ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY: EVALUATING THE CONCEPTUAL LANDSCAPE OF A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PHENOMENON

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ABSTRACT

As a fundamental, yet often a confusing concept due to its multilevel structure, organizational legitimacy has attracted great attention in management and organization research as well as sociology and political science. In this comprehensive review, I discuss the concept within the former scope by taking a picture of the accrued conceptual challenges faced by researchers and by revealing the divergences and convergences among several dimensions of legitimacy suggested in essential typologies. Herein, this systematic literature review investigating these conceptual challenges in direct proportion to the increase in the number of studies indicates that each discipline and paradigm embraces the concept through its own contextual elements. As a result, whereas current typologies and dimensions of legitimacy are found to be overlapping in some respects, they are also observed to differ significantly from one another in some other aspects. Accordingly, the concept still lacks a broad conceptual consensus and more integrative future research is required to construct an overarching framework with the contributions of different theoretical contexts.

Keywords: *Organizational Legitimacy, Legitimacy, Legitimation, Institutional Theory, Organization Theory*

JEL Codes: M10, D23, L14, L22.

ÖRGÜTSEL MEŞRUİYET: ÇOK BOYUTLU BİR OLGUNUN KAVRAMSAL BAĞLAMDA DEĞERLENDİRMESİ

ÖZ

Son derece önemli, fakat çok katmanlı yapısı nedeniyle çoğu zaman kafa karıştırıcı bir kavram olan örgütsel meşruiyet, sosyoloji ve siyaset biliminin yanı sıra, yönetim ve örgüt alanlarında da büyük ilgi görmüştür. Bu kapsamlı literatür incelemesinde araştırmacıların karşılaştığı kavramsal güçlüklerin bir resmini çekerek ve temel tipolojilerde önerilen meşruiyetin çeşitli boyutları arasındaki farklılıkları ve yakınsamaları ortaya çıkararak kavramı yönetim ve örgüt alanında tartışıyorum. Bu noktada, söz konusu kavramsal güçlükleri kavramla ilgili çalışma sayısındaki artışla doğru orantılı olarak inceleyen bu sistematik literatür incelemesi, her disiplinin ve paradigmanın meşruiyet kavramını kendi bağlamsal unsurlarıyla ele aldığını göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak, meşruiyetin mevcut tipolojileri ve boyutlarının kaçınılmaz olarak bazı açılardan örtüştüğü görülürken, bazı noktalarda birbirlerinden önemli ölçüde farklılaştığı görülmüştür. Bu durumda kavram henüz geniş bir kavramsal konsensüsten yoksundur ve farklı kuramsal bağlamların katkılarıyla kapsayıcı bir çerçeve oluşturmak için daha bütüncül araştırmalar yapılması gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Örgütsel Meşruiyet, Meşruiyet, Meşrulaştırma, Kurumsal Kuram, Örgüt Kuramı*

JEL Kodları: M10, D23, L14, L22.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational legitimacy as as a social phenomenon is not a novel concept. Rather, it has long been one of the fundamental concepts of social sciences which seems to get attention more than ever before. The concept of organizational legitimacy, which allows analyses of how organizations relate to their environment (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975), has attracted a significant amount of attention within various disciplines of social sciences, particularly sociology, organization theory, law and political science. Indeed, substantial theoretical discussions on organizational legitimacy in different scientific frameworks indicates to the abundance of divergent approaches to the concept of organizational legitimacy. The existence of these divergent approaches has intrinsically opened new doors for intense discussions within especially organization theory. Having been developed theoretically from divergent disciplines, the notion of organizational legitimacy has aroused curiosity within organizationa field. It is now regarded as a pivotal element that allows for a better understanding of how organizations survive, how organizations behave and the relationship between organizational performance and organizational behaviour.

However, it would be fair to remark that most of the efforts to understand and conceptualize the concept of organizational legitimacy are literally based on the Weberian tradition of sociology. Today, organization theorists still refer to Weber (1968), who emphasizes the importance of social practice and bases social action types on the basis of a belief in the existence of a legitimate order (Weber, 1968: 31). With reference to the fact that several concepts developed within the scope of law, political science and sociology have been regarded as reference points for organizational studies in the last two decades (Mazza, 1999: 38), it is not surprising to see that the term organizational legitimacy has approved itself populously as a vital, yet confusing construct in organizational field. As many others, Hybels (1995:241) attributes this confusion to the abstract nature of term and asserts that though definitions of legitimacy are quite ample, they still ground mostly on abstract logic that relate to abstract objects (Hybels,1995:241).

By this time, researchers have developed a large number of different typologies to conceptualize organizational legitimacy. These typologies as the focal point of this research can be claimed to overlap in many respects, but at some points, they may also be claimed to differ considerably from each other. Since the divergence among typologies is due to the different scientific origins and the theoretical contexts in which the researcher acts and the object and method of analysis (Díez-de-Castro et al., 2018), there seems an intense consensus on the existence of a terminological confusion that makes it difficult for researchers to conceptualize organizational legitimacy. I believe, this confusion should be examined in direct proportion to the increase in the number of studies from different perspectives. This is both because with every single effort on the issue new meanings are attributed to existing dimensions in different typologies or new dimensions are added to existing typologies and no single definition has fully satisfied the researchers from different areas yet. Hence, it will be helpful for researchers to get to the bottom of this confusion through a systematic literature review that will provide an insight for the main research types, levels and camps and the typologies originating from them.

