

## Interorganizational Alignment of Strategic Orientations in Supply Chains

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### ABSTRACT

This study argues that Market Orientation, Learning Orientation, Innovation Orientation and Relationship Orientation provide synergic effects to organizations in organizational and interorganizational levels. Two theoretical frameworks are presented in this theoretical essay. The first one considers the organizational level. The second one is regarded to interorganizational relations. This study argues that actors might improve their results and increase joint performance through a strategic alignment along a supply chain. Besides, network features like positioning, structural holes and density might impact on joint performance achieved through this strategic alignment. Thus, this study suggests that Learning Orientation in a competitive environment might harm joint performance, considering that some actors might act opportunistically defending their knowledge acquisition. Future studies should be focused on issues like open innovation, opportunistic behavior and network structures.

### 1 Introduction

Given the current global competitive environment and demands of international markets, some strategic postures are prioritized by companies in order to raise their competitive conditions. Related to that, it is observed some important strategic orientations focused on build lasting relationships and trust, knowledge transfers between companies and an incessant search for business partners that can add greater value to production process. Strategic orientations can be defined as “principles that direct and influence the activities of a firm and generate the behaviors intended to ensure its viability and performance” (Hakala, 2011, p. 199). Strategic postures are strongly related to a core objective focused on maximizing organizational performance and increasing satisfaction and value

delivered to consumers. Indeed, several studies suggest that there are strong complementarity aligned between strategic orientations at organizational and interorganizational levels (Deutscher et al., 2015; Timsit et al., 2015; Abdulai & Hinson, 2012; Abbade et al., 2012).

Considering some strategic orientations, it is possible to address the market orientation (MO), learning orientation (LO), innovation orientation (IO) and relationship orientation (RO). The MO is based on an approach focused on generation and use of market intelligence regarded mainly to competitors and customers (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). The LO is based on a business philosophy based on building an environment that fosters organizational learning (Baker & Sinkula, 1999a; Sinkula, Baker and Noordewier, 1997; Slater & Narver, 1995). The IO focuses on the creation of an innovative and

proactive company directed to the implementation of new ideas related to products and/or processes (Damanpour, 1991; Hult, Hurley and Knight, 2004). And the RO aims to build lasting and profitable relationships with stakeholders through commitment, trust and shared values (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Vlosky & Wilson, 1997). Thus, these orientations are often empirically investigated focusing in their relationships with organizational performances.

These strategic orientations are not mutually exclusive and the construction of an organizational environment that merges these orientations can add value and improve the organizational performance based on a synergistic effect, creating and developing competitive leverage. So, the organization can obtain strategically and operationally gains through synergistic effects of these related orientations. However, the search for evidences of these synergistic effects related to these strategic orientations in an interorganizational logic like supply chains may be something not quite simple to reach.

Through a meso-analytical logic (Dopfer, Foster and Potts, 2004), some of these strategic orientations may become contradictory in some aspects. The knowledge and experience exchange, for example, is likely to disrupt an interorganizational relationship increasing information and power asymmetry, which may harm the confidence level and longevity of a relationship. Furthermore, observing the performance of firms in a systemic logic, at the time that a relationship is affected by certain attitudes and practices, other organizations will also be affected in a lesser (or greater) level because of the interdependence existing between actors involved.

This study aims to join some main strategic orientations, highlight the possibility of positive and synergic relationships between some main strategic orientations and their aggregated impacts on organizational and interorganizational performance. So, this paper discusses the possibility of synergistic effects of some strategic orientations focused on market, learning, innovation and relationship in the organizational and interorganizational levels. As background, it is briefly addressed the logic of supply chains as well as the four strategic orientations explored in this discussion. This study also seeks to provoke

an academic discussion to generate insights for future theoretical and empirical studies assessing the impacts of strategic orientations in an interorganizational logic.

