

Decision-making processes in organizational arrangements: An analysis in the light of population ecology and resource dependence

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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, in contemporary organizations, discussions about decision-making have been occupying a relevant space, because the "decision maker" has the responsibility of making decisions for the organization, considering that the entire environment is transformed through decisions within the perspective of a theory: when in the light of population ecology, the organization adapts to the environment and when in the light of the theory of resource dependence, The organization prioritizes cooperative relations. This article, through a narrative bibliographic review, brings contributions to the theories of resource dependence and population ecology in the decision-making processes in the organizational arrangements, through an objective theoretical framework, which allows the reflection on decision-making processes, their relationship with organizational arrangements and theories, their interface with the most diverse areas, as well as their applicability in organizations.

Keywords: Decision-making processes, Behavioral economics, Population ecology, Resource dependence.

1 INTRODUCTION

Competitiveness among companies has grown over the last few years, motivated by technological advances and changes in the relationship between people and work. For this reason, there is a constant search for differentiation and improvement of methods, tools, and techniques, to improve the performance of companies and increase their competitive advantages (BARROS, 2010). One of the strategies adopted to achieve this improvement is the strengthening of inter-organizational relations, that is, the creation of ties through a network of partnerships between companies, the government, cooperatives, universities, and other stakeholders. This theme is often found in the literature as Organizational Arrangements (GONÇALVES; CANDIDE, 2015).

It can be stated that the construction of Organizational Arrangements takes place from a social, cultural, political, or social base that is common. For Lastres and Cassiolato (2005), in any environment in which there is the provision of service or generation of products, there is a possibility of the formation of an Organizational Arrangement, but it must be considered that in friendly environments

– that is, more open to the generation of partnerships, in which there are exchanges of trust and availability to cooperation, these formats are more viable. Organizational Arrangements are a phenomenon that is formed from the cooperation between agents, being a very common model today. Due to its relevance to improving competitiveness and increasing strategic advantages, this topic is the object of study of Management. As it is a construction made between organizations, this theme has an interface with decision-making processes – a theme explored by Behavioral Economics since the early 1970s.

Considering the studies on the subject, this article will focus on "Population Ecology" and "Resource Dependence", themes that are strongly related to decision-making processes, especially concerning the role of the decision-maker. The Dependence on Resources is premised on the thought that the decisions made within an organization always consider the conditions of the environment in which they are inserted so that the good management of external relations is essential for the survival of the company, which is influenced by external forces. In decision-making processes, there is a specific focus on the way decisions are made within organizations and yours with the environment in which they are inserted. In this perspective, the management of external relations and decisions about it are central points for the company to survive in this environment (ALDRICH; PFEFFER, 1976).

Population Ecology, in turn, studies the relationships that surround organizations to understand why they are often so similar to each other. Since organizations are always changing and adapting to the environment, studies in this branch try to explain how the institutional environment modulates the decisions made in each one. Adaptation is a key concept for this analysis of decision-making processes in light of population ecology. Organizations are affected by the environment from the way managers create strategies, face problems and make decisions, causing the company to adapt to the context and needs, through these decisions (DIMAGGIO & POWELL, 1983; HANNAN; Freeman, 2005).

Judgment and decision-making are themes that correlate with several areas, and are therefore the object of study of the social sciences, psychology, management, economics, among many others (Kahnemann, 2011) and, considering its interaction with organizational arrangements, this article brings the following research question: how are decision-making processes approached in the light of theories of resource dependence and population ecology?

Thus, this article aimed to show how the theories of resource dependence and population ecology can explain the decision-making processes in organizations. In addition, it was intended to respond to the following specific objectives: to present a panoramic view of the aforementioned theories of organizational arrangements, as well as to bring an exposition on the decision-making processes in organizations; contextualize the theme of population ecology and resource dependence, correlating it to decision-making processes and contribute with ideas for future research.

