

Social Representations and Organizational Management in MSMEs in Sincelejo, Colombia: A Study Beyond Theory

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze potential factors related to social representations of organizational management that may be contributing to the economic stagnation of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Theoretical Framework: Social representations are examined drawing on the contributions of Moscovici (1979), Jodelet (2002), and Farr (1986). Organizational management is grounded in the postulates of David (2003). The study is situated within the qualitative paradigm and is underpinned by an interpretative methodological approach. It was observed that organizational management practices among micro, small, and medium entrepreneurs are limited. Based on descriptions of their social representations, respondents associate the concept with terms such as order, control, objectives, planning, development, quality, processes, loyalty, growth, efficiency, and responsibility. This suggests that they frame the business process through constructs generated by their mental representations. A significant influence of these representations on various aspects of the enterprise and on the conduct of organizational activities was identified, which is reflected in business outcomes. Regarding the impact of social representations on organizational management, findings indicate that planning emerges as the most frequently cited social representation of organizational management. This research delves into how managers' perceptions and social representations influence diverse management processes within MSMEs in Sincelejo—a topic scarcely addressed through qualitative methodologies in this local context.

Keywords: Social Representations, Organizational Management, MSMEs, Organizations-Companies.

INTRODUCTION

The generation of knowledge is facilitated by theoretical and practical research, which aims to deepen our understanding of social phenomena. In this context, this study focuses on explaining how social representations

can influence organizational management and, in turn, affect work motivation in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Sincelejo.

Social representations have been the subject of discussion in various disciplinary fields. Initially debated in the field of philosophy, the concept then transcended to sociology and finally landed in the field of organization. In philosophy, they were the subject of discussion as to whether they were knowledge directly derived from empirical reality or rather a product of the reflective effort of the mind, as understood by Sellars (1968) and Rorty (2022), who attacked representation as a mirror of nature and opted for a more mental representation. Later, Moscovici (1979) used the term representations to refer to social phenomena, and finally, Ramirez & Ceja (2015) studied them in the context of organizations.

On the other hand, MSMEs play a crucial role in productivity, job creation, and socio-economic development, positioning themselves as key agents for a country's financial growth. A recent study by Confecámaras, entitled 'Mobility and Growth Dynamics of Colombian Companies,' which covered the participation of 299,565 companies, revealed that 15% of MSMEs have increased in size over the last eight years, in addition to showing growth in their assets (Confecámaras, 2017).

According to Segarra & Callejón (2002), for these companies to survive and grow, they must establish a solid organisational structure that allows for sustainable growth. However, despite their important contribution to the economy, many MSMEs operate informally, which leads them to face precarious conditions that hinder their development and longevity.

Currently, these companies face various challenges in ensuring their survival and improving their profitability in the medium and long term. These challenges include difficulties in accessing finance, mastering technology, and the lack of intellectual preparation of managers to address the planning and execution of organisational management (Armijo, 2011). Considering the above, the objective of this study is to analyse the possible factors related to social representations of organisational management that could be contributing to the economic stagnation of MSMEs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Relevance of Social Representations

Social representations (SR) have emerged as a key concept for understanding how individuals and groups interpret the world around them. These representations are the result of a dynamic interaction between the human mind and the social environment, playing an essential role in how we perceive, interpret, and share information in our daily lives.

In the field of social representations, it is essential to recognise the contribution of various authors throughout history who have approached this topic from multiple analytical perspectives. Among them are Moscovici (1979), Jodelet (2002), Farr (1986), and Ibáñez Gracia (1988). These researchers have articulated the idea that social representations constitute a network of concepts, propositions, and explanations that emerge from the interaction of individuals or groups with everyday reality. This process establishes a connection with pre-existing situations, objects, and concepts, generating a synergy between cognitive elements and the environment in which the individual develops.