The main contribution of this study is to provide a discussion focused on a level of interorganizational impacts of important strategic orientations. Thus, this study is directed to researchers who are dedicated to investigate the relationship of practices and organizational strategic orientations theoretically and empirically, providing possible opportunities for future researches. Moreover the theoretical model proposed in this paper might guide the development of a better strategic alignment of agents acting in supply chains in order to provide greater overall profits and leverage for the value chain.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Supply Chain Management

Supply Chain Management (SCM) can be defined as the processes integration in a given production chain, from its origin point to the final consumption, with the goal of providing superior value to customers and other stakeholders also involved through better products, services and information (Lambert, Cooper and Pagh, 1998). In addition, a supply chain is a set of three or more entities directly involved with the upstream and downstream flow of products, services, finance, and / or information from the source to final consumer (Mentzer *et al.*, 2001). The definition of SCM focuses on cross-boundary activities involved in the production process encompassing the various stakeholders involved. The logic of the SCM might contribute to the development of an integrated system based on enduring relationships, exchange of knowledge and experiences, development of innovations and competitive leverage.

The principle of SCM is the basic premise that organizational and operational efficiency can be improved by sharing skills, information and joint planning (Bowersox & Closs, 2001). Considering that competitive advantage is hardly achieved working isolated and independently of the stakeholders on the market, the establishment of interconnectedness with other organizations that participate of the production process of the

value chain is necessary to increase returns and raise the competitiveness (Wood & Zuffo, 1998). Rises, in this context, a system based on network configuration where the organizational development of strategic and operational synergies can generate sustainable competitive advantages.

Currently, organizations compete based on their respective networks. The organization's success will be related to how it will manage its partnerships with stakeholders (Cooper & Gardner, 1993; Spekman, Kamauff Jr. and Myhr, 1998) and its ability to integrate skills (Vollmann, Cordon and Raabe, 1996) in the supply chain. From this point of view, SCM deals with the excellence of all organizational processes and represents a new way to manage businesses and relationships with other members of a supply chain (Lambert & Cooper, 2000).

Considering that the core objective of a supply chain is to build an integrated value chain, or a system able to delivery superior value (Kirchmer, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Zokaei & Simons, 2006), we can assume that a strategic alignment among its members is quite necessary. Value chain can be defined as the representation of value activities generated by companies to meet the requirements demanded by consumers. However, thought this logic, value chain can be seen as an integrated system of companies that generates superior value sharing a high performance with their upstream and downstream stakeholders, represented by suppliers, distributors and retailers (Porter, 1989). The construction of a value system able to provide superior products to their customers, and provide competitive leverage for its members, is closely linked to the strategic alignment (Chopra & Meindl, 2003) considering network positions and strategic orientations.

The study of supply chain is substantially based in social network theory. Thus, it is considered that the structure of the supply chain network and the relationship between economic agents involved are important dimensions for the understanding of the supply chain and its dynamics (Lambert *et. al.*, 1998). This is important because the company's position in the network structure and the nature of the relationships forged affect the organizational performance (Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001; Granovetter, 1985; Rowley, Behrens and Krackhardt, 2000). On the other hand, the

interorganizational performance can be also affected, in a positive or negative way, given the strategic alignment (or misalignment) and due to knowledge transference that can stimulate opportunistic behaviors.

## 2.2 Market Orientation (MO)

The MO is defined as the organizational culture that develops behaviors needed to create high value to customer, generating competitive advantage to the company (Narver & Slater, 1990). Developing a greater focus on customers and the market (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990), a market-oriented company can provide solutions beyond the customers' expectations. Also, market-oriented companies consider that there are several ways to reduce the total costs involved in the acquisition and maintenance of consumers, as well as the existence of many ways to create additional benefits and value for clients. Moreover, it is also necessary to develop a long term view of relationships, linking organizational culture and organizational structure, coordinating efforts in all sectors and departments of the company to create superior value for customers (Narver & Slater, 1990).

Kohli and Jaworski (1990), proposes a construct of MO based on three perspectives or dimensions. According to these authors, the MO should be measured by the analysis of (1) the generation of market intelligence related to the business unit, (2) the dissemination of this market intelligence; and (3) the response or reaction of the business unit based on the intelligence generated and disseminated. These three dimensions of MO are interlinked and should be seen as interdependent.