1. AN OVERVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY RESEARCHES

Organizational legitimacy has attracted great attention as a point of concern within social sciences and the literature on organizational legitimacy has reached a certain level of maturity. Suddaby et al. (2017) postulate that literature offers three essential types of researches in which the notion of legitimacy is dealt differently: *legitimacy as a property, legitimacy as a process* or *legitimacy as a perception*. Accordingly, the ones adopting legitimacy as property focuses merely on the organization and its external environment. Researchers in this category tend to theorize legitimacy as a thing that represents property, resource or a capacity of an entity (Suddaby et al. 2017:2). Researches in the scope of *Resource Dependency Theory* seem to fit categorically well into this first group. The second type which adopt legitimacy as an interactive process rather than a property, on the other hand, has a macro perspective emphasizing the interaction among multiple actors and legitimation processes. Institutionalist within the organizational field appear to be to founders and advocates of this second group as they assert that organizations can gain legitimacy by adopting to institutions in their environment (Yüncü & Koparal, 2017:62). As for the third group, they embrace legitimacy as perception and refer to the term as a form of sociocognitive perception or evaluation. In this case, legitimacy is an "*occurring between traditional levels of analysis as a cross-level process of perceptions, judgments of appropriateness and actions that occur in interactions between the collective and the individual*" (Suddaby *et al.* 2017:3).

In addition to these types, as stated by Kostova & Zaheer (1999:65), it is possible to come across with two main levels through which scholars have investigated the notion of legitimacy so far: *legitimacy at the level of classes of organizations* and *legitimacy at the organizational level* (the one embraced within this review*)* which is termed as *organizational legitimacy* by the authors. Conspicuously, an effort to see the work of

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Kostova & Zaheer (1999) through the lenses of Suddaby et al. (2017) unveils a parallelism between the two different view in that Suddaby et al.'s (2017) first two types of legitimacy researches (legitimacy as a *property, legitimacy as a process*) are already referred in Kostova & Zaheer's (1999) explanation of legitimacy at organizational level, though not directly (*legitimacy as a resource, legitimacy as a result of legitimation process*). Further to that, assertions of Elsbach (1994), Oliver (1991) and Suchman (1995) on organizational legitimacy literature also indicates a similar framework built by two main theoretical camps —one *strategic,* the other institutional. The strategic camp that is principally reflected in the work of resource dependency theorist such as Dowling & Pfeffer (1975), Pfeffer (1981), Pfeffer & Salancik, (1978) and Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) consequently characterizes organizational legitimacy as an operational resource (Suchman, 1988). The Institutional camp represented mostly by DiMaggio & Powell, (1983, 1991), Meyer & Rowan, (1991) and Meyer & Scott (1983), on the other hand, characterizes organizational legitimacy as a set of constitutive beliefs rather than an operational resource (Suchman, 1988).

Evidently, the arguments given above indicates that despite the great effort spent on it, the notion of organizational legitimacy seem to lack a conceptual consensus as it still seems to be a conceptual Pandora's box where any researcher can find the definition that best fits his purposes (Mazza, 1999:18). I am of the opinion that reviewing those types, level and theoretical camps in organizational legitimacy literature will offer us opportunities to get a grasp of the notion better within future studies. I also believe that this should be done in two subsequent ways: discussing the conceptual framework and the categorical challenges particularly typologies and discussing the theoretical roots. Therefore, in this comprehensive review, my immediate purpose is to reveal and discuss the conceptual and the categorical challenges particularly typologies in order to establish a ground for further theoretical approaches.

2. THE CONCEPTS OF LEGITIMACY AND LEGITIMATION

In this review, it is endorsed wholeheartedly that the notion of legitimacy has approved itself as a pivotal construct, definitions of which abound in, yet ground on abstract logic relating abstract objects. Beyond any doubt, abstraction is a simplification that is crucial in the process of constructing a theory. Within a comprehensible theoretical framework, however, the categories of formal models should be both abstract *and* well-specified. Legitimacy and related concepts such as reputation and status unfortunately have been both abstract and indefinite, instead (Hybels, 1995:241). Along with the notions of reputation and status, legitimacy has been considered as one of the fundamental concepts in organization theory. Management scholars and organization theorist who embrace such concepts as reputation, status and legitimacy as intangible organizational resources or assets have long been exploring these constructs both separately and in various relational frameworks. Thus, it is necessary that we clarify how the notion of legitimacy differs from these two similar key concepts; reputation and status. Though briefly, remarking the differences will both help to avoid confusion and set light to theoretical arguments on the focal matter within this study.

Indeed, the relationship between legitimacy and reputation of organizations has become a field of interest that is often addressed by the literature (Díez-de-Castro et al., 2018) and researchers predominantly seem to have a perspective that focuses more on the pragmatic outcomes of these intangible assets. The way legitimacy benefits organizations (Baum & Oliver, 1991), how a good reputation affects organizations (Dowling, 1994), and the benefits of a desired status (Podolny, 2005) are all quite popular topics within organizational field. However, researchers with distinctive perspectives may also invite a terminological confusion as "*the prior literature frequently confuses and conflates legitimacy with both status and reputation*"(Deephouse & Suchman, 2008:62).

Firstly, the substantial body of literature on the differences among these concepts (Bitektine, 2011:160) suggests that legitimacy signifies a perception that an organization conform to *taken-for-granted* standards while reputation come to mean a perception that an organization become positively distinct within its peer group (King & Whetten, 2008:192). Organizational reputation is, therefore, regarded as a critical asset that plays a key role in gaining competitive advantage that allows for making more profits (Yüncü & Koparal, 2019:1044). In other words, organizational legitimacy lays the stress on social acceptance that roots in adherence to social expectations and norms while organizational reputation underlines comparisons among organizations (Deephouse & Carter 2005:329) as organizational reputation can be good or bad (Yüncü et. al., 2017:5). Concordantly, many definitions of organizational legitimacy centers upon the social acceptance resulting from adherence to regulative, normative or cognitive norms that qualify one to exist whereas organizational reputation definitions often center upon relative comparisons among organizations on various attributes (Deephouse & Carter 2005:350). This means that "*the conferring of organizational legitimacy and organizational reputation are the products of fundamentally different forms of assessment*" (Deephouse, 1999).

The second concept status is also commonly discussed along with the notion of organizational legitimacy. Status, however, connotes the relative position of social groups within a hierarchy of collective honour and an externally attributed position in the social hierarchy (Sauder et al., 2012). Weber (1968) embraces status as one of the dimensions that is utilized to depict social ranking systems. Unlike organizational legitimacy, the notion of status is intrinsically *ordinal* and *categorical*, and it varies less within groups than across groups (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008:62; Weber, 1946). In this sense, status offers a consistent ordering system that cuts a path for prescribed associations between actors or organizations of similar position within the system (Patterson et al., 2014:75).

As a practical and a social phenomenon, it would be decent to restate that a great many definitions of legitimacy rest on the Weberian tradition of sociology and organization theorists stating that legitimacy derives from conformity to general social norms and laws still refer to Weber (1968). What Weber (1968) formulates as legitimacy is conceived simultaneously as conformity with a set of rules that actors accept as either as a set of obligation or as an acceptable model of action (Johnson, 2004). Later, with reference to this formulation, Dornbusch & Scott (1975) elaborated a theory of authority by defining validity as the acceptance of norms, values, beliefs, and procedures as matters of objective fact (Johnson, 2004). From an institutional perspective, thereafter, Scott (1995) defined legitimacy as "*a condition reflecting cultural alignment, normative support and consonance with relevant rules or laws*" . He also asserted that legitimacy could be possessed but not exchanged; yet it is visible to others (Scott, 2001).

Suchman (1995), in addition, focused more on the social basis of the term legitimacy and defined it as representing the desirability of an entity depending upon a number of social norms and values. Accordingly, Suchman (1995) offers an inclusive approach defining the term 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*". This definition, which is one of the most cited works in the social sciences, reminds us the definition of Parsons (1960) who defined legitimacy as the appraisal of action in terms of shared or common values in the context of the involvement of the action in the social system. This is because like most of the efforts (*often institutional efforts*) concentrating on different processes to build and sustain legitimacy they both understand organizational legitimacy as a dynamic state and a constantly negotiated construct (Suddaby et al, 2017).

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Likewise, Meyer & Scott (1983) embrace organizational legitimacy as rooting in conformity between the organization itself and its cultural environment. Particularly, organizations procure organizational legitimacy to the extend they are able to conform to institutional environments shaped by general belief systems (Scott, 2003). In this regard, the notion of legitimacy as a "*condition reflecting cultural alignment, normative support and consonance with relevant rules or laws*" (Scott, 1995) also fulfills a significant role within social theory since it offers explanations and interpretations for consistent forms of social relations through which organizations gain legitimacy. On the basis of acquiring such social support, Dowling & Pfeffer (1975) indicate three main paths to gain and establish organizational legitimacy from a more strategic perspective centering upon how organizations instrumentally manipulate and deploy evocative symbols in order to garner societal support (Suchman,1995:572). Accordingly, the first one is adapting organizational goals to conform to the greater social norms. Second one is trying to alter or convince stakeholders to switch their conventional social norms and the final one is trying to be defined trough symbols or institutions which currently reveal an intense sense of legitimacy.

Together with the notion of legitimacy, conceptualizing *legitimation* in organizational context is yet another issue to be discussed. As noted earlier in the introduction part, organizational legitimacy literature indicates a framework built by two main camps - one *strategic,* the other *institutional-*. With a focus on tangible, real outcomes, such as sales, profits, and budgets (Pfeffer, 1981: 5), strategic perspective highlights the need for a high level of managerial control over the process of legitimation and assumes that legitimation is purposive, calculated, and frequently oppositional (Suchman,1995:576) and being able to attract resources is a decent proxy of legitimation (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). However, with reference to Suddaby et al. (2017) who points at two approaches for organizational legitimacy; legitimacy as a *property* and *legitimacy as a process,* it is better to set forth in the first place that a great many definitions of *legitimation* fall largely into the second category-*legitimacy as a process.* As a matter of course, legitimation of organizations at various levels finds its place in the works of institutional theorist like Maurer (1971:361), who defined legitimation as "*the process whereby an organization justifies to a peer or superordinate system its right to exist*".

