

## Giddens' Triad in Accounting Research

### Abstract

To understand how the theory of Structuration has been investigated in Accounting, the objective was to analyze Giddens' Triad in accounting research. Studies in the framework of the theory of Structuration (TS) were triangulated. The structural dimension of signification was conceived from a perceptive perspective, that is, when cognitive schemes are used to interpret the reality. Nevertheless, in the accounting information context, Accounting cannot be considered a monolithic tool to interpret the information. From a constitutive perspective, there are the languages that provide for the social construction of reality. With a view to the systematic integration of social practices, the function of Accounting is to standardize the processes among the different organizational sectors. The legitimation structure based on the window-dressing device considers Accounting as a means to reflect the organization's expectations. Nevertheless, Accounting needs to play a neutral role to conquer the reliability of the information disclosed. The perspective of the sanction mechanisms takes into account the assessments of the interaction forms. Hence, based on the standardization of rules and routines, Accounting can promote the processes of approval, or not, of organizational conducts. In the conception of the domination structure, the authoritative or allocative resources promote the exercise of power. Thus, Accounting can expand its activity sphere and, consequently, participate directly in organizational power disputes. Finally, the ideological mechanism is discussed that considers Accounting as a mechanism that can facilitate the understanding of the structural contradictions of society. Therefore, the accountants need to be agents of changes in the social transformation processes.

**Key words:** Signification; Domination; Legitimation; Duality of Structure; Giddens' Triad.

### Edson Roberto Macohon

M. Sc. in Business Administration from Universidade Regional de Blumenau – Furb and Assistant Professor B at Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste – Unicentro. Contact: PR 153 – KM 07 – Caixa Postal 21, Riozinho. Irati-PR. CEP.: 86300-000.

E-mail: [ermacohon@irati.unicentro.br](mailto:ermacohon@irati.unicentro.br)

### Carlos Eduardo Facin Lavarda

Ph.D. in Accounting from Universitat de Valencia, Spain and Professor in PPGCC at Universidade Regional de Blumenau – Furb and Scholarship CNPq. Contact: Av. Antonio da Veiga, 140, Sala D-202, Victor Konder. Blumenau-SC. CEP.: 89030-903.

E-mail: [elavarda@gmail.com](mailto:elavarda@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

To analyze the process of continuity and change in Accounting, it should be taken into account that the events depend on environmental circumstances. Hence, Accounting and the context it is inserted in need to be investigated jointly. The social relations reproduced over time condition the process of continuity and change of the management accounting artifacts. In that interaction, the intentionality of the agents, who are capable of promoting changes, can facilitate or hamper the reproduction of the social practices (Burchell, Clubb & Hopwood, 1985).

Englund, Gerdin and Burns (2011) affirm that, 25 years ago, Giddens' Structuration theory (ST) was introduced in accounting research as a reaction to the historical, apolitical and technical-efficiency focus of traditional functionalist research. Today, this increasing flow of research corresponds to approximately 65 internationally published studies. Thus, it turned into one of the alternative approaches to explore Accounting as an organizational and social practice.

The mobilization of ST offered three main contributions: the introduction of a perspective of duality (the structure is both the means and the result of the social systems); the concept of Accounting as an interconnected set of signification, domination and legitimation structures (Giddens' Triad); and an ontological base (science of being) in order to theorize how, when and why the socially integrated agents can produce the continuity or change of accounting practices (Englund, Gerdin & Burns, 2011).

From the perspective of signification, the interpretative schemes are the cognitive means through which the agents, who are incapable of promoting changes, give meaning to what the others say and do (Conrad, 2005). Accounting, as an interpretative scheme, became important in the organization, as evidenced by Conrad (2005) when he investigated the adoption of an artifact to comply with fiscal requirements.

Para Macintosh and Scapens (1990), from the perspective of domination, management accounting is a resource that can be used in the exercise of power. It is a key element in the accountability process in organizations and offers mediation facilities in power relations.

Granlund (2002) affirms that management accounting, through the accounting policy and language, that is, the financial reports, annual reports, information bulletins and different means of interaction and communication, can be the mediator in the search for organizational legitimization.

Hence, the Giddens Triad can condition the structuration of management accounting artifacts. Nevertheless, little is known about the factors that condition this structuration. The earlier studies have ignored the fact that the structuration is a continuous process, as they concentrate on one phase of the implementation lifecycle, that is, the institutionalization of habits and routines (for example Jack & Kholeif, 2007; Jack & Kholeif, 2008; Coad & Herbert, 2009; Coad & Glyptis, 2014). Nevertheless, little is known about the factors that influence the structuration in the post-institutionalization cycle (Hossain, Moon, Kim & Choe, 2011).