The starting point for developing a market orientation is the acquisition of market intelligence. This stage is based on the analysis of internal and external factors of the organization that affect its respective market, associated with an awareness of the needs and preferences of customers, as well as knowledge of macro-analytical aspects like government regulations and technology (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). The acquire of market intelligence is initiated through the generation of this kind of intelligence, which includes investigations about consumers associated to complementary mechanisms of

research, such as client meetings, discussions with partners and analysis of sales reports. The attention to involve the analysis of external factors in generating intelligence process is linked to the necessity of knowing the actions of competitors and how they influence customer preferences. Another factor that influences the intelligence generation is the business environment. There is therefore a need to recognize market pressures and the environmental system, among other factors, as an important step of the process to generate competitive intelligence (Jaworski, Macinnis, and Kohli, 2002).

The second factor to be developed in a market orientation approach, which should be viewed as a sequential step to the generation of intelligence, is the dissemination of this intelligence. The knowledge built and acquired in the first step should be disseminated in the organization through its people. This practice must be performed by means of horizontal communication, which must occur within the company, involving all departments (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). It is also considered that the vertical and diagonal flows of information play a fundamental role in the dissemination of market intelligence.

The last dimension of MO is the responsiveness that is related to actions taken by the company in order to use the knowledge and intelligence generated and disseminated with strategic purpose of competitive gain. Fundamentally, the responsiveness is composed of two sets of activities: (1) design of response, and (2) implementation of response. The first one addresses the use of market intelligence to develop plans. The second activity, on the other hand, is focused on the pursuit of such plans (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). The responsiveness involves the selection of target markets, the design and supply of products that meet current and future needs of customers, among other activities (Kohli, Jaworski, and Kumar, 1993).

It is important that an organization that pursues greater gains of competitive advantages should be always updated (Slater & Narver, 1995). So, organizational learning is seen as a strategy adopted to learn and acquire knowledge faster than competitors. However, frequent dedication to training programs and organizational changes can cause a failure in the development process of an organizational culture geared to the

market (Narver, Slater, and Tietje, 1998). It is considered that the Learning Orientation (LO) is fundamental to the development in a MO. These two strategic orientations are seen as interdependent and synergistic (Baker & Sinkula, 1999a). However, they should be correctly aligned.

### 2.3 Relationship Orientation (RO)

The relationship orientation dedicates its focus of attention to relationships between companies and their stakeholders. This strategic posture is forged from the perspective of relationship marketing, which can be defined as the marketing seen from the perspective of relationships, networks and interactions (Gummesson, 2000). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), relationship marketing refers to all marketing activities and processes dedicated to establish, develop and maintain successful trading and business relations.

Relationships currently earn a strategic level in the management process (Wilson, 1995) due to high levels of global competition and its complexity, as well as due to relocation of bargaining power to retail companies and final consumers. This requires that organizations seek more lasting and beneficial relationships that can bring mutual benefits attracting and maintaining customers. Thus, relationship marketing can be related to definitions of Supply Chain and Demand Chain, since it establishes that the relationship between suppliers and buyers adds value along a network of organizations generating superior value to end users and companies involved.

There are some models widely used to evaluate the orientation relationship of companies. It was found that the two most prominent models of Relationship Orientation (RO) are proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Wilson and Vlosky (1997). The model presented by Wilson and Vlosky (1997) incorporates six dimensions in its construct. These dimensions are: (1) dependency level; (2) level of comparison of alternatives; (3) specific investments in the relationship; (4) commitment; (5) trust; and (6) sharing of information. Each of these dimensions influences the level of RO. Also, they can be used to evaluate and differentiate traditional relationships from partner relationships. In addition, the model

proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994) analyzes four key dimensions that influence the level of commitment to the relationship. These dimensions are: (1) relationship termination costs; (2) relationship benefits; (3) shared values; and (4) trust. This model also analyzes the relationship between other variables faced as consequences of trust and commitment to the relationship. Among other models found in the relationship marketing literature, it is observed that trust and commitment are dimensions of analysis commonly addressed with great emphasis (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wilson & Vlosky, 1997). These two dimensions are discussed briefly.

