A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL THEORY ON HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Resumo

Neste estudo, exploramos como a teoria institucional e suas muitas subáreas contribuem, são utilizadas e aplicadas à área de pesquisa da gestão do ensino superior por seus pesquisadores. Para tanto, realizamos uma revisão sistemática, realizando análise de conteúdo em artigos científicos sobre o tema da teoria institucional aplicada ao ensino superior, extraídos do banco de dados da Web of Science. Como resultados, indicamos que esse campo utilizou uma multiplicidade de lentes teóricas porque as instituições de ensino superior são naturalmente diversas e heterogêneas, mas podem ser organizadas e classificadas pelo nível de análise, em conformidade com aquelas apresentadas por (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

Palavras-chave: Teoria institucional; gestão do ensino superior; IES;

Abstract

In this study, we explore how institutional theory and its many subareas contributes, are utilized and applied to the area of higher education management's research by their scholars. For this purpose, we did a systematic review, performing content analysis on scientific papers about the subject of institutional theory applied on the higher education sector, extracted from Web of Science database. As results we indicate that this field utilized a multiplicity of theoretical lens because higher education institutions are naturally diverse and heterogeneous but it can be organized and classified by their level of analysis, in conformity of those showed by (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

Keywords: Institutional theory; higher education management; HEI;

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1 INTRODUCTION

When it comes to study higher education, there are a plethora of theories, approaches, objects, actors, stakeholders and so on that seeks to solve very specific problems inside this field, but we argue that all of them have at least parts that are influences by its surrounding institutions, be it in terms of need for legitimation, dominance of some kind of institutional logic or is impacted by their institutional fields.

Higher education is a field that is very heterogeneous and diverse (Zafiropoulos & Vrana, 2008), have many levels and objects of analysis, e.g. their ranking systems (Saisana, D'Hombres, & Saltelli, 2011), their faculty (Bana e Costa & Oliveira, 2012; Goodall, 2009), their students (Heitor, Horta, & Mendonça, 2014) or their especific research units (Lockett, Kerr, & Robinson, 2008; Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013; Schubert, 2009) only to cite a few.

These evidences come as public policies, pressure from stakeholders, different contexts, different types of higher education institutions that permeates this area of investigation and, because of that, in this present paper, we try to find some pattern in studies that intersects the management of higher education institutions and institutional theory.

We ask the question: **How institutional theory and its many subareas contributes, are utilized and applied to the area of higher education management's research by their scholars?**

To answer our research question, we performed a systematic review on papers to explore the state of the art in researches about facets related to institutional theory in higher education institutions. For this purpose, we used the Web of Science database to build the papers that going to be analyzed. Working with search expressions constructed specifically for this research, we extracted a total of 659 papers about this theme, limiting the time frame from within the last ten years (2008 to 2017).

In our review, we found that the higher education sector, using institutional theory, have a multiplicity of theoretical lens. All papers explore, in some extent, this theory but not using this denomination. There is also non-standardized nomenclature regarding the various specific object of analysis.

This comes as an understanding that higher education institutions are naturally diverse and heterogeneous, in which a wide range of theories can be applied and used to explain them. However, we observed that all theories are all influenced by their context and their institutional contexts, preeminently in search of some kind of legitimacy.

All of this classified by their level of analysis, in conformity of those showed by (Friedland & Alford, 1991) – institutions, organizations and individuals.

Our study is organized in chapters, this first as an introduction, followed by a succinct explanation of the theories used on chapter 2. After that we show how the systematic review was done in chapter 3 with methodologies. We continue on demonstrating the analysis on chapter 4 and we finish in chapter 5 showing our discussion and final remarks.

2 UNDERLYING THEORIES

2.1 Institutional Fields

The core of institutional theory lies in the Institutional fields, that are locations that guide the behavior of institutions found within them as they are the sources of institutional conformity and embeddedness pressures (Zietsma, Groenewgen, Logue, & Hinings, 2017). The same actors argue that they also enable the institutional infrastructure in which the embedded actors interact with each other predictably.

We can find in the work of (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) one of the most used definition of institutional field, which they defined as "recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or product" and only exists "to the extent that they are institutionally defined".

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This way, they argue that it highlights the totality of actors that is relevant in those fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

(Scott, 1995) indicates that institutional fields have sets of institutional forces within its context and the organizations inside those fields do respond in different manners to those pressures, in other words, different organizations have different responses facing the same environment based on their characteristics or their location in these fields (Scott, 1995).