The study is divided into three sections. In addition to this introduction, a brief theoretical framework on decision-making processes in organizational arrangements is presented, as well as decision-making processes in the light of population ecology and decision-making processes in the light of the theory of resource dependence. The following are the final considerations.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1 DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN ORGANIZATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Organizations are becoming more and more important in modern society. If on the one hand, they are complex due to their particularities and specific rites, on the other hand, they have their purposes, resources, and power. Work, education, recreation, and leisure – intrinsic aspects of the daily life of society, are largely influenced by modern organizations (KNIGHT; MCDANIEL, 1979).

Organizations seek to achieve their goals – and most of the time they comprise increasing their profit, surviving in the market, increasing their number of customers, and dominating a niche. Regardless of what these objectives are, it is possible to make two statements: these organizations will depend on others for this and there will be a series of decision-making processes involved (AUSTIN-EGOLE; IHERIOHANMA; NWOKORIE, 2020).

When it comes to relationships, organizational arrangements play a prominent role, since they deal with the ability to regulate complex transactional interdependence and cooperative interdependence between companies when creating networks. By exercising this function of mediating and adjusting these relations, arrangements become increasingly important in the economy (GRANDORI; SODA, 1995). Networks between companies are also very relevant from a theoretical point of view and have a vast literature about them. They can be studied from different disciplinary approaches, thus offering precious grounds of common interest and potential dialogue between the various branches of the social sciences (GRANDORI; SODA, 1995).

Looking inside the organizational arrangements, it is possible to perceive the presence of the decision-making processes there. According to Kajamaa and Laukkanen (2022), organizational arrangements are a fertile environment for progress and innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic was a good example of this: with it came the need to review protocols, change policies, and establish requirements for training in various areas. The need for change made the relationships between companies stronger and there was an exchange of knowledge between them – organizational arrangements played an important role in this environment. However, this context of challenge also made it clear that there is still a complex network of few professionals with specific knowledge and diverse power relations within the arrangements, which are the origin and end of a series of decision-making processes (KAJAMAA; LAUKKANEN, 2022).

Each organizational arrangement has its own rules and rites, being influenced by the people who are inserted there, by the current regulations, and by the *decision-makers*, among other factors. The organizational arrangement is seen as an ally to increase performance levels and improve the achievement of goals, but each of them connects distinctly with efficiency and innovation (KAJAMAA; LAUKKANEN, 2022).

If organizational arrangements are often seen as facilitating the success of organizations, effective management of them necessarily involves decision-making processes. Judgment and decision-making are themes that correlate with several areas and are therefore the object of study of the social sciences, psychology, management, and economics, among many others. The stages of decision-making processes and *the types of decisions, as well as the characteristics of decision-makers*, have been studied by several authors since the 1970s. The theme remains current and its relevance in organizational arrangements is due to the complexity of the decisions made in this environment and the influence of organizational arrangements throughout society (ARIELY; JONES, 2008; BALES, 1950; CYERT et al, 1963; MARCH; SIMON, 1993; TVERSKY; KAHNEMAN, 1974; KAHNEMAN et al, 1982, 2011, 2022; SIMON, 1947, 1957; SIMON et al, 1984).

In recent decades theorists and researchers have increasingly given attention to issues related to the decision-making process, mainly because this is a fundamental aspect of leadership, thus being very relevant for effective administrative and organizational performance. According to Sbicca (2014), Simon presents a vast academic production in which he proposed a theory of economic decision around the concept of bounded rationality. And the identification of complex means and cognitive limits led him to sustain the frequent use of heuristics by humans (TVERSKY; KAHNEMAN, 1974).

Simon maintains that in most organizations there is a distinction between the types of aggregate decisions that are adopted at higher hierarchical levels and the day-to-day decisions that are made at lower hierarchical levels. The author identified a polarized typology of decisions: programmed decisions and unprogrammed decisions. Simon (1965) also states that this typology aligns with highly programmed decisions, on the one hand, and unprogrammed ones, on the other. For the author, programmed decisions are routine, having already developed procedures and rules for their execution, while unprogrammed decisions are poorly structured, full of unpredictability, relevant and complex so that there is no predetermined method to deal with them or execute them.

