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RELATIONAL CAPABILITY IN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS: THE ROLE OF MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES FROM A MICROFOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

CAPACIDADE RELACIONAL EM PARCERIAS ESTRATÉGICAS: O PAPEL DAS COMPETÊNCIAS GERENCIAIS SOB UMA PERSPECTIVA MICROFUNDACIONAL

CAPACIDAD RELACIONAL EN ASOCIACIONES ESTRATÉGICAS: EL PAPEL DE LAS COMPETENCIAS GERENCIALES EN UNA PERSPECTIVA MICRO FUNDACIONAL

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Develop a conceptual framework of how relational capability is developed in the context of strategic partnerships, considering managerial competencies as important antecedents of this capability.

Design/methodology/approach: The study is based on ideas and theoretical assumptions that have significant importance in the definition and construction of the concepts discussed in this analysis. The literature review was based on the reading, analysis, and registration of national and international articles that enabled the discussion of points of intersection of the theme of strategic partnerships, relational capability, and managerial competencies. Finally, it presents a research agenda with emerging questions.

Results: The conceptual model developed proposes the manager's actions based on their characteristics that involve experience, training, cognition, and behavior. Aspects of senior management's intellectuality and conduct have been positively related in the literature to business models and to the company's ability to relate to other agents in the business ecosystem of which it is part. It is suggested that the manager's knowledge, skills, and characteristics are necessary to promote actions between partner companies to detect and develop new business opportunities.

Originality: The study proposes a structure of the components of managerial competencies in the development of relational capability, necessary for strategic partnerships between companies. The proposed structure presents contributions to the concept of relational capability and its role in the business performance of partner companies and adds the interaction between the individual and organizational dimensions necessary for the

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performance of partner companies.

Keywords: Managerial competencies. Relational capabilities. Strategic partnerships.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Desenvolver um quadro conceitual de como se dá o desenvolvimento da capacidade relacional no contexto das parcerias estratégicas, considerando as competências gerenciais como importantes antecedentes dessa capacidade.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: O estudo é baseado em ideias e pressupostos teóricos que têm significativa importância na definição e construção dos conceitos discutidos nesta análise. A revisão da literatura foi baseada na leitura, análise e fichamento de artigos nacionais e internacionais que possibilitou a discussão de pontos de interseção do tema parcerias estratégicas, capacidade relacional e competências gerenciais. Por fim, apresenta uma agenda de pesquisa com questões emergentes.

Resultados: O modelo conceitual desenvolvido propõe a atuação do gestor a partir de suas características que envolvem experiência, formação, cognição e comportamento. Aspectos da intelectualidade e conduta da alta administração tem sido positivamente relacionados na literatura aos modelos de negócios, e à capacidade da empresa de se relacionar com outros agentes do ecossistema de negócios do qual faz parte. Sugere-se que o conhecimento, as habilidades e características do gestor são necessárias para promover ações entre empresas parceiras para detectar e desenvolver novas oportunidades de negócios.

Originalidade: O estudo propõe uma estrutura dos componentes das competências gerenciais no desenvolvimento da capacidade relacional, necessária para parcerias estratégicas de empresas. A estrutura proposta apresentada contribuições ao conceito da capacidade relacional e seu papel sobre o desempenho dos negócios de empresas parceiras, e agrega a interação entre as dimensões individuais e organizacional necessárias para o desempenho de empresas parcerias.

Palavras-chave: Competências gerenciais. Capacidade relacional. Parcerias estratégicas.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Desarrollar un marco conceptual de cómo se desarrolla la capacidad relacional en el contexto de asociaciones estratégicas, considerando las competencias gerenciales como antecedentes importantes de esta capacidad.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque: El estudio se basa en ideas y supuestos teóricos que tienen importancia significativa en la definición y construcción de los conceptos discutidos en este análisis. La revisión de la literatura se basó en la lectura, análisis y registro de artículos nacionales e internacionales que posibilitaron la discusión de puntos de intersección del tema de asociaciones estratégicas, capacidad relacional y competencias gerenciales. Finalmente, presenta una agenda de investigación con preguntas emergentes.