Therefore, the ST conceives that the agents and structure do not constitute two independent sets of phenomena (one dualism), but represent the two sides of the same coin, through the signification, domination and legitimation structures. Based on this scenario, the continuity of the social systems is promoted, which is a fundamental characteristic of the largest part of social life (Giddens, 2009).

Nevertheless, Giddens (2009) alerts that human action cannot be previewed, as the agents are always well informed and reflexive. The agents know a lot about the environmental conditions for the daily practices and, based on that knowledge, they can always choose to do the opposite (Englund, Gerdin & Burns, 2011). Hence, this problem of the relation between the action and the social structure is the center of Social theory (Rosenbaum, 1993).

Departing from this premise, this research aims to answer the following question: **How has the Giddens Triad been investigated in Accounting research? Therefore, the objective is to analyze the Giddens Triad in Accounting research.**

According to Englund, Gerdin and Burns (2011), the Giddens Triad permits exploring how the simultaneous representation can function as an interpretative scheme, as a facilitator for the exercise of power and as a set of standards and ideas.

Many critical approaches generally concentrate on the capacity of Accounting to reflect and reproduce the power structures over time, but often without an in-depth and specific analysis of the signification and legitimation matters. Nevertheless, the ST perspective produces a useful picture to understand how symbolic issues are linked to matters of morality and domination, and vice-versa (Englund, Gerdin & Burns, 2011).

Due to the limited attempt to holistically theorize how the management accounting artifacts are reproduced in daily life, the joint analysis of the three perspectives of ST is suggested.

## 2. Structuration theory

According to Giddens (2009), the study of standardized and recurring practices that are stabilized in time and space is the focus of research on the Structuration theory (ST). The individuals live and get organized through dynamic processes of social interaction, that is, all people have potentials that are developed in the course of their life (Giddens, 2009). For the sake of a better understanding of this scenario, next, Figure 1 displays the central concepts and key aspects of ST.

Central concepts	Key aspects
<b>i. Structure and system</b>	Structures and systems are treated as distinct concepts. The social systems consist of situated practices, while structures are virtual and beyond the time and space that only exist to the extent that they are recursively (repetition process) engaged in the (re) production of systems.
<b>ii. Structure as rules and resources</b>	Structures can be analyzed as a set of rules and resources, organized as properties reproduced from social systems.
<b>iii. Duality of structure</b>	Structuring processes are recursive in which the duality (property or nature of what is double or contains two natures) of the structure suggests that the structure functions as a means for and/or the results of social systems. The duality of the structure thus connects the reproduction of systems through time-space, through the production of situated interactions.
<b>iv. Experienced agents</b>	Agents are treated as experienced, who know much more about the functioning of social systems due to their participation in those systems. The knowledge the agents rest on in the (re) production of interaction is incorporated through unconscious motives.
<b>v. Power as an element of social life</b>	The human actions are logically linked to their transformability, in which agents can make the difference. Consequently, beyond their significant and normative contents, social interactions always involve power.
<b>vi. Structuration</b>	Structuration refers to the repetition of the social systems, involving both continuity and change.

**Figure 1.** Central components and key aspects of ST

Source: adapted from Englund, Gerdin and Burns (2011).

According to Rosenbaum (1993), the structure permits linking the social system's time-space. Therefore, there is the structuration, which conceives the reproduction of similar practices in time and space. As opposed to the structure, a social system refers to the standardization of the social interaction and social relations in time and space. The structure, however, is present in the social system.

Structuration specifically refers to the conditions of continuity or transmutation of structures and, therefore, conditions the reproduction of social systems. The structuration demonstrates how social practices and, therefore, social system can persist over long periods of time and space (Rosenbaum, 1993). Figure 2 explains the differences between social systems and social structures.

Social systems	Social structures
(i) Include the human agents' current activities.	(i) The structural properties (that is, the general models and institutionalization for human action) that permit the "link" of space-time.
(ii) Are always situated in the configurations of the specific time and space.	(ii) Are beyond the time and space, there is but a virtual existence.
(iii) Are always linked to specific themes.	(iii) Are marked by the absence of the object.

**Figure 2.** Distinction of social systems and structures

Source: adapted from Englund, Gerdin and Burns (2011).

The structures can be divided into a subset of structural properties: (i) significance (rules); (ii) legitimation (rules); and (iii) domination (resources). The theoretical domain of the signification structures is the Coding theory and, consequently, interpretation schemes need to be provided for communication. These interpretive rules provide means for people to interpret events. The legitimation structures, on the other hand, have their theoretical domain in the theory of Normative Regulation and provide sanctioning rules for certain forms of conduct (Englund, Gerdin & Burns, 2011).

For Englund, Gerdin and Burns (2011), the domination structures are designed by the theories of Authorization and Resource Allocation. The exercise of power is facilitated by two types of resources: (i) allocative (e.g., raw materials, land and technology); and (ii) authoritarian (e.g., expertise, authority and language skills).