Simon (1984) presents the concept of bounded rationality admitting that, to deal with complex situations, the decision maker must build a simplified model for each situation. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) exploring Simon's studies of bounded rationality did not limit themselves to merely observing that we make decisions based on non-optimal strategies. The authors drew attention to the frequency

with which we use mental shortcuts (heuristics), which often result in unwanted biases limiting and may even distort our ability to make rational decisions.

Simon (1957) established the concept of rational behavior as being individual and a function of psychological properties, including understanding, thinking, and learning. Thus, we can consider that it contradicts the normative theory, which advocates approaches in search of a specific ideal solution for each decision problem.

Theorists and researchers such as Mullainathan and Thaler (2000); Thaler and Sunstein (2008); Ariele and Jones (2008); Kahneman (2011) have already recognized the complexities that exist between the various models and ideas about decision-making, especially in terms of human vulnerability to error, when deciding a superficial, intuitive and biased information processing. From the observations of the experiments of Tversky and Kahneman during the 1970s, the authors sought to conceptualize types of effects that influence decisions and specify various heuristics used by human beings - elements that subsidized their criticism of the descriptive role of the Theory of Expected Utility (TUE). The research of these authors was forming a theoretical framework that in 1979 wrote *Prospect Theory: an analysis of Decision under risk*, one of the most cited articles in the journal *Econometrica* (CAMERER; LOEWENSTEIN, 2004).

Decision-making processes are a key point of the analysis of organizational arrangements. Different theories of Organizational Arrangements analyze decisions in different ways: if in some there is greater recognition of the hierarchy, in which the manager is the decision maker who controls and determines the paths from the top – as is the case of Population Ecology – in others there is a greater consideration of the environment, that is, decisions are made inside and outside the arrangements, relating strongly to the environment – as is the case with Resource Dependence. With this in mind, this article considers these two theories to explain the decision-making processes in organizational arrangements (ROSSETO; ROSSETO, 2005).

2.2 RESOURCE DEPENDENCY

According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), TDR was developed to direct attention back to the social context of organizations to explain behavior and develop an analysis of organizations that began from the premise that organizations were real and had an existence and purpose beyond serving as scenarios. This theory also highlights how organizations remain autonomous even with the adversities that arise over time, as they can control and manage the environment according to their priorities.

Broadly speaking, this theory has the following central premise: every company depends on two types of resources: those it controls and those it does not control. Without one of them, it is not operationally viable. These resources can be labor, raw materials, and knowledge. The resources it

controls allow for comfort because it has a low risk of threatening production. Resources that it does not control, on the other hand, increase its risk. To mitigate this risk, the company must try to reduce its dependence on the companies that have these resources, and this reduction is carried out through agreements, partnerships, contracts, and collaboration between companies (ROSSATO; ROSSATO, 2005).

The Theory of Resource Dependence is considered in all asymmetric organizational arrangements, whether bureaucratic or social. Such arrangements in the bureaucratic network are the arrangements that are not balanced and in the social network, they present non-formal contracts, where the relationship always has "one who holds the power".

Concerning political action, the Theory of Resource Dependence has as a practice lobbying, organized and exercised within the law and ethics and to be heard by the public power to inform it and obtain from it measures, decisions, and attitudes. This theory is constantly present in the competition for all the resources that act as the lifeline for an organization. Researchers Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) tell us that the division of power between different organizations can be labeled as "those who have power" and those who do not. In this way, the managers of such organizations compete with competitors and suppliers for superiority in the global economic food chain and survival favors those who can control essential resources and maintain positive exchange relations.

2.3 POPULATION ECOLOGY

And Population Ecology is a topic of the Organizational Sciences that is in vogue – largely due to the growing relevance of this current since the publication of Hannan and Freeman's seminal paper in 1977. According to Pfeffer (1993), this theory has a characteristic of "paradigmatic consensus", while the other disciplines of organizational studies seem to fragment and feed counterpoints.

