

Referência para Citação:

MARTENS, C. D. P.; FREITAS, H.; SALVI, E. J.; LAJUS, G. M.; BOISSIN, J.-P. Entrepreneurial Orientation in Food Industries: Exploratory Study on Medium and Large Size Companies in South of Brazil. International Conference Entrepreneurship in BRICS. São Paulo: FGV/EAESP, 2010.

Entrepreneurial Orientation in Food Industries: Exploratory Study on Medium and Large Size Companies in South of Brazil

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Abstract

This article deals with the Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), understood as the entrepreneurial posture of an organization. The aim of this paper is to present the results of an exploratory qualitative study aimed to understand how it manifests itself in the OE food industries of medium and large size enterprises. A conceptual review addresses concepts about OE and its dimensions: innovativeness, risk taking, proactiveness, autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with leaders of nine food industries of medium and large size enterprises of the central region of Rio Grande do Sul. The analysis presents a characterization of OE in organizations and an overview on how the dimensions of the OE reflected in organizational practice in the area. In general, it was found that the OE in the organizations studied is characterized by only a few dimensions, and not always the same, depending on peculiar factors to each organization.

1 Introduction

Entrepreneurship is one of the themes that have motivated researchers from different fields of knowledge. In several regions of the world this issue has been longstanding the focus of interest of researchers, and more recently in Brazil as well. But nationally, there is still much to do with regard to scientific research in this theme, considering that most of the indexed scientific literature come from abroad.

One of the factors that point to the importance of studying the topic of entrepreneurship in Brazil is the fact that this is a country where more businesses are created (GEM, 2010). While this, there is the country a high mortality rate of organizations, where about half of them end their activities with up to two years of existence, and about 60% do not pass four years (SEBRAE, 2004). According o SEBRAE (Entrepreneur and Small Business Support Agency) studies, the main mortality factors of the organizations are managerial failures.

The GEM (2010) research also points out that Brazilian organizations are few innovative, normally acting in traditional sectors of trivial business that are created like somewhat done in

segments that have already been tested and that have a high competition. This also can be one of the aspects that contribute to the obstacles faced by entrepreneurs in order to keep their business up longer having in mind that innovation is one of the entrepreneurship characteristics and one of the main factors for development and income generation (SCHUMPETER, 1982).

Researches show that among the factors that contribute for organizations success are: management skills which are related to the businessperson preparation in order to interact with the market that he/she is in, entrepreneurial capacity which is, in fact, a group of attributes and among those, the highlighted ones are: creativity, opportunity, perseverance and the courage to take risks in business; and aspects of business logistics, which comprise the basis for the creation, sustenance and growth of business activity (SEBRAE, 2004).

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) gets in this context as being the entrepreneurial attitude of an organization. The literature has shown that organizations with high greater EO tend to have a better performance. Empiric evidences corroborate this literature sign, as example of Mello *et al.* (2004) study in high-tech Brazilian companies. Among the benefits of a high EO authors have highlighted the fact that it is positively associated with growth, having a positive impact at the financing performance measures, may provide the ability to discover new opportunities, facilitating the differentiation and creation of competitive advantage, among others (MILLER, 1983; COVIN; SLEVIN, 1991; ZAHRA, 1993; ZAHRA; COVIN, 1995; WIKLUND, 1999; WIKLUND; SHEPHERD, 2005).

Miller (1983) argues that while the OE can be influenced by external factors, internal factors, the profile of the primary manager, among others, the most important is not the critic actor who makes entrepreneurship happen, but the process of entrepreneurship itself as well as the organizational factors that promote or hinder. Thus a better understanding of the entrepreneurial process and its management may contribute to the identification of possible things to improve the EO of an organization.

Considering the importance of OE in the management of organizations, this study aims to understand how it manifests itself in the OE food industries of medium and large companies located in Taquari Valley, central region of Rio Grande do Sul. To this end, this paper is structured as follows: section 2 reviews the literature on OE, its dimensions and elements, the section 3 describes the research method used in the study, the section 4 presents the results of research, addressing how the five dimensions impact in the organizations investigated, the final considerations behind section 5 of the study.

2 Entrepreneurial Orientations in Organizations

In the entrepreneurship field, EO is one of the topics that has attracted a range of researchers (SCHILDT; ZAHRA; SILLANPÄÄ, 2006; GRÉGOIRE *et al.*, 2006). Originally from studies from Canadian School of Strategy, EO can be understood as an entrepreneurial management process, portrayed in methods, management practices and styles or decision making used to achieve a entrepreneurial way of doing (LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996). Thus EO is a concept used to characterize an entrepreneurial organization. Covin and Slevin (1989) state that organizations with an entrepreneurial attitude show a particular standard conduct reflected in a global strategic philosophy in effective management practices.

Some studies have linked EO with a good organization performance, suggesting that EO can positively influence it (MILLER, 1983; COVIN; SLEVIN, 1991; ZAHRA, 1993; ZAHRA; COVIN, 1995; WIKLUND; SHEPHERD, 2005). Zahara and Covin (1995), for instance, point out: entrepreneurial organizations have a positive impact in the financial performance measures. These effects tend to be modest in the first few years and grow within time, suggesting that an entrepreneurial behavior can contribute for the organization's financial performance progress in the long-term. Wiklund e Shepherd (2005) affirm that EO can provide the ability to discover new opportunities promoting differentiation and creating a competitive advantage helping to overcome difficulties in little dynamic environments which new opportunities rarely show up and also have limited financial sources access.

According to Covin and Slevin (1991), entrepreneurship as an organizational behavior can be affected by many external, internal variables and the organization strategies which moderate the relation between the entrepreneurial attitude and performance. In the same sense Lumpkin e Dess (1996) emphasize that organizational and environmental factors do influence EO in the organization. Also Miller (1983) points out that entrepreneurship is totally related to environment variables, structure, strategy and the leader's personality. This relationship systematically varies in the organizations having a strong influence from the leader, his/her personality, strength and information.

Many studies have focused on dimensions that characterize an EO. Miller (1983) was one of the first to deal with this and he proposed three dimensions to characterize and test the entrepreneurship in the organizations: innovativeness, risk taking and proactiveness. According to him, the entrepreneurial organization strives through these aspects while a non-entrepreneurial organization innovates very little, it is highly adverse to risks and it does not act in a proactivity way towards its competitors, only being an imitating follower of market changes. Lumpkin and Dess (1996), which give sequence to the EO studies, propose that there are two more dimensions to characterize and distinguish the entrepreneurial process: competitive aggressiveness and autonomy. Thus an EO is characterized by five key dimensions: innovativeness, risk taking, proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness and autonomy. Altogether these five dimensions must permeate decision making styles and the organization staff practices (DESS; LUMPKIN, 2005).

The greatest number of studies about EO has adopted the 3 dimensions proposed by Miller (1983). For this author the three dimensions must be present (at certain level) to characterize an EO, typifying the unidimensionality of the construct. Yet for Lumpkin and Dess (1996), EO can be constituted by different combinations of the EO dimensions or even by just few of them, characterizing the EO multidimensionality. Between these two main approaches that are identified in the literature, this study assumes the proposal by Lumpkin and Dess (1996), which considers the 5 EO dimensions of an organization considering the fact that it seeks a more complete and broader approach. Below the dimensions are briefly described.

2.1 Dimensions which Characterize an Entrepreneurial Organization

The innovativeness is considered one of the most important EO dimensions. It reflects an trend in an organization to adopt and support new ideas, novelties, experiments, and creative processes (LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996). According to Wiklund (1999), a strategic innovative approach increases the chances of the organization to become aware of the advantages in moving first (before its competitors) and capitalize market opportunities.

Some ways to identify an organization innovativeness level are: financial sources invested in innovation, human resources committed with innovation activities, new products or services, the frequency of changes in products and services lines (MILLER; FRIESEN, 1982; COVIN; SLEVIN, 1989). Apart from the kind of innovation or the way to classify it, innovation is considered a very important EO component since it reflects a way in which the organizations seek new opportunities. However, it also involves a greater risk since the investments on innovation may not have the expected results. The Chart 1 represents a literature summary about innovativeness and the elements which characterize it.

Chart 1 – Conceptual basis about the dimension of EO Innovativeness

INNOVATIVENESS	Categories	Innovativeness Elements
	Products and services	New products/services; New lines of products and services; Changes in products/services and in lines of products/services; Frequency of changes in products/services and in its lines.
	Processes	Administrative and technological innovation. in product and market
	Financial resources	Financial resources invested in innovation; Assure investments in P&D even in economical difficulties times; Invest in new technologies, P&D and continuous improvement; Emphasis in P&D, technological leadership and innovation.
	Staff	Human resources committed with innovational activities.
	Creativity	Creativity and experimentation; to engage and support new ideas, novelties, experiments and creative processes.

	Categories	Innovativeness Elements
	Differentiation	Innovative actions which are difficult to be copied by competitors.

Source: elaborated by authors, based on the studies of Miller and Friesen (1982), Covin and Slevin (1989), Lumpkin and Dess (1996, 2001) and also Dess and Lumpkin (2005).

The risk taking dimension is strongly connected to innovativeness and according to Mello and Leão (2005), both risk taking and innovativeness are more common in the entrepreneurial practices development. Risk taking captures the level of risk reflected on decisions on resources allocation, as well as on the market and product choices, reflecting, in a certain way, the criteria and the standard of decision taking in organizational level (VENKATRAMAN, 1989). Lumpkin and Dess (1996) state that organizations that have an EO are normally characterized by a risk taking behavior, assuming greater financial commitments looking forward to obtaining high results through market opportunities grasp.

Those last mentioned authors point out that in order to identify an organizational risky behavior, the EO approach by Miller (1983) has been well accepted in the literature due to the fact it has the focus at the organization trend to engage in risk projects and at the managers preferences to acting with wariness versus boldly to achieve organizational objectives. As a rule, risk taking has a purpose of maximizing the results probability from the exploitation of potential opportunities (COVIN; SLEVIN, 1989; LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996) denoting the risk-result relation. Chart 2 presents the elements that characterize this EO dimension from the literature about it.

Chart 2 – Conceptual basis about the dimension of EO Risk Taking

	Categories	Risk taking elements
RISK TAKING	General risk	Organization characterized by a risk taking behavior; Operations generally characterized by high risk; Strong tendency for risky projects.
	Decision risk	Adopting a view which is no conservative on decisions; Strong and aggressive attitude on taking decisions, seeking potential opportunities; Preference for acting boldly in order to achieve organizational goal; Encourages to assume personal risk.
	Financial risk	Encouraging taking financial risk
	Businesses risk	Encouraging taking formal risk in businesses; Due to the nature of the setting; great actions are necessary to achieve the organization goals.

Source: elaborated by authors, based on the studies of Miller and Friesen (1982), Miller (1983), Covin and Slevin (1989), Venkatraman (1989), Lumpkin and Dess (1996, 2001) and also Dess and Lumpkin (2005).

The proactiveness dimension can be crucial for an EO, because it suggests a forward view perspective which is followed by innovative activities or new businesses. It is related to the initiatives in order to anticipate and chase new opportunities and also join emergent markets (LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996). Miller and Friesen (1978) characterize the proactiveness as the act of modeling the environment through the introduction of new products and technologies. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) deal with the proactiveness as a continuous aspect, in which its opposite would be the passiveness, considered as an inability to grab opportunities or to conduct the market.

The proactiveness always seeks acting before the change in the environment cause a direct impact in the organization and, in practice, it frequently involves reacting to symptoms that anticipate a change. Proactiveness seen as part of the continuous, organizations can take different productivity levels as well as it can be analyzed separately in different functional areas. Some researchers, Miller (1983) and also Covin and Slevin (1989) for instance, have evaluated proactiveness level of the organization considering the organization's tendency to be ahead in the development of new products and technologies and in the introduction of new products and services instead of simply following the market. Organizations which are considered proactive ones monitor trends, identify future clients' necessities and anticipate changes and demands or emerging problems that can turn out to be new business opportunities (DESS; LUMPKIN, 2005). Chart 3 presents the elements' summary of this dimension from the literature about it.

Chart 3 – Conceptual basis about the dimension of EO proactiveness

PROACTIVENESS	Categories	Proactiveness elements
	Environment monitoring	Continuous monitoring of the market; Identifies client's future necessities; Anticipates changes; Anticipates clients' future necessities; Anticipates problems; Constantly search for new opportunities; Constantly search for business that can get in.
	Anticipation attitude	Frequently it is the first one to introduce products/services, administrative techniques, operational technologies; Innovative and creative company; Frequently starts actions that competitors react to; Strong tendency to anticipate in the introduction of new ideas or products; Generally anticipates to the competitors expanding capacities; Tends to start competitive attacks; More innovative products and services
	Problems solutions and resolutions	Decentralized and participative controls procedures; Oriented planning for problem solutions and opportunities search; Eliminating operations in advanced and life-cycle stages.
	Technological flexibility	Availability and accessibility to people, sources and equipment needed in order to develop products and services; Multiple technologies; Technological abilities.

Source: elaborated by authors, based on the studies of Miles and Snow (1978), Miller and Friesen (1978), Miller (1983), Covin and Slevin (1989), Venkatraman (1989), Chen and Hambrick (1995), Lumpkin and Dess (1996, 2001) and also Dess and Lumpkin (2005).

Already autonomy has a direct relationship with the team, sometimes it is portrayed in leaders with autonomous behavior, autonomous work teams, which represents a broader concept, the independent act from key role actors in the organizations (LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996). Dess and Lumpkin (2005) affirm that in autonomy the entrepreneurial thought must be encouraged. In a similar view, Lee and Peterson (2000) point out that, in order to make the dimension of autonomy strong, entrepreneurs must operate within the cultures that promote the independent acting and also seek opportunities.

Miller (1983) highlights that: the most entrepreneurial organizations have more autonomous leaders. In studies with organizations, researchers have examined an autonomous behavior, investigating the leadership centralization and the authority delegation. Thus, autonomy evidences in an organization can vary due to organization's size, management style or ownership. For example, in organizations which the main decision maker is the owner, the autonomy will be implicated in the strength of ownership. However, the extension in which the autonomy is exerted can depend on the centralization or delegation level and this can have a relation to the size of the organization(LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996). Chart 4 presents a set of elements that characterize this dimension from the literature about it.

Chart 4 – Conceptual basis about the dimension of EO Autonomy

AUTONOMY	Categories	Autonomy Elements
	Team	Leaders with autonomous behavior; Autonomous work teams; Coordinate autonomous activities; Measure and monitor autonomous activities.
	Centralization	Leadership centralization; Authority delegation; Organization's property.
	Intraentrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial thought must be encouraged in people; Encourage entrepreneur initiatives.
	Independence action	Independent thought and action; Creative though and stimulus to new ideas; Cultures that promote the independent actions and to seek opportunities.

Source: elaborated by authors, based on the studies of Miller (1983), Lumpkin and Dess (1996, 2001), Lee and Peterson (2000) and also Dess and Lumpkin (2005).

Finally, the competitive aggressiveness, which has a relation with the organization's propensity, intensely and directly challenges its competitors reaching better market position, seeking to overcome them. Chen e Hambrick (1995) deal with the competitive aggressiveness as being an organization's trend in responding aggressively to the competition actions, looking forward to reaching competitive advantage, dominating it with responsiveness. Similarly, Lumpkin and Dess (2001) characterized it as threat responses.

For Venkatraman (1989), the competitive aggressiveness is the position adopted by a company, through allocating sources in order to gain positions in a specific market faster than its

competitors. It can be based on product innovation, market development, and high investment to improve market char and to achieve a competitive position. Covin and Covin (1990) point out that some evidences of competitive aggressiveness can be reached when evaluating the management attitude as far as competitiveness. This evidence can also reflect the use of non-conventional competition methods instead of traditional or reliable ones (LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996). Those dimension elements consolidated in the literature, are shown in Chart 5.