For Moscovici (1979), social representations are imbued with the gestures, customs, emotions, and thoughts of a group, thus forming a collective imagination. This social knowledge is the result of experiences and information provided by the environment, whether through the media, tradition, or education. In this context, information from the environment is absorbed and assimilated by the subject, producing spontaneous knowledge, known as common sense. The author also introduces a concept that adds to practical knowledge, which seeks to explain what is happening around us and how a person manages to appropriate external reality and psychologically develop their understanding of it.

Social Representations and Organisational Management

Organisations are groups of individuals that form a complex social system, characterised by stability, hierarchies, power structures, and a clear division of roles, responsibilities, objectives, and strategies, all geared towards achieving common goals (Banchs, 1982).

In the business context, social representations encompass images, symbols, and conceptualisations related to work, taking into account aspects such as productivity, competitiveness, and management techniques, as well as the actions and processes that arise within these organisations (Ramírez Murillo & Ceja Oseguera, 2015). The model of social representations and business dynamics proposed by these authors encompasses a set of beliefs, values, and opinions regulated by the standards established in organisations. For them, these social representations

guide and focus staff on the integration of functions, ensuring their analysis through both individual and collective perspectives within the various business entities.

Carrasco Aguilar et al. (2015) highlight that the study of social representations facilitates the interpretation and analysis of human behaviour, both in society and in the organisational environment. This approach emphasises cognitive systems where positive and negative perspectives can be identified, as well as stereotypes, values and beliefs rooted in different social groups. It is essential to recognise that these social representations arise from personal experiences, culture and the living conditions in which the individual is immersed, thus encapsulating the mindset of society as a whole (Arancibia et al., 2013).

For Davolos & Perelman (2004), collective actions and self-management within organisations take on a meaning that allows them to transform the internal operations of companies. Jodelet (2002) argues that social representations reflect experiences, knowledge and behaviours associated with different contexts and social roles, providing an interpretation of reality at a given moment, a material reality and form to which organisations are not indifferent.

In today's dynamic and competitive business environment, organisational management is essential for achieving objectives, optimising resources and adapting to constant market changes. This concept encompasses a wide variety of practices, strategies and approaches designed to direct and coordinate human, financial and material resources towards the achievement of defined goals.

Montes de Oca Sánchez & Pulla Ochoa (2019) highlight that administrative management involves the way in which the unpredictable resources necessary to achieve organisational objectives are handled. In the business world, this approach is also known as strategic management or planning, which requires a comprehensive analysis of organisations in order to guide processes towards the achievement of their goals. According to Chiavenato & Sapiro (2016), this comprehensive analysis allows organisations to adopt a long-term perspective, facilitating decision-making that adapts to all those involved through mental models related to the perception of the world.

For David (2003), organisational management is understood as an art that allows companies to design, implement and evaluate decisions through functions that help them achieve their goals, taking into account their mission, strategic objectives and the necessary policies. In this sense, strategic management became a process that establishes organisational goals and defines strategies to achieve them, systematising decision-making in planning as proposed by the classics of this approach in the mid-1960s (Ansoff, 1976; Andrews, 1985; Steiner, 1998).

Following David's (2003) postulates, planning is the organisational process that determines what activities must be carried out to achieve objectives, maximising the company's efforts and gathering the necessary resources to execute tasks as efficiently as possible. It is also important to highlight the positive impact of planning on organisations, as it improves the performance of human and productive capital by identifying and leveraging internal resources and external opportunities. Strategic planning offers actions that enable organisations to adapt to a changing environment, focusing on the achievement of their objectives.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight the significant positive impact that planning has on organisations, as it enables the company to maximise the performance of its human and productive resources by identifying and taking advantage of internal resources and external opportunities offered by the environment. It is also important to mention that strategic planning will provide organisations with the actions that allow them to adapt to changing times and markets in order to be able to direct a horizon in the achievement of objectives.

In organisational management, strategies become the means to achieve objectives and require decision-making actions on the part of management, given their relevance to the company's functions. David (2003) argues that internal factors within the organisation directly influence strategic management, including the organisational structure, which refers to the model or design used to organise objectives. This must be aligned with the company's structure and planning, reflecting the complexity of the environment.