Organizations develop a series of strategies to strengthen themselves in the environment and maintain their survival – and these phenomena are studied by Population Ecology. The findings of Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (2000), show that the survival of an organization that has adapted to the context depends on the nature of the environment and the competition in that environment. According to the authors, applying the concept of selection, the environment selects the organizations, generating the evolution of some and the death of others.

3 METHODOLOGY

This is a bibliographic research, in which the *online* databases, Scielo, Google Scholar, and Scopus were used. Initially, a search was conducted on the production of knowledge regarding Population Ecology and Resource Dependence, aiming to identify how they approach the Decision-

Making Processes, referred to in national and international journals, through the literature review on the subject.

At first, the titles and abstracts were considered for the selection of the works of interest, being used the full texts of the articles that had as keywords "'population ecology' AND 'decision-making processes'"; OR "'resource dependence' AND 'decision-making processes'".

Thus, qualitative research was carried out, of the narrative review type with the use of scientific articles with a time-lapse from 2000 to 2022. The narrative review was chosen due to its breadth and suitability to describe and discuss the development of a given subject. It has as its main characteristic the selection of articles arbitrarily, subject to selection bias (CORDEIRO, 2007).

4 RESULTS

4.1 DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN ORGANIZATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS EXPLAINED BY RESOURCE DEPENDENCE

The Theory of Resource Dependence (TDR) is a phenomenon that considers that organizational relationships are a key factor for the functioning of a company. The importance of this theory was documented during the 1970s when authors Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik published *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*, which deals with the origin of power and dependence and how organizations can use their power and manage those who depend on them.

Regarding the decision-making processes, for the authors, the Theory of Resource Dependence defends the idea that decisions are made within the external and internal context of organizations, to relate to the conditions of the environment where they are inserted, as well as examines the relationship between organizations and the resources they need to operate. An example of this power relation is that whenever a resource considered relevant is replaced, this relationship of dependence weakens and with it, the power relation is extinguished. The same occurs when groups and individuals with varying interests and preferences do not establish patterns of interaction and do not engage in exchanges. Such a phenomenon affects the organization, as there is no clear power relationship. When it comes to who is in control, an organization should focus on whether or not the feature in question has been monopolized by a single manufacturer. Economic uncertainty decreases when there are more acquisition options available, as opposed to a single entity controlling a resource that is not immediately abundant. For the resources that an organization does not control, that is, it does not have, the company must try to reduce its "dependence" on the companies that have these resources, and this reduction is carried out from agreements/contracts of cooperation/collaboration between companies (ALDRICH; PFEFFER, 1976).

For decision-making, the top management of a company considers its values and premises. Thus, when the interests of organizations are not considered in decision-making, consequently there is no clear understanding of such organizations, which hinders all actions that manage the dependencies and interdependencies of such organizations. According to this perspective, decisions are made within organizations, considering all their context and particularities, and relate to the environment in which they are inserted. Thus, the management of external relations is a central point for the company to survive in this environment, since it is strongly impacted by this context and the relationships formed there (ALDRICH; PFEFFER, 1976; PFEFFER; Salancik, 1978).

Another important aspect that correlates the Theory of Resource Dependence with decision-making processes is how these relations with the environment take place: the organization has an active role in its interactions with the environment, and can even manipulate it to its advantage. Instead of assuming a passive role in their relationship with the environment and other organizations, universities, and government, among others, they make strategic decisions to adapt to the environment (ALDRICH; PFEFFER, 1976; PFEFFER; Salancik, 1978).

For the organization to lead its interactions with the environment, being, therefore, an agent in this relationship, human actors – decision makers in organizations – have a central role in this theory: environmental conditions, the social, economic, and political context, are interpreted and analyzed by them. Different actors can perceive the same scenario in different ways so that each organization can position itself differently, even if both are subjected to the same environment.

