

Full Length Research Paper

Motivational factors of formation, cooperate actions and gains obtained from the cooperation networks of building material retail in Parana: A comparative between the associated managers' and retailers' perceptions

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This study analyzes factors that condition the formation of the building material of retailer cooperation networks and the results obtained with this actuation. This study was carried out of multiple descriptive and comparative cases, with transversal perspective of time. A non-disguised questionnaire was used, answered online by fifteen associated retailers and the manager of each one of the four formally incorporated networks acting on the field in the State of Parana, Brazil. On the basis of the answers provided by these two groups of managers, it was raised similarities and differences about the formation and gains obtained after entering these organizations. The study reveals that the main factors for the formation of the networks are: a) development of collective actions; b) pursuit of stability in the market; c) reduction of costs; and d) adaptation to the market conditions. The cooperated actions of big interest among the networks managers are those turned to the projection of a brand in the market. The main results obtained are: a) higher negotiation power with the suppliers; and b) exchange of experiences, importance of the business management. The study highlights the different dimensions for the constitution of the cooperation networks and that there are different perceptions regarding the obtained results for the cooperated actuation.

Key-words: Retail, building material, cooperation network, formation, results.

INTRODUCTION

The globalized economy determines the deep changes in the strategic process of the companies, propitiating

opportunities and threat on every segment and requiring new ways to compete. On this environment of changes,

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some organizations seek acting on a cooperating way in order to face the problems related to costs, marketing, employees' training and others. For Balestrin and Verschore (2008), cooperation allows seeking technologies and the reduction of transaction costs related to the innovational process, increasing the economic efficiency and, therefore, improving the levels of competitiveness. In the retail scope, the approach of the business cooperation networks allows achieving actions previously inaccessible, specially the micro and small companies that find it difficult obtaining resources (Pereira, 2004; Castro et al., 2011).

In Brazil, the building material retail is prospering, driven by the habitation politics and the distribution of income applied by the federal government. The sales of the sector contributed to 1.9% of the Brazilian GDP in 2011 billing more than R\$ 76 billion (IBOPE, 2012). The State of Parana counts with four building material of retailer cooperation networks that together account 145 associated retailers, mostly micro and small companies, acting in different cities. These organizations are formed to achieve common goals of their members.

The goal of the current work is to determine the factors that motivate the formation, the impacts on the cooperated actions and the gains obtained by the building material of retailer cooperation network existing in the State of Parana, Brazil. The methodology consists of a study of multiple cases, questionnaires answered by the managers of the four networks acting in the segment in Parana and by the retailers association.

This work is part of a wider study, still in development, that seeks to comprehend the marketing strategic formulation and implementation processes in the cooperation networks in the State of Parana. The study is structured in five sections that can be summarized this way: the first section approaches the introductory part and the goals of the study, the second handles the theoretical empirical approach, the third represents the methodological procedures, the fourth section presents the data analysis and the fifth approaches the final considerations and recommendations.

THEORETICAL EMPIRICAL APPROACH

The retail of building material in Brazil

The relevance of studying the retail and its activities is to represent a manifestation of the marketing concept in the exact moment good and services are delivered to the consumers (Las, 2010). According to Vieira et al. (2012), there is a strong tendency on which the Brazilian researches increasingly accompany the market dynamic; the retail activity is the right field for this kind of investigation that involves the relation between theory and practice.

According to the Annual Research of Commerce of

IBGE (2008) the quantity of companies acting in a retail activity in Brazil accounts for more than 1.4 million establishments in 2008. From this total, the retail activity of building material congregates almost 145 thousand companies. The productive chain is segmented into four main groups: goods protection industry, building trade industry, building material commerce, and specialized services.

The retail building materials commerce is an important part of the complex called *Constru Business* that involves also capital goods for the construction and services that in 2011 represent around 14% of the Brazilian GDP (IBOPE, 2012). Data from IBOPE (2012) reveal that the building material retail is in a growing stage due to the good development of the real state sector, verified from 2005, with the financing politics of the building trade. Between 2003 and 2008, this retail sector increased by 117% and, in the same period was placed above the nominal increase of the GDP (78%) and the increase of all the retail activities (106%).