Mintzberg (1991) introduces the concept of emergent strategy to signify that strategic planning is not constructed using the formal method that has traditionally been employed, but rather is developed adaptively through the interaction of the organisation with its environment. In order to cope with the turbulence of the environment, scenario planning (Chandler & Cockler, 1982) also emerged as a flexible planning system.

On the other hand, Porter (1980; 1985) began applying strategy to the case of competitiveness and introduced the concept of competitive advantage, which is achieved through management that integrates various logistical elements such as technology, human resources, business processes, physical infrastructure, management models, experience, and effective management methods (Porter, 2006).

For David (2003), information systems are crucial because of their ability to generate data relevant to the entire organisation, enabling decision-making at the management level. Thus, information becomes an input that, depending on its use, can be transformed into an internal strength or weakness. Information systems are tools that facilitate the collection, storage and systematisation of data. Laudon & Laudon (2016) define an information system as a set of interrelated components that collect or retrieve information, which is then processed and stored for use in decision-making or business goal planning.

In addition to planning, leadership as a means of achieving results also comes into play in management, evolving from McGregor's studies (1960) to Bass's transformational leadership (1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006). motivation as a way of stimulating performance, which has transformed from Maslow (1943) through Amabile's (2000) self-motivation and is enriched by discoveries about the role of dopamine in neuroscience (Lieberman & Long, 2018), coordination also comes into play from Fayol (1980) and Barnard (1938) to Teece's (2006) dynamic capabilities, where coordination is considered as such. Finally, there is the control or evaluation function, which has developed from Fayol to the Balanced Score Card (Norton and Kaplan, 2000) with its numerous indicators, now supported by 4.0 technology.

If we examine the contributions that have been made in the field of social representations in organisations, we can see that almost all of them refer to issues of organisation and culture rather than management, unlike this work, which examines the relationship between social representations and organisational management in a comprehensive manner.

METHODOLOGY

The study is framed within the qualitative paradigm and is based on an interpretative methodological approach. This method aims to understand and reconstruct the meanings that people attribute to their experiences and social realities. It is based on a relativist ontology, according to which realities are multiple, local and specific, constructed and co-constructed by subjects in interaction. In epistemological terms, it adopts a transactional and subjectivist stance, which implies that knowledge is constructed from the interaction between the researcher and the participants. Methodologically, the interpretative approach uses hermeneutic and dialectical processes to generate increasingly informed, profound and well-founded interpretations (Denzin et al., 2024).

The purpose is to understand and interpret in depth the phenomenon of social representations of organisational management from the perspective of the actors themselves. The research seeks to reveal the meanings, concepts and thought structures that managers and administrators of MSMEs in Sincelejo attribute to their management practice, rather than measuring or quantifying variables.

Techniques and Instruments

The information gathering phase of the research was carried out in several stages. In the first stage, a field study was conducted to establish contact with managers and administrators of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Sincelejo, Sucre. Subsequently, a questionnaire with open-ended questions was developed to explore the different social representations related to organisational management in micro and small enterprises.

The questions were designed after a thorough review of the literature on the categories of study and theoretical references. It begins by inquiring about sociodemographic aspects, such as age, academic background, employment data, company size, productive sector, years of experience, current position, length and type of employment, and type of contract. The instrument includes a space for participants to indicate representative words about organisational management, organisational culture, competencies, human resources, and work motivation, which are key categories within the study.

The study population consisted of 20 companies in the footwear sector, registered in the Sincelejo Chamber of Commerce database for the year 2022. Among the inclusion criteria, it was established that MSMEs had to be registered in that database and comply with the minimum number of workers defined by Colombian regulations: between 2 and 9 employees for micro-enterprises, and between 10 and 49 for small enterprises, as provided for in Law 590 of 2000. Business units that did not meet the staffing requirements to be classified as MSMEs were excluded.