The structures and systems are interconnected in a recursive manner (repeated) through the duality of the structure. In other words, these rules and resources the agents rest on in the production and reproduction of social systems are the products of social action (Englund, Gerdin & Burns, 2011).

To understand the significance of the duality of structure, three key elements of ST need to be discerned: structure, social systems and structuration. The structure, according to Table 2, is defined as the rules and resources that are involved in the production and reproduction of social systems; it exists in time only when there is action. Accordingly, the structure refers to a virtual order of relationships, out of time and space, which can, when reproduced in situated interaction, both permit and restrict the action (Rosenbaum, 1993).

To achieve virtual order, you need to have rules, which are generalizable procedures or techniques applied in enacting and reproducing social practices (Rosenbaum, 1993). Giddens (2009) points out that the most important rules are invoked when reproducing institutionalized social practices, those more deeply rooted in time and space, but also, for the sake of the virtual order, the resources, which are the power bases for the agent to have access during social interaction. Thus, as supplementary information to Table 2, the resources are structured properties of social systems, played by agents with knowledge in the course of interaction (Rosenbaum, 1993).

Based on this, the notion of the duality of structure is conceived, when the agents and structures should not be considered as two independent sets of phenomena (a dualism). The systems, however, only exist through the agents' actions (Giddens, 2009).

According to Giddens (2009), the structuration is the continuity of these phenomena, that is, only the people can act and get organized as a group. Nevertheless, the agent is a purposeful individual who is very well informed about his/her participation in the production and reproduction of social practices.

Giddens (2009) conceives that the social practices are considered to be the root of the subject and the object's constitution. Hence, the conceptual structure of ST rejects the structuralist thinking about the primacy of the structure, as well as the hermeneutic conception of action. According to Rosenbaum (1993), Giddens decentralizes the agent as the subject and society as the object in the structuration of social systems.

### 3. Structuration theory in Accounting

The framework of the Structuration theory (ST) induces to the holistic interpretation of Accounting as structures of signification, legitimation and domination. Next, Figure 3 presents the international studies about the structural dimensions of Accounting from the perspective of ST.

Structural dimensions	Key aspects of studies	References
<b>1. Accounting as a signification structure</b>		
Perceptive lens	Accounting is modeled as a cognitive scheme to interpret the reality.	Boland (1993); Jack (2005); Scapens and Macintosh (1996)
Constitutive lens	Accounting is modeled as a language through which the reality is socially constructed.	Macintosh and Scapens (1990); Roberts (1990)
<b>2. Accounting as a legitimation structure</b>		
Window-dressing device	Accounting is modeled as a means to reflect on the expectations of the organization and society.	Granlund (2002); Granlund, Lukka and Mouritsen (1998); Lawrenson (1992)
Sanction mechanism	Accounting is modeled as a means to sanction certain forms of (inter)actions.	Conrad (2005); Lawrence et al. (1997); Macintosh (1995)
<b>3. Accounting as a domination structure</b>		
Resources for domination	Accounting is modeled as a resource that can be used in the exercise of power.	Collier (2001); Cowton and Dopson (2002); Jack (2007); Saravanamuthu and Tinker (2003); Uddin and Tsamenyi (2005)
Ideological mechanism	Accounting is modeled as an ideological mechanism that is constitutively incorporated in the social relations	Alam <i>et al.</i> (2004); Jayasinghe and Thomas (2009); Jones and Dugdale (2001)

**Figure 3.** Structural dimensions of accounting from the perspective of ST (international studies)

Source: adapted from Englund, Gerdin and Burns (2011).

Figure 4 displays Brazilian studies that conceive the structural dimensions from the perspective of ST.

Structural dimensions	References
<b>1. Signification structure</b>	
Perceptive lens	Guarido Filho and Costa (2012); Santos (2008); Tavares (2012)
Constitutive lens	Wanderley and Cullen (2012)
<b>2. Domination structure</b>	
Domination resources	Rodrigues (2008); Silva and Fonseca (1993); Ribeiro (2010); Beuren and Almeida (2012); Cosenza, Teixeira Filho and Lopes (2012); Walter, Cruz, Espejo and Gassner (2009)

**Figure 4.** Structural dimensions from the perspective of ST (Brazilian studies)

Source: research data.

Due to the few Brazilian studies from the perspective of ST in Accounting, studies on other organizational areas were also used. There are no studies focused on the legitimation structure, nor on the domination structure, nor studies focused on ideological mechanisms.

The next chapters are organized based on the triangulation of the studies within the perspectives of signification, legitimation and domination, as presented in Figures 3 and 4.

### 3.1 Accounting as a signification structure

#### 3.1.1 Perceptive lens

Anthony Giddens' Structuration theory (ST) was used by Macintosh and Scapens (1990), who argued that the management accounting systems are interpretive standards and schemes managers use to make plans, make decisions and control other people in the organizations (Boland, 1993).