Institutional fields and forms are itself shaped by their societal context, both as agent and environment (Scott, 1995). This construction process can be explained as bottom-up and top-down. In one hand, the transmission or diffusion of institutions can be explained as an environmental process of copying already existing forms, be it coercive, normative or mimetic (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995).

Fields or environments in which organizations are inserted determine their responses and influence their behavior and structure. In response, organizations or actors make rational efforts to deal with such uncertainties, threats and constraints (Dacin, 1997; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

This way, Formal and informal institutional constraints can also affect organizational performance as organizations do not make decisions only by conscious and deliberate efforts to increase their performance or efficiency, since institutional pressures may be contrary to efficiency, in which interactions between them and the context in which they are present are only ceremonial (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008; Peng, Sun, Pinkham, & Chen, 2009; Yiu & Makino, 2002).

2.2 Institutional Logics

Institutions such as the capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family and Christian religion can make potentially contradictory logics available to the individuals and organizations, because they shape individual preferences and organizational interests and their behaviors (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

From that, institutional logics can defined as "historical pattern of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules" that are socially constructed by which "individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

For example, as (Friedland & Alford, 1991) shown, the institutional logic of capitalism is accumulation and commodification of human activity, that of the family is community and unconditional loyalty of its members that motivates human activity and so on. This make institutional logics as "symbolically grounded, organizationally structured, politically defended, and technically and materially constrained, and hence have specific historical limits" (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

In this environment, individuals and organizations seek to achieve their on ends through these social relations, while they also reproduce these symbolic systems and make life meaningful. That is important because individuals don't participate in the various social relations just because of material interests but also in terms of symbolic meaningfulness of that participation, so that their analysis need to consider as such (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

The authors say that institutional logics can operate in multiple levels of analysis: on the macrolevel they are supra-organizational symbolic and material patterns that controls the reality, give meaning to actions and structure conflicts. On the sector level, logics are the common identity of the players based on social and status comparison. On the organizational level, more specifically their actions and decisions, the focus is on attention and decision making (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

2.3 Legitimacy

Legitimacy is another facet of institutional theory and can be defined as collective orientation to binding rules (Stryker, 2000), or as "a generalized perception or assumption that

the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995).

(Suchman, 1995) arguments that legitimacy is generalized because it is resilient to particular events, specific acts or occurrences; it is a perception or assumption because it depends on the observer of the organization as they see it; Legitimacy is socially constructed as it is a reflection of behavior between the "legitimate entity" and the shared beliefs of social groups, therefore "is dependent on a collective audience, yet independent of particular observers" (Suchman, 1995).

Legitimacy can be divided and looked at with two perspectives in mind: a) strategic legitimacy and b) institutional legitimacy. At the strategic tradition, a managerial perspective is utilized and focus on manipulation from organizations to deploy symbols in order to gather societal support. In the institutional tradition, the legitimacy is somewhat more detached, focusing on how structuration dynamics generates cultural pressures that go beyond any organization's control (Suchman, 1995).

3 METHODOLOGY

For this systematic review, we perform content analysis on scientific papers about the subject of institutional theory applied on the higher education industry, extracted from Web of Science database. The research is of qualitative nature, as we perform explore these papers in depth, all of which are summarized in Table 1 below.

Methodology summary	
Research's nature	Qualitative method
Methodological approach	Exploratory
Paradigm	Interpretivism
Method	Content analysis
Analysis unity	Papers about the subject
Data collection procedures	TS= ("higher education" OR "HEI" OR "tertiary educat*" OR "graduate progr*" OR "graduate degr*" OR "graduate school*" OR "postgraduate progr*" OR "postgraduate school*" OR "postgraduate degr*" OR "post graduat*") AND TS= ("Institut* theory" OR "institut*" OR "institute* logic*" OR "institut* environment*")
Data collection instruments	Scientific papers database: Web of Science
Data analysis	Content analysis

Table 1 – Methodological matrix of the research
Source: prepared by the authors (2018).

As for the data collection procedures, we tried to use most of the variants that define the higher industry, such as those shown in Table 2 and we used truncations to widen the range of our research. By using TS we specify the topic of interest and use Boolean expressions to account for all keyword selected, all shown in Table 1.

For our systematic review, we choose to use the scientific manuscripts database Web of Knowledge, as it is one of the most prominent databases for top papers from top journals.