RESULTS OF THE MOST REPRESENTATIVE TERMS

Atlas. Ti software was used to analyse the information collected in relation to the most representative terms. First, the responses of each interviewee were examined, which allowed us to identify emerging categories associated with social representations of organisational management. Based on these results, a word cloud was also created, which includes the most significant terms related to the topic of study. The findings corresponding to the categories and dimensions identified are presented below.



Figure 1. Terms representative of organisational management.

Note: The figure shows the terms representative of the organisational management of the research participants.

The social imaginaries that had a high level of repetition with respect to the words provided are related according to the word cloud to the following concepts: objectives, planning, growth, development, and efficiency, corresponding to the planning function; order and responsibility, corresponding to the organisational function; control, such as evaluation and monitoring, which belong to management, but also appear quality, which is integrated into the quality management model; process, related to routine work; and loyalty, which has significance in marketing and human talent. Here we can see that organisational management is represented more by actions than by processes and is linked to the management component.

The cognitive aspect is addressed first in terms of representation, with the category Influence of knowledge on organisational management, the results of which are shown in

Table 1. Category: Influence of knowledge on organisational management.

Category	Subcategories
Influence of knowledge on organisational management.	Empirical knowledge. Informal learning. Professional knowledge. External orientation.

The table reflects the responses of each participant, the category and subcategories derived from the question ‘influence of knowledge on organisational management’. With regard to the synergistic relationship between the subcategories, it is evident that this is related to empirical knowledge, where practical experience dominates; informal or tacit learning rather than rational or argumentative learning; with an external orientation, that is, connected to the environment in a strategic orientation, as can be seen in Figure 2.

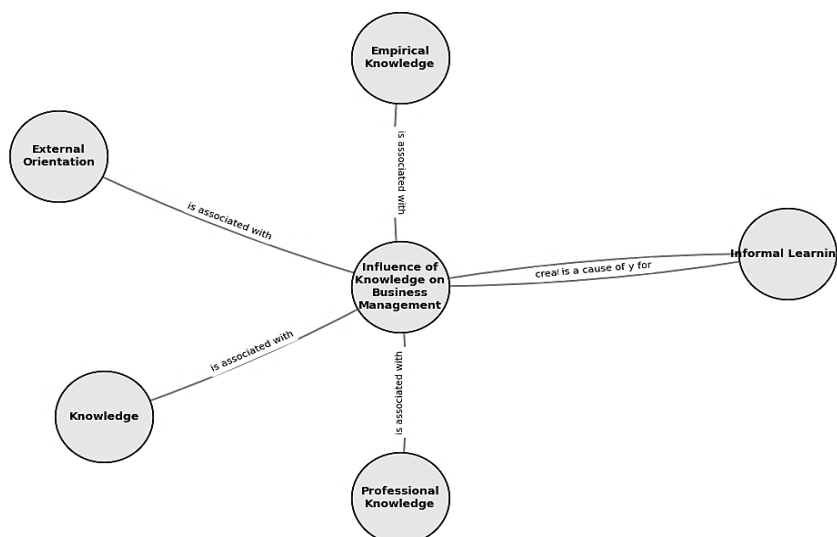


Figure 2. Influence of knowledge on organisational management.

Note: The figure reflects the synergistic relationships of the influence of knowledge on organisational management.

Table 2 lists the perceptions that managers or administrators have about organisational management.

Table 2. Company perception of organisational management.

Category	Subcategories
Company perception of organizational management.	Lack of knowledge about organisational management. Organisation and planning. Management and leadership. Achievement of goals and objectives. Work performance.

Note: Table 2 lists the question, the responses of each of the practitioners, and the category and subcategories that emerge from their perception of the work culture.