Chart 5 – presents the elements from the literature that characterize this EO dimension

COMPETITIVE AGGRESSIVENESS	Categories	Competitive Aggressiveness Elements
	Competitive reactions	Moving towards the competitors actions; Responds aggressively to competitors actions; Very aggressive and intensively competitive company; Typically adopts a very competitive attitude, disqualifying the competitors.
	Financial competition	It seeks market positioning based on the money flow and profitability; Cutting prices for to increase market share; Places lower prices than competitors; Gets into markets with very low prices.
	Business competition	Aggressive attitude to fight against industry tendencies that can threaten the survival or competitive position; Copies business practices or techniques from successful competitors; Uses non-conventional competition methods.
	Marketing	Opportunist marketing of new products or technologies; Aggressive budgets in marketing, services and products quality or manufacturing capacity.

Source: elaborated by authors, based on the studies of Venkatraman (1989), Chen and Hambrick (1995), Lumpkin and Dess (1996, 2001), Dess and Lumpkin (2005) and Macmillan and Day (apud Lumpkin and Dess, 2001).

Charts 1 to 5 constitute the conceptual basis in this study to characterize the EO in organizations elaborated from classic studies on EO. Below the research method adopted in this study is described.

3 Research Method

This study is considered being of exploratory character (SELLTIZ *et al.*, 1967) for having sought the understanding of a determined phenomenon: the case of EO in organizations. For its accomplishment, qualitative data were essential.

The food industry was the focus adopted to accomplish this study. The studied context was medium and large size food industries situated in Taquari Valley, in the central area of Rio Grande do Sul – Brazil, considered one of the main food production poles in the State (CONTO, 2005). The area has an assorted range of food industries, where the candy factories (hard candy and lollipop), meat derivatives (poultry and sausages) and dairies are among the main food industries in Brazil (ABIA [Brazilian Association of Food Industries], 2009). The food industry is one of the main transformation industries in Taquari Valley concerning job opportunities and number of companies. It is where some of the greatest companies of this area are established. All this factors contribute for the choice of this sector as a studying target.

Nineteen mid-sized and large-sizes food industries were identified, being 12 mid-sized and 7 large-sized companies the target for the study. From the 19, some were excluded due to the fact that they belong to the same group from the others what would lead to repetitive results, so 14 industries remained. The data were collected with the help of executives from 9 organizations where the interviewed one was the organization main manager [or the unit manger, in case of companies having more than one unit]. Non-participation of the other companies was justified due to the recent selling of the firm, financial difficulties or lack of availability of the executive in charge.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with main managers at the organizations in September and October 2009. The topic to approach the organization was EO and its five dimensions: innovativeness, risk taking, proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness and autonomy, each one divided in elements and categories, as shown in Charts from 1 to 5 from section 2 for identification of the organizations. In 7 organizations the interviews were in person, recorded and later transcribed for the result analysis; they lasted from 40 to 90 minutes. Two managers were

not able to be interviewed in person, but they answered the questions through e-mail.

The collected data analysis was done through the transcriptions reading and the audio listening for review. The two e-mail interviews were very attentively read in order to identify possible complementary information although it was not needed. The data were analyzed in a qualitative way using content analysis techniques. Thus making it possible to understand the obtained data and classify them as conceptual basis using analysis strategy from theoretical propositions by Yin (2005). The orientation followed was the one by Tesch (*apud* GODOY, 2006) which suggests that the analysis must include a reflexive activity resulting in a set of marks that guide the process helping the researcher change the empiric methods to the conceptual level forming categories, establishing borders and finding evidences.

The elements and the study leading categories were reviewed by the researchers (KRIPPENDORFF, 1980) through reading and rereading at different moments and having break periods allowing its confirmation. The data and results analysis are presented below.

4 Entrepreneurial Orientation in Medium and Large Size Food Industries

The 9 companies, in which executives were interviewed, are situated in 5 different cities of Taquari Valley in the central area of Rio Grande do Sul. Five of the industries are mid-sized and four large-sized and their sectors are: dairy (3 companies), candy (2), mate-tea (1), food additives and condiments (1) dairy/meat derivatives (1) and beverage (1).

The staff average number in the organizations is 280 for mid-sized companies and 900 for large-sized ones. Seven of the nine companies work with exportation and the other ones have the national market as their main target but one of them only focuses the market in the state. A characterization of the 5 EO dimensions at the organizations, where their executives were interviewed, is presented below.

4.1 Innovativeness in the Organizations

The innovativeness in this study is considered as the willingness to innovate, introduce novelties through creativity and experimentation aiming at the development of new products and services as well as new processes. While dealing with innovativeness, it was sought the understanding on how it can impact on the organizational practices considering products and services, processes, financial resources, staff, creativity and differentiation.

The product and services innovations take place in a variety of way among the studied companies. It was identified that 4 of the 9 companies constantly innovate, in special two of them that release new products in the market every month. “Many products were launched last month.” the interviewed manager affirmed. Another executive also expresses this reality: “It is a characteristic of this sector [candies] to always come up with new stuff.” Other companies usually release or modify products according to the market need, “at least 3 to 4 products released per year is a launching trend.” On the other hand a distinct reality is found in two different companies that do not release products and services very often. One due to the lack of a structured mechanism of marketing to release products while the other states that the market is dominated by multinationals firms which have a great power on releasing new products, “each of our great competitors have in stock a profile of about 600 or 700 brands” stated the executive emphasizing that they hub their investment in the quality of their products.

