that only through work are they able to contribute to humanity. In our research, we have observed executives who claim to believe that they can offer contributions to humanity through their work and personal relationships that they create in corporate environments. Executives interviewed expressed concern about leaving a legacy, in other words, a contribution to those around them. We propose here a reflection: would pop-management literature have influenced these executives in this kind of thought at any moment of their lives?

Many of the respondents (10) reported recent or old cases of feeling pressure to consume pop-management literature by their companies and colleagues, which is also mentioned by Wood Junior and Paula (2002a, 2002b). Some of the interviewees (6) said they had already influenced entire teams to read books and apply the content to their organizational activities. There were several (12) arguments about the benefits of such use. Interviewee Diana, for example, reported the successful use of the book *The Five Dysfunctions of Team* when applied to the process of identity building and consolidation of the alignment between the high leadership of the family business that she managed. On the other hand, another (8) interviewees did not believe that the simple reading of the books can promote individual behavior changes and they understand that the lived experiences can offer the maturity and the understanding of the situations. This idea is similar to the critics Micklethwait and Woldrigde (1998), who alerted to the implications of the indistinct use of managerial trends.

Crosby (1991) argues that a manager is a person with a strategic role, that is, they have the capacity to understand the present and to visualize the future. Thus they allow the participation and understanding of the other team members and engage them in the goals and results that must be achieved. In the interviews, we observed that this is how the executive self identifies and because of that they feel pressured to disseminate their knowledge throughout their networks.

(4) Pop-management literature is a source for personal development

Interviewee Minerva argues that he felt excited to be attending a lecture by the author of the book she is currently reading. Interviewee Jupiter felt embarrassed but joyful when he mentioned that he asked for an autograph from an author he considers relevant. These arguments related to personal development and attitude corroborate the literature. Costa, Barros, and Martins (2012) affirmed that business media discourses generate impacts on labor relations by objectifying the search for professional triumph as the drive of the behavior in the world of work. Thus, the interviewees agreed that reading books, attending lectures, and knowing success cases result in personal improvement. When they attend a lecture or meet the author of the book they are currently reading, executives are looking for their development and professional triumph. When these executives mention gurus' books as a reference, they indicate that popular business media contributes to the creation and constant modification of a symbolic reality, and it plays a relevant role in the "dramatization" or "theatricalization" of business reality by providing (limited) alternatives to the scenes, roles, scripts, and characters (WOOD JUNIOR and PAULA, 2006). This dramatization is often understood by the executives and, therefore, they act like actors who know the text and know how to use it. A world of saviors and heroes is constructed where executives are the leading actors.

During the interviews, many books were cited by executives as a support resource for decision-making processes. Some of the books cited are not necessarily classified as pop-management literature, such as biographies. We realized that executives demonstrated, considering both books and gurus cited spontaneously, that they are somehow part of their professional history and experience. We identified arguments that reinforce the fourth argumentative topic, whose central idea involves the interviewees' belief about the necessity to be close to the guru in order to influence the decision-making process.

When analyzing the interviewees' statements to identify their arguments for incorporating pop-management literature into the executive work, we saw criticisms and skepticism from 8 interviewees about this phenomenon, which we interpreted as a research finding that is also relevant, even though it was not our goal. Gurus and pop-management literature are not the only influencers of executives nor the main ones. Analyzing the responses of all interviewees, we realized that they are influenced by people from their own lives, such as family members and current or former leaders. Executives are inspired by people from their daily life, not just gurus, because they cited their parents, grandparents, and leaders as examples of references that they identify as informal mentors. This statement is supported by the premise that it is necessary to live and develop relationships with those who influence them. The executives cited the companies' founders where they work and, in most cases, people present in their daily life and that directly influence the direction of the organizations.

Executives believe that gurus are practical and clear. This idea ratifies the concept that pop-management literature has practical mechanisms that offer simple solutions for complex problems, as approached by Carvalho, Carvalho and Bezerra (2010), who indicate that this type of literature can facilitate understanding and decision-making by using narrative resources that approximate to the reader's daily life.

Clarck and Salaman (1998) question the managers' passivity assumptions when directing the ideas in a single way (from the guru to the manager) and also the dependence on an academic concept of knowledge. To explain the success of the theories disseminated by gurus, the authors suggest that their work - analyses, theories, and presentations - offers attractive conceptions of the role of the managers, constituting the modern identity of the senior manager as a heroic-transforming leader. The interviews confirm these statements since managers know and admire certain gurus. However, all respondents showed that they are more influenced by people that live with them than by renowned gurus.

The criticisms directed to pop-management literature by the interviewees refer to the questions of McGovern (1997) and Clark and Salaman (1996) about the validity and value of gurus' theories for the business world. According to these authors, the popularity of gurus should be recognized by the content in their theories, not by their style or externalities, such as a favorable context to their success in the corporate environment.