Resultados: El modelo conceptual desarrollado propone las acciones del directivo en función de sus características que involucran experiencia, formación, cognición y comportamiento. Aspectos de la intelectualidad y conducta de la alta dirección se han relacionado positivamente en la literatura con los modelos de negocio y con la capacidad de la empresa para relacionarse con otros agentes del ecosistema empresarial del que forma parte. Se sugiere que los conocimientos, habilidades y características del directivo son necesarios para promover acciones entre empresas colaboradoras para detectar y desarrollar nuevas oportunidades de negocio.

Originalidad: El estudio propone una estructura de los componentes de las competencias gerenciales en el desarrollo de la capacidad relacional, necesaria para las asociaciones estratégicas entre empresas. La estructura propuesta presenta aportes al concepto de capacidad relacional y su papel en el desempeño empresarial de las empresas socias, y agrega la interacción entre las dimensiones individuales y organizacionales necesarias para el desempeño de las empresas socias.

Palabras clave: Competencias gerenciales. Capacidad relacional. Asociaciones estratégicas.

INTRODUCTION

The transformations that have occurred worldwide, affecting both societal behavior and technological innovations, have heightened competitiveness for companies amidst economic uncertainties. Recognizing that companies may lack internal resources to thrive in competitive environments, strategic partnerships emerge as a viable alternative for exploring new opportunities and generating greater business value.

Strategic partnerships have become important for companies as they aim to improve their day-to-day efficiency and reap long-term benefits. According to Villena et al. (2011), these benefits include expanding market share, acquiring new knowledge, improving organizational learning, reducing costs, and fostering innovations. The strategic outcomes of companies now hinge not only on internal resources and capabilities but also on collaborative gains from partnerships. Companies collaborate to access resources (Dyer & Singh, 1998) and engage in inter-organizational exchanges that yield greater gains collectively (Zhang et al., 2017).

Dyer et al. (2018) assert that companies must prioritize building collaborative relationship management capabilities when forming strategic partnerships. These relationships go beyond accessing partners' resources, requiring collaborative efforts to manage diverse perspectives and ensure commitment at micro and macro levels, crucial for achieving mutual gains (Ghouri et al., 2019).

As per the capabilities approach, a company's strength lies in its knowledge, which is expressed through its unique ability to carry out activities that involve interactions between different parties searching for solutions (Dosi et al., 2000; Teece & Pisano, 1994). However, knowledge can take explicit as well as tacit forms and can be embedded in the minds of individuals (Gera, 2012). Therefore, to manage the complexity of the partnership, managers need specific individual characteristics to complement the relational capability at the organizational level (Badir et al., 2019). Managers' human capital can be considered a link between the individual and organizational levels (Felin et al., 2015; Ghouri et al., 2019).

Although there is growing recognition of the role of individuals in global strategic partnerships (Abell et al., 2008; Felin et al., 2012; Felin et al., 2015), previous research in this area lacks a theoretical framework and evidence to portray the human side of this collaboration (Badir et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2017). This phenomenon still lacks an explicit understanding of organizations as entities that are formed by individuals. To fill this research gap, it is necessary to understand how the individual-level characteristics that constitute the human capital required by companies, in strategic partnerships, contribute to the organizational level (Barney & Felin, 2013). Additionally, it is important to understand how organizational-level relational capabilities are developed (Schillebeeckx et al., 2016).

To understand the development of relational capabilities in partnerships, an integrative theoretical framework is required that links various theoretical approaches, in an attempt to explain all the elements that can develop relational capabilities in partnerships. Relational capability plays a crucial role in establishing successful relationships, which in turn can boost company performance (Sivadas & Dwyer, 2000). Therefore, it is essential to comprehend all factors that affect the development of these capabilities. This analysis aims to clarify the antecedents of relational capabilities and demonstrate how they lead to the emergence of company performance.

Kohtamäki et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive review that highlights the importance of relational capabilities in the field. The authors suggest that researchers and companies are keen to explore the processes, structures, tools, and activities involved in partnerships, as well as, understanding the antecedents and results of the relational capability benefits that offer benefits to partners. Empirical studies reveal that relational capabilities contribute to the generation of relational income, while managerial competencies play a significant role in the company's overall capabilities, resulting in managerial income, based on the quality of the managers' skills (Castanias & Helfat, 2001).