In 2011, the building material retail moves around R\$ 86.4 billion. Class C represents the highest volume of consume in the Brazilian building material retail. The families with this economic profile represent 24.5% of urban homes in the whole country. In 2011, southern Brazil represented a consume potential for building materials of around R\$ 13.1 billion. In that region, there are around 27 thousand commercial establishments (IBOPE, 2012), configuring a strong competition. This way the average of the featuring in the South is R\$ 480 thousand for commercial establishment, value that is 15% below the national average, which is R\$ 567 thousand for each establishment.

The National Association of Building Material Merchants- ANAMACO, professional class association that defends the sector interests with government entities and fabricants of products commercialized by the resellers has on its database around 50 thousand registered stores, of which 56% are located in the state of Sao Paulo; 10% in Minas; 6% in Rio de Janeiro; 4,5% in Rio Grande do Sul; 4% in Parana, around 4% in Bahia and 3.5% in Santa Catarina (ANAMACO, 2012). In order to meet up with the challenging environment, some building material retail companies act in cooperation networks to keep the competitiveness.

Building material retail cooperation networks

Facing the changes of production, management and distribution, there are new relations between companies and employees, and companies and institutions. From this new scenario, the cooperation relations are intensified in order to reduce the difficulties that "translate how costs of transaction for the companies, that is to say, the costs that go beyond the production costs" (Olavee, 2001, p. 290).

Malafaia et al. (2006) mention that the cooperation networks appear due to crisis in the traditional models of verticalisation, requiring lean and flexible actuation for a quick adequacy of the market conditions. The cooperation is a strong motivator of cross-organizational (Bengtsson, 1999). Among micro, small and medium companies, the link between the cooperation networks can be vertical, horizontal, and laterals, composing closer relations with the clients, suppliers, government agents and even the competition that seeks better conditions (Zeng et al., 2010). The horizontal networks between competitors are common in the retail context and especially in Brazil; they have been expanding not only for characterizing as a survival option but also for the opportunity of innovations generation (Bortolaso et al., 2013). Balestrin and Verschore (2008, p. 208) highlight the horizontal networks:

[...] formed by companies that hold each one its independency, but choose to coordinate certain specific activities in a cooperated way, with the following goals: creation of new markets, costs and risks support in researches and new products development, information and technology managing, definition of quality brands, interests defense, marketing actions, among others. These networks are formed in the dimension of cooperation of the members, that choose the flexible formalization in order to better adapt to the nature of their relations.

The retail environment is a propitious scenario to build cooperation networks, specially the micro and small companies that suffer with the difficulty of obtaining resources (Pereira, 2004). For Martignano et al. (2005), the building material retail in the Brazilian context suffers deep transformations from the 90s, with the intense dispute for better competitiveness positions among the international groups, such as Leroy Merlin and Castorama. This scenario also propitiates new stores layout, as *home centers* that intensify the auto-service. Furthermore, the imported goods increase due to the economy opening and the *mix* of products require adaptations of the distribution channels.

This way, understanding the strategic moves of this sector can generate subsidies to improve the decisions processes and a better comprehension of the potentialities and limits. Following the example of other segments, to adjust to the challenging environment, micro, small, and medium entrepreneurs of the building material retail substitute the paradigm of the individual competition to act on a cooperated way. Pereira (2004)'s study on marketing in cooperated networks, especially in a building material network created in 2000 in Rio Grande do Sul, formed initially with 11 stores, pointed many joint activities. The study reveals that the cooperated action improved the intern and extern communication and management by caption, the treatment and dissemination

of information among the associated members. This way, the network faces the sector's strong competition in the most appropriate way, while it solidifies its image and increases the customer satisfaction. On a similar study, Castro et al. (2011) pointed that the combat of the industries action that sells direct to the final consumer, without the retailer participation, was an important conquer for an association of building material retailers in Parana. This practice affects the sector that cannot compete with the fabricant on equal conditions.

