

## Learning in Interorganizational Relationships of the Union of Clothing Manufacturers of Bamboo Thicket

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### ABSTRACT

The research presents as a cooperation network can provide a collective learning environment, represented mainly by the dynamics of interaction that occurs between companies through the emergence of inter-organizational learning and innovation practices. Thus, this article aims to investigate what the main practices of inter-organizational learning and innovation in existing partner organizations in the Union network of Clothing Manufacturers of Taquaral / Goiás and region (UCMT / GOIÁS), trying to understand how they occur. As a research strategy, we opted for an exploratory research, with qualitative and quantitative approach through case study. In the survey results found that learning companies are contributing to the improvement of production processes and the introduction of new products by companies. It was found that the associated companies had access to new concepts and know-how of production, knowledge providers and representatives, knowledge about new technologies and raw materials, creating their brands and new product designs, as well as a better understanding of business cooperative system. Moreover, the experience of formal and informal situations of inter-organizational learning, which offered chances to UCMT entrepreneurs so that they could share skills, experiences and know-how promoted on the network, an intense sharing tacit knowledge environment, key resource for sustainability of competitive advantages in the long term. Thus, the creation of the Network enabled knowledge to be shared, bringing benefits to members, such as production processes, suppliers, raw materials, technology and market.

**Keywords:** Interorganizational learning, organizational knowledge, collaborative innovation, business cooperation networks.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The current context in which organizations are inserted is measured by deep structural changes, this has required the emergence of new inter-organizational relations (RIOs) and the incorporation of new practices of relationships between them. The benefits provided by the organizations RIOs, have attracted the attention of companies from different productive sectors seeking new resources and alternatives to adapt to this new economy. Thus, it is understandable the increasing search for more knowledge about the conditions in which it gives learning, as well as inter-organizational learning practices and change, as ways to expand the possibilities and effects of learning (Souza, 2004) [1]. Increasingly, companies have realized the advantages of establishing alliances with each other, forming networks. These cooperation networks between companies have strategic role for companies to access technologies, information, markets and resources, thereby increasing their knowledge, their experience and achieving economies of scale and scope, and competitive

advantages (Balestrin; Verchoore, 2008) [2]. For Child et al. (2005), business cooperation has emerged as an alternative organizational configuration in response to growing economic transformations no longer supported by the strategies of companies operating individually [3]. In strategic terms, the cooperation between the organizations, through a flexible organizational structure (Todeva, 2006), provides a new economic vision. This new vision refers that two competitors together can get better conditions cooperating to compete with a third party [4].

In the case of RIOs, it is understood as the relevant inter-organizational learning practices, as organizations that establish relationship could not have access to knowledge, if there were no interactions between individual organizations and their partners. Thus, shares from the understanding that interorganizational relationships that are formed in this scenario changes provide a platform for inter-organizational learning, providing opportunity for other organizations to access existing knowledge in partner companies (Inkpen, Tsang 2008) [5].

This study is justified by the need for research in small business association, noting that the development of inter-organizational networks is one of the effective vectors to reduce the vulnerability of these companies and simultaneously build a solid foundation to promote their survival. RIOs, the study of strategic alliances, joint ventures, partnerships, networks and other forms of relationships between organizations, is a very current field of study (Cropper et al. 2014) [6]. In the current economic context of globalization, the competition between organizations, it is essential to follow up the changes that occur in day-to-day. Such changes create a need to know to promote continued innovation in organizations. Innovations are essential for organizations. As they say (Nonaka; Takeuchi, 1997), may arise from unexpected and unpredictable ideas, but tacitly existing in the minds of people who make up the organization [7]. Research involving inter-organizational learning and innovation can bring relevant contributions to small businesses and as well as subsidies that can help in strengthening relationships between organizations involved in collective relationships in pursuit of competitiveness. In order to achieve the proposed objective, the paper is structured as follows: it starts with a reflection on Business Cooperation Network (RCE), Organizational and organizational learning skills, followed by a deepening of the conceptual aspects of the Cooperation Networks interorganizational, with emphasis on inteorganizacional learning and collaborative innovation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following sections provide concepts on LANs, inter-organizational learning and work related to this research.