The keywords used are those utilized in researches about the institutional environments and pressures in the higher education, which have heterogeneous denominations, such as Higher education; HEI; Tertiary education; Graduate programs; Graduate degree; Graduate school; Postgraduate program; Postgraduate school; Postgraduate degree; Post graduation.

The same effect is present when we look at institutional theory, as it could be expressed in any sort of ways, such as Institutional theory; Institutions; Institutional logics; Institutional environment, all of which is illustrated in Table 2.

Keywords	Higher education; HEI; Tertiary education; Graduate programs; Graduate degree; Graduate school; Postgraduate program; Postgraduate school; Postgraduate degree; Post graduation; Institutional theory; Institutions; Institutional logics; Institutional environment;
Time period	10 years (2008 to 2017)
Language	English
Research fields	Management, Business
Type of manuscript	Articles
Date of research	31/12/2017
Research results	659 papers

Table 2 – Criteria of selection of the papers used for the systematic review
Source: prepared by the authors (2018).

The time period selected are the last 10 years, ranging from 2008 to 2017. This is done for us to have an insight of how the area developed, as much as view the most recent manuscripts about the subject. We choice only papers in English language as it's the most prolific language used in all sciences.

For Research fields, we limited on only management and business areas as this is the main interest for our systematic review, in a perspective of an organizational theory applied in the higher education industry.

Using these criteria cited above, we yielded a total of 659 papers in the Web of Science database by 31/12/2017.

4 ANALYSIS

First, we look at the quantity of papers published per year in Figure 01. We can clearly observe that there's constant increase of papers published each year about institutional theory on higher education institutions, coming from only 14 papers at the beginning of our database in 2008 to 171 papers published on this theme in 2017. This indicates an increasing interest and relevance demonstrated by the scholars on this theory applied to this field.
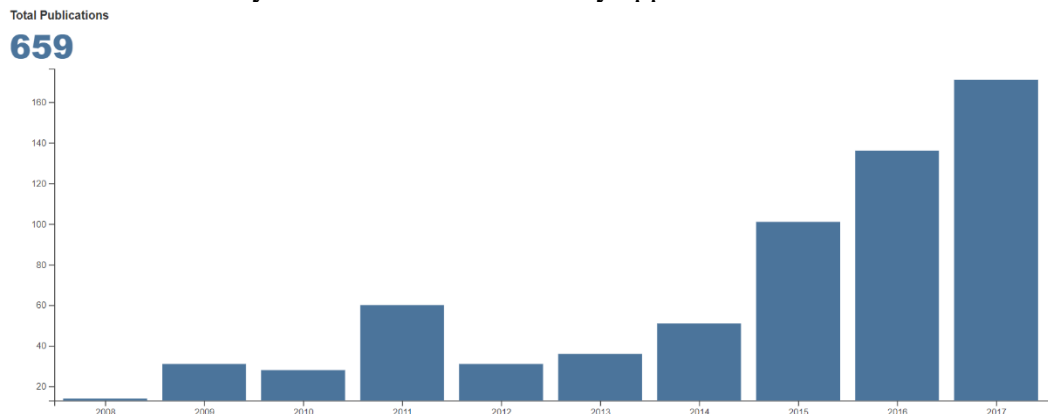

Figure 01 – Papers published per year
Source: Web of Science (2018).

Other statistic that we can show is the h-index from the extracted database, which comes to h-index of 25. This means that there are 25 papers that have a been cited at least 25 times with a total nominal average citation count of 4,88 per paper.

Analyzing top articles cited from the Web of Science database, illustrated in Table 3, we can look at it as a proxy of how the area is organized, for example, what are the objects or elements that's the focus of their study, the choices of methodologies used, underlying theories that support their empirical enquires, as well as the hypothesis elaborated by them and the main findings based on all these items.