Huczynski (1993), Goldman (2012) and Jackson (2001) approach the gurus and managerial trends as well as discussing the fascination that gurus generate, dictating opinions about how companies should be managed. Therefore we present a counterpoint: Are parents, grandparents and former managers the real gurus of the interviewees? Many phrases were quoted

as mantras to be followed that did not come from books or lectures, but from simple conversations in which there were affection and closeness. We consider this a contribution of this paper, and we propose a reflection: who are the real gurus that influence the decision makers?

CONCLUSIONS

This research was conducted based on the following guiding question: how do executives of big companies construct their arguments to justify the incorporation of pop-management literature elements into their daily work?

During the studies and analyses, we worked to contribute to Organizational Studies complementing previous researches related to the influence of this theme on the performance and training of the executives. We also tried to fill the gap indicated by Paula and Wood Junior (2003), analyzing the demand side by listening to the readers of pop-management literature and also observing, through the users, the impact that this literature implicates on the individual and the organization.

This question guided us about the establishment of the general objective: the analysis of how executives from big companies construct their arguments to justify the incorporation of pop-management literature elements into their work. Also, we noted the construction of executives' arguments about how they make decisions and how they support them. Moreover, we were able to consolidate their justifications for the incorporation of pop-management literature elements in their work in four argumentative topics: (1) Pop-management literature is a mechanism to support decision-making; (2) Pop-management literature provides practical orientation of how to achieve results; (3) Pop-management literature is a tool to disseminate knowledge throughout networks; and (4) Pop-management literature is a source for personal development.

During the research, we met executives looking for guidance on how to proceed - some to define the strategy; others, to establish the tactics of their companies' performance - using pop-management literature or other (as they also cited other famous types of books as well as newspapers and magazines), and success cases, including consultancies and gurus. We have identified that this was a thoughtful search for support. Executives argue that they recognize the positive and negative aspects of pop-management literature, so they know how to use it wisely. Regarding this, we admit that the interviewees understand that magic solutions do not exist and that they need to relate several factors to the decision-making, thus forming the professional experience, cited as the real referential of all our interviewees. The fact that they indicate that pop-management literature cannot be used without criticism may be an effect of the contemporary context, that it permeated by the easy access of academic content through the social media, due to the online social networks that enable to question the truth.

While the interviewees showed continuous concern with their development and improvement, we also noted that there is a sense of personal responsibility that requires these executives to dedicate to their teams and commit to the development of the people under their management. Analyzing their arguments, we have been able to expand our point of view of the mechanisms that influence the interviewees. We were surprised that, even in a cold and competitive environment, such as corporations, executives seek inspiration from ordinary people, who are in their daily life, applying their examples and actions in their workday.

This article contributes to Organizational Studies by introducing the reader's (the executives) point of view, providing more clarity on the reasons why managers would be interested in reading pop-management literature. In addition, we offer a review of the available bibliography about the work of the executive and the pop-management literature, consolidating and organizing the studies done so far, which may contribute to future studies on the subject. We also believe that by using argumentative analysis as a method, we are contributing to a new vision and form of interpretation for organizational studies, since it is not yet widely applied.

Regarding the practical contribution, we concentrated the attention on an alternative view of readers of pop-management literature, presenting to future readers the vision and interpretations of executives about the stories present in this literature. Based on managers' arguments, potential readers will be able to make decisions about the use or not of this literature in their work.

We identified as limitations of our research: 1) we did not have access to all executives initially contacted. And even considering that the number of interviews is adequate to the criterion of saturation, we understand that the imbalance between the number of men and women interviewed can lead to deviation in the conclusions; 2) we intentionally delineated some market segments to choose the companies, whose executives would be contacted for the interview in this work. It is not possible to

guarantee that the arguments are similar across all segments, so the findings are not fit to be generalized for segments not yet researched; 3) it is important to emphasize that the results translate our interpretations and, therefore, other interpretations can lead to different results.

It is noteworthy that the title of this article refers to research conducted in the early 2000s by Wood Junior and Paula, who used the term pop management. However, the discussion presented here is based on a different context, 15 years later. Today, organizations act in the context of online social networks and the generation and dissemination of contents are facilitated, as well as it is the popularization of this type of literature.

We tried to fill the gap left by Paula and Wood Junior (2003) by looking at the demand, listening to the readers of pop-management literature and analyzing the impact that this literature has on the individual and the organization. As a contribution, we analyzed how executives incorporate this literature into their work.

Both contributions and limitations of this research may stimulate further research. Suggestions for future studies would be analyzing the arguments of individual entrepreneurs and liberal professionals; analyzing the gurus' discourses cited in this research in order to identify argumentative topics; analyzing researchers, comparing the arguments according to the gender of respondents, considering our difficulty to find female respondents (or other gender categories) that work in leadership positions, which may indicate other issues that may influence the use pop-management literature. We also suggest research on social networks and their potential for the generation and dissemination of pop-management literature, as well as academic content, and on the influence of the Internet on executives' behavior.

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