Currently there are four cooperation networks that compete in the building material retail in Parana. These networks are located in different cities and have important role on the generation of jobs and distribution of products, characterizing a propitious environment to investigate the forming motivations and the results obtained by this way of acting.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This research is characterized as a case study, with qualitative approach and consists of the determination of the motivational formation factors, the impacts on the cooperated actions and the gains obtained by the building material retail cooperated networks in Parana. The study is developed with the transversal perspective of time. According to Richardson (1999, p.148), "in a study with transversal cut, the data are collected on time based on a selected sample to describe a population in this particular moment".

For Yin (2010, a case study implies the investigation of a question explored by one or more cases inside a delimited system, comparing situations. Different from other qualitative methods, the case study combines many sources of evidence to promote a triangulation of information in order to explain the facts. The study of multiple cases involves the data collection and analysis of many cases, being useful to highlight the differences and similarities among them (Gil, 1999; Merriam, 2009). A case study can also present a descriptive purpose, building a detailed report of a phenomenon, involving the configuration, structure, activity, and relation with other phenomenon, as it is investigated in the current study (Godoy, 1995; Yin, 2010).

The secondary data were obtained from the websites of IBGE, connected to the building material commerce, and the studied networks. The primary data collection was made through the writing communication method, using a non-disguised questionnaire, answered by a manager of each one of the four cooperation networks formally formed in Parana, and by the managers of the associated stores. It was distributed and collected online using the help of the Qualtrics system. The instrument has closed questions, with answers pointed to scales that are, according to Gil (1999, p.139) "instruments building within the goal of measuring the intensity of the opinions and attitudes on the most objective way possible".

Open questions were used, in which the respondents can freely express themselves, giving the opportunity to explore the information not approached on the closed questions. This structure of the questionnaire, as well as its online hosting, considers the fact that all the respondents are in different regions of Parana, imposing limitations of time and access to them. In order to verify the consistency and adequacy to the proposed study, the questionnaire was previously tested with the manager of an informal cooperate network in Curitiba, and also in two building material stores connected to this network, chosen by the access and convenience criteria.

On this stage, it was made previous contact with the respondents, informing them the goal of the study and motivating them to indicate the strong and weak points of the instrument. This procedure allowed the elaboration of the questionnaire's final version that was passed, after the previous contact, to the promotion of the clarification and purposes of the study. The managers of the cooperation networks are included in the current study.

The link that hosts the questionnaire was sent to the network managers and redirected by them to the 145 associated retailers. Among these retailers, 15 filled the whole instrument, characterizing a non-probabilistic sample. The contacts with the managers were made between June and November of 2012, contemplating different stages and goals, such as: invitation to participate in the research, the delivery of the data collection instrument, the delivery of the documents explaining the study purposes, clarification of questions about the research protocol filling, solicitations of forwarding to the associated retailers, solicitation of additional information. These contacts happen many times through phone calls and emails.

The treatment of the secondary data was made through the content description. The primary data were treated from the analysis of the answers content issued by the cooperation networks and stores manager. The closed questions were treated from the indications made on the intensity and agreement scales in the data collection instrument.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Profile of the building material retail cooperation network

A common feature observed on the four studied organizations refers to the typology of the cooperation network. They are characterized as Horizontal Networks of Business Cooperation. On this typology, the competition is seen as similar, allowing finding common solutions to face market difficulties (Balestro, 2004). In fact, it was noticeable on the four networks that the main links are the associations, that is to say, building material retailers that, even competing in the same segment, seek ways of using the cooperated actions. Another point that is also a result of the studied organizations refers to the governance structure.

All of them have managers that are exclusively dedicated to the coordination and monitoring of the cooperated activities. This structure allows that the retailers dedicate their routines and that the most important decisions are taken in assemblies. On the other hand, this formation makes the decision making progress bureaucratic on the network scope, as described in Provan's and Kenis' studies (2007).

All of the observed networks already celebrated more than 10 years of existence, congregating a significant number of associated stores. The biggest one is *Rede Bem Viver*, with 56 associations that together bill 10 and 15 billion *reais* a month, and employs 900 employees in the stores. The second biggest is *Rede Constru and Cia Maringa* owing 19 associated stores but do inform the number of employees and billing.