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	Article title	Authors	Year	Journal	Timed cited
1	The Multiplicity of Institutional Logics and the Heterogeneity of Organizational Responses	Greenwood, Royston Diaz, A. M. Li, S. X. Lorente, J. C.	2010	Organization Science	223
2	Can governance and regulatory control ensure private higher education as business or public goods in Bangladesh?	Alam, Gazi Mahabubul	2009	African Journal of Business Management	105
3	Rickety numbers: Volatility of university rankings and policy implications	Saisana, Michaela D'Hombres, Béatrice Saltelli, Andrea	2011	Research Policy	74
4	The development of an entrepreneurial university	Guerrero, Maribel Urbano, David	2012	Journal of Technology Transfer	66
5	Costs and efficiency of higher education institutions in England: A DEA analysis	Thanassoulis, E. Kortelainen, M. Johnes, G. Johnes, J.	2011	Journal of the Operational Research Society	41
6	Highly cited leaders and the performance of research universities	Goodall, Amanda H.	2009	Research Policy	40
7	Tourism education and curriculum design: A time for consolidation and review?	Fidgeon, Paul R.	2010	Tourism Management	39
8	Building global-class universities: Assessing the impact of the 985 Project	Zhang, Han Patton, Donald Kenney, Martin	2013	Research Policy	36
9	A multicriteria decision analysis model for faculty evaluation	Bana e Costa, Carlos A. Oliveira, Mónica D.	2012	Omega	36
10	Offsetting illegitimacy? How pressures from securities analysts influence incumbents in the face of new technologies	Benner, Mary J. Ranganathan, Ram	2012	Academy of Management Journal	35
11	Institutional Multiplicity in Practice: A Tale of Two High-Tech Conferences in Israel	Zilber, Tammar B.	2011	Organization Science	35
12	Distributed leadership in higher education: What does it accomplish?	Gosling, Jonathan Bolden, Richard Petrov, Georgy	2009	Leadership	35
13	Economic impact of entrepreneurial universities' activities: An exploratory study of the United Kingdom	Guerrero, Maribel Cunningham, James A. Urbano, David	2015	Research Policy	33
14	Academic Institutions in Search of Quality: Local Orders and Global Standards	Paradeise, Catherine Thoenig, Jean Claude	2013	Organization Studies	31
15	Empirical observations on New Public Management to increase efficiency in public research-Boon or bane?	Schubert, Torben	2009	Research Policy	31
16	An instrument for measuring the critical factors of TQM in Turkish higher education	Bayraktar, Erkan Tatoglu, Ekrem Zaim, Selim	2008	Total Quality Management and Business Excellence	31
17	Making universities more entrepreneurial: Development of a model	Kirby, David A. Guerrero, Maribel Urbano, David	2011	Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences	30

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18	Prospects and possibilities of critical management education: Critical beings and a pedagogy of critical action	Dehler, Gordon E.	2009	Management Learning	27
19	Multiple perspectives on the challenges for knowledge transfer between higher education institutions and industry	Lockett, Nigel Kerr, Ron Robinson, Sarah	2008	International Journal of Small Business	27
20	Lean Service: A literature analysis and classification	Suárez-Barraza, Manuel F. Smith, Tricia Dahlgaard-Park, Su Mi	2012	Total Quality Management & Business Excellence	26
21	The UK and Italian research assessment exercises face to face	Rebora, Gianfranco Turri, Matteo	2013	Research Policy	25
22	The relative efficiency of education and R&D expenditures in the new EU member states	Aristovnik, Aleksander	2012	Journal of Business Economics and Management	25
23	Business elites, universities and knowledge transfer in tourism	Thomas, Rhodri	2012	Tourism Management	25
24	The role of entrepreneurship clubs and societies in entrepreneurial learning	Pittaway, Luke Rodriguez-Falcon, Elena Aiyegbayo, Olaojo King, Amanda	2011	International Small Business Journal	25
25	The measurement of the construct satisfaction in higher education	Alves, Helena Raposo, Mário	2009	Service Industries Journal	25

Table 3 – Top articles selected for review
Source: prepared by the authors (2018).

Based on the analysis of these top cited papers, we can draw some conclusions. Firstly, although we specified Institutional Theory within our research terms, the papers that came as result shows a multiplicity of theoretical lens used in a diversity of unities of analysis. Little to none two papers has been found that share a common theoretical ground or standardized nomenclature in regards of object of study.

Three papers (Benner & Ranganathan, 2012; Greenwood, Diaz, Li, & Lorente, 2010; Thomas, 2012) didn't have higher education institutions as object of analysis, but looked at different sectors and how multiple, conflicting and competing logics helped shape them.

We also found that the most similar specific object in these papers was that of entrepreneurial universities, shown by the studies of (Guerrero, Cunningham, & Urbano, 2015; Guerrero & Urbano, 2012; Kirby, Guerrero, & Urbano, 2011; Pittaway, Rodriguez-Falcon, Aiyegbayo, & King, 2011). They used quantitative methods based on different theory approaches (endogenous growth perspective, institutional economics, formal and informal factors, entrepreneurial learning) to propose models and measure economic impacts of these universities.