Giddens (2009) defines the interpretive schemes and typification modes the agents incorporate as stocks of knowledge. Jack (2005) exemplifies, based on Berger and Luckmann (1990), that a society's knowledge stocks are structured in terms of what is generally relevant for specific functions. In general, the relevant knowledge refers to the acknowledged facts, methods and procedures. The specific knowledge is more concrete. To give an example, an accountant should know about the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), as well as about the appropriate standards, values and emotions for his expert role. Knowledge is therefore socially distributed and, in addition, one may suppose that the specific knowledge will grow at a faster rhythm than the general, relevant and accessible knowledge (Jack, 2005).

According to Gadamer (1976), Boland (1993) highlights that the agents' actions, through the management accounting systems, can mediate the interpretation process, but can do this in surprising and unexpected ways. The interpretive act is a universal condition of being in the world. The meaning of the individuals' actions is an interpretation, and not something universally conceived. The creation of meanings through interpretation is a qualified accomplishment of the individuals (Giddens, 2009).

According to Giddens (2009), the human being is an intentional agent when admitting that the agents use their linguistic skills to talk, write and reflect on the rules and resources used in social interaction. The interpretive act can result in multiple and mistaken meanings. The individuals are not social fools, but existential beings who reflexively monitor the logics of the continuous flow of social life. That contrasts directly with the structuralist viewpoint, based on which the agents are implicitly considered as socially naive (Scapens & Macintosh, 1996).

Concerning the role of stakeholders in the context of Accounting, the study by Guarido Filho and Costa (2012, p. 01) indicates four analytical implications, "the social nature of the accounting practices; the recognition of the sociocultural dimension underlying the accounting environment; the interposition between legality and legitimacy of accounting practices; and the understanding of the profession as a relevant social actor in the construction of the accounting environment.

Thus, accountants do interpretive readings of an organizational situation as a basis for making records and reports. Financial reports, in turn, are interpreted by managers to try to understand organizational situations (Boland, 1993).

Based on Cohen (1989), Scapens and Macintosh (1996) conceive that, from the perspective of management accounting, the ST provides researchers with a theoretical framework that can be the basis to study management accounting as part of the established routines and institutionalized behaviors. In ST, agents with practical awareness of appropriate behavior patterns maintain these standards through their active participation in institutionalized routines.

The ST is an approach to understand the social world, which replaces the traditional dualisms of social theory, which portrays the social structure as something that exists independently of human action (Giddens, 2009). Instead of these dualisms with separate perspectives, Giddens (2009) presents the duality of the structure, wherein the structure is both the means and the result of the reproduction of practices.

Giddens' ST is therefore a hermeneutic theory, to the extent that it emphasizes the continuous effort of the agents for the sake of decisions, such as the instantiation of the social structure. If viewed as a medium or as a result, the structure is only present during the hermeneutic, i.e. the interpretive act (Boland, 1993).

Jack (2005) corroborates Scott (2001) on the use of ST, which allows the institution to be examined in terms of processes. Instead of properties, the agents reproduce the structures. It is, as Giddens himself (2009) claims, a sensitizing device, instead of a universal structure (Jack, 2005). The study by Jack (2005) analyzes

the structures from another perspective of structures, based on the cognitive process. In this context, the author examines the beginning of the spread and routinization of the accounting technique called “gross margin” and seeks to understand why this practice still exists, albeit in a simplified and unintentionally form.

In the context of change, the results by Santos (2008) contradict the studies mentioned above. In his survey, the author found that the legal, normative and cognitive cultural environment did not cause profound changes in the practices of management accounting in the industries from the Brazilian electric sector. However, Tavares (2012) showed that the assimilation of information systems in the banking sector was influenced by the confluence of individual and organizational goals and the type of training applied.

Giddens distinguishes three types of structuration, or three dimensions of rules and resources on which actors support and establish the interpretive act, which include interpretive schemes; standards, i.e. updating of rights and enactment of obligations; and reproduction of the relations of autonomy and dependence in social interaction (Boland, 1993).

Seen as institutionalized practices, interpretative schemes give rise to the signification modes; to the rules, the legitimation modes and thus through the recursion of social relations, the forms of domination. As Giddens points out, these arrangements are not isolable phenomena, but intersect with the dimensions of all institutionalized social practices. The interpretive act invokes the understanding of all three dimensions that are reproduced in action. Any act of interpretation is based on personal understanding (Boland, 1993).

Giddens (2009) points out that the structures of meaning always have to be understood through the connection with the domination and legitimacy. One of the basic principles enunciated by the author states that the cognition of the agents is always limited on the one hand by the unconscious and, on the other, by the unrecognized conditions, unintended consequences. Social activities are staged by deliberate action that leads to unintended consequences (Jack, 2005).