Trust can be positioned as a central element in the relationships analysis and this variable is constantly discussed in the context of relationship marketing (Berry, 2000; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust can be understood as a particular level of subjective probability in which an agent evaluates and believes that another agent will act in a certain way (Gambetta, 1988). So, trust can be seen as a matter of predictability (Grossman, 1998) based on experiences (Moorman, Deshpandé and Zaltman, 1993). Thus, trust exists when one side of the transaction believes in the integrity and safety of others agents involved (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This argument is complemented by the assumption that trust is related to experiences, and the past behavior of an agent can be considered in order to give him reliability. Mutual trust can be achieved or developed through personal interactions between economic agents (Seal, 1998) reinforcing the importance of social ties between individual and organizational actors. However, experiences that give previously reliability to an agent do not prevent that this same agent will not act opportunistically, only the probability of such behavior is considered minor.

The commitment is another variable with great importance for the analysis of relationships between companies and their clients. Considering that this variable can be directly related to trust, commitment can be defined as the belief of economic agents have that maintain the relationship with a partner is important and should be maintained through efforts, that sometimes can be expensive (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Corroborating with such idea, it is considered that the commitment is seen as an enduring desire to maintain a relationship considered valuable (Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpandé, 1992). We

can consider then that the commitment is directly dependent on the degree of value that agents deposit in the economic relationship. Besides, this value can be faced as a function of benefits and costs involved. Also, we can suggest that the commitment relates positively with other elements such as trust and relationship termination costs. Logically commitment can also be associated negatively with other transactional elements such as the risk of opportunistic behavior and uncertainty. It is further considered that sustainability of a relationship is closely related to a mutual commitment between agents involved.

Logically, there are other important constructs adopted to define the RO as shared values, relationship termination cost, information asymmetry, opportunistic behavior of agents and communication. However this essay does not aim to deepen the discussion on the RO itself. The idea is to discuss this strategic orientation, along with other ones, and their potential impacts over the relationships in a supply chain, considering a strategic alignment.

#### 2.4 Learning Orientation (LO)

Knowledge management and organizational learning have been faced as a strategic and operational way to keep companies actualized to demands of the competitive market, thereby increasing organizational performance (Khandekar & Sharma, 2006; Prieto & Revilla, 2006). The generation and transference of knowledge in companies are organizational learning processes considered as having great strategic importance for the competitive development.

The Learning Orientation (LO) is seen as an approach that aims the development of learning and knowledge management (through the provision, commitment, sharing, and constant questioning of working procedures) by members of the organization. In this context, the LO can be defined as a set of values that influences the degree to which an organization is deemed satisfied in relation to their theories in use (Argyris & Schon, 1978) and its dominant action logic (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995). LO has the purpose to create an organizational environment that encourages the organizational learning and sharing knowledge.

It is considered that the LO, when viewed as

a strategic organizational philosophy, provides conditions to improve organizational performance through innovative processes and the development of a better market understanding (Baker & Sinkula, 1999b; Calantone, Cavusgil and Zhao, 2002; Hult, et al., 2004; Slater & Narver, 1995). Still, the construct of LO proposed by Sinkula, Baker and Noordewier (1997) is based in three integrated dimensions: (1) commitment to learning, (2) shared vision, and (3) "open mind". These dimensions can be seen as interdependent, creating an organizational environment that can lead to organizational learning.

The commitment to organizational learning represents the efforts of individuals to promote organizational learning (Sinkula et al., 1997), and create and strengthen an environment and context that foster learning in the organization (Norman, 1985). For that commitment exists, there must be trust between members of the organization and this mutual trust positively influences the acquisition of knowledge (Cheng, Hailin and Hongming, 2008). The degree of commitment to organizational learning is considered an important asset of organizations (Sinkula et al., 1997), by the fact that through this commitment organizations are able to develop a better understanding of the market, competitors and the organizational environment (Kandemir & Hult, 2005), obtaining competitive advantage and identifying key market opportunities.

The shared vision refers to the focus and dedication of members on organization learning with attention on the enforcement of commitment and work team intentions (Sinkula et al., 1997). It is reasonable to consider the shared vision increases the learning quality (Calantone et al., 2002) and, without this sharing permeating the organization, the learning of its members will probably lose their meaning. This phenomenon refers strongly to issues of socialization among organizational members, which should share experiences and knowledge, building an organizational vision.