The complex management of companies requires in-depth knowledge of the people in charge and their competencies to achieve collective objectives. Given the constantly changing business environment, it is crucial to understand the role of managerial competencies (individual characteristics of managers) in making effective decisions and reaching goals. Studies have shown that individual factors such as cognition and emotions play a significant role in strategic decision-making (Hodgkinson & Healey, 2011). Additionally, the emotions and feelings of the people in charge of conducting business can also have an impact on the relational capabilities

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at the organizational level (Rungsithong et al., 2017).

Managers can play an essential role in modifying, extending, and reconfiguring company resources in response to market changes, based on relationships between companies (Martin & Bachrach, 2018). Managers' attitudes and behavior are important antecedents of companies' capabilities in identifying, selecting, and evaluating suitable partners to build a solid foundation of partnerships (Gammoh & Voss, 2013).

Although previous research has investigated many macro-level attributes to understand relationships between partnerships, the micro-level is only partially understood. Though previous studies have recognized the importance of top managers in developing a company's capabilities, many of them have focused more on organizational, structural, and institutional aspects, neglecting behavioral aspects at the individual level of analysis.

This essay aims to develop a conceptual model that explores the relationship between managerial competencies at the individual level and relational capability at the organizational level to improve partner companies' performance in strategic partnerships. By doing so, this study adds to the understanding of how relational capability can be developed in the context of strategic partnerships through managerial competencies.

To achieve its proposed objective, this study, which is a theoretical essay, was conducted through a thorough literature review. The literature review not only provides new insights into the topic but also generates new research opportunities by raising questions that arise during the review (Torraco, 2005).

From the theoretical perspective of dynamic capabilities and the relational view, this study proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) between the individual level and the organizational level (Arndt et al., 2018; Salvato & Vassolo, 2018) for analysis. This study contributes to the debate presented about the microfoundations of relational capability as a dynamic capability of the company (Felin et al., 2015). It presents propositions to evaluate the relationships between managerial competencies and relational capability in strategic partnerships, which lead to greater performance for the companies involved.

The proposal aims to deepen the understanding of strategic partnerships by advancing discussions on the development of relational capability in the context of business partners. It also contributes to future studies by identifying antecedents motivating these capabilities' development and understanding how main managers' behavior contributes to organizations.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study aims to achieve its objectives through a theoretical essay of an exploratory nature. To do so, a review of national and international literature on the topic was conducted, seeking to deepen ideas (Gil, 2002). The literature review not only helps expand knowledge on the topic but also allows for critical analysis to identify points that are still controversial. This, in turn, leads to the formulation of new research questions (Taylor & Procter, 2012).

The motivation for developing this study began with the desire to critically analyze how managers can contribute to the generation of capabilities that provide greater performance for companies. Furthermore, evaluate these relationships from the context of strategic partnerships, as a business structure that contributes to maintaining the competitive strategy of companies in the market.

For the literature review, we conducted a thorough search of national and international articles on the topics of strategic partnerships, relational capability, and managerial competencies. Our search was conducted in various databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Wiley Online Library, Science Direct, and Emerald, as well as in the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) databases and repositories. This allowed us to access important periodicals and annals of national and international events, and identify the main theoretical lenses used to discuss the literature.

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THEORETICAL BASIS

Researchers from various academic fields and levels of analysis have been striving to understand the different roles played by organizations and individuals in strategic partnerships (Albats et al., 2020; Bertello et al., 2022). Stakeholder theory considers collaboration between organizational and extra-organizational levels of analysis (Freeman, 2010). Network theory presents an inter-organizational or multilevel approach (Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Weert et al., 2022). The theory of social capital has as its central point the level of analysis between the individual and the community. The relational view approach focuses on inter-organizational networks and alliances as the unit of analysis to explain competitive advantage (Dyer & Singh, 2018; Ferrigno et al., 2023). In the study by Sirmon et al. (2007), organizations are viewed as arrangements, where organizational human capital combines individual characteristics, acting as a link between different levels of analysis (Felin et al., 2020).