In response to Bolland (1993), Scapens and Macintosh (1996) argue that Giddens offers a bilateral set of supports and distinguishes between institutional analysis and analysis of strategic conduct. Scapens and Macintosh (1996) emphasize that this distinction can accommodate their own and Bolland's vision in ST. The difference is that institutional analysis focuses on the intertwining of rules and resources of social systems, while the analysis of strategic conduct focuses on how the agents resort to such rules and resources in setting up their interaction (Scapens & Macintosh, 1996).

### 3.1.2 Constitutive lens

When he analyzed the functioning of the accountability systems, Giddens was inspired by the formulation of the theory of the duality of structure, which explores the interaction of three key elements, its constitution as meaning, its constitution as a moral order and its constitution as the operation of power relations (Roberts, 1990).

For Giddens (2009), action and structure are not opposites but complement each other recursively. The virtual order of structures of meaning, domination and legitimacy is drawn from the interaction of individuals and structures. In Accounting, the structure of signification is designed through meanings of the organizational events, like routine accountability practices for example. At the same time, these practices enact and enforce certain rights and obligations of power relations, thus contributing to the reproduction of broader structures of legitimation and domination (Roberts, 1990). Thus, accounting is modeled as a language in which the reality is socially constructed (Englund, Gerdin & Burns, 2011).

Roberts (1990) is not concerned with the visible patterns of relationships, but rather with their production and reproduction over time, the construction of reality. Compared with the conventional structure discussions, the structuration viewpoint is more comprehensive in that the discussion is not limited or falsely separates the internal structures of the organizations or markets. For this, one must consider the implications of this analysis to understand the role of accounting and its relationship with the strategy (Roberts, 1990).

The structuration of the theory (ST) can be useful in trying to understand the social context of management accounting in organizations. The TE is concerned with understanding the relationship between the activities of the agents and the structuration of social systems (Giddens, 2009).

In analyzing social systems, Giddens (2009) distinguishes between system and structure. For social systems, the author considers the social practices noticeably similar to those practices reproduced in time and space through the agents' actions while the structures are the structural properties that provide the connection of these social practices to social systems. To emphasize this distinction, it may be stated that the systems are not structures, but the systems have structures that are designed based on social interaction. Thus, in the context of accounting, management accounting systems are involved in the construction, maintenance and change of the social order of an organization (Macintosh & Scapens, 1990).

With regard to changes in management accounting practices, Wanderley and Cullen (2012) found that the budget control and performance measurement system were institutionalized in a regulated electricity industry in Brazil. The authors also revealed that the structures of meaning, domination and legitimacy at the political and economic levels, provided the social, political and economic context that reflected in the changes of management accounting. Accounting systems were essential tools to build the new business strategy of the industry under study (Wanderley & Cullen, 2012).

## 3.2 Accounting as a legitimation structure

### 3.2.1 Window-Dressing device

Granlund (2002) attributes to Luhmann (1979) and Barber (1983) the claim that, for a long time, sociologists have considered trust as an integral part of the social interaction that makes social life possible. People need to gain legitimacy for their actions and must also be able to rely on the actions of others. Accounting, legitimacy and trust are therefore interconnected ingredients and necessary for the flow of human life (Granlund, 2002).

Information systems are used in the structures of domination and legitimacy in the search for trust (Giddens, 2009). Over time, information systems have become increasingly important as mediators of organizational trust (Granlund, 2002).

Roberts (1990) suggests that accounting artifacts reflect and partly solve the problem of trust and divergence of interests. Accounting is mobilized as a legitimate institution not only in the financial reports of companies, but also in annual reports, newsletters and communication media (Granlund, 2002).

The study by Lawrenson (1992) reveals that the advancement of accounting at a railway industry in the UK was a factor that contributed to the change in attitude of engineers. The development of accounting represented a means to reflect the expectations of the organization and society, which was perceived as a threat to the rule of the profession of railway engineers. In response to the development of management accounting, engineers have begun to understand the new routines and accounting concepts and to look for ways that could not be adopted by accountants. Engineers have therefore directed their attention to the physical production processes, which accountants had hitherto neglected and were known only to the staff of the operational production sector, which allowed engineers to remain in power (Lawrenson; 1992).

Due to the market opening in the EU, a Finnish company in the food sector went through organizational restructuring. This phenomenon was analyzed by Granlund (2002), who found that the organization started to act according to the establishment of the new order of legitimacy. Corporate management began to convince the staff of the new direction to create a new strategy. This re-engineering process and the change in management accounting have become important components of a new operating ideology, resulting also in a new corporate culture (Granlund, 2002).

The research by Granlund et al. (1998) showed that the macro-environmental issues, for example, internationalization, globalization and the European Union, in particular, are legitimate elements in financial reports of the food industry in Finland. The authors revealed a connection between the broader social debate and concerns of businesses. Thus, they are able to make significant alignments that, in turn, facilitate corporate restructuring.