The innovation in processes is an ordinary practice in the great majority of companies as mentioned by one of the executives answers: “This is what usually goes on, because when we got in the *Programa Gaúcho de Qualidade* (Gaúcho Quality Program) we started working a lot with the program tools aside with our planning.”. Only one company does not innovate constantly in its processes for being not evolving at the same speed in which it is growing. Thus its executive states: “In the administrative processes I would say that we do not have the innovator profile [...] the company is doubling its income results in such short time requiring doubling the size of the company, staff and processes. So there is a lot happening altogether then it creates a disorganized growth and so it needs to evolve in this sense too”.

Concerning financial resources invested in innovation, it was identified the fact that companies invest in P&D (research and development). However few executives quantified these investments. Three companies have a P&D sector in their own premises and in other two companies there is a subdivision in their headquarters which is responsible for all units of the group. On the other hand, two companies do research and development using their suppliers as in the statement: “The supplier already brings the novelties from all over the world and I do not need to have another team in here”. Some companies have partnership with universities and laboratories. As P&D is concerned, the majority of companies’ investments - even during periods of crisis - keep the same amount of sources seeking differentiation before their competitors do.

There are people assigned to the innovation activities in the organizations that have a P&D sector, “We have people exclusively thinking about products: seasonings, cuts and flavors”, said an executive. At other companies there are people that are engaged with this activity in a higher or lower level, but not in a exclusive way. Some examples are identified as: product committees which have monthly meetings to take care of innovations and product changes only, people who are assigned to travel to Europe to visit suppliers among other activities to keep them updated about the market trends.

Since creativity is important in the innovation context, it is stimulated by the companies. In some of them there are meetings where staff is called to propose improvements. Yet other companies make it very clear that the enticement is the workers’ space itself inside the company reflecting the company's culture. In some cases incentive programs were identified as in this statement: “There is a program where suggestions are analyzed by a committee and the best ones are awarded”. As far as differentiation is concerned, it is clear that companies seek to be different by coordinating marketing strategies and brand. Besides that many other aspects allow a better market exploitation and a better relationship with their clients. The search for differentiation through an innovative way in products also happens, however it is really difficult to release a product without the possibility of competitors having similar ones. “Nowadays having money is one thing but the most difficult thing is the market: equipment you buy, but it is difficult to buy a market in a short time. That is why we have this great growing brand appraisal”.

The analysis about the innovation dimension from the EO conceptual base allowed checking all elements which occur in food industries where executives were interviewed - some companies have them in a more intensive way than others. Chart 6 illustrates how the innovativeness was noticed in the study researches, based on the interviews.

Chart 6 – Innovativeness in the organizations: an illustrative classification

Innovativeness categories	Illustrative classification about the innovativeness in the studied organizations	Companies which executives participated									Total of 9
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Products and services	Constantly innovating	x		x				x	x		4
	Innovation based on market needs		x				x			x	3
	Not often innovative				x	x					2
Processes	Constantly innovating in processes	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	8
	Not often innovating in processes					x					1
Financial sources	Have a P&D sector [in the unit or in the headquarter]	x	x	x			x				4
	P&D is done by suppliers				x			x			2
	Keep P&D investments even in crisis periods	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	8
Staff	Staff involved with innovation activities				x	x			x	x	4
	Staff exclusively dedicated to innovation activities	x	x	x			x	x			5
Creativity	Formal procedure for staff that propose improvements				x	x	x		x	x	5
	Incentive to creativity and proposition of improvements are part of the company's culture	x	x	x				x			4
Differentiation	Seek differentiation in processes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
	Seek differentiation through products innovation	x		x		x		x	x		5

Source: elaborated by authors

This difference in checking innovativeness among companies seem to have some relation to smaller or bigger sources availability for investments in innovation and also with some specific characteristics of each segment. For instance, it is outstanding the fact that some segments tend to have a strong support from suppliers for innovation development.

4.2 Risk Taking in the Organizations

The risk taking is seen in this study as a tendency to express bolding acts. For example, adventurously going to new and unknown markets and trusting great part of financial resources to be risked in order to obtain greater returns. This EO dimension reflects the risk level in placing resources, decisions on products and markets choices, showing certain criteria for decisions (VENKATRAMAN, 1989). While studying this dimension, some aspects were observed: general risks, risk in the decision, financial risk and businesses risk.

It was noticed that a great part of companies take risks, but generally calculated ones. However, some companies are seen as audacious in the market assuming high risks related to projects of growing, according to this statement: “In 2007 we jumped from 1 to 5 units; in 2008 we jumped from 5 to 20 productive units – just production – in a market with this entire government announced crisis”. Other executive examples high risk projects: “We have a bold project which is a powder milk unit here in the South having as a target only the external market”. In addition, it was identified more conservative organizations that practically do not take risks unless they need it for a particular situation. A testimonial expresses that: “Our company is very conservative [...] but in the case of a recent release, the UHT milk in bag, I got surprised because then the risk was quite high due to the monopoly from the supplier in the country so there was a great pressure”.

From the decision risk was established that some companies are very aggressive in the market as the example illustrated by this executive: “We intended to be the biggest company in Brazil in our sector, we are already in the third place”. The other interviewed executive corroborate with this position by saying: “There are very bold projects. For example, we have just opened a new unit in the Northeast of Brazil which is right in the center of the region. It is a risky project. [...] We work hard with opportunities”. On the contrary an organization that represents a more cautious group of companies made it clear that looks forward to taking advantage of market opportunities especially because they like innovative projects but projects are very well evaluated so they do not offer risks.

As far as financial risks, it was seen that the greater number of companies take this kind of risk counting on bank and government supports as noticed in this statement: “There is a financial risk with acquisitions. When purchasing a company you must put money on it and in a crisis period you have not enough returns so it gets complicated”. One of the companies considered aggressive in the market exemplifies its latest investments: “In this month we changed the characteristic of a product line that corresponds to 12 million of liters per month”.

There is also a business risk. It became very that companies are at all moments searching for differentials – in P&D, internal processes, in continuous improvements among others. That happens with market segments which are very competitive. Therefore some companies can not come up with great actions because of its structure, as said: “If I want to move too forward I will have to face people of great power. So I must first gain body so I can suddenly take bolder actions”. This statement makes the presence of great competitors that dominate the sector very clear. Also it can limit or even redirect some actions.

The analysis on the risk taking dimension, which is oriented by the EO conceptual base, allows affirming that all elements in risk taking appear in the food industries studied. So they cause a great contrast between more conservative companies and bolder ones. Chart 7 illustrates how the risk taking was noticed in these organizations, based on the interviews.

Chart 7 – Risk taking in the organizations: an illustrative classification

Risk taking categories	Illustrative classification about the risk taking in the studied organizations	Companies which executives participated									Total of 9
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
General risk	Recently took high risk projects	x	x			x		x			4
	Took calculated risks			x	x		x	x	x		5
	Takes low risk in general					x				x	2
Decision risk	Takes personal risk by executives	x	x	x			x	x	x		6
	Adopts a strong and aggressive view on decisions	x	x	x							6
	Adopts a conservative view on decisions				x	x	x	x		x	5
	Outrageous actions to reach organization objectives	x	x	x		x			x		5
Financial risk	Takes/ recently took high financial risks	x				x		x			3
	Takes calculated financial risks	x	x	x							3
	Practically does not take financial risks				x	x	x	x		x	5
Businesses risk	Outrageous actions needed in the sector's environment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
	Does/ recently did great actions	x	x	x		x		x			5
	Searches differentials due to competitive market	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9

Source: elaborated by authors

From a general analysis about the risk taking dimension, it was established that there is a certain contrast among the few companies that take high risks and other more moderate ones, mainly in the financial area and decision taking. These differences seem to happen especially due to the decision makers' profile which the boldest ones take greater risks.

4.3 Proactiveness in Organizations

In this study proactiveness is considered a search for opportunities, the anticipation on the introduction of new products and services and the action to create changes and modeling the environment by anticipating tendencies. It is a must for EO because it suggests a forward perspective view followed by innovative activities (LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996). When studying these dimension aspects of environment monitoring, anticipation attitude, problems resolution and participation and technological flexibility were verified.

Many actions with the intention of monitoring the environment were identified, in a special way though since monitoring happens through promoters, representatives, participations in national and international fairs and also in market researches. An executive shows one of the practices through his statement: "Any new market that would open in any country should have us in the exporters list because we have a differential". It is also stated the support from raw material suppliers in this monitoring as it can be seen in this statement: "The 'x' organization's representative that comes here to sell a flavor does not only wants to sell the product, he wants to sell us the idea".

As far as the anticipation attitude was considered, it was observed that the ones interviewed, it was established that only one of the companies considered itself a follower comparing to its competitors, launching only what the market approves; the other companies state pioneering cases whether on new products releasing or technologies and services. "When it was first spoken about production traceability we were the first ones to launch the national traceability program for swine production back in 1997. It was a breakthrough in concepts of swine meat production since the other companies did not do that". Another executive said. Other interviewed executive illustrates the competitor's response to his actions: "A multinational from the sector had a drop (candy), which was in the market for 70 years, our first move was: let's release a drop to compete with it. We released it. In a second moment we ranged the flavors and then our competitor saw itself having to assort its flavors". Anticipated problems are also shown in this statement: "There are many schools forbidding the consumption of chewing-gums [...] besides, sugar is seen as fattening and causes dental decays. These are things that worry us". The worry is seen as infant obesity in the candy market.

The participation in problems and resolution is also clear. "Our management and our decision making are very much participative", says an executive. There are companies with greater centralization and other with greater decentralization and the last one is more common among

companies. Another interviewed executive from a family company also illustrates this reality: “We are three brothers but are open to critics [...] we express an opinion but they [staff] must have more autonomy so the results will be followed”. An executive expresses a practice for problem resolutions: “There are some projects here that are the 'see and act' kind, you see the problem and then you have to act soon to solve it”. There is also a habit of eliminating operations in advanced life-cycle stages. In the case which operations have no longer use nor add up value to products its elimination happens from simple actions to the an inactivation of an industrial unit. “Some products we take out of the market, even if there are consumers complaining about it”, an executive illustrated.

In relation to technological flexibility, it was identified that 5 companies have resources for new products and services development in their own company through the P&D sector. Still there are cases in which has been established a partnership with entities and suppliers as seen in this testimonial: “Besides selling me a machine, equipment suppliers point out people for giving advisory”.

The analysis about the proactiveness dimension, which was guided by the EO conceptual basis, allowed stating that all the proactiveness elements are present in the studied food industries. Chart 8, which illustrates how the proactiveness was noticed in these organizations, is based on the interviews.

Chart 8 – Proactiveness in the organizations: an illustrative classification

Proactiveness categories	Illustrative classification about the Proactiveness in the studied organizations	Companies which executives participated									Total of 9
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Environment monitoring	Continuous monitoring with market research	x	x								2
	Continuous monitoring of market through representatives, fairs and others	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
	Seek anticipating problems and changes	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	8
	Constantly seeks for deals to be done.	x	x					x			3
Anticipation attitude	Frequently is the first to introduce new products and services and/or management techniques	x						x	x	x	4
	Follower on product release				x						1
	Starts action which competitors respond to	x	x				x	x	x		5
	Innovative and Creative	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		7
	Has more innovative products than competitor	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	8
Problems participation and resolution	Decentralized and participative management			x	x	x		x	x		5
	Eliminates advanced life-cycle staged operations.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
Technological flexibility	Own sources for new product and services development	x	x				x			x	4
	Partnerships for new product and services development			x	x			x	x	x	5
	Technological skilled labor	x	x				x	x	x	x	6

Source: elaborated by authors

The analysis of this dimension allows reporting that the bigger companies with more professional management have more often expressed proactiveness characteristics.

4.4 Autonomy in the Organizations

The autonomy in this study is considered an independent action of an individual or team which seeks to take forward a business or concept view; it is an action taken without organizational pressure. In order to identify this dimension among the executives in the team, centralization, intra-entrepreneurship and independent action were considered.

According to the testimonials from the interviewed ones, 9 studied companies have autonomous leaders; however in some organizations this autonomy is limited as in that executives' statement: “There is the board of directors and each unit has its managers which have autonomy

within the policy implanted”. As far as the autonomous work teams, it was seen that this practice exists in many companies, even though in some of them they are more systematically installed using control procedures well defined.

It was clear that in all companies there is a responsibility delegation, though in some there is also a little centralization. As the 9 companies' management, 5 have a more family like management in which 2 keep founders in the board of directors, 2 are cooperatives and other 2 have a well professionalized management since they belong to a greater group. An executive speaks about family management and professionalism existence: “Family matter is out of here, it does not interfere”.

Concerning intra-entrepreneurship most executives affirm that there is an encouragement so staff can have an entrepreneurial attitude, therefore not always the actions are systematized e then sometimes they do not meet expectations, as it is stated: “I would love that when the purchase sector people buy raw material, they would fight for pennies as they were buying a car for themselves. We keep hitting the same button, but it does not work because some things are just from the human nature”. Considering intra-entrepreneurship encouragement, it is normally done the same path with participative management, training goals, job promotions, prizes, etc. The entrepreneurship importance is stated by an executive: “Our mission is to promote social and economical development for our associated and staff; we need entrepreneurial employees since their work must have results. [...] without a doubt, we stimulate the entrepreneurship”.

Similarly to the intra-entrepreneurship the independent action is also stimulated, however there is a lack of practices about it. Some examples are identified as in this statement: “We are always with our doors open so an employee can come here to discuss debate and make decisions about something”. Another executive corroborates: “The company has a suggestion program which works for anything: product suggestion, industrial and process improvement”.

The analysis over the proactiveness dimension, which is guided by the EO conceptual basis, allows saying that proactiveness elements happens in the studied food industries. Chart 9, which illustrates how the autonomy was noticed in these organizations, is based on the interviews.

Chart 9 – Autonomy in the organizations: an illustrative classification

Autonomy categories	Illustrative classification about the autonomy in the studied organizations	Companies which executives participated									Total of 9
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Staff	Autonomous behavior leaders	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
	Autonomous work teams	x		x			x	x	x		5
Centralization	Family company				x		x	x	x	x	5
	Cooperative company			x		x					2
	Professionalized company	x	x								2
	Authority delegation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
	Decentralized control (participative)			x	x	x		x	x		5
	Centralized control		x								1
Intraentrepreneurship	Mixed control (centralized and participative)	x					x			x	3
	Entrepreneur though encouraged	x	x		x		x	x		x	6
	Ideas positioning is encouraged	x				x			x		3
Independent action	It is cultural to encourage staff to enterprise	x		x				x	x		4
	Culture that promotes the independent action	x		x				x	x		4

Source: elaborated by authors

The analysis of the autonomy allows reporting that companies seek giving autonomy to its employees, but in general at the same time few actions have been developed towards this behavior.

4.5 Competitive Aggressiveness in Organizations

Competitive aggressiveness is considered as a strong struggle to overcome the competitors; it is characterized by a combative attitude or aggressive response, which seeks a better positioning in the market or defeat threats. In order to study it, competition, financial competition, marketing and business competition reactions were considered.

The competition reaction is common. “We always keep an eye in the competition checking out to see what they do so we can try doing it better or at their level”, affirms an executive. Other examples: “Suddenly we saw 24 long-life milk brands coming on the market and for each release a penny was lost in the products price [...] so it happened: we needed a differential”. On the whole, companies seek acting in a competitive way through innovation, partnerships, unit acquisitions, among other actions. The cases are highlighted in relation to competing with great multinationals according to this statement: “The two multinational companies from our sector are extremely aggressive, it is really hard having such aggressiveness at the beverage sector, [...] we looked for openings to keep on going and we had to turned out to be good at it”.