On this theme, Starbuck (1971), brings the following point of attention, corroborated by Rocha, Moura, and Reis (2012): at certain times, the perceptions of decision-makers are, effectively, different from the objective reality of the indicators. The subject interprets the environment also bringing their baggage and their particularities, which can bring a bias to the interpretation of the situation. Therefore, the decision maker must have team support and theoretical basis, as well as technical knowledge, so that his interpretation of the scenario is as reliable as possible to the facts and data present. Table 1 presents a consolidated summary of the main explanations of the decision-making processes, in light of Resource Dependence:

Table 1 – Decision-making processes explained by Resource Dependence

Decision-making processes explained by Resource Dependence		
Theme	Brief explanation	Author
Interaction with the environment	Decisions are made within the external and internal context of organizations to relate to the conditions of the environment where they are inserted.	Aldrich e Pfeffer (1976)
Interaction with the environment	Decisions are made within organizations, considering all their context and particularities, and relate to the environment in which they are inserted.	Aldrich e Pfeffer (1976); Pepper e Salancick (1978)
Role of the decision maker	At certain times, the perceptions of the decision-makers are effectively different from the objective reality of the indicators.	Starbuck (1971) Rocha, Moura and Reis (2012)

Source: prepared by the authors, from Aldrich and Pfeffer (1976); Pfeffer and Salancick (1978) and Starbuck (1971), Rocha, Moura and Reis (2012).

The central aspect of the decision-making model analyzed from the perspective of Resource Dependence is that organizations are active to manipulate and influence their environment and, in this way, the decision-maker has an important role. This autonomy and protagonism, as well as the interpretation of the decision maker, are the justification for why there are differences between organizations, even if they are subject to the same means. On another front, organizations can incorporate uncertainty through mergers of organizations (PFEFFER, 1972b), partially through cooperation (Pfeffer, 1972a), or through the movement of personnel between organizations (PFEFFER; Leblebici, 1973; ALDRICH; PFEFFER, 1976; FROOMAN, 1999).

4.2 DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN ORGANIZATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS EXPLAINED BY POPULATION ECOLOGY

The literature on management in Population Ecology focuses on the perspective of adaptation – also predominant in the studies on decision-making processes March and Simon (1958). According to Hannan and Freeman (2005), scholars of this theory report that there is a hierarchy in which leaders determine the decisions that will be followed by the other levels. In this way, organizations are affected by the environment from the way managers create strategies, face problems and make decisions, making the company adapt to the context and present needs.

Following this logic, for Hannan and Freeman (1989), the role of the leader is limited by the following factors: the organizational form, which delimits his action and guides individual behavior; the scarcity of resources; competitions both between and within organizations; the limitations to rationality. Thus, as much as the leader is the decision maker who will unfold to the other levels, his role is impacted by a series of variables – internal and external – that place him as a representative subject to the context. Cunha (1999) points out that literature often excessively empties the role of the

leader in Population Ecology, since he is, yes, restricted by the context, but his actions are not determined by the context.

On the other hand, it is important to consider the limitations that influence the adaptation of companies, a point explored by Bernardo, Foresto and Ribeiro (2017). For Burns and Stalker (1961), structural inertia is the result of internal and external pressures and makes it difficult for an organization to adapt, among them the challenges that a company encounters by investing in a certain sector, for example, which force it to stay in a certain project or diversify its activities. The greater these pressures, the less flexibility companies have, making the selection logic more appropriate for this context.

In decision-making processes, it is important to consider both internal and external pressures. Looking inside organizations, the authors show that decision-makers don't always have access to all information. Often, details about processes, activities and details of the units are unknown to managers, causing them to distance themselves from the "optimal decision", a concept explored by Simon (1957), that is, that decision in which there is a considerable minimization of the effects of limited rationality.

Already perceiving organizations externally, Hannan and Freeman (2005) emphasize that it is important to consider legislation – a determining factor to moderate decision-making processes. Political agreements and regulations prevent companies from shutting down their activities in certain branches, for example, thus limiting their ability to adapt and the autonomy of the decision-maker.