When we focus on those papers that investigated universities as a whole, we can cite the works of (Alam, 2009; Alves & Raposo, 2009; Aristovnik, 2012; Bayraktar, Tatoglu, & Zaim, 2008; Rebora & Turri, 2013; Thanassoulis, Kortelainen, Johnes, & Johnes, 2011; Zhang, Patton, & Kenney, 2013), demonstrating how universities from Bangladesh, United Kingdom, China and Turkey are impacted by their contexts and how they perform under the constraints of their specific environments.

Out of these cases, all of other top cited papers investigated different elements of higher education institutions, such as ranking systems (Saisana et al., 2011), leadership in universities

(Goodall, 2009; Gosling, Bolden, & Petrov, 2009), curriculum (Fidgeon, 2010), faculty (Bana e Costa & Oliveira, 2012), conferencies (Zilber, 2011), university departments (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013), research centers (Lockett et al., 2008; Schubert, 2009), undergraduate courses (Dehler, 2009), and even only revision of literature (Suárez-Barraza, Smith, & Dahlgaard-Park, 2012).

The most common journal that appeared in our database was Research Policy, which represent in some extent the role, even implicitly, of external institutional pressures on universities, as this journal is set "to analyzing, understanding and effectively responding to the economic, policy, management, organizational, environmental and other challenges posed by innovation, technology, R&D and science" ("Research policy," 2018).

What we can draw as the main idea from these works is that, even though the papers make use of different theory foci, we can find evidence for the need of legitimacy in all of their works, for example, when (Alam, 2009) proposed strategies for private universities in Bangladesh, one of the main suggestions was that these universities need to obey to international standards when it comes to assurances of education quality in order to be accepted in international universities and job markets.

Other evidence of subject of legitimacy is found in the paper from (Goodall, 2009), as she interviewed highly cited leaders in universities from United States and UK, she indicated as a primarily result that those scholars whom were also a researcher would gain more respect from their colleagues and more legitimate to be in his or her position. This legitimacy would, then, extend the leaders' power and influence inside their institutions and ultimately help to improve research performance in their universities (Goodall, 2009).

Similar results were found by (Gosling et al., 2009) as they explored leadership within the higher education context. They found that leadership in universities is not configured only as a hierarchical order within these institutions, but a combination of both shared and hierarchical elements resulted from iterative relations between tasks, actors, roles and organizational context.

5 DISCUSSION AND FINAL REMARKS

With our systematic review, we found that the area is in a state of increasing interest by scholars, as demonstrated by the number of articles that has been published corresponding to our search expressions.

But this interest doesn't come without some interesting characteristics that is worth pointing out. By our analysis, in order to organize de field in a more systematic way, we indicate that some kind of classification is needed. We argue that this classification should follow the already existing classification on institutional theory works, that is, the level of analysis. (Friedland & Alford, 1991) have already said in their work that an adequate social theory should work at the levels of a) individuals – competing and negotiating; b) organizations – conflicting and coordinating and; c) institutions – in contradiction and interdependency.

We think that these three levels of analysis must be applied to systematize the field even if the theories utilized in various of those papers are not directly related to institutional theory. The reasoning is that, as we found, even though they are not using institutional theory, all of the papers analyzed have, as findings, at least parts related to stakeholders and contexts influences, which in turn, are evidences of impacts of their institutional fields, logics and legitimization actions.

We can go back to the top cited papers analyzed more in depth and use this classification to better organize them, as shown in Table 4.

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	Article title	Authors	Year	Level of analysis	Object
1	The Multiplicity of Institutional Logics and the Heterogeneity of Organizational Responses	Greenwood, Royston Diaz, A. M. Li, S. X. Lorente, J. C.	2010	Institutional level	Spain firms
2	Can governance and regulatory control ensure private higher education as business or public goods in Bangladesh?	Alam, Gazi Mahabubul	2009	Institutional level	Bangladesh public and private universities (meso)
3	Rickety numbers: Volatility of university rankings and policy implications	Saisana, Michaela D'Hombres, Béatrice Saltelli, Andrea	2011	Institutional level	University ranking systems
4	The development of an entrepreneurial university	Guerrero, Maribel Urbano, David	2012	Organizational level	Spanish public universities (internal and external factors)
5	Costs and efficiency of higher education institutions in England: A DEA analysis	Thanassoulis, E. Kortelainen, M. Johnes, G. Johnes, J.	2011	Institutional level	UK HE (Higher education)
6	Highly cited leaders and the performance of research universities	Goodall, Amanda H.	2009	Organizational level	Leaders in universities
7	Tourism education and curriculum design: A time for consolidation and review?	Fidgeon, Paul R.	2010	Institutional level	England and Wales Tourism education curriculum
8	Building global-class universities: Assessing the impact of the 985 Project	Zhang, Han Patton, Donald Kenney, Martin	2013	Institutional level	Chinese top universities
9	A multicriteria decision analysis model for faculty evaluation	Bana e Costa, Carlos A. Oliveira, Mónica D.	2012	Individual level	Portuguese faculty evaluation
10	Offsetting illegitimacy? How pressures from securities analysts influence incumbents in the face of new technologies	Benner, Mary J. Ranganathan, Ram	2012	Institutional level	Three industries: Photography, Wireline telecommunication, Newspaper publishing
11	Institutional Multiplicity in Practice: A Tale of Two High-Tech Conferences in Israel	Zilber, Tammar B.	2011	Institutional level	Tech conferences in Israel
12	Distributed leadership in higher education: What does it accomplish?	Gosling, Jonathan Bolden, Richard Petrov, Georgy	2009	Individual level	Leadership - Further Education
13	Economic impact of entrepreneurial universities' activities: An exploratory study of the United Kingdom	Guerrero, Maribel Cunningham, James A. Urbano, David	2015	Institutional level	UK Universities
14	Academic Institutions in Search of Quality: Local Orders and Global Standards	Paradeise, Catherine Thoenig, Jean Claude	2013	Organizational level	University subunits - 27 departments in several fields and countries

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15	Empirical observations on New Public Management to increase efficiency in public research- Boon or bane?	Schubert, Torben	2009	Institutional level	German research units
16	An instrument for measuring the critical factors of TQM in Turkish higher education	Bayraktar, Erkan Tatoglu, Ekrem Zaim, Selim	2008	Institutional level	HEI in Turkey
17	Making universities more entrepreneurial: Development of a model	Kirby, David A. Guerrero, Maribel Urbano, David	2011	Organizational level	University of Barcelona
18	Prospects and possibilities of critical management education: Critical beings and a pedagogy of critical action	Dehler, Gordon E.	2009	Individual level	American undergraduate course
19	Multiple perspectives on the challenges for knowledge transfer between higher education institutions and industry	Lockett, Nigel Kerr, Ron Robinson, Sarah	2008	Institutional level	UK center of research
20	Lean Service: A literature analysis and classification	Suárez-Barraza, Manuel F. Smith, Tricia Dahlgaard-Park, Su Mi	2012	Institutional level	Literature review
21	The UK and Italian research assessment exercises face to face	Rebora, Gianfranco Turri, Matteo	2013	Institutional level	UK and Italian HE
22	The relative efficiency of education and R&D expenditures in the new EU member states	Aristovnik, Aleksander	2012	Institutional level	EU & OECD HE
23	Business elites, universities and knowledge transfer in tourism	Thomas, Rhodri	2012	Individual level	Business elites
24	The role of entrepreneurship clubs and societies in entrepreneurial learning	Pittaway, Luke Rodriguez-Falcon, Elena Aiyegbayo, Olaojo King, Amanda	2011	Organizational level	Entrepreneurship clubs; SIFE (Students In Free Enterprise) teams; and investment clubs
25	The measurement of the construct satisfaction in higher education	Alves, Helena Raposo, Mário	2009	Institutional level	Portuguese HE

Table 4 – Top articles three level classification
Source: prepared by the authors (2018).

This way, even though there are a diversity of theories and approaches that has been used to study higher education institutions. It can be explained by its levels of analysis and their subsequent objects within those levels. This way we argue that the high diversity of elements that exists in management of higher education institutions, is the result of the wide variety of objects existing in higher education institutions and, therefore, a multiplicity of theoretical lens is necessary to explore and explain these objects.

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To conclude, as we evidenced before, management of higher education institutions are naturally diverse and heterogeneous, in which a wide range of theories can be applied and used to explain them. But, in fact, we observed that all theories are all influenced mostly by institutional fields (that's an evidence from the institutional level of analysis), institutional logics (showing relation with the organizational level of analysis) and in search of legitimacy (related to the individual level of analysis).

We hope with this paper, help scholars and practitioners to understand how the field of higher education management, focusing on institutional theory, can be, at first, seem to be very disorganized but, with the division of levels of analysis, this apparent disorganization can be systematized and give a deeper understanding on how higher education institutions can be explored in the future.

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