Human capital is a concept in the economy that refers to the value of human work. It is considered an essential resource within inter-organizational transactions, represented by personal characteristics like skills, knowledge, experience, and education (Albats et al., 2020; Goldin, 2016). In this study, we refer to these characteristics as competencies, which can be defined as an individual's ability to apply their skills and knowledge effectively (McClelland, 1973) "necessary to perform successful work in a given position" (Blaškova et al., 2017, p. 575).

In the origins of management theory, the individual is always seen as the organization's basic strategic factor (Barnard, 1968). The Resource-Based View (RBV) approach, developed by Barney in 1991, argues that human capital possesses unique characteristics that make it a strategic resource, contributing to sustainable competitiveness. To manage a partnership, especially when it is strategically important to the company's performance, managers need specific individual characteristics to complement relational capability at the organizational level (Badir et al., 2019; Palmié et al., 2023).

In this sense, individuals can interact in a way that influences variables at organizational levels, and represents the collective level under analysis (Felin et al., 2012; Jong et al., 2023). According to the authors, microfoundations can impact the development, maintenance, or change of a routine or capability, which we call relational capability in this study. Felin and Hesterly (2007) state that individuals can interfere in the performance of organizations through their management capabilities, knowledge, experiences, and cognitive characteristics, influencing the development or modification of routines or capabilities at the organizational level (Bağış et al., 2022).

An increasing number of studies tend to adopt a microfoundations approach when analyzing strategic partnerships, examining the components of the human capital necessary for collaborative activities. The term microfoundations refers to the individual- and group-level actions that shape the organization's strategy and, more broadly dynamic capabilities, and lead to the emergence of superior performance at the organizational level (Eisenhardt et al., 2010).

The proposed analysis of the studies seeks to integrate and develop an understanding of micro-level characteristics with macro-level results (Felin et al., 2015). For example, Najmaei (2014) points out in his study that attitudes related to organizational knowledge, the use of innovations in the business model, the ability to analyze markets, the adoption of investments, and proposed solutions depend on the manager's cognitive style. Botts (2017) also showed that managerial cognition influences dynamic capabilities. Krupskyi and Grynko (2018) present a positive correlation with the different dimensions of the dynamic capabilities of tourism companies, in which these capabilities are influenced by the cognitive characteristics of managers.

Tatham et al. (2017) also support that problem-solving skills, and customer and supplier relationship management, are important components of supply chain managers for the company to obtain the ability to identify and shape opportunities and threats in its business environment. Mazzucchelli et al. (2019) created a conceptual model that analyzes how individual skills and behaviors affect strategic innovation

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capabilities at the company level. Podmetina et al. (2018) developed an open innovation competency model that relates to organizational capabilities, innovation processes, and individual skills.

According to Blaškova et al. (2017), competence is a central element in the development of the company's capabilities. These competencies are the necessary knowledge and skills required for success in a given hierarchical position. The use of competencies not only stands out for the knowledge, skills, and personal qualities necessary for the efficient performance of the position but also for identifying the qualities necessary for the success of the company as a whole (Bonder et al., 2011). Managerial competencies are related to the cognitive, emotional, and intuitive aspects of managers, which help them find effective solutions in a dynamic and transforming company environment (Gheitarani et al., 2022; Hodgkinson & Healey, 2011).

The concept of competence was used in studies in macro and micro contexts, with different approaches. In the micro context, competence is known as a characteristic inherent to the individual, whereas in the macro context, used as an essential competence, it is inherent to the organization (Neves et al., 2017). The connection between these two levels contributes to translating the organization's strategy into individual competencies (Fleury & Fleury, 2004), which is still a path to be better explored by research, due to its conceptual complexity and possibilities of measures that capture the subjectivity involved.