### 3.2.2 Sanction device

The legitimation structures consist of the rules and moral obligations of a social system. Hence, they constitute the shared set of values and ideas about what is important and what should happen in the social environments (Macintosh, 1994). Consequently, the legitimation structures can be considered as the sanction of values and ideas communicated by regulatory regimes (Conrad, 2005).

The study by Lawrence et al. (1997) analyzes the evolution of new health institutions in New Zealand and particularly the points in which the accounting practices and medical professionals oppose. The authors treated accounting as part of broader social practices, used Giddens' Structuration theory (ST) to understand the ways in which the accountants and their practices are implied in certain social reforms. There is an increasing acceptance that accounting cannot be understood as an autonomous sphere of activity, but should be seen as part of a complex series of political, economic and organizational contexts (Lawrence et al., 1997).

Based on this organizational context, Conrad (2005) points out that the accounting systems provide a structure of meanings for social interaction, i.e. the signification structure, but also incorporate a moral order, the legitimation structure, as they define the rights and obligations (Macintosh, 1995; Conrad, 2005).

Macintosh (1995) also affirms that the artifacts of management accounting communicate a set of values and ideas about what is approved or not, as well as the reward and penalty policies. Thus, such artifacts become an important means to sanction the managers' actions (Macintosh, 1995).

Lawrence et al. (1997) found in the New Zealand health sector that the accounting information was becoming increasingly important and accepted as a significant interpretive mode. The socio-political obstacle was overcome and the accounting artifacts came to be used as a sanction mechanisms through new relationships of accountability (Lawrence et al., 1997).

Giddens (2009) explicitly associates the sanctioning aspect of morality with the oppressive side and acquiescence of power relations. Such analysis can identify how the artifacts accounting turn into mechanisms of conflict and power struggles within the perspective of the dialectic of control. Thus, the ST framework can devise explanations of morally appropriate behavior, of accounting in organizations' social and political roles (Macintosh, 1995).

## 3.3 Accounting as a structure of domination

### 3.3.1 Resources for Domination

In line with Lowe, Puxty and Chua (1989), Cowton and Dopson (2002) state that recent years have witnessed the development of more critical perspectives on management control that explicitly address the issues of power. Based on Hoskin (1998), Cowton and Dopson (2002) recommend Michel Foucault's thinking, which recognizes the power of movement in organizations and society. Although Foucault has written almost nothing about management or accounting, it gained great influence in these areas. The aim of the study by Cowton and Dopson (2002) was to evaluate, through the presentation and discussion of a case study, the value of Foucault's emerging perspective on the study of management control.

Weber (1947) defines power as the probability that one actor, within a social relationship, is able to carry out his own will despite resistance. More recently, Pfeffer (1992) defined power as the ability to influence the behavior and overcome resistance. These definitions of power explicitly incorporate conflict and resistance. Clegg (1979) argued that power comes from the control of the production means and methods (Collier, 2001).

In contrast to the conventional interpretations of the civilizing process, Foucault argues that knowledge is produced through discourse and understands knowledge as necessary to examine the institutions that produce it. Foucault develops the notion of practices that serve to create not only knowledge, but also power. Therefore, according to Foucault, power and knowledge are therefore to, two sides of the same social relationship, giving rise to the concept of power and knowledge (Cowton & Dopson, 2002).

Scapens and Roberts (1993) used the Structuration theory (ST) to distinguish the concepts of power and thus focus on tensions over the use of Accounting, as an enabling device as well as to achieve hierarchical control. Scapens and Roberts (1993) employ Foucault's view that the effects of power are not negative, but productive (Collier, 2001). According to Silva and Fonseca (1993, p. 22) "power and commitment are crucial factors in the intensity of change, due to the struggle among the different groups or organizational agents to protect their interests in the definition of the structural configuration".

Foucault's concept of power and knowledge is elaborated at some length in the book *Discipline and Punish*, in which Foucault considers the changes that have occurred in the punishment mechanisms in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Foucault argues that, within 80 years or more, the method of punishment by torture disappeared, to be replaced by a general and impersonal system of surveillance that focused attention on the individual's psychology (Cowton & Dopson, 2002).

Based on the organizational psychology and the legal environment of accounting, Cosenza, Teixeira Filho and Lopes (2012, p. 81) highlight the power practices of accounting:

Power practices in interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships, such as the ability to group financial statements and turn them into management reports, and the power coming from the enforcement of the collegiate bodies of regulators of accounting policies and activities in Brazil.

Giddens (2009) expresses a considerable degree of admiration for the work of Foucault, but does not consider it as a contribution to the design of a general social theory. He affirms the importance of surveillance, but only as one of the four main institutional aspects of modernity, along with capitalism, industrialism and military power (Cowton & Dopson, 2002).