Another relevant external pressure is collective rationality: "It is difficult to establish that a strategy that is rational for a single decision-making is also rational when adopted for a large number of decisions" (HANNAN; Freeman, 2005, p.72). Table 2 presents a consolidated summary of the main explanations about the decision-making processes, in the light of Population Ecology:

Table 2 – Decision-making processes explained by Population Ecology

Decision-making processes explained by Population Ecology		
Theme	Brief explanation	Author
Role of the decision maker	Organizations are affected by the environment from the way managers create strategies, face problems and make decisions, making the company adapt to the context and needs present.	Hannan e Freeman (1989) Cunha (1999)
Role of the decision maker	The decision-makers are the protagonists of the process, but their autonomy is restricted by the internal and external pressures to which the organization is subjected.	Hannan e Freeman (2005)
Influence of the Internal environment on Decisions	Internally, decision-makers don't always have access to all the information to make the "optimal decision." Often, details about processes, activities and details of the units are unknown to managers.	Hannan e Freeman (2005); Hannan e Freeman (1989)
Influence of the external environment on decisions	Externally, decision-making processes can be limited by laws, political agreements and regulations that prevent companies from shutting down their activities in certain branches, for example, thus limiting their adaptability and decision-maker's autonomy.	Hannan e Freeman (2005) Bernardo, Foresto and Ribeiro (2017)

Source: prepared by the authors, from Hannan and Freeman (2005); Hannan and Freeman (1989), Bernardo, Foresto and Ribeiro (2017), Cunha (1999).

Population Ecology approaches decision-making processes mainly from the perspective of adaptation. According to her, managers (or decision makers) are the protagonists of the process, but their autonomy is moderated by the internal and external pressures to which the organization is subjected (HANNAN; Freeman, 2005).

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article aimed to show how the theories of resource dependence and population ecology can explain the decision-making processes in organizations, presenting a panoramic view of the aforementioned theories of organizational arrangements, bringing an exposition on the decision-making processes in organizations. In addition, there was a contextualization of the theme of population ecology and resource dependence, correlating it to decision-making processes.

In the studies it was noticed that, to trace a positive relationship between Organizational Arrangements and Decision-Making Processes, it is fundamental to understand that the decisions are inherent to the organizations. Population ecology brings adaptation as a central concept and in this sense, the decision-making processes have an important role: there is a hierarchy followed in decision-making since decision-makers determine which path will be followed by the other employees. Following this logic, the environment is formed by the decisions made by the leaders and this makes the company adapt to the environment and the needs.

On the other hand, the dependence on resources seeks to demonstrate that organizations should have as a priority the establishment of cooperative relations, since this facilitates their access to necessary and sometimes scarce resources. In this sense, decision-making processes are central and have analysis in the position of the decision maker: this person is responsible for filtering and analyzing the environment, relationships and cooperation, and based on these perceptions he decides. For this reason, organizations inserted in the same environment, often peers and with cooperation, have different positions. The reading of the scenario is central to this analysis, in light of Resource Dependence.

It is interesting to keep in mind, however, that these theories can intersect when explaining decision-making processes, since the formation of organizational arrangements aims to create ties between companies and the role of the decision-maker is highlighted in both theories. Both position the decision maker as the central piece to influence the environment: in population ecology he appears as responsible for determining the path to be followed at the other hierarchical levels and in the dependence on resources as responsible for analyzing the context and actively positioning the company in its midst.

It is important to highlight that both theories bring light to the importance of subjectivity and the role of the decision maker in organizational arrangements. They explain in a complementary way how the organization has an active role in its environment and therefore cooperation within the arrangements is important to achieve common goals and access necessary resources.

Given the relevance of the theme in organizational studies, as a suggestion for future work, we have the case study in Brazilian Organizational Arrangements, with an analysis of the role of decision-makers; It is also suggested a bibliometric study of the Brazilian literature on the theory of resource dependence and organizational arrangements, as well as a bibliometric study on the theory of population ecology and organizational arrangements.

Organizational arrangements are a rich object of study due to their practical applicability and complexity. Therefore, it is important to bring to the discussion their interfaces with current themes, such as management tools, technologies, leadership and the aforementioned decision-making processes. It is still undeniable the contribution of approaches to resource dependence and population ecology in the studies of decision-making processes, a topic so relevant today.

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