### Network Business Cooperation (NBC)

Studies and research that deals with cooperation, point out that the issue does not constitute a recent idea. Studies conducted by (Barnard, 1979), have sought to confirm the collaborative process as the essence of the organization. However, this concept emerged with greater force from the 80, whose studies by (Astley; Fombruna, 1983, Astley, 1984) accessory has come to realize the concept of cooperation between organizations, confirming other organizational strategic addition to the practiced by traditional companies [8, 9, 10]. Alternatives like these began to take shape in the face of constant socio-economic transformation of the time in which the process of globalization and rapid technological advances have sharpened the competitiveness of organizations and blasphemed their survival on the market (Todeva, 2006). In these situations, the difficulties faced by

organizations in general, brought a reflection on how they were structured in the market [4].

After that, what is going to realize is a reorganization of activities and organizational strategies. Companies before mobilized in isolation, have to take a more systemic nature, aimed at optimization, and complementarity of resources (Balestrin; Verschoore, 2008). Thus organizations began to move around other structure possibilities and strategies to expand its capabilities, improve resources, gain markets and improve their skills through interorganizational cooperation (Todeva, 2006) [2, 4].

Are networks of cooperation that can provide a favorable environment for effective interaction between people, groups and organizations. Its dynamic communication is a real strategic knowledge community and, as Fayard (2004), a space where not only knowledge, but the practices, values, processes, culture and individual differences are shared collectively in favor of a common project. Thus, cooperation networks represent the place where learning processes and sedimentation of knowledge take shape [11]. For Balestrin, Vargas and Fayard (2005), the logic of network action arises from the awareness of the need for joint action and cooperation between and micro and small businesses, in order to achieve greater efficiency and competitiveness. In this same thought Leon (1998), says that business networks are initially formed in order to reduce uncertainties and risks, managing the activities from the coordination and cooperation between the partner companies [12, 13].

### Organizational Skills And Learning Organizational

To Streets, Antonello and Boff (2005), organizational skills allow to solve or improve organizational processes within a specific context by mobilizing various capacities in an integrated manner. Organizational learning is closely linked to the development of organizational skills [14]. Organizational competence relates to a group of individuals who interact in carrying out specific tasks that are impossible for a single individual to perform them alone. The interaction of each of the group members is important for this type of racing, because that way the group members can share many things (eg different backgrounds and points of view), making a synergy that results in collective competence (Gamarra, 2013) [15]. The collective skills are known as "effects team," which emerges when it relates to learning with the collective skills, even when the different group members learn to adapt to organizational changes, comparing to professional practices and applying them in daily (Michaux, 2011). Thus learning of members

becomes collective action (team learning), and consequently reflected in the performance of the organization of collective skills [16]. Fleury and Fleury (2005), organizational learning made the idea that organizations should be in continuous flow management improvement when looking to become more than they are in this for the learning that is related to the experience gain and building skills [17]. Organizational learning involves trying to understand how people, individually and collectively, decide and act when confronted with daily challenges that it faces in their work activities. The theme of the research has proved increasingly important so that you can not only embrace organizational change processes, as well as interfere with them (Antonello, 2007) [18]. Zanginski et al., (2009) argue that organizational learning can be seen in the interpretation and understanding of the processes of action, reflection and dissemination. Whereas knowledge is a product of intrinsic origin to people in the organization, the possible outcomes of an organizational learning process are not the performance results of provision with direct competitiveness gains and positive financial results, but in the interpretation of results and generation knowledge and skills, even in situations where the performance result was negative [19].

### **Interorganizational Cooperation Networks**

Interorganizational networks, also called cooperation networks, have been valued in theory and business practice, for benefit increase the competitiveness of organizations in the twenty-first century (Fayard, 2000) [20]. The need to adapt to this new organizational context, marked by inter-organizational alliances, business networks and partnerships required of companies, especially small and medium-sized (SMEs), the development of strategies to minimize risk and strengthen the sector, such alliances strategic, which, according to Balestrin and Verschoore (2008), arise from different types of organization who love cooperation as a strategy to maximize competitiveness through information sharing, marketing, technology, shopping, risks and opportunities [2]. To Verschoore (2006), SMEs adapted the RIOs is configured as an alternative to increasing competitiveness, this process involving local, regional and government communities [21]. Inter organizational learning, Balestrin (2005) is the learning in the context of group or organization pairs with cooperative relations. Learning in interorganizational level refers to organizational learning derived from an active process of cooperation with an organization (dyad) or more organizations (organizational networks). Refers to the learning in the context of groups or pairs of organizations that are cooperating proactively, ie, some individuals, groups and

organizations, in collaboration unite around a common goal (Knight, 2002) [22, 23].