The basis for forming a partnership is the companies' ability to create and develop relationships (Martin & Bachrach, 2018), exchange information, learn, manage relationships and, thus, generate value (Yan et al., 2010) called relational capability (Niesten & Jolink, 2015; Schilke & Goerzen, 2010). However, given the rapid change in markets, it becomes a constant challenge for companies to manage relationships with other partners (Forkmann et al., 2016), making it necessary to develop internal capabilities for the appropriate management of the resources involved in the partnership. Involvement in partnerships depends on the ability to identify potential partners and define strategies for adequate business management with partners, for engagement between companies. The relational capabilities are considered critical factors for the success of a partnership (Giraldi et al., 2023).

For this collaboration to be effective, partners need to align their performance measures (Kennerley & Neely, 2002), to promote business development. Performance measures are management tools that allow companies to translate their strategies into action, control results, direct alignment, provide returns, and fulfill strategic objectives between partners (Ojra et al., 2021; Rey & Neely, 2010).

To align strategic objectives between partner companies in search of greater performance, it is necessary to develop specific relational capabilities, which comprise solutions, procedures, and organizational competencies relating to intra- and inter-organizational dimensions (Goerzen, 2005). Studies point to positive evidence of the influence of relational capability on company performance (Capaldo & Petruzzelli, 2011; Costa & Porto, 2015; Kale & Singh, 2007, Maulina & Natakusumah, 2020; Nugraha & Hakimah, 2019; Schilke & Goerzen, 2010).

It appears that there is a growing interest in the scientific community in understanding this relationship. However, there is still no clear understanding of its nature and development, to understand its characteristics, precedents, and results (Bengtsson et al., 2020; Donada et al., 2015; Kohtamäki et al., 2018; Rungsithong et al., 2017). These antecedents appear to involve constructs related to the business environment, strategy, and company operations (Kohtamäki et al., 2018).

RELATIONAL CAPABILITIES IN THE RELATIONAL VISION AND DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES APPROACH

The capability to manage alliances is presented in the literature as a dynamic capability at the company level, according to the literature (Mamédio et al., 2019; Niesten & Jolink, 2015). This is because it has the potential to create,

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mobilize, and transform a company's resource base using the resources of its partners (Kale & Singh, 2007). In this sense, these capabilities are seen as dynamic capabilities, as they play a role in creating new resources that can generate value for both parties involved in a partnership. Dynamic capabilities refer to the capabilities that enable companies to "integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to deal with rapidly changing environments to create innovative forms of competitive advantage" (Teece et al., 1997, p. 516).

Strategic partnerships are related to organizational processes and the ability of companies to access the resources and capabilities of other organizations (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Since the superior management of strategic partnerships contributes to competitive advantage at the company level, it has become a central concern for studies in the area of strategy (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Ireland et al., 2002) to understand the concept and process of developing capabilities aimed at managing partnerships. These capabilities, when developed by partners, can directly influence partnership decisions. From this perspective, relational capabilities emerge as a dynamic capability that intentionally alters the company's routines and resource bases (such as knowledge, procedures, and policies), to achieve shared objectives with its partners (Alves et al., 2019; Czakon, 2009), as well as the particular objectives of each company.

The seminal study on relational capability was developed by Dyer and Singh (1998), in which the authors present the generation of relational income by combining complementary resources and sharing knowledge with alliance partners. Adopting the dynamic capabilities approach Dyer and Kale (2007) expanded the relational view by arguing that relational capabilities are a prior condition for companies to access the benefits of their strategic partnerships, through the complementarity of resources. By benefiting from the acquisition of heterogeneous resources from its relationships, through effective management, the company captures value, enables organizational improvements, and contributes to the company's performance (Alves et al., 2019).

According to Yan et al. (2010), relational capabilities generate expectations of benefits and collaborative synergy between companies to improve mutual performance. For Dyer and Singh (1998), relational capability is a potential capability when alliance partners have a synergistic combination, exchange or invest assets, knowledge, and resources, and integrate routines and processes to improve organizational efficiency. Relational capabilities require efficiency, structural interaction, personal relationships, development of specific assets, cooperative behavior, and interpersonal bonds (Yan et al., 2010).