The "Open Mind" is associated with a critical assessment of the operations, procedures and activities of the organization by its members, as well as the acceptance of new ideas related to objectives of improvement (Sinkula et al., 1997). The embedded knowledge can be considered as a barrier for organizations to adapt to market changes and respond strategically. This preview

knowledge can create an inertial behavior damaging the ability to predict market conditions and damage the long-term relationship with stakeholders (Schindehutte, Morris, and Kocak, 2008). It is considered that the open mind behavior of the members of an organization oriented for learning is an individual characteristic that, when shared with all organizational members, fosters an environment of inquiry and double loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978), improving the innovation and organizational performance (Calantone et al., 2002).

Organizations with a sharp LO encourage its members and employees to question existing organizational norms that guide their activities related to processing market information and organizational actions (Sinkula, 1994; Sinkula et al., 1997). This strategic orientation is associated with the innovativeness of organizations and, consequently, organizational performance (Calantone et al., 2002; Hult, et al., 2004) and the quality of relationships that companies develop with their buyers (Chang, 2007).

Studies that relate the LO to organizational performance presents evidences that this orientation has a positive impact on company performance (Baker & Sinkula, 1999a; Calantone et al., 2002; Hult, et al., 2004; Panayides, 2007; Rhee, Park and Lee, 2010; Wang, 2008). Moreover, studies also report that market orientation (MO) improves the performance of companies when mediated by organizational learning (Abbade, Zanini and Souza, 2012; Jimenez & Navarro, 2007; Lin, Peng and Kao, 2008). These empirical evidences support some propositions of this study.

## 2.5 Innovation Orientation (IO)

Given the inherent complexity of the innovation concept, a sharp definition is difficult to be achieved. An innovation can be related to a product, a technological process, a management structure or program associated with members of a given organization (Kimberly, 1981; Tushman & Nadler, 1997). Thus, it is considered that the Innovation Orientation (IO) is present when organizations implement new ideas, products or processes (Damanpour, 1991; Hult & Ketchen, 2001; Lukas & Ferrell, 2000). Considering that IO can be associated with investments in a technological leadership position and product

quality (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Han, Kim and Srivastava, 1998), this strategic posture, based on innovative attitudes, positively affects the long-term success and provides flexibility, desire for change and foster the development of new products (Damanpour, 1991; Gatignon, & Xuereb, 1997; Hult et al., 2004).

Siguaw, Simpson and Enz (2006) define innovation orientation as being composed by learning philosophy, strategic direction and organizational beliefs that define the direction of organizational strategies and specific actions towards skills and innovative process. The approach to innovation can be focused on the allocation of resources, technologies, employees, operations and markets (Siguaw, Simpson and Enz, 2006). In addition, some background and antecedents of innovation related to products, like advantage of such product, market potential, knowledge of customer needs, competence in pre-development tasks and resources devoted to innovation, are seen as the most significant antecedents of the positive performance of new products (Henard & Szymanski, 2001). This argument provides foundations to support the close relationship of IO with other strategic orientations.

Once highlighted the importance of innovation in the economic context, where an approach oriented to innovation can provide increases in organizational performance, we seek to emphasize its impact in the organizational context. We can consider that organizational changes and economic results may be related to the innovation orientation of the companies. Thus, there are numerous studies pointing to the existence of associations between innovation and organizational learning (Hurley & Hult, 1998; Perin, Sampaio and Hooley, 2007), as well as between innovation and the market orientation (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Webster & Gupta, 2005) and with learning orientation and market orientation simultaneously (Baker & Sinkula, 1999a; Baker & Sinkula, 1999b).

Hurley and Hult (1998), based on the study conducted by Slater and Narver (1995), included the variable innovation to the original model composed by LO and MO. Through this inclusion they proposed a model of market orientation with a focus on innovation considering the implementation of new ideas, products and processes, associated with learning orientation

that focus on the development of knowledge and insights, which are the primary mechanisms to respond to the market. Considering the model proposed by Hurley and Hult (1998), they present the concept of innovativeness and ability to innovate. The first refers to the organization's openness to new ideas, and this is one aspect of organizational culture, which emphasizes on learning, participation in decision making, supporting decisions, collaboration and shared power. All of these elements, jointly or independently, may affect the approach to innovation. The second concept, the ability to innovate, is the organization's ability to adapt and implement new ideas, processes and products successfully.