Almeida et al. (2012) say that, in a competitive manner, there are two possibilities to understand learning within interorganizational alliances network: First, there is the relevance for participants or members to extract certain knowledge of a partnership, discarding it when satisfied the need. Second, a collaborative vision to enter a partnership would, in theory, members or participants submit spirit of cooperation with each other, generating knowledge by combining capabilities. Under the second expectation, networks can tailor an information exchange space, opinion, data, collaboration and mobilization of a given project, thus requiring the expansion of knowledge among the participants [24]. Considering this context, Nonaka and Takeuchi studies (1997) say that the practices by which organizations build learning are called conversion knowledge. This conversion are qualitatively and quantitatively expanded the tacit knowledge and explicit through the process of socialization, externalization, combination and internalization (SECI). Knowledge is born on an individual level, being expanded through the dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge to the organizational and interorganizational after (Balestrin; Verschoore, 2008) [2, 7].

Balestrin and Verschoore (2008) cite the following interaction practices applied in RIOs that contribute to inter-learning with the associated companies [2]: Courses and lectures - practices that allow entrepreneurs to develop concepts and techniques of business management, production process in order to ensure an acceptable quality of products and the brand of the network; Technical visits - visits between industries that identify opportunities for improvements in production processes and technologies businesses;

Trips and visits to fairs - practices that allow entrepreneurs the opportunity to meet ouras experiences and reflect on the trends and challenges; Meetings-relevant area of knowledge of complementarities in the network and should function as a forum for the collective process of making strategic decisions and must take place at least once a month; Strategic planning - should involve all members of the network in defining the objectives, strategies, goals and timelines. It is a learning opportunity and seeks the commitment of the group in carrying out actions based on what was planned; Togethers - These moments are important to solidify the relationship of trust between employers, employees and family members involved in the network, as well as providing informal talks about the opportunities, challenges and the future of the network and its companies; Electronic space -

Strengthens connectivity and socialization of knowledge between business network (e-mail, internet, facebook, etc.). The Interorganizational learning drives innovation. According Nighth (2002), the process of innovation is an interactive learning process, requiring intense relationships between different actors. These relationships, which are configured as networks, should occur with the internal actors of the organization (individuals working in different sectors) and especially with external actors, such as research institutions and universities, government funding agencies and funding organizations business, non-governmental organizations, among others. The ability of organizations to insert these networks and in this new context is fully linked to the investment of training of individuals who are responsible for the generation of knowledge and innovation [25].

### III. METHODOLOGY

The research used methodological approaches, both qualitative and quantitative character, in order to address the issue and objectives, enabling an understanding and background and explanation of the phenomenon studied. This research is also characterized as exploratory for having the intention to deepen the enterprise network issue and get to the problem of response with greater accuracy. Exploratory search is indicated when more accuracy is required the problem set, analyzing the alternative, to develop survey questions and isolate and classify such variables as independent or dependent (Malhotra, 2006). The case study was chosen to be a study of empirical investigating a particular phenomenon, usually contemporary, in a real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context in which it operates are not clearly defined. In the case of an in-depth analysis of one or more objects (cases), allowing its broad and detailed knowledge (Gil, 2007). The survey was conducted in the Union of clothing manufacturers of Taquaral / Goiás and region, made up of small and medium enterprises in underwear garment sector in the town of Taquaral / Goiás, 93 km from Goiania. To Bortolaso (2009), in this interview, the answers were treated in detail in relation to four criteria / characteristics [28]: Strategy - This criterion is divided into: Formulation and Implementation Strategy, the first and defining a set of objectives that the network should be set to their members;

Structure - Check if the network has contractual instruments, which are spread among the members, the number of regular participants at meetings of the association; Process - is divided into: Operational and Relational Processes: the first is about the network trading routines with suppliers, internal, external, marketing; Result - This feature is the most important for this study to treat the acquired learning and innovation and is formed by the results provided by the Network and Absorbed by companies.

This qualitative and quantitative approach study interviews provided information that made it possible to identify the inter-organizational learning network studied. It was used content analysis to analyze strategy of research data. We carried out the mapping of single network through the UCINET 6,579 software and NetDraw 2,153 (Alejandro; Norman, 2006), from the network configuration studied obtained through the mapping done, the relationship only were analyzed, considering the internal actors and external and the resulting relations of these partnerships [29].

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Profile Analysis Unit: Single

The Union of Clothing Manufacturers of Taquaral and Region (UCMT) was established on August 26, 2008, initially 53 entrepreneurs. Born of the business need exposed for thirty-three (33) local entrepreneurs branch of manufacture of underwear, which met to discuss the difficulties encountered at the time common to all, such as: a) lack of skilled labor; b) high wages demanded by employees; c) high default; d) the price of raw materials unfeasible for good local business performance; e) poor sales, etc. In the search for new markets and solutions to their problems, they added up efforts and managed to form an association with a view to make their business become more competitive.

#### Single Relationship Network

The UCMT the relationship network is composed of actors belonging to the internal network, represented by business associates. And the external network consists of the following stakeholders: customers, suppliers, consultants, SEBRAE / GO, FIEG, SENAI / GO, prosecutors through a Promoter of local courts, the State of Goiás by SIC and City Hall and Chamber Municipal Taquaral.

**Criteria / Features Identified In Single Network**

**Table 01 - Strategy Formulation**

Formulation Strategy							
Answer Yes				Answer No			
Question	Amount	Weighting	Total	Question	Amount	Weighting	Total
A	12	0,2	2,4	A	2	0,2	0,4
B	2	0,7	1,4	B	12	0,7	8,4
C	10	0,1	1	C	4	0,1	0,4
<b>SUM</b>			<b>4,8</b>	<b>SUM</b>			<b>9,2</b>

Source: Prepared by the Authors

In Table 01, the weighted sum of no response, Strategy Formulation supplanted the weighted sum of the Yes response (4.8 vs. 9.2). It appears that the network is still far from

recommended to formulate an effective strategy. This should especially as regards the involvement of all members of the network not to participate in the formulation of strategic planning.

**Table 02 - Organizational Structure**

Organizational Structure Of The Network							
Answer Yes				Answer No			
Questao	Quantidade	Ponderação	Total	Questao	Quantidade	Ponderação	Total
A	10	0,14	1,4	A	4	0,14	0,56
B	0	0,26	0	B	14	0,26	3,64
C	5	0,21	1,05	C	9	0,21	1,89
D	14	0,21	2,94	D	0	0,21	0
E	8	0,18	1,44	E	6	0,18	1,08
<b>SUM</b>			<b>6,83</b>	<b>SUM</b>			<b>7,17</b>

Source: Prepared by the Author

According to the Table 02, the weighted sum of non-response on the ONE Organizational Structure, exceeded the weighted sum of the Yes answer (6.83 versus 7.17). It was found that the network still needs to improve its organizational

structure, because there is no regular participation of members at meetings, according unanimous responses of entrepreneurs interviewed and as noted in the minutes of meetings by the researcher.

**Table 03 - Operational Processes**

Operational							
Answer Yes				Answer No			
Question	Amount	Weighting	Total	Question	Amount	Weighting	Total
A	2	0,22	0,44	A	12	0,22	2,64
B	2	0,28	0,56	B	12	0,28	3,36
C	13	0,28	3,64	C	1	0,28	0,28
D	0	0,22	0	D	14	0,22	3,08
<b>SUM</b>			<b>4,64</b>	<b>SUM</b>			<b>9,36</b>

Source: Prepared by the Author

In Table 03, the weighted sum of non-response on Network Operational Processes exceeded the weighted sum of the Yes answer (4.64 versus 9.36). It was found that the network is still below the indicated range for efficient operational processes, because there is no internal routines network (relationship with associates, learning,

innovation). This routine is done externally by actors primarily by SEBRAE / GO and there are no marketing routines on the network. Table 04 shows that the weighted sum of the response Yes, the results provided by the network exceeded the weighted sum of non-response (12.14 versus 1.86).

**Table 04 - Results provided by the Network**

Provided By Network							
Answer Yes				Answer No			
Question	Amount	Weighting	Total	Question	Amount	Weighting	Total
A	14	0,22	3,08	A	0	0,22	0
B	10	0,1	1	B	4	0,1	0,4
C	11	0,1	1,1	C	3	0,1	0,3
D	11	0,16	1,76	D	3	0,16	0,48

E	11	0,16	1,76	E	3	0,16	0,48
F	14	0,16	2,24	F	0	0,16	0
G	12	0,1	1,2	G	2	0,1	0,2
<b>SUM</b>			<b>12,14</b>	<b>SUM</b>			<b>1,86</b>

Source: Prepared by the Author

It was found that participation in the network has provided learning for associated companies (market, product, supplier, processes, etc.), infrastructure contracting, specialized services to increase competitiveness (consulting, store construction, etc.), reduction costs and risks (operating costs, transaction costs, etc.), better trading conditions (dates, prices, etc.), market innovation (offering new products, offer new

services, etc.) and expansion of trade relations (new customers , new suppliers, etc.). This is due to the associated business courses, seminars and lectures, technical visits, trips and visits to trade fairs provided by UCMT network actors, mainly by SEBRAE / GO.As with Table 05 the weighted sum of answers Yes, on the results Absorbed fur companies, supplanted the weighted sum of non-response (13.24 versus 0.76).

**Table 05 - Results Absorbed by companies**

Absorbed By Companies							
Answer Yes				Answer No			
Question	Amount	Weighting	Total	Question	Amount	Weighting	Total
A	13	0,11	1,43	A	1	0,11	0,11
B	12	0,11	1,32	B	2	0,11	0,22
C	11	0,09	0,99	C	3	0,09	0,27
D	14	0,11	1,54	D	0	0,11	0
E	14	0,14	1,96	E	0	0,14	0
F	14	0,14	1,96	F	0	0,14	0
G	14	0,14	1,96	G	0	0,14	0
H	13	0,16	2,08	H	1	0,16	0,16
<b>SUM</b>			<b>13,24</b>	<b>SUM</b>			<b>0,76</b>

Source: Prepared by the Autho

To research all businessmen were unanimous in saying that with the formation of the UCMT network the following gains were achieved: improvements in facilities of their businesses, improve the credibility of associated companies, increased confidence in their own business by business network and increased self-confidence of business associates. As a result, caused an expansion of the company revenues and improved the quality

**Analysis of Learning Practices Identified In Network**

In this study it was observed that one of the unanimous answers obtained was that the greatest gain through the formation of the single was the access of new knowledge among the member

of life of members. These criteria are positively interrelated. For Balestrin et al. (2010) that means a good structure will affect positively the strategy and vice versa. And the same can be said in relation to other criteria [30]. These four criteria / characteristics (strategy, structure, process and outcome) addressed together a set of elements that are essential to the evaluation of the management of a network of cooperation and actors involved. companies. The shared knowledge that brought more benefits to members were on production processes, suppliers, raw materials, technology and market. The inter-organizational learning practices identified in UCMT networked knowledge conversion and its interaction modes are shown in Table 06:

**Table 06:** knowledge conversion modes and interaction with interorganizational learning practices UCMT network

Socialization	Conversion of tacit knowledge into tacit knowledge;	Visits business skills, travel and visits to fairs, Confraternizations and informal meetings.
Externalization	Conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge;	Formal meetings and collective decision-making processes.
Combination	Explicit knowledge conversion into explicit knowledge;	Electronic communication space and courses and lectures.
Internalization	Explicit knowledge conversion in tactical knowledge.	New management concepts and new production practices.

Source: Adapted by authors from Balestrin (2005) and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997)

This research found that, in Taquaral and region, even companies that are not associated with enriched network just by learning to observe and

repeat the actions of the companies associated with UCMT performed, such as building stores with beautiful windows.

## V. CONCLUSION

In this study we sought to explain that the successful outcome of interorganizational learning practices is directly related to the synergistic interaction between the group in which the network can be considered not only as a knowledge transfer channel, but also as a space knowledge bears fruit through relationships with internal and external actors. After analyzing the results, it was noted that member companies have access to new concepts and know-how of production, knowledge providers and representatives, knowledge about new technologies and raw materials, creating their brands and new product designs. This is a result of learning

companies, which are already contributing to the improvement of production processes and the introduction of new products by companies such as: Date of collection, as well as a better understanding of the business cooperative system. It found the experience of formal and informal situations of inter-organizational learning, which offered chances to the SOLE entrepreneurs so that they could share skills, experiences, emotions and know-how, through face to face communication. This promoted the network an intense sharing tacit knowledge environment, key resource for sustainable competitive advantages in the long term.

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