Teece's (2007) framework on dynamic capabilities primarily focuses on the activities of a company at a macro-level. However, it also recognizes the importance of managerial cognition in achieving such activities. The ability to detect, seize, and transform is linked to the cognitive (Hodgkinson & Healey, 2011) and behavioral (Arndt et al., 2018) competencies of individuals and groups within the organization. These competencies strengthen the processes and activities that are assigned by senior management (Teece, 2021). They imply the rationality of processes that help management detect information from the external environment, which allows them to identify potential threats and opportunities (Teece, 2018). Furthermore, these competencies help create behaviors that generate a response to environmental dynamism (Arndt et al., 2018), and through creative management, they can reconfigure the existing business model to align it with the organizational strategy (Teece, 2007; Teece, 2014). Thus, it is suggested that there is a relationship between the cognitive and behavioral characteristics of management, listed in this study as managerial competencies, with the development of relational capability.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL: STUDY PROPOSITIONS

In this study, it is stated that partnerships represent a dynamic process of interaction between individual and organizational-level actions that affect the performance of companies involved in strategic partnerships. Based on the literature, this section proposes that when an organization has competent management, the

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possibilities of developing relational capability increase, generating greater performance for the partners involved. The formulated propositions are presented, indicating the relationships between the possible constructs addressed during the study.

Managerial Competencies: Microfoundations of Relational Capability

Given the complexity of partnerships, important questions remain about how companies build capabilities to create, develop, and manage their relationships. In this study, these capabilities are understood through dynamic capabilities, as they participate in the development of new resources, capable of creating value for both parties involved in a partnership. Relational capability (Dyer et al., 2018) provides a relevant analytical perspective to examine interactions and how the results of these interactions contribute to the results of the companies involved.

In the field of strategic management, the role of managers has been of central interest to dynamic capabilities researchers (Ambrosini & Altintas, 2019; Guenduez & Mergel, 2022; Kurtmollaiev, 2017; Huy & Zott, 2018). They are considered central elements in conducting organizational strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of companies, explore opportunities, and identify possible threats in the market (Anzengruber et al., 2017).

Management activity is a process that involves various aspects of a manager's experience, including their professional qualifications, education, training, and learning (Oliveira & Silva, 2020; Bengtsson et al., 2020), as well as cognitive characteristics (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015; Souza & Forte, 2019) and behavioral (Boyatzis et al., 2017; Cortellazzo et al., 2020) of the manager. Managers with high cognitive ability acquire knowledge more intensely and make more agile decisions, allowing them to develop effective strategies in the face of complex and dynamic business environments. On the other hand, complementing cognitive characteristics, the behavioral characteristics of the manager's personality have an impact on company culture, and also on a wide range of organizational outcomes, such as financial performance, reputation, and team attitudes (O'Reilly et al., 2014).

The dimension of organizational capabilities intersects with the dimension of human capital skills. It highlights the need for managers to be skilled in negotiation, building trust, and balancing diverse expectations from both partner sides, they need to be able to connect interests between companies, which have different structures, operations, organizational routines, and environments. They need to analyze these structural differences on a macro level, but also be able to manage them on a micro level. Expectation management skills, the ability to build trust, and negotiation skills also help balance the contradictory needs of partners.

Another important management skill for partnerships is directing and conducting long-term strategies (Marchington et al., 2005). This direction requires the manager to adopt an attitude open to new connections, with skills to articulate ideas and situations, to develop activities that promote win-win collaboration. In the short term, some alternatives may not exactly meet the company's current challenges but may contribute to the future.

Regarding cognitive competencies, managers need educational training. Educational aspects allow managers to deal with complexities, be creative, and be capable of combining different market knowledge with decision-making processes. In this way, managers perceive changes at the individual micro level and can provide an impetus to detect new opportunities (Teece, 2007) at the organizational level.

The interaction between components of intellectual capital analyzed from an individual-level approach, with the organizational or intra-organizational level, makes it possible to evaluate the heterogeneity of organizations and the importance of individual-level characteristics in the formation of organizational-level relational capability (Ali et al., 2021; Knudsen, 2008; Marchington & Vincent, 2004).