Few organizations adopt an attitude of committing its profits in order to reach an outstanding position in the market and also in particular cases as identified in the financial competition relation. “We can get to the limit to get even, but never lose money”, affirms an executive. The same occurs with the practice of adopting lower prices than our competitors. Another executive illustrates a reality from his sector in which his company keeps an intermediate position. According to him, his company's products will never be seen with lower prices if compared to local competitors' products since the company has quality, structure and a different service. However, when compared to great multinational companies from the sector, the prices are basically similar so when the company practices a specific action, they lower prices to harm us. Due to this, the company does not have as policy to reduce their product prices, but struggle to keep in an intermediate position within its acting scenario.

In relation to businesses competition, it is seen that businesses seek protection from market threats. “I think that the greatest threat is the tax incentives when the government gives it individually and not to the sector”. One of the interviewed illustrates that concern with the competitive attitude all companies are shown in the market doing benchmarking of actions which succeed in the market. “The successful cases need to be copied as well as marketing”.

According to the marketing actions, it was identify that two companies take heavier actions, in special when releasing new products. They are the biggest interviewed companies with many units in the country. An executive's statement gives examples in this sense: “The Company's focus is more on the brand than on the product [...] the product actions are specific actions”. Other executive states about a long-term marketing view: “We work with the company's brands with a long-term view”.

The analysis over the competitive aggressiveness, which is guided by the EO conceptual basis, allows saying that competitive aggressiveness elements were found in the studied food industries. Chart 10, which illustrates how the competitive aggressiveness was noticed in these organizations, is based on the interviews.

Chart 10 – Competitive aggressiveness in the organizations: an illustrative classification

Competitive aggressiveness categories	Illustrative classification about the competitive aggressiveness in the studied organizations	Companies which executives participated									Total of 9
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Competition reaction	Responds to the competition actions	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
	Responds aggressively to the competition	x	x								2
Financial competition	Seeks position in the market based on the money flow or profitability		x					x			2
	Releases/puts products with lower prices that competitors to gain market		x				x				2
Business competition	Seeks combating threats in the market	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
	Competitive attitude	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
	Competitive attitude through companies' acquisitions		x								1
	Competitive attitude through innovation	x		x		x		x	x	x	6
	Competitive attitude through marketing	x	x								2
	Competitive attitude through products quality	x	x		x						3
Marketing	New products opportunist marketing		x			x					2
	High investments in marketing, product and manufacture quality	x	x								2

Source: elaborated by authors

The analysis about competitive aggressiveness allowed identifying that the majority of companies which are not aggressive in the market. The two biggest companies are noticed for having many units in Brazil and as having more aggressive competition characteristics.

The final considerations from this study are done bellow.

5 Final Considerations

The research done with nine executives from medium and large size food industries allowed characterizing how the EO dimension occurs in organizations and also permitted stating that companies which have EO are all characterized by some of the 5 dimensions and not always the same ones; It depends very much on particular facts from each organization. This corroborates bringing aspects from the literature in a sense that the EO of an organization can be constituted by the presence of some dimensions only (LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996).

Throughout the interviews analysis, it was able to identify that innovativeness seem to be among the 5 dimensions to be present the most in a great number of organizations, but not all of them. In general, it is reflected by the innovation in products and processes through the presence of investments in P&D and dedication of people to innovational activities. However, competitive aggressiveness seemed to be the dimension present in a fewer number of companies and occurring in two of them. The other dimensions: risk taking, proactiveness and autonomy seem to be present in an intermediate way. In some companies they were more highlighted and in others in a very superficial way or even absent. The autonomy dimension among the three of them seem to be the least evidenced.

So, some organizations seem to have an EO characterized through a bigger number of dimensions than others. Thus, it is important to remember on how much each EO dimension is useful to predict the nature and the success of a business and how it can be related to external and internal factors and to the organizations' founders and leader's profile (LUMPKIN; DESS, 1996). The research clearly showed that the external environment has a relation to the organization's EO, even though it was not really checked. As executives from different areas of the food industry were interviewed, it was clear that there is a difference among segments, consequently companies must respond in different ways to their environment. The beverage segment for instance, which is multinational dominated, has some particular characteristics due to the fact that there is a lot attention to these leaders and there is a search for 'openings' in the market, among others.

Thus it seems that the great question or challenge is realizing which dimensions are more important for the segment or specific context and then act to boost such dimensions. In this sense,

the characterization or diagnoses of the EO in organizations, which takes into account the dimensions, categories and elements, can bring great benefit for the ones that wish to boost their EO.

This study offers academic and management contributions. Concerning academic terms, it contributes to consolidate literature about EO, representing Charts from 1 to 5, shown in section 2, which constitutes the conceptual basis for the EO study in organizations through its dimensions, categories and elements that characterize this attitude. Such conceptual basis can be regarded as an orientation for the accomplishment of other studies about EO in organizations. The study also contributes with the debate over the entrepreneurship in the organizational level.

For the organizations' management practice, the study offers subsidies for executives, businessmen, food company managers, as long as it shows elements to be understood on EO development in organizations of this sector. That, somehow pictures the sector's characteristics. It also shows some EO effective practices done in the organizations by pointing out knowledge and experience about the food industry. Besides, for the ones that took part in the research, a reflection about the EO dimensions and its characterization in the context studied and in the specific reality of each organization and how it can bring contribution for diagnoses and identification of elements to be boosted in the search of a greater EO.

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