Motivations for the cooperate act

The organizations are built with a purpose. Yet, this purpose can change during the existence. It is important when analyzing an organization that is understood the motive of their existences. The mission is "a declaration of generic purpose, tougher, that identifies the operations achievements of an organization and what they can offer to the stakeholders" (Wright et al., 2000, p. 93).

Analyzing the mission declarations presented by the networks and comparing them to the view of the managers it is noticeable that: a) *Rede Bem Viver* directs their acting to seek efficiency through the associated action of the members, trying to get a better power of purchase and sells, and also to achieve the regional and national projection; b) *Rede Constry and Cia Cascavel* and *Rede Constru and Cia Maringa*, for being in the same brand of acting network, present the same purpose directed to the coordination of strategic bonds on business model and on the vision of the managers, achieve advantages in the moment of purchase with the suppliers; c) the Network seeks 100% partnering to strengthen the companies that compose the network to capacitate them to act in a more competitive way.

It is noticeable that the improvement in the competitive development is a recurrent element on the presented declarations, directing the difficulties on the acting of small building material stores observed from the 90's in Brazil, according to the studies of Martignano et al. (2005). This notion elaborated by the networks studied here is explained in the studies of Wegner and Padula (2010); they affirm that the retailing cooperate networks can strengthen their competitive positions regarding the competitors or even the position on the value chain when better negotiating with the suppliers and clients.

According to Castels (2007), the organizational transformations seek dealing with the uncertainty caused by the changes on the economic environment, making the companies rethink in the way of acting. Comparing the network managers' opinion (Table 1), it is possible to identify their perceptions about the facts that motivate the retailers to act on a cooperated way: a) the identification with the other members of the networks and the intention of obtaining easy resources are not common motivations; b) the sales increase, the development of collective actions, stability in the market, reduction of costs and adaptation to the market are more important motivational factors.

Table 1 also indicates two differences on the perception among the network managers. Regarding affirmative 2 (the retailers participate in the network to obtain easy resources), the average in the answers of the store managers are 3.20, while the answers of the network managers point 2.75, revealing a more optimistic comprehension of the retailers regarding this factor. Affirmative 5 (the retailers participate in the network to achieve stability in the market) also presents differences. The average

Table 1. Comparative between the network's and store's managers about motivations for cooperation act and obtained results.

Motivations for the Cooperate act	Average		Obtained gains	Average	
	Network managers	Store managers		Network Managers	Store Managers
1) The retailers participate in the networks because they identify with their members	3,50	3,67	1) The retailers increased the sales volume.	4,25	4,07
2) The retailers participate in the network to easily obtain resources	2,75	3,27	2) The retailers obtained risks reduction of being overcome by the competition	4,00	3,93
3) The retailers participate in the networks to sell more.	4,25	4,33	3) The retailers reduced the costs	4,25	3,70
4) The retailers participate in the network to develop collective actions	4,75	4,27	4) The retailers increased the involvement with the collaborators.	4,00	4,13
5) The retailers participate in the network to achieve Market stability	4,75	4,13	5) The retailers exchanged experiences about the managing of the business.	4,75	4,40
6) The retailers participate in the networks to reduce the costs	4,75	4,27	6) The retailers are collaborate on the proposition of innovations to be shared by the network members.	4,50	3,80
7) The retailers participate in the networks to better adapt to the market changes	4,75	4,33	7) The retailers conquered better power of negotiation with the suppliers.	4,75	4,53
General Average	4,21	4,03	General Average	4,35	4,08

Source: The Authors.

in the store managers is 4.13, while the network managers gave an average of 4.75, revealing a more pessimistic comprehension of the retailers regarding this factor.

Still regarding the motivations that make the retailers acting in a cooperated way, in the Works of the *Rede Bem Viver* manager the retailers participate in this network in order to “sell more and better, purchase better and understand better”. For the manager of *Rede Constru and Cia Cascavel*, the retailers participate in this network to increase the buying power and act as a strong brand in the market, since the communication actions on TV, radio, and newspapers of the network are allowed by the assesses of the costs and by the bonus allocation coming from the suppliers according to the volume of purchase. According to the manager of *Rede Constru and Cia Maringa*, based on similar thing that happens with Cascavel region, the main reason that makes the retailers participate in the network is the purchase power increase with the suppliers. As the manager of *Rede 100%* highlights, the retailers seek the cooperation to “occupy a place in market, achieving competitive prices with the competition”.

The motivational factors for the joint action are important for the establishment of the cooperation levels and the need of information Exchange among the members. At this point in the exchange of ideas, a

strategic view is developed, and if we analyze the problems, the common solutions and the definitions of the performance papers among the partners are found (Casarotto and Pires, 2001; Balestrin and Verschore, 2008).

In the organizations observed here it is verified that before the entrance in networks the relationship among the retailers was characterized by the high competition. The unfolding of the cooperation view, especially those related to the expectation of a better financial and market development, created motivational factors that united the studied companies, corroborating for previous studies about such motivations for the formations of cooperation networks (Oliver and Ebers, 1998; Bengtsson and Kock, 1999; Livato and Benedicto, 2010). It is important to highlight that the motivation regarding the easy access to resource (Balestrin and Verschore, 2008), in the retailers perception, is the factor with lower relevance for the entrance into cooperation networks.

Cooperate acting

Comparing the opinion of the network managers it is verified as main cooperated acting implanted on the observed organizations: development of new business opportunities and new store managing processes, joint

promotions of products commerce, and marketing of the name/brand of the network in the market. Although there are perceptions of improvement regarding the capacitation of the human resources, this result is less expressive comparing to the others.

The perception of the positive results seems to be more intense in *Rede Bem Viver* network. As the manager of this network highlights, the obtained results with the member's cooperation "in general are good and contributed to the growth of our stores". Still regarding the results of the cooperated acting, according to the manager of *Rede 100%* the cooperated actions help to increase the sales, but not all the stores to achieve good results". According to the manager of *Rede Constru and Cia Cascavel*, the visual identity strengthens the brand and the company (associates). Beyond that, the cooperated actions require training and consults, improving the managing of the stores in a generic way. The answers of the store's managers do not reveal bigger differences and follow the same perceptions presented by the network's managers.

The results of the cooperation actions presented previously approximate to the main ideas that the cooperation allows seeking new ways of acting and also for the reduction of costs (Bortolaso et al., 2013), increasing the economic efficiency. This improves the levels of the maturity stage of the network that composes the current study, compared to Castro et al.'s (2011) studies, developed in an association of building material retailers in Parana. This difference can come from the fact that the acting in formal cooperation networks, on which the associate share the same brand while keeping their own legal identity, can conduce to a bigger commitment when compared to a retailers association that does not have the same characteristic.

Gains obtained after entering the network

Comparing the opinion of the network managers (Table 1), is possible to determine their perceptions about the obtained gains by the retailers after entering the networks: a) Exchange of experiences about the business managing, the collaborative act in the position of innovations without being shared and the better negotiation power with the suppliers are the most noticeable gains; b) the sales increase and the reduction of operation costs are significant gains, but are not noticed with full intensity; c) the reduction of risks of being overcome by the competitors and the increase in the collaborators' involvement are gains that present more difficulties of being conquered.

Table 1 also indicates two differences in the perceptions among the stores managers and the network managers. Regarding affirmative 3 (the retailers could reduce the operation costs) the noticed average on the retailers varies from 3.80, while the answers of the network

managers indicate 4.25. Affirmative 6 (the retailers are collaborative in the proposition of innovations to be shared with the network members) also presents a divergence. The verified average in the answers of the stores managers on this variable is 3.80, while in the perception of the network managers is 4.50. On these two affirmatives is verified a less optimistic perception of the retailers.

Still regarding the gains obtained by the retailers after entering the network, the competitive advantage seeking is evidenced on the words of *Rede Bem Viver* manager when he affirms that "the gain in purchase is not always what the retailers want, but regarding the marketing and apprenticeship they can get more than what was imagined when entering". According to the manager of *Rede Constru and Cia Cascavel*, the gains appear immediately, but are evident, especially due to the qualification actions in the stores managing through shared consulting. For the manager of *Rede Constru and Cia Maringa* it seems there is significant improvements in the general performance of the associated stores. According to manager, some affiliates already thought about changing the area due to difficulties found in the independent act.

Although, with the capacitation a collaboration actions that reflect on a better managing of the business, today they are stronger to face difficulties. From previous studies about building material retail networks (Pereira, 2004; Castro et al., 2011), the cooperate act reflects positively in some of the specific points observed on the networks, with a greater market power due to the enlargement of the clients base, collective solutions of operational problems such as storage managing and the need of disclosure, reduction of costs and risks, accumulation of social capital, collective apprenticeship, and collaborative innovation through the sharing of experiences among the members that compose the network. Beyond that, it is evident on these reports the improvement of the negotiation conditions with the suppliers, also in the perspective of Castro et al. (2011), about the practice of indiscriminate sells by the industry, since such behavior affects the sector that cannot compete equally with the fabricants. Contrary to the studies of Zeng et al. (2010), that affirm the acting in cooperation networks reduce the vulnerabilities facing the competition with *Rede Constru and Cia Maringa* that still did not conquer the advantages. Also *Rede Bem Viver* did nott conquer the goal of increased involvement of the collaborators. These data deserve a more detailed investigation since they do not meet the expectations of these organizations. However, the five other items that refer to the gains are found with high intensity.

Final considerations

This study is part of a wider research, still developing, that investigates the process of formulation and

implementation of marketing strategy in cooperation networks in retailer segments of Parana. The study presents a qualified step, specifically about networks that act on the building material retail for constituting a solid example of this way of acting. The profile of the four formal networks on this segment of Parana is diversified regarding the number of stores, covered area, number of collaborators, and sales volume.

Regarding the factors of formation and the existence of cooperation networks observed, the sales increase, the development of collective actions, the market stability, the reduction of costs, and the adaptation to the market are the most important motivational factors on the search of cooperated action, in the opinion of the network managers. In the managers' opinion still, the identification with the other network members and the intention of obtaining easy access to the resources is not a consensus motivation. On the other hand, the search of resources in a facilitated way is the factor with lower relevance in the retailers' point of view when entering the cooperation networks. This specific point seems to be a mismatch between the retailers' expectations and the focus of the managers' actions in the networks.

Regarding the results of the cooperate actions on the networks studied here, it is verified that the managers of the networks highlight the new opportunities of business, the improvement on the store managing processes, and better promotion of name/brand of the network in the market. Despite the fact that there are perceptions of improvement regarding the capacitation of human resources, this result shows less expression regarding the others. About these results, the answers of the store's manager follow the same perceptions verified among the networks' managers.

About the obtained gains by the retailers after entering the networks, according to the opinion of the managers, stand out as bigger conquers the exchange of experience about business managing, collaborative action when proposing innovations to be shared, and a better power of negotiation with the suppliers. Still regarding the perception of the network's managers, the reduction of risks to be overcome by the competitors, and the increase of the collaborators involvement show more difficulty. The collaborative acting proposing innovations to be shared with the network's members and the reduction of operation costs are not very intense for the retailers, revealing a better optimism with the managers regarding these factors.

Finally, even though there are no bigger frustrations regarding the general expectations on the cooperated actions, this study reveals the importance of being considered the divergences between the perceptions of the network's manager, and the store's managers on a wider context, involving the factors of formation, results of the cooperated actions, and the gains obtained with this way of acting. On this context, the study shows that there seems to be no divergences on the governance structure

of the organizations observed here, being an indication that they are on a stage of maturity and stability.

Even though the study here presented has involved all the horizontal cooperation network formally formed on the retailing sector of building material of Parana, it is necessary to present as limitations: a) the exploratory approach, that can limit the comprehension of complex situation with the organizational relations; b) the subjectivity regarding the results measuring mentioned by the stores' and networks' managers, that can constitute the imprecision of economic and market results related; and c) the transversal perspective used, that limits the capitation of the relational dynamic along the existence time of the networks. Future studies in retailing network of diverse segments must consider these limitations and can progress in other questions of relationships in co-operation network such as confidence and competitiveness among the associates.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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