Given the above, it is understood that managerial competencies contribute to the development of relational capability. Consequently, it is proposed that:

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Proposition 1: Managers' competencies, formed by knowledge, education, experiences, and skills, contribute to identifying opportunities, obtaining knowledge, solving problems, creating alternatives, managing resources, making decisions, articulating ideas, leading, and managing expectations.

Proposition 2: Managerial competencies contribute to identifying, developing, and managing strategic partnerships with companies.

Relational Capability, Managerial Competencies, and Performance The Partner Companies

According to Dyer and Singh (1998), one of the challenges inherent to strategic partnerships is the company's ability to identify partners to combine resources that are complementary to them. In other words, the company needs to be able to find strategic partners that have resources that contribute to the partnerships being effective and generating results. According to these authors, to identify strategic partners, the company needs to recognize partners with experience in inter-organizational relationships, and internal capability to select and evaluate partners that occupy the centrality of the network, as this way, it is possible to obtain information about the complementary strategic resources of the potential partner (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

The ability to develop relationships creates opportunities to access information about markets, creates new links and knowledge of partners generates new information about suppliers, customers, and competitors (Chen et al., 2017). The relational capability allows the company to improve its strategies for the development of products and services (Story et al., 2017), suppliers, customer satisfaction, profit maximization (Srećković, 2018), and contributes to achieving the strategic objectives of companies. companies (Lans et al., 2015).

Theoretical approaches based on competencies suggest that the characteristics, actions, and behaviors of the strategic leader are essential for company performance (Hambrick, 1984), being important predictors of performance (Goldman & Scott, 2016). Studies have already investigated the role of skills in improving performance and, consequently, in the outcome of organizational goals (Amedu & Dulewicz, 2018; Shah & Prakash, 2018). The manager's competencies determine potential gains for a company involved in strategic alliances (Goldman & Scott, 2016).

The performance obtained by companies can vary depending on managerial understanding (Wensley, 1999), on how effectively their managers strategically use resources to generate performance (Sirmon et al., 2007). Empirical research shows that managers' actions can impact the conduct of the company's strategies and, consequently, its results in different ways, due to differences in managerial recognition and managers' human capital (Helfat & Martin, 2015). The participation of managers and the effort to achieve strategic objectives include the implementation of policies and strategic objectives at different organizational levels, promoting resources for the progress of teams' work, and rewards for performance obtained (Majid et al., 2019).

Managers' competencies generate performance, but as companies promote the development of these competencies in favor of generating organizational capabilities, these capabilities tend to improve the company's performance. Managerial commitment provides governance mechanisms that support the promotion of unique capabilities (Alhaqbani et al., 2016) and influence the company's ability to establish strategies and make effective choices. Adequate and supported management can help the company identify and explore its relationships by its strategic objectives, promoting the achievement of its objectives.

Relating the elements of managerial competencies with the elements of relational capability and performance of companies involved in strategic partnerships, it is proposed that:

Proposition 3: Managerial competencies positively promote the performance of companies involved in partnerships, that is, senior management has greater skills, which allows the company to improve its business strategies to achieve its objectives, obtaining superior performance.

Proposition 4: Relational capability is

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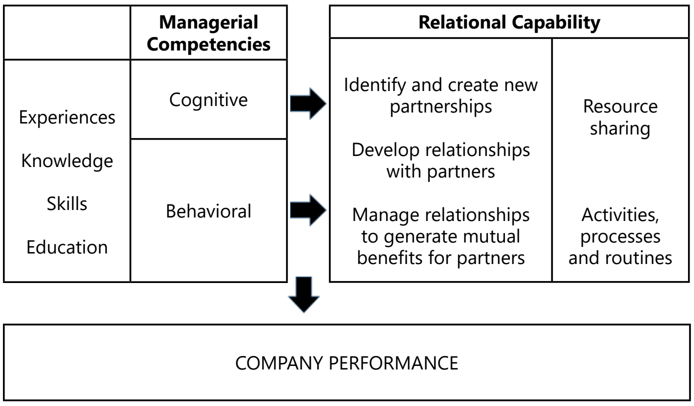
positively related to the performance of companies involved in partnerships, that is, relational capability allows the company to improve its business strategies to achieve its objectives, obtaining superior performance.