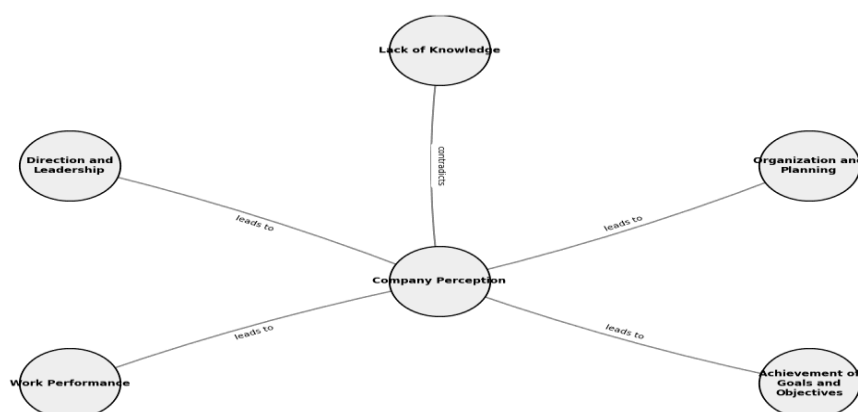


Figure 3. Company perception of organisational management

Note: The figure shows the relationships between perceptions regarding the category of organisational management.

Regarding synergistic relationships linked to the company's perception of organisational management, participants' responses reveal limited knowledge of the subject. Most indicate that, in their work environment, they work according to daily dynamics, without a defined strategic approach. However, some interviewees relate organisational management to concepts such as organisation, activity planning, and the ability to coordinate and set objectives, aspects related to planning and organisation. Terms such as management and leadership and work performance are also mentioned, referring to the execution function, which is crucial for achieving effective goals. These expressions suggest that organisational management encompasses both management and leadership in the company and focuses on establishing procedures and actions that enable satisfactory results to be obtained.

Table 3 and Figure 4 show the responses relating to perceptions of good organisational management practices.

Table 3. Perception of good practices in organisational management.

Category	Subcategories
Perception of good practices in organisational management.	Organisation and order. Planning and management. Quality and commitment. Adaptability and innovation.

Note: The table shows the question, the responses given by participants, and the categories and subcategories that emerged from the good practices in organisational management.

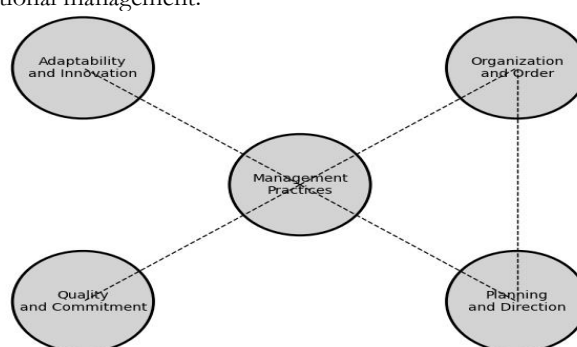


Figure 4. Perception of good practices in organisational management.

Note: Own elaboration.

Relationships surrounding the category of perception of good practices in organisational management are linked to organisation, order, adaptability and innovation, as well as quality and commitment, elements that are fundamental to planning and management. Organisational management is conceived as a process that involves keeping everything in order and achieving established goals, emphasising the importance of implementing good practices that address organisation and maintenance in various aspects of the company. The themes of planning, organisation and execution (commitment) are confirmed, but they appear in relation to the quality management model, which is a specific aspect of management, as well as adaptability and innovation, which are part of the confrontation with today's turbulent environments.

In addition, concepts such as responsibility at work, quality, commitment, seriousness towards customers and suppliers, and the importance of performing tasks correctly are highlighted. These notions emphasise the need to adopt good practices that promote quality at work, commitment to customers and suppliers, and the execution of activities in a responsible and effective manner. Likewise, it is emphasised that good practices in organisational management must include the ability to adapt to changes in the business environment, keep abreast of market trends, and be innovative in the products or services offered.

DISCUSSION

After analysing the results obtained, it is important to consider whether the social representations of managers influence the organisational management of MSMEs in Sincelejo, Sucre, in line with the postulates of the theory of (Moscovici, 1979).

The findings of the research on sociodemographic variables, obtained from the questionnaire administered to the population registered with the chamber of commerce, reveal information relevant to understanding the topic under study. In particular, the educational level of micro and small entrepreneurs shows disparate responses; 58% have a professional degree, 29.3% have technical studies, and 12.7% are high school graduates, which affects how they represent management.

However, in the footwear sector, out of a total of 20 interviewees, only 5 have higher education, which supports the findings of Baporikar et al. (2016) on the relationship between low educational attainment, social representations related to management strategy, and the internal management capacity of organisations.

It is observed that the understanding of the term 'organisational management' is limited among micro and small entrepreneurs in the footwear sector. According to the descriptions of their social representations, they associate the concept with words such as order, control, objectives, planning, development, quality, processes, loyalty, growth, efficiency, and responsibility. This suggests that they can relate to the business process through terms that generate mental representations. In this context, Moscovici (1979) points out that social representations constitute a form of knowledge that is communicated and generates behaviours in individuals, transforming the intangible into social realities through everyday interaction.

The interviews reveal that some participants have received training from government entities, which is related to the dimensions described by Moscovici on how knowledge is transmitted in social groups, in this case, from managers to employees.

It is evident that social representations of organisational management are associated with concepts such as planning, objectives, control, and development, reflecting more actions than the processes inherent in organisational management. This leads to the conclusion that in-depth knowledge of what organisational management entails is scarce among MSME entrepreneurs, which can be a significant obstacle to the development of effective management models (Navarro et al., 2016). This conclusion is supported by studies by Ates et al. (2013) and Yan & Zhao (2009), which indicate that these companies face great difficulties in management. Additionally, there is little perception of the competitiveness of Porter's models and even less of such specialised topics as scenario planning or emerging strategies. Organisational representations do reflect common themes in Colombia, such as quality and innovation, which are part of everyday management language.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this analysis reveals that social representations of organisational management are linked to different processes, with planning showing the strongest connection to social perceptions that view the process as a set of planning, management and control actions, while task supervision appears less marked.

Furthermore, it is observed that in organisational management, the prevailing knowledge is empirical in nature and based on informal learning. On some occasions, this knowledge has been influenced by government entities, such as the mayor's office and the governor's office, through training and education. However, despite these

external efforts, there is a lack of precise understanding of the term, as it is associated with the general functioning of the business, reflecting a lack of specific knowledge in this area.

On the other hand, it has been found that part of the population links organisational management practices with activity planning, although this is adapted to the level of demand for product production. This indicates that, instead of medium- and long-term planning, MSMEs opt for short-term planning to meet immediate objectives. Likewise, it is recognised that management and leadership are key strategies for establishing procedures and actions that enable results to be achieved.

Regarding the synergistic relationships linked to the company's perception of organisational management, the participants' responses reveal limited knowledge of the subject. Most indicate that, in their work environment, they work according to daily dynamics, without a defined strategic approach. However, some interviewees relate organisational management to concepts such as organisation, activity planning, and the ability to coordinate and set objectives. Terms such as management and leadership are also mentioned, which are crucial for achieving effective goals.

Relationships surrounding the category of perception of good practices in organisational management are linked to organisation, order, adaptability and innovation, as well as quality and commitment, elements that are fundamental to planning and management. Organisational management is conceived as a process that involves keeping everything in order and achieving established goals, emphasising the importance of implementing good practices that address organisation and maintenance in various aspects of the company.

In addition, concepts such as responsibility at work, quality, commitment, seriousness towards customers and suppliers, and the importance of performing tasks correctly are highlighted. These notions emphasise the need to adopt good practices that promote quality at work, commitment to customers and suppliers, and the execution of activities in a responsible and effective manner. Likewise, it is emphasised that good practices in organisational management must include the ability to adapt to changes in the business environment, keep abreast of market trends, and be innovative in the offering of products or services.

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