Giddens' main difficulty in Foucault's philosophical baggage Foucault is the failure to consider the knowledge of the agency. One of the important features of Giddens' structuration approach is that, while recognizing the way in which the context influences the behavior, through resources, there is the possibility that the agents will act individually (Cowton & Dopson, 2002). Walter et al. (2009), from the perspective of Giddens, affirm that the agency power conditions the organizational actions at the organization's micro and macro levels.

Giddens' analysis (2009) of power implicitly contains domination, which is perceived as a product of control over the resources (Uddin & Tsamenyi, 2005). For Ribeiro (2010, p. 6), "Conceptually, the control is closely associated with the exercise of power." This eventually gives certain individuals or groups the perception of power in social relations.

Giddens (2009) distinguishes between two types of resources, allocative and authoritarian, and defines these resources as follows: a) allocative resources: material resources involved in the generation of energy, including the natural environment and physical artifacts, deriving from the human dominion over nature; b) authoritarian resources: Non-material resources involved in the production of energy, due to the ability to take advantage of the activities of human beings, result from the mastery of some agents to the detriment of others.

Therefore, in the view of Foucault and Giddens, resources promote facilities in social relations: "The facilities represent the means the agents use to achieve their goals and achieve results, through these facilities the power emerges" (Beuren & Almeida, 2012, p. 656). In Giddens' view, the resources are the means by which power is exercised. As a result, it has a limited influence on society due to the available amount of resources (Uddin & Tsamenyi, 2005).

Jack (2007) investigated the changes of power asymmetries in the United Kingdom agricultural sector. The search covered the farmers, government, rural extension services, as well as corporations. From the perspective of domination, the author clarified the difficulties the farmers faced, as well as the understanding of the strategies for the development of management accounting in the agricultural sector.

Management strategies are influenced by forms of technology, workers' skills and competition. However, these strategies can be affected by the workers' resilience. To this end, organizations develop dialectic control policies (Saravanamuthu & Tinker, 2003).

The dialectic of control indicates how organizational practices shape and are shaped by the complex power relations between subordinates and superiors at various levels of the power structure, inside and outside the organization (Giddens, 2009). The central focus of the ST in the analysis of power is the dialectic of control, which explains the power in two ways. Thus, in power relations, there is no condition in which one party has absolute power, while the other has no power (Uddin & Tsamenyi, 2005).

The work of Uddin and Tsamenyi (2005) is based on the dialectic of control to explore how the budget works in the public sector in less developed countries. This aspect of structuration provides a way to examine how different state agencies and agents interact to shape the current practices of management control and budget in state-owned companies in Ghana.

Power and resistance are present throughout the process of interaction between the user and the system and the transformations in labor (Rodriguez, 2008). Accounting is the primary means of monitoring of management actions - it is official, although it goes against a management standard. Accounting needs both dimensions (moral and instrumental) of power, because it influences the way the management navigates through the contradictions between capital and labor (Saravanamuthu & Tinker, 2003).

### 3.3.2 Ideological mechanism

In recent years, Accounting became considered as a social and institutional practice that acts on people, organizations and processes. Moreover, this practice is seen as one of the most influential bodies of expertise in many Western societies, making it a central element of government, as a mechanism of social and economic management. In this process, the accountants have occupied powerful positions in business organizations. In short, Accounting influences both individuals and society (Jones & Dugdale, 2001).

The study Jayasinghe and Thomas (2009) explores how and why the old accounting practices were preserved in a subordinate rural community in Sri Lanka, despite the external pressures for change. In particular, it examines how these accounting practices are mobilized in the daily community life and how and why community members tend to preserve them from generation to generation (Jayasinghe & Thomas, 2009).

There are two important issues in the analysis of Accounting as a mechanism of power. The first concerns the construction of Accounting as a network of practices. Each individual practice is related to groups of other accounting practices, which are embedded in the knowledge of accounting as a form of economic discourse. The power of accounting may therefore not reside in any particular practice, but in the interconnection of the network of practices. The second issue is the incorporation of Accounting and the constitution of social relationships to identify its power. Thus, not only the practices and the information generated are considered, but also their permeability in social relations and ways of thinking (Jones & Dugdale, 2001).

Alam et al. (2004) were inspired by Benson (1977) and Neimark and Tinker (1986) to argue that the social and organizational order is produced and reproduced through the social construction process in time and space and may contain contradictions, ruptures, inconsistencies and incompatibilities, as part of the very fabric of social life.

Accounting is an instrument used to minimize such contradictions. This view emphasizes how accounting practices involve the operation of power relations or of a system of domination through accountability mechanisms (Jayasinghe & Thomas, 2009).

The theoretical foundations of the study by Alam et al. (2004) are based on the notion of contradictions, an important theme in Giddens' Structuration theory (ST). The approach is the tradition of dialectic thinking, that is, not looking at the functions of social practices, but seeking its contradictions. The contradiction is a key element of the Marxist dialectical view of social and organizational life (Alam et al., 2004).

Accordingly, Alam et al. (2004) investigated the changes in the operations and accounting practices in the Fiji Development Bank. The study found that profit is at odds with the local culture. Local tradition conflicts with capitalist development. The bank's decision to increase profitability through a technology based on profit, was contradictory to its traditional role of development in Fiji (Alam et al., 2004).

The analysis of accounting as an ideological mechanism induces reflections about its role in the formation of social relations. Therefore, the accountants need to actively engage in the processes of social transformation.

#### 4. Final considerations

The signification structure, from the perceptive lens, sees Accounting as a cognitive scheme, in order to interpret reality. However, the artifacts of Accounting cannot be considered as monolithic information tools. As recommended by Giddens (2009), the agents are deliberate and intentional in their behavior. Thus, the interpretive act is designed by individuals, in this case users of accounting information. The information extracted by means of financial reporting depends on the context of each user. The interpretation of this information transcends the boundaries of accounting knowledge.

From this, it was concluded that the studies by Boland (1993); Jack (2005); Scapens and Macintosh (1996); Guarido Son and Costa (2012); Santos (2008); and Tavares (2012) promoted an incursion on the following key questions of the Structuration theory (ST): a) interpretative schemes; b) stocks of knowledge; c) intentionality of agents; d) institutionalized behaviors; e) duality of structure; f) cognitive process; g) dissemination and routinization; h) assimilation of systems; i) social interaction; and j) analysis of strategic conduct.

The signification structure, from the constitutive lens, analyzes Accounting as a language through which reality is socially constructed. Hence, with a view to the systemic integration of social practices, the function of Accounting is to standardize the processes between the various sectors of organizations. Thus, the studies by Macintosh and Scapens (1990), Roberts (1990) and Wanderley and Cullen (2012) revealed the following key aspects: a) accountability systems; b) duality of structure; and c) organizational strategy.

The legitimacy structure under the window-dressing device advocates Accounting as a means to reflect the expectations of the organization and society. Thus, Accounting needs to play a neutral role to conquer the reliability of the information the companies disclose. The research by Granlund (2002), Granlund et al. (1998) and Lawrenson (1992) highlighted these aspects: a) trust; b) organizational expectations; and c) macroeconomic events.

The legitimation structure, from the perspective of sanctioning devices, sees accounting as a means to sanction social relations. Based on the standardization of rules and routines, Accounting can promote the process of approval, or not, of organizational behaviors. Accordingly, Conrad (2005), Lawrence et al. (1997) and Macintosh (1995) investigated the following key aspects: a) rules and moral obligations; b) moral constitution of managers' actions and interactions; c) accountability; and d) dialectic of control.

The structure of domination, in the form of resources for domination, analyzes accounting as a resource that can be authoritarian in the exercise of power. Based on the systemic integration in organizations, Accounting can expand its activity area and, as a result, participate directly in the power disputes.

That prospect was investigated by Collier (2001); Cowton and Dopson (2002); Jack (2007); Tinker and Saravanamuthu (2003); Uddin and Tsamenyi (2005); Rodrigues (2008); Fonseca and Silva (1993); Ribeiro (2010); Beuren and Almeida (2012); Cosenza, Teixeira Filho and Lopes (2012); and Walter et al. (2009), highlighting the following: a) power; b) management control; c) conflict and resistance; d) the concept of power and knowledge; e) power and commitment; f) individual and organizational psychology; g) regulatory environment; h) interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships; i) surveillance; j) knowledge of the agency; k) allocative and authoritarian resources; l) agency power; m) power asymmetries; n) the dialectic of control; and o) duality of structure.

The structure of domination, from the perspective of ideological mechanism, considers Accounting as a mechanism that can facilitate the understanding of the structural contradictions of society. Therefore, the accountants need to be agents of change in the processes of social transformation.

In this perspective, Alam et al. (2004); Jayasinghe and Thomas (2009); and Jones and Dugdale (2001) highlighted the following points: a) mechanisms of social and economic management; b) maintenance of social practices; c) network of social practices; d) social and power relations; e) contradictions, ruptures, inconsistencies and incompatibilities of social life; f) systems of domination; and g) dialectic of control.

For future research, under the interpretative and qualitative theoretical framework of Giddens' ST, in the design of the meta-structure of signification, the investigation of the functions, activities and communication of management accounting and/or controllership in the corporate strategic context is suggested. As for the meta-structure of legitimation, checking the verification of the obligations, penalties, legitimated behaviors and production of morality of accounting and / or controllership in relation to other sectors of the organization. Finally, as to the meta-structure of domination, research is recommended about authoritarian features, allocative resources, facilities, social relations and power in the context of accounting and / or controllership in integrated management environments.

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