Given the propositions presented, we outline a conceptual framework that represents the associations theoretically defended for this study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study suggests a framework for the managerial competencies essential to developing relational capability, a crucial factor in establishing strategic partnerships within companies. The proposed structure follows a microfoundations approach (as suggested by Felin et al., 2015) in the development of relational capability, which is considered a dynamic capability (as per Teece et al., 1997), and the relational view advocated by Dyer and Singh (1998). It emphasizes the interaction between individual and organizational dimensions, essential for enhancing partner companies' performance.

The literature review addressed fundamental concepts about the research model that guide this work, contributing to the identification of variables, the definition of the conceptual framework (Figure 1), and the formulation of propositions. Interest in the study of strategic partnerships contributes to the improvement of management models that encourage the development of relational capability, to foster debates in favor of beneficial relationships between companies, whether private or public.

The role of the main organizational actors, executives, and/or managers, as antecedents of the company's capabilities in the formation and development of partnerships, points to possibilities for further investigation into how these capabilities are developed in the company. The study also advances toward future investigations into understanding how the process of developing relational capabilities occurs, adopting the theoretical approach of dynamic capabilities in conjunction with the relational approach. It also considers the microfoundations approach when bringing into discussion the role of managerial competencies in developing the company's capabilities.

The integration of these approaches enables the discussion of a set of theoretical arguments that can provide theoretical and empirical insights for the generation of a new theory on individual-level microfoundations and the development of relational capability in the context of strategic partnerships. It also makes it possible to study the phenomenon of strategic partnerships based on investigation between different levels of analysis, individual, organizational, and intra-organizational.

Managers' competencies can explore and anticipate organizational changes (Teece, 2021). Top management competencies seem to be important elements in building relationship capabilities between partner companies, especially those related to change and management. As drivers of change, managers assume the responsibility of identifying and pointing out the company's strategic direction, and promoting business development and performance.

The conceptual model developed proposes the manager's actions based on their characteristics that involve experience, training, cognition, and behavior. Aspects of senior management's intellectuality and conduct have been positively related in the literature to business models and to the company's ability to relate to other agents in the business ecosystem of which it is part.

It is suggested that the manager's knowledge, skills, and characteristics are necessary to promote actions between partner companies to

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detect and develop new business opportunities. As managers know the company's business and market, they identify different relationship opportunities that allow them to access resources that are not available but necessary for business expansion. With information from relationships, they can articulate new ideas and promote win-win collaboration situations focused on their strategic objectives, increasing long-term performance and business competitiveness.

Considering the structure of the microfoundations of capabilities (people, processes, and interactions), it is considered that future studies can analyze the different interactions between these elements within organizations, and how their effects contribute to developing relational capability in contexts of strategic partnerships. A better understanding of the behavior of these microfoundations can advance the understanding of what drives the behavioral differences that exist in these processes, with an impact on the performance results of organizations.

The choice of the company's top management can consider the characteristics related to the skills profile that the company needs to develop in the market to promote its operations based on its partnership relationships. As such, managers need to engage in learning practices that strengthen the competencies needed to develop and manage new strategic partnerships. The importance of access to resources is highlighted, but it is also highlighted that managerial skills are essential to identify which of these resources can offer an advantage and obtain better performance. The ability to interpret the environment and direct appropriate strategies to meet the needs of that environment are essential skills in managing strategic partnerships.

Future research studies can conduct empirical investigations based on the propositions raised in this study to either support or reject them, and to enhance our understanding of managerial competencies, relational capability, and strategic partnerships. The propositions developed in this study can be tested using data collected from managers in various sectors and/or partner environments, employing different methodological approaches. Further research can also explore diverse cultural backgrounds, emerging and developed economies, and challenging situations in different countries or regions.

The empirical research of the propositions contributes to the application of existing scales in the literature and the exploration of new insights into various managerial competencies that can be identified through exploratory studies. With the theoretical structure presented, there is a potential for future empirical studies to deepen the proposed relationships and associate other organizational variables.

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