Thus, it is considered that firms that have the capacity to innovate can also improve the development of competitive advantage (Hurley & Hult, 1998; Siguaw et al., 2006). So, we can assume that MO, LO, innovativeness and ability to innovate are properties that affect the organizational innovation process. In addition, MO and LO are considered as key antecedents to innovativeness in organizations (Hult, et al., 2004).

Both innovativeness and the ability to innovate culminate in competitive advantage and organizational performance. However, Hurley and Hult (1998) argue that MO is not critical and crucial to performance. However, organizational learning and development capacity can lead to positions of competitive advantage. Thus, when organizational learning is faced as a change in organizational behavior or implementation perspective and procedures, it can be considered an innovation too. Given the preview argumentation, it is plausible to assume that innovation (including the organizational innovativeness and ability to innovate) can contribute to creating or maintaining competitive positions and increased organizational performance (Hurley & Hult, 1998).

## 2.6 Integrating Strategic Orientations in Organizational and Interorganizational Levels

The proposed framework to be presented next assumes that there are positive relations between the strategic orientations addressed. Several studies show that such relations exist, and some of these are strongly supported. On the other

hand, some of these relations were poorly investigated. Some of the empirical findings are reported in this section.

Some important studies deal with the LO and MO as constructs closely related (Dickson, 1996; Hurley & Hult, 1998; Sinkula, 1994; Sinkula et al., 1997; Slater & Narver, 1995) and there are some empirical evidences that confirms the positive relationship between the MO and LO (Abbade et al., 2012; Baker & Sinkula, 1999a; Perin, Sampaio and Faleiro, 2004; Sujan, Weitz and Kumar, 1994). The LO is characterized as an attitude of commitment to the construction of knowledge and organizational learning. Thus, the MO can take advantage of this construction. Therefore, a strong LO might encourage the development of a MO given the nature of these strategic orientations with focus on knowledge construction. Also, this association may potentially contribute to a successful approach to innovation (Hult & Hurley, 1998; Slater & Narver, 1995). Evidence suggests that LO affects innovativeness and, consequently, the economic performance (Rhee, Park and Lee, 2010).

Considering the MO and IO, there is a controversy about the nature of the relationship between these two strategic orientations. Some studies provide evidence supporting the argument that the proximity to the market and consumers can affect the attitude of innovation (Christensen, 1997). This is because market-oriented companies try to satisfy the expressed needs of its customers, or imitate their competitors, leaving in second place a posture with focus on innovation (Connor, 1999; Lukas & Farrell, 2000; Narver, Slater and Maclachlan, 2004). As a counter-argument, some researchers advocate the idea that MO is positively related to IO. A company focused on the market is in an advantage position to anticipate future needs of its customers and may contribute to the development of an innovative approach (Houston, 1986). Moreover, a MO may contribute to the innovativeness and success of new products, and the closeness to the market can promote conditions to react differently to market conditions (Hult, et al., 2004; Kirca, Jayachandran and Bearden, 2005). An innovation-oriented company might use its technological capabilities to develop new solutions that will meet the consumers' needs (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Im & Workman, 2004; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Complementing this argument, market-oriented

companies also prioritize the use of information about competitors and consumers, creating an organizational learning and behavior change that can contribute to innovativeness (Atuahene-Gima, 1995; Atuahene-Gima, 1996). Thus, earlier study suggested that innovation is a key factor, together with Corporate Social Responsibility, transforming market orientation strategy (Abdulai & Hinson, 2012).

It is also possible to considerate that an RO provides a close relationship between economic agents acting in a given supply chain, promoting knowledge transfer and organizational learning. Likewise, focus on a LO could come to encourage an attitude of cooperation that would enable the development of a more elaborate and sharp RO (Panayides, 2007). However, knowledge transfer is likely to unbