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THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION, ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SMALL ENTERPRISES

ABSTRACT

The study analyses the Organizational Performance antecedents, mainly the mediating role of the Entrepreneurial Orientation in the relationship between the Organizational Learning and the Organizational Performance in small Brazilian enterprises. A confirmatory factorial analysis was performed, through a structural equation modeling (SEM), to test the association between constructs. The results confirmed the hypothesis. The Entrepreneurial Orientation mediation role for the relationship between the Organizational Learning and the Organizational Performance. It was noted, however, that the organizational learning still needs to be better structured regarding formal procedures in those small enterprises researched.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurial Orientation, Organizational Learning, Organizational Performance, Small Enterprises, Brazil.

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INTRODUCTION

Companies need to constantly adapt their organizational strategies to promote growth and organizational sustainability, as well as to develop competitive advantages. Therefore, the entrepreneurship arises as a viable option for enterprises to achieve the targeted results: sources of sustainable competitive advantage (Dess, Lumpkin & Covin, 1997).

At first, research on entrepreneurship sought to understand the figure and characteristics of the entrepreneur's profile, and the economic and social environment that favored the emergence of entrepreneurship. From the 1980s, the studies about entrepreneurship change the focus to the entrepreneurial process and after, to the entrepreneurial orientation. (Castanhar, Dias & Hope, 2006). According to Lumpkin and Dess (1996), the entrepreneurial orientation (EO) represents the decision-making practices and processes used to act in an entrepreneurial way. The study conducted by Miller (1983) points out this evolution: it changed the focus of analysis from the individual level to the organizational level.

Based on the works of Miller (1983) and of Lumpkin and Dess (1996) it can be understood that the EO represents the decision-making practices and processes used to act in an entrepreneurial way at the organizational level. Moreover, they postulate that five dimensions reflect the EO in organizations: innovativeness, proactivity, risk-taking, autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. (Miller, 1983; Lumpkin & Dress, 1996). While Miller (1983) proposed the EO´s one-dimensionality (innovativeness, risk-taking and proactivity), Lumpkin and Dess (1996) proposed that the EO is a multidimensional construct that can be manifested in the organization depending on the context and situation (autonomy and competitive aggressiveness). According to the authors, the five dimensions of EO may occur at different times, depending on environmental contingencies. Therefore, faced with different types of opportunities and challenges, the dimensions may or may not manifest. An organization can be considered entrepreneurial when some, and not necessarily all, dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation are developed.

Mainly from this study of Miller (1983), emerged some studies about entrepreneurial orientation, introducing gradually, a cumulative body of knowledge under development. Also, some research on entrepreneurial orientation turn, more specifically, to the relationship among constructs, these being: organizational performance, organizational learning, market orientation, innovation, among others, as well as to the variables that shape these relations.

These studies suggest that there is a positive relationship between the highest EO of an organization and its best organizational performance (OP), in other words, organizations with

a greater entrepreneurial guidance is likely to achieve a greater business performance and consequently, success.

Rauch, Wiklund & Lumpkin (2009) conducted a meta-analysis to explore the magnitude of the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational performance, and evaluate potential moderators that affect this relationship. The results indicated that the correlation of EO with OP is moderately large. The findings of the study reinforce that the dimensions of the EO (innovativeness, proactivity and risk-taking) impact in a balanced way on business performance.

The studies of Fernandes and Santos (2008); Wang (2008); Short, Payne, Brigham, Lumpkin and Brogberg (2009); Wiklund, Patzelt and Shepherd (2009); Frese (2009); Rhee, Park and Lee (2010); Covin and Lumpkin (2011); Wales, Monsen and McKelvie (2011); Zhao et al (2011);. Huang and Wang (2011), Alegre and Chiva (2013), Carneiro (2013); Reis Neto et al (2013); and Real, Roldán and Leal (2014) similarly approach this matter.

Thus, the objective of this work seeks to analyze the background of the Organizational Performance, particularly the mediator role of the Entrepreneurial Orientation in the relation among Organizational Learning and Organizational Performance in small Brazilian enterprises.

Based on the literature of the topic, the first research hypothesis was formulated, taking in consideration the definition of entrepreneurial orientation proposed by Miller (1983) comprised of the dimensions innovativeness, proactivity and risk taking.

H1: *The entrepreneurial orientation of the organization is positively related to the organizational performance;*

On the other hand, the organizational learning is essential for the survival in a competitive and dynamic environment (Garvin, 1993). An organization is considered steered to learning when a continuous improvement process is adopted, by encouraging learning and development for the transformation of structures, attitudes, behaviors Garver, (1993).

Slater and Narver (1995) define organizational learning as a knowledge development process that impacts the behavior of a company, especially in relation to organizational performance. For Barney (1991) the knowledge shaped in organizations is an important resource, because it is responsible for generating and sustaining the sources of competitive advantage in companies. For Hanssen-Bauer and Snow (1996) establishing a learning process comprises the fulfillment of some steps: information acquisition, interpretation, focused experimentation, dissemination of experience and knowledge restructuring.

Fernandes and Santos (2008) and Li, Huang and Tsai (2009), among others, addressed the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational learning. The results show that EO is a key factor for learning, innovation and organizational performance. Rhee, Park and Lee (2010) from a theoretical review about EO, MO and learning orientation, have built a theoretical model and created hypothesis. These hypotheses were tested through the structural equation model, and the results confirm that the continued commitment of companies with learning is essential to innovation and performance in small technology-based companies. And that this relationship is fostered by the EO and the MO. This study provided a better understanding of performance promoters in small enterprises and also contributes with research regarding innovation and EO.

Based on this reasoning, it was developed the following hypothesis:

H2: *The organizational learning is positively related to the entrepreneurial orientation;*

To the extent that the organizational learning constitutes a cumulative set of knowledge over time, its connection to the organizational performance depends on the establishment of processes that lead to this higher knowledge. However, in small enterprises with up to 49 employees, there might not have structured processes of organizational learning. This leads to the third and fourth hypotheses of this study.

H3: *The organizational learning will have a negative and significant relationship with the organizational performance;*

H4: The *organizational learning will have a positive and significant relationship with the organizational performance through the mediation of entrepreneurial orientation, regardless of the moderation of the organization's life cycle.*

These hypotheses are represented in Figure 1.

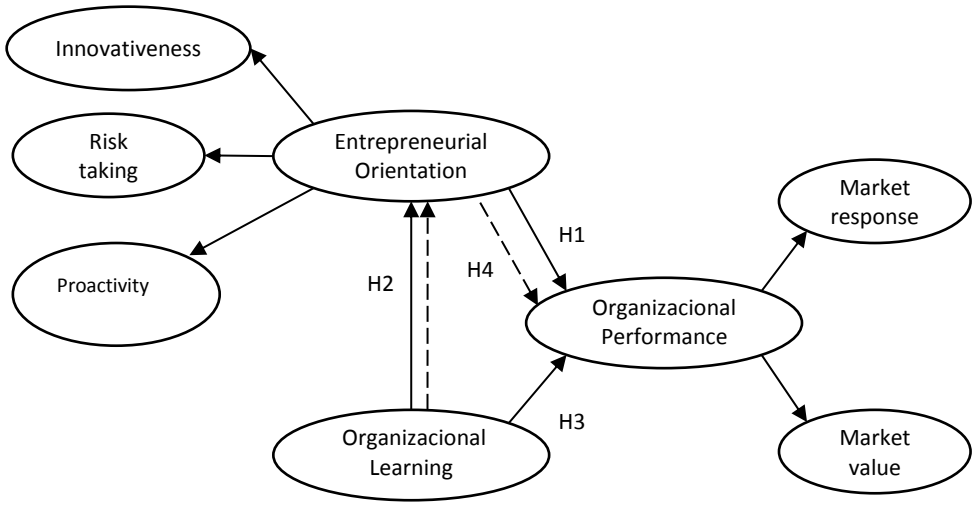

Figura 1 – Conceptual Model
*the dotted line represents the mediating relationship.

METHODS

The research was a descriptive, quantitative, survey type. A stratified sample was defined from 200 managers of retail and service companies established in the Dirceu Arcoverde neighborhood in the city of Teresina, Piauí, Brazil. It was carried out between June and July of 2014. These individuals were included only once in the sample (Malhotra, 2012). The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire with closed questions. It was divided into four parts, being them: the profile of the company, the entrepreneurial orientation, the organizational learning and the organizational performance.

The first part included questions that characterized the type of company (micro or small), the business activity sector (product or service) and the company's life cycle. The classification criteria for the type of company was proposed by the Brazilian Support Service for Micro and Small Enterprise (SEBRAE, 2014), where the micro company has up to 9 employees; and the small company has between 10 and 49 employees.

The company's life cycle was divided in companies with up to 4 years of establishment, and still being young; companies with 5 to 10 years of establishment, under development, and companies with more than 10 years of establishment, considered mature. In the second part, to measure the entrepreneurial orientation, it was adapted the scale developed by Carneiro (2014). In the third part the organizational learning was measured. In these two parts a Likert scale of 7 points of agreement was used (1 - totally disagree to 7 - totally agree). The fourth and last part measured subjectively the organizational performance.

These subjective measures involve comparative perceptions of the company's result in relation to its main competitor, where it was adapted the scale of Moore and Fairhurst (2003) and of González-Benito, González-Benito and Muñoz-Gallego´s (2008) scale. In this part was used a 7-points Likert scale (1 - much worse to 7 - much better).

Initially the data was explored using the software SPSS v.21 regarding the distribution normality through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, collinearity analysis through the Variance Inflation Factor test (VIF), where items with values below 5 could be kept, and the profile analysis of the companies surveyed. The small businesses were grouped into sub-samples by time of establishment, for further moderation test of this aspect, in the comparison of the proposed relationships in the conceptual model. For grouping the companies were taken in consideration the business cycle of the organizations.

The proposed relations of the conceptual model presented were analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the software SmartPLS2.0M3 (Ringle, Wende,

2010) which allows a better prediction of structural relations (Hair Jr., 2014) to observe the Determination Coefficient (R^2) of the dependent variable. It was considered acceptable R^2 above 2% in social sciences. Discriminant and convergent analysis criteria were used to adjust the proposed model.

The convergent analysis was performed through the observation of factorial loads above 0.7 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) above 0.5. The discriminant validity was observed through the square root of the AVE of each variable *versus* its correlation with the other variables. Besides this, cross-loads were observed (*crossloadings*) of each item in its respective variable. In a complementary way the Cronbach's alpha and composed reliability were analyzed.

Are considered acceptable values those above 0.6 and 0.7 respectively. To accept the statistical significance of differences of the other tests were accepted values of α of 10%, or 90% of reliability, with the value of t for *student* equal or above 1.67, and p-value of 0.10 or less. This standard was used in the analysis of the structural relationships between variables through the resampling technique called *Bootstrapping*. It was also used this criteria in the mediation and moderation tests.

The mediation test was carried out using the Sobel test. For the moderation test the sample was separated according to the organization´s time in business, and it was compared the statistical significance of the relationship between the dimensions of OL and EO as well as the relationship between the dimensions EO and OP.

RESULTS

This study included 200 companies, where 71 were considered young, 76 considered under development, and 53 considered mature. No question had missing data. The initial examination revealed no multicollinearity of the data. In all items the VIF stayed below 5.

The data distribution was observed and the non-normal was identified ($p < 0.001$). The conceptual model was initially tested in an overall base with all organizations. In order to search for the convergent validity of the model, a total of seven items, with a factorial load below 0.7 were taken out.

Were eliminated 2 items of the dimension innovativeness, 4 items of the dimension Organizational Learning, and 1 item of the dimension Market Value.

The convergent validity adjust indicators can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 – Convergent validity

Dimension	**AVE**	**Composite Reliability**	**R Square**	**Cronbachs Alpha**
Organizacional learning	0,563	0,865	-	0,806
Risk-taking	0,556	0,787	0,538	0,594
Iinnovativeness	0,679	0,863	0,654	0,763
Proactivity	0,627	0,834	0,702	0,702
Market response	0,663	0,853	0,822	0,740
Market value	0,774	0,873	0,697	0,711

Source: Research data.

The discriminant validity was also observed through the square root of AVEs of variables greater than its correlation with the other variables, as noted in Table 2 and confirmed by the cross-loads of items which were higher in their respective variables than in others (*crossloadings*), in Table 3.

Table 2 – Discriminant validity

Dimensões	Organizacional learning	Risk-taking	Iinnovativeness	Proactivity	Market response	Marke t value
Organizacional learning	***0,751****	-	-	-	-	-
Risk-taking	0,406	***0,746****	-	-	-	-
Iinnovativeness	0,549	0,376	***0,824****	-	-	-
Proactivity	0,559	0,485	0,487	***0,792****	-	-
Market response	-0,027	0,033	0,133	0,110	***0,815****	-
Market value	0,137	0,081	0,291	0,170	0,526	***0,880****

Source: Research data, *Square root of the AVE

Table 3 – *Crossloadings*

Item	Organizacional learning	Risk-taking	Iinnovativeness	Proactivity	Market response	Market value
ao1	***0,739***	0,318	0,409	0,455	0,049	0,109
ao2	***0,779***	0,324	0,387	0,354	-0,075	0,117
ao3	***0,665***	0,208	0,362	0,311	-0,014	0,044
ao4	***0,754***	0,287	0,449	0,351	0,013	0,204
ao7	***0,808***	0,361	0,444	0,574	-0,069	0,045
inov1	0,450	0,183	***0,762***	0,368	0,147	0,237
inov2	0,432	0,347	***0,852***	0,370	0,132	0,239
inov3	0,476	0,379	***0,855***	0,461	0,060	0,246
proa1	0,490	0,403	0,395	***0,780***	-0,027	0,058
proa2	0,364	0,364	0,333	***0,800***	0,063	0,083
proa3	0,469	0,384	0,426	***0,796***	0,221	0,256
riscco3	0,290	***0,626***	0,198	0,307	-0,046	0,015
risco1	0,294	***0,742***	0,283	0,334	0,121	0,086
risco2	0,327	***0,852***	0,343	0,433	-0,006	0,071
rm1	-0,042	0,043	0,140	0,089	***0,849***	0,448
rm2	-0,035	0,021	0,143	0,092	***0,893***	0,482
rm3	0,020	0,015	0,026	0,090	***0,688***	0,343
vm1	0,178	0,080	0,304	0,204	0,377	***0,859***
vm2	0,072	0,064	0,217	0,104	0,537	***0,901***

Source: Research data

The structural relations of the conceptual model were proven to be adequate to explain 4.9% of the variance of the Organizational Performance, according to pre-established criteria (Hair et al, 2014), confirming hypotheses **H1**, **H2** and **H3**. These indicators can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 – Structural relations

Hypotheses	Structural relationship	Life Cycle	Original Sample	t Statistics	p-value	Status
H1	EO -> OP	General	0,2824	2,3542	0,020	confirmed
		Young	0,287	1,703	0,093	confirmed
		Under Devel	0,302	1,797	0,076	confirmed
		Mature	0,326	1,709	0,093	confirmed
H2	OL -> EO	General	0,643	10,035	0,000	confirmed
		Young	0,722	6,194	0,000	confirmed
		Under Devel	0,769	7,922	0,000	confirmed
		Mature	0,489	3,385	0,001	confirmed
H3	OL- > OP	General	-0,131	1,394	0,165	confirmed
		Young	-0,103	0,822	0,414	confirmed
		Under Devel	-0,221	1,351	0,181	confirmed
		Mature	-0,108	0,853	0,397	confirmed

Source: Research data

It was noted the mediation of EO to the relationship between OA and OP. The Sobel test was performed in the overall sample and in the subsamples of organizations classified by time of existence. These results are shown in Table 5. These results confirm the hypothesis H4.

Table 5 – Sobel test

OL→EO→OP	**Sobel test**	**p-value**
General sample (n=200)	2,288	0,022
Young Enterprises (n=71)	1,641	0,105*
Mature Enterprises (n=76)	1,752	0,079
Ancient Enterprises (n=53)	1,620	0,104*

Source: Research data
*minimum difference to be considered in an exploratory research

The moderation test considers the influence of the variable time of existence of the organization over the relationship between OL and EO and for the relationship between the EO and the OP. These relations confirm the mediation of EO. These results collaborate for the confirmation of the hypothesis **H4**. These results can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6 – Time moderation of the mediation relation of the EO variable.

	Relation	**Young**	**Mature**	**Ancient**
General sample	OL→EO	t=1,053; p=0,294	t=1,053 ; p=0,294	t=1,289; p=0,199
	EO→OP	t=0,021; p=0,983	t=0,088; p=0,930	t=0,111; p=0,912
Young	OL→EO	-	t=0,308; p=0,758	t=1,474; p=0,142
	EO→OP	-	t=0,062; p=0,951	t=0,093; p=0,926
Mature	OL→EO	-	-	*t=1,927; *p=0,055
	EO→OP	-	-	t=0,034; p=0,973

Source: Research data.
*only significant case found

CONCLUSION

It was confirmed in this study that the Entrepreneurial Orientation has a very strong relationship with Organizational Performance, in small businesses in general (Γ=0,282; $t_{(199)}$=2,354; p=0,019), as well as those young (Γ=0,287; $t_{(70)}$=1,703; p=0,093), or under development (Γ=0,301; $t_{(75)}$=1,796; p=0,076) or those mature (Γ=0,325; $t_{(52)}$=1,7094; p=0,093). In a scenario of increasing uncertainties this characteristic is strategy in a small business organization, and may become the difference between staying or not in the marketplace. The young business organizations *versus* under consolidation showed no significant differences in the Entrepreneurial Orientation Dimension ($MO_{EO\ young}$=5,87, $MO_{EO\ under\ consolidation}$=5,89, p=0,383).

This appears to indicate that during the initial years, the organizations maintain this philosophy of action, but eventually lose over time. Enterprises in process of consolidation have lower Entrepreneurial Orientation compared to Younger or more Mature enterprises ($M_{Omature}$,60 , p=0,005 e p=0,003, respectively).

The most mature companies wind up being less innovative than younger or consolidation companies. ($M_{Innovative\ mature}$ =5,61, $M_{Innovative\ young}$=5,95, $M_{Innovative\ underconsolidation}$=6,06, p=0,028 e p=0,006, respectively). However, the Organizational Learning obtained a non-significant relationship with the organizational performance, not only in the sample as a whole (Γ= -0,131; $t_{(199)}$=1,393; p=0,164), but in all other classifications, such as in young business (Γ= -0,103; $t_{(70)}$=0,822; p=0,413), under consolidation (Γ= -0,221; $t_{(75)}$=1,350; p=0,180) and matures (Γ= -0,107; $t_{(53)}$= -0,8534; p=0,397).

These scenarios suggest that the Entrepreneurial Guidance could result in different results in the Organizational Performance regarding the companies' life cycle, however, this does not occur ($M_{OP\ mature}$ =5,078, $M_{OP\ young}$ =5,016 e $M_{OP\ under\ consolidation}$ =5,087, p>0,05 for all combinations).

Another element must coexist in the development of small size business organizations that combined with the Entrepreneurial Orientation wind up balancing the result in the Organizational Performance, and mitigating the effect of the Entrepreneurial Orientation. This element could be the Organizational Learning, which also does not change in organizations, in accordance with the life cycle of the company ($M_{OL\ young}$=6,51, $M_{OL\ under\ consolidation}$ =6,45 e $M_{OL\ mature}$=6,40, p-value > 0,05 in all possible combinations). It is then up to the Entrepreneurial Orientation the crucial role in influencing organizational results.

For small size businesses managers these results suggest that the Organizational Learning should be structured as a process that can generate an effective contribution for the expansion of the results of the company.

This learning process should also contribute to the innovative capacity of the organization, another aspect previously identified as of minor contribution for the organizations in this study.

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