Indeed, Thompson (1967) states that legitimation as a process takes place at institutional level of formal organizations and legitimating the organization within the social system is among the primary functions of people on the institutional level. In this regard, social entities, structures, actions, ideas etc. the acceptability of which are being assessed can all be considered as the subjects of legitimation (Deephouse

& Suchman, 2008:54). Moreover, the process of legitimation appears to hold an intrinsic duality between sociopolitical dynamics that take place at the institutional level and cognitive aspects that can provide explanations for the emergence of *taken-for-grantedness*. The coexistence of a legitimation process at the sociopolitical and at a cognitive level has been the main research concern of the new institutional school. Investigation of legitimacy through these two important levels, which are usually mediated by the legal system and the social construction of *taken for granted* institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), has contributed to the identification of many elements that will contribute to the organizational legitimacy literature. (Mazza, 1999:43-45). Among such contributions are, for example, models that aim at revealing the process through which new social objects and organizational forms are legitimized. Setting the pace within this scope by examining legitimacy as a general social process, Johnson et al. (2006) suggest four stages in the process through which new social objects gain legitimation: *innovation, local validation, diffusion, and general validatio*n. In addition to these four stages creating legitimacy of new social objects that could be both individual and collective, they also indicate that "*the construal of a social object as legitimate in a local situation involves an implicit and sometimes explicit process in which widespread consensual beliefs about how things should be or typically are done creates strong expectations for what is likely to occur in that local situation*" (Johnson et al., 2006:72).

3. TYPOLOGIES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY

The literature offers several researches regarding the typologies of legitimacy in a broad array of theoretical backgrounds and dimensions (types) of legitimacy particularly after 1990s. The need to distinguish specific types of legitimacy has attracted the attention of organization theory and related disciplines and has been addressed as an important issue (Bitektine, 2011:153). As a result, researchers have argued different types of legitimacy and/or developed different legitimacy typologies pointing out two or more dimensions of legitimacy together. In many studies, however, the divergences among these typologies have caused a *legitimacy jungle,* though they try to systematize different aspects of the concept in the literature. This is because the concept of legitimacy is a multilevel construct (Díez-de-Castro et al., 2018:6) which seems to be a conflux for different scientific origins and the theoretical contexts in which new meanings are added to existing concepts in different typologies or new ones are added to existing concepts. Consequently, definitions do not satisfy the researchers from different disciplines equally.

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The fact that different disciplines contribute to the concept of legitimacy through their own contextual elements has inevitably led to theoretical nuances often caused by the conceptual and typological diversity in the literature. This is easily noticed when Weber's legitimacy formulation is compared with the way organization theory deals with legitimacy. Taking the concept of legitimacy mainly within the systems of power and authority, Weber's formulation of legitimacy expresses the state of compliance with certain rules that current actors accept as a set of obligations or a desired model of action (Johnson, 2004). On the other hand, organization theorist (mostly institutionalists) ground their understanding of the concept on Parsons (1956) who examines the concept on the basis of institutional and cultural perspective, not on the context of power and authority systems. Parsons, (1956) one of the most widely used researchers on the subject of legitimacy in organizational literature, propounds that the main objective for organizations is to comply with social values and the legitimacy that can be gained in this way is an effective normative and cognitive power for restricting, structuring and empowering organizational actors (Kalemci & Tüzün, 2008:404). Even this distinction on a simple level is a bare indication of how some common conceptual frameworks can evolve in different research contexts as new windows opened with the progress in the studies of organizational legitimacy. Stretching the limits of familiar concepts or producing novel definitions with a claim that previous ground did not satisfy researchers is an inevitable consequence of this situation.

Díez-de-Castro et al. (2018:2) state that even the most popular typologies suggested by the major researchers in the literature continue to develop over time, and that there are two main reasons that are exactly parallel to those mentioned here. In the first place, researchers of different schools of thought have felt that the typologies that were initially revealed have a strong origin in the sociology of the organization and felt the need to use new terms, differentiate the original concepts or clarify the contend by segmenting them. For example, management researchers have expanded the concept of legitimacy to fit their own contexts, just like other concepts and metaphors imported from external disciplines such as biology and psychology (Mazza, 1999:17). In the second place, researchers revealed that some characteristics of organizational legitimacy were not exemplified in the available typologies and it became necessary to add new types to complete the perspective of aspects to evaluate the legitimacy of organizations. In short, it is quite often that such typologies either overlap in certain respects or differ significantly from one another in a way, which calls forth current typologies and conceptual turmoil as

such typologies of legitimacy are not mutually exclusive in that more than one category can apply to the legitimacy of an organization in a particular social context (Bitektine, 2011:154).

3.1. Evaluating Basic Legitimacy Typologies

To support what is argued so far, I believe it is a *sine qua non* to analyze critical thresholds in the history of legitimacy typologies. In this direction, literature first indicates to the typology of Singh et al.(1986) as the opening gambit in proposing a multidimensional structure of organizational legitimacy. With this research from organizational ecology perspective, in which they investigated why young enterprises usually die before than older enterprises, Singh et al.(1986) set forth internal legitimacy and external legitimacy as two dimensions of organizational legitimacy by concluding that the main reason is young enterprises' lack of external legitimacy. Accordingly, they refer to *internal legitimacy* as "*internal processes such as members learning mutual coordination of roles within the organization*" and they use external legitimacy to mean "*an organization having its actions endorsed by powerful external collective actors*" (Singh et al.,1986:176 ; Stinchcombe, 1968). These two initial dimensions were also stressed in following researches by Kostova & Zaheer (1999), Kostova & Roth (2002), Drori & Honig (2013) and Treviño et al. (2014).

Table 1: Basic Legitimacy Typologies

Authors	Types of Legitimacy
Singh, Tucker, and House (1986)	Internal legitimacy
	External legitimacy
Aldrich and Fiol (1994)	Social & political legitimacy
	Cognitive legitimacy
Scott (1995)	Regulatory legitimacy
	Normative legitimacy
	Cognitive legitimacy
Suchman (1995)	Pragmatic legitimacy
	Moral legitimacy
	Cognitive legitimacy

Source: Prepared by the author.

Subsequently, focusing on the importance of organizational legitimacy for entrepreneurs, Aldrich & Fiol (1994) put forward the concepts of cognitive and sociopolitical legitimacy as two basic types of organizational legitimacy, which later formed the basis of the studies of organizational ecologists to measure organizational legitimacy. Accordingly, the socio-political legitimacy expresses the level of harmony between the characteristics or behaviors of an organization and the normative expectations of other organizations surrounding it in the cultural meaning system. In this sense, "*Sociopolitical legitimation refers to the process by which key stakeholders, the general public, key opinion leaders, or government officials accept a venture as appropriate and right, given existing norms and laws*" (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994:648). Cognitive legitimation, on the other hand, refers to *"the spread of knowledge about a new ventur*e" and it is possible to estimate cognitive legitimacy of an enterprise by measuring the level of public knowledge of it (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994:648).

In this regard, cognitive legitimacy is an extension of socio-political legitimacy and it results from a high level of harmony or acceptance between the normative expectations of an organization and its environment without being questioned (Suddaby et al., 2017:9). This absence of questioning is refered as *taken-for-grantedness* status in the literature. According to Hannan & Freeman (1986:63), for instance, when *taken-for-grantedness* status is achieved, time and other organizing resources are conserved, "*attempts at creating copies of legitimated forms are common, and the success rate of such attempts is high"*. Hence, *taken-for-grantedness* of a new product, process, or service indicates the highest form of cognitive legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994:648). At this stage, organizational characteristics or actions gain a normatively high acceptability within the organization's own environment, and these characteristics and actions are now considered "*natural*". However, we should also emphasize that *taken-for-grantedness*s is not free from problems. It is rather difficult to measure since as "*asking one's research subjects about it is, in itself, a form of questioning"* (Deephouse & Suchman,2008:54).

Subsequently, Scott (1995), who defines legitimacy as a condition that reflects cultural harmony, normative support or compliance with the relevant rules or laws (Scott,1995:45), subdivided Aldrich & Fiol's (1994) classification of historic sociopolitical legitimacy and by attributing to his three pillars of institution, he put forth three dimensions of legitimacy: *cognitive legitimacy, regulative legitimacy and normative legitimacy*. Thus, Scott (1995), who offers a typology that encompasses all the different dimensions that have the power to influence an organization, argued that organizational legitimacy stems

from the approval or permission of certain actors in the environment (Revilla-Camacho et al., 2018: 108) and institutions consist of cognitive, normative and regulatory structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviors. (Scott, 1995: 33). Indeed, Scott's (1995) cognitive legitimacy definition and Aldrich & Fiol's (1994) definition of cognitive legitimacy can be though to be in-line. Scott's (1995) regulative legitimacy, on the other hand, refers to "*the degree to which an organization complies with explicit regulative processes-rule setting, monitoring and sanctioning activities*" (Scott, 1995:42) and the origin of the regulatory legitimacy dimension is based on Weber's concept of rational-legal legitimacy (Suddaby et al., 2017:9).

As for the last dimension of this typology, normative legitimacy concerns the appropriateness of organizations actions to the non-formal norms, values, beliefs and cultural values of society. The emphasis here is on normative rules that give social life a prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory dimension. Normative systems are composed of values and norms. Values refer to common opinions expressing preferred or desirable and standards to which existing structures or behaviors can be compared and evaluated. Norms specify how things should be done and define legitimate ways of achieving to value attributed goals (Scott, 1995: 37). In fact, by distinguishing among regulatory, normative, and cognitive dimensions of legitimacy that form the basis of institutions, Scott (1995) provided a systematic order to institutional analysis and an impressive holistic perspective to institutional theory studies that experiencing the most productive phase of development.

Figure 1: . A Typology of Legitimacy

	Actions	Essences	
		Disposition	Pragmatic Legitimacy
Episodic	Exchange	Interest	
Continual	Influence	Character	
Episodic	Consequential	Personal	Moral Legitimacy
Continual	Procedural	Structural	
Episodic	Comprehensibility		Cognitive Legitimacy
	Predictability	Plausibility	
Continual	Taken-for-Grantedness		
	Inevitability	Permanence	

Source: Suchman, 1995:584

Following the typologies of Scott (1995) and Aldrich & Fiol (1994), Suchman (1995) propounds another typology including two new dimensions (see figure 1). Concentrating on a distinctive aspect from his antecedents, he formed his own model with two temporal textures along with two substantive foci through which he composed a typology that is composed of twelve distinct legitimacy types each of which rests on a different behavioral dynamic (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008:52). In this well-cited typology, the concept of cognitive legitimacy is defined as *"the acceptance of the organization as necessary or inevitable".* This definition actually does not differ significantly from its previous uses. Moreover, Suchman's(1995) moral legitimacy dimension reminds of Scott's (1995) normative legitimacy dimension and what Aldrich & Fiol (1994) call sociopolitical legitimacy. Pragmatic legitimacy "*rests on the self-interested calculations of an organization's most immediate audiences*" (Suchman, 1995:578) and roots in an organization's capacity to achieve practical outcomes in its immediate environment. In this sense, pragmatic legitimacy demonstrates the extent to which an organization represents the specific interests of this *most immediate audiences* or provides them with favorable exchanges (Foreman & Whetten, 2002). This means that pragmatic legitimacy of an organization is ensured by the achievement of the objectives of its constituents through the organization and it is closely related to the balance among the interests of the powerful actors in the internal and external environment and the organization.

Hence, organizations try to persuade these actors around that their institutional policies and objectives are not independent of the demands of the environment. In fact, pragmatic legitimacy as a dimension is probably the least popular one in the literature compared to the ones that are mentioned so far (Suddaby et al., 2017:10) and literature indicates two reasons for this. First, the notion of pragmatic legitimacy is not acknowledged by researchers of certain theoretical perspectives. Second, researchers such as Ahlstrom &

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Bruton (2001), Treviño et al., (2014) prefer to draw on a different terminology for their own reasons. What Ahlstrom & Bruton (2001) call resource legitimacy, for example, is very a similar concept to what Suchman (1995) terms as pragmatic legitimacy. Accordingly, resource legitimacy is gained when organizatiöns create value for their internal and external stakeholders like desired contracts or profit sharing etc. Treviño et al., (2014), on the other side, terms pragmatic legitimacy as instrumental legitimacy which is gained when evaluator's personal expectations are fulfilled (Díez-de-Castro et al.,2018:13).

3.2. Evaluating Idiosyncratic Dimensions of Legitimacy

Subsequent to above-mentioned fundamental typologies and dimensions of organizational legitimacy, the literature continued to evolve in a way that has brought about new typologies or different approaches to established typologies through new dimensions within them. As my purpose is to take a picture of the status quo rather than expanding on each typology, I will refer to idiosyncratic tendencies to conceptualize legitimacy and idiosyncratic dimensions of legitimacy in direct proportion to the increase in the number of studies from different perspectives.

Table 2: Idiosyncratic Dimensions of Legitimacy

Media legitimacy	Hybels (1994), Lamertz & Baum (1998), Pollock & Rindova (2003), Bansal & Clelland (2004), Deephouse (1996), Bitektine (2011)
Technical Legitimacy	Ruef & Scott (1998)
Managerial Legitimacy	Ruef & Scott (1998)
Industry legitimacy	Zimmerman & Zeitz, (2002).
Cultural legitimacy	Archibald (2004)
Corporate environmental legitimacy	Bansal & Clelland (2004)
Output Legitimacy	Ossewaarde et al., (2008)
Relational Legitmacy	Tost (2011), Treviño et al., (2014)

Source: Prepared by the author.

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The first of these emerging dimensions is *media legitimacy*. The concept is emphasized by Hybels (1994), Lamertz & Baum (1998), Pollock & Rindova (2003), Bansal & Clelland (2004), Deephouse (1996) and Bitektine (2011). Deephouse (1996), who tested one of the basic propositions of institutional theory that claims organizational isomorphism strengthens organizational legitimacy, found that isomorphism in the strategies of commercial banks is related to the legitimacy given by bank regulators and the media. Correlatively, Bitektine (2011) also emphasized the importance of the media in the process of social judgment formation regarding the organization.

The second and third dimensions are *Technical* and *Managerial Legitimacy*. Indeed, these two dimensions alone suggested by Ruef & Scott (1998) constitute an original typology together in which Ruef & Scott (1998) take managerial and technical legitimacy as two forms of organizational legitimacy. Accordingly, managerial legitimacy "*involves normative support for organizational mechanisms such as personnel management, accounting practices, and the rules of conduct and structure of the administrative staff*" and it underlines the aspects relevant to efficiency in management and operations. Technical legitimacy, on the other hand, "*is focused on aspects of core technology, including normative support for staff qualifications, training programs, work procedures, and quality assurance mechanisms*" Ruef & Scott (1998:883). In this sense, the similarity between Ruef & Scott's (1998) concept of technical legitimacy and Suchman's (1995) procedural legitimacy -*social acceptance of the internal process or procedures of an organization*- one of the four forms of moral legitimacy of Suchman (1995) is salient.

The fourth dimension under this title is *industry legitimacy as* suggested by Zimmerman & Zeitz, (2002). In addition to the existing three types of legitimacy (*Sociopolitical Regulatory Legitimacy, Sociopolitical Normative Legitimacy, Cognitive Legitimacy*) that are often expressed within previous typologies, Zimmerman & Zeitz, (2002) who was mostly influenced by Suchman (1995) suggests an additional legitimacy form rooting in the industry in which a new organization operates. Accordingly, industrial legitimacy is achieved "*when the organization is classified as a member of some already known and already legitimate class of organizations*" (Bitektine, 2011; 157). The industry mentioned here refers to one that has already developed its own norms, established standards and practices. Therefore, different industries may have different degrees of legitimacy, depending on the actions of an industry members and lifetime of an industry. A very new industry with a very little history and unusual practices, for example, will not be able to provide its component organizations (*industry members*) with a high degree of legitimacy and

those component organizations of that the industry may need to work rather harder to gain its own legitimacy (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002:421). However, this new dimension suggested by Zimmerman & Zeitz (2002:421) evokes Suchman's (1995) notion of *taken-for-grantedness* which is indeed a more lasting form of cognitive support (Suchman,1995:583) and therefore, this legitimacy dimension is sometimes considered as a form of cognitive legitimacy. I find this quite unexceptional for two basic reasons. First, as I stated earlier, Zimmerman & Zeitz (2002), often prefers to refer to Suchman(1995) to support their arguments at key points. Second, they seem to have grounded their work both on Suchman's (1995) statement in the conclusion part of his work that "*theorists currently know little about how legitimacy differs from one industry to another" and* the notions of industry and sector that Suchman (1995) emphatically underlined.

The fifth dimension is *cultural legitimacy* which was suggested by Archibald (2004) who united normative and cognitive legitimacy so as to reach a new dimension denominated *cultural legitimacy*. Archibald (2004) asserts that "*legitimacy should be characterized by two major dimensions -cultural and sociopolitical-*". Cultural legitimacy "*entails constitutive norms and beliefs that enhance comprehensibility because they create the impression of meaningfulness, predictability and trust*" while sociopolitical legitimacy entails expedience (Archibald, 2004:177). Indeed, he separates cultural legitimacy from sociopolitical legitimacy on the basis of professional and cultural contexts. Accordingly, cultural legitimacy is harder to implement as a strategy but it accrues to organizations over time while sociopolitical legitimacy is easier to manage in political contexts (Archibald, 2004:187). Based on his research model on 589 organizations, he found out that organizations with high cultural legitimacy are less vulnerable to incur a transition meaning that they are more likely to survive, yet it is not affected by organizational competencies and resources.

The sixth dimension is *corporate environmental legitimacy*. Suggested and defined by Bansal & Clelland (2004:94) as "*the generalized perception or assumption that a firm's corporate environmental performance is desirable, proper, or appropriate*", this new idiosyncratic context-oriented dimension reflects regulatory, moral and cultural-cognitive convenience in regard to a particular certain of environmental practices and norms (Deephouse et al, 2017:20). Indeed, Bansal & Clelland (2004) ground their study on the claim that unsystematic risk is contingent upon the acceptability of the firm's environmental performance as well as general financial indicators of an organization's success. By conducting an analysis of media reports and stock prices of 100 firms over a five-year period, they measured the frequency of positive, negative or neutral characterizations of a firm's environmental behavior (Suddaby et al., 2017). Herewith, Bansal & Clelland (2004) conclude that organizations with superior degrees of corporate environmental legitimacy experience less unsystematic risk providing them with better business opportunities and access to resources as the environmental actors surrounding these organizations will prefer to invest in them.

Based on an analysis of international non-governmental organizations, the seventh-dimension *output legitimacy* was introduced by Ossewaarde et al., (2008). Researchers suggest that output legitimacy is one of the sources of INGO legitimacy -*by which they refer to Suchman's (1995) definition*- along with normative, regulatory and cognitive legitimacy. Accordingly, output legitimacy is consolidated when organizations inform their achievements to their audiences through transparent decision-making and communication structures (Scholte, 2004). Accordingly, organizations must let their various stakeholders know how they are realizing their goals and whether they are acting in accordance with their mission and vision. However, Ossewaarde et al., (2008) also suggest that because of the increasing tensions between four sources, increasing transparency or tightening accountability mechanisms are not sufficient for such organizations to gain INGO legitimacy, and output legitimacy requires that INGOs incorporate technical and managerial expertise (Ossewaarde et al., 2008:45).

The final dimension under this title is *relational legitimacy*. Based on the studies of Tyler (1997, 2006) and Tyler & Lind (1992), this new dimension was first identified by Tost (2011) who asserts that the relational dimension of legitimacy has not been explored as much as the others within institutional school of thought Tost (2011:692). She designates legitimacy judgement process consisting of three stages which are not mutually exclusive and two modes through which individual-level judgements are developed or revised. In this integrative framework, she asserts that individual-level legitimacy judgments are based on instrumental, relational, and moral evaluations. Accordingly, procedural and interactional fairness promotes relational evaluations and (Tost 2011:704) and an organization can gain its relational legitimacy by verifying the social identity and self-worth of individuals or social groups and ensuring that these entities are treated with respect and dignity (Tost 2011:694). Following Tost (2011), Treviño et al. (2014), who focuses on the internal legitimacy of the organization, also identifies *relational legitimacy as* one of the dimensions of legitimacy. By reviewing the macro and micro legitimacy literatures together, they distill four different dimensions of legitimacy: instrumental or pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, cognitive legitimacy and *relational legitimacy*. Indeed, Treviño et al. (2014) refer to Suchman

(1995) for the first three dimensions. *Relational legitimacy, on the other hand,* is based on Tyler (1997) and Tyler & Lind's (1992) work on a relational model of authority. Accordingly, it is gained when "*when one affirms another person's social identity and reinforces their self-worth, generally through identification with the group or organization*" (Treviño et al. 2014:200).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I am taking a picture of the accrued conceptual challenges faced by researchers through revealing the divergences and convergences among several dimensions of legitimacy suggested in essential typologies. Thus, I would like to draw attention to the underlying reasons of this confusion through a macro and a micro theoretical viewpoint and provide a good starting point for discussion and further research in which both recent theoretical developments or extensions and the most common theoretical paths can be discussed. This is because developing a better understanding of the general processes underlying organizational legitimacy as a social phenomenon requires addressing the principal theses of different theoretical roots, schools of thought and fundamental arguments raised by them. In this regard, the extensive literature review affirms that the notion of legitimacy has approved itself as a vital yet confusing construct, which is eventually reflected in various typologies of legitimacy with the contributions of a broad array of theoretical backgrounds notably after 1990s. As each discipline embraces the concept through its own contextual elements, current typologies and dimensions of legitimacy overlap in some respects, but at some points, they differ significantly from one another. Despite the intense conceptualization efforts within different scientific origins, theoretical contexts and idiosyncratic frameworks, however, the only consensus seems to be on the existence of a terminological confusion. Undoubtedly, this conceptual confusion makes it difficult for researchers to analyze organizational legitimacy. For instance, while sociological tradition refers very often to legitimacy as an outcome of sociopolitical processes of institutionalization (Mazza,1999: 31), organization theorists' approaches to legitimacy differ significantly even among themselves. Most of the legitimacy researches within organization theory field, however, spring from two main theoretical perspectives: strategic approach (functional view) and institutional (symbolic) approach. The second group bears a resemblance to sociological tradition in that they ground their understanding of the concept on Parsons (1956) who examines the concept on the basis of an institutional and a cultural perspective. Indeed, even this similarity covers only a little area as implied by Deephouse & Suchman (2008:53) who point out that general sociological usage of normative legitimacy differs significantly from institutionalists usage in organization theory. What is more important, though current literature offers a large spectrum of researches of how these two main groups differ based on distinct basic premises, the ones that embrace a more integrative perspective seems to be very limited. Hereof, I believe further work is required to investigate the divergences and convergences between these functional and symbolic paradigms in an integrative perspective as suggested by Massey (2001) and Archibald (2004) previously. Utilizing such an integrative perspective will allow for building theoretical connections among various dimensions and will pave the way for a more systematic comparative evaluation.

This paper also provides sufficient evidence that with each effort to systematize dimensional abundance, new meanings are attributed to existing dimensions in different typologies or new dimensions are added to existing typologies. The similarity between Ruef & Scott's (1998) concept of technical legitimacy and Suchman's (1995) procedural legitimacy, the parity between Scott's (1995) cognitive legitimacy and Aldrich & Fiols's (1994) cognitive legitimacy, the similarity between Suchman's (1995) pragmatic legitimacy and Ahlstrom & Bruton's (2001) resource legitimacy, the similarity between Suchman's (1995) moral legitimacy and Scott's (1995) normative legitimacy, associations of related dimensions with Suchman's (1995) notion of *taken-for-grantedness* etc., and finally the emergence of those idiosyncratic dimensions that did not appear in fundamental typologies provide us with enough evidence to prove this claim. Furthermore, this review also affirms that dimensional divergences also stems from the beliefs of different researchers that some characteristics of organizational legitimacy were not reflected in the available typologies and it became necessary to specify new dimensions or reinterpret the existing ones. Viewing the conceptualization efforts in direct proportion to the increase in the number of studies both unfolds and supports this proposition. In this regard, I would like to rearticulate that future research devoted on the construction of an overarching framework of organizational legitimacy depends upon researches efforts to develop an integrative perspective on this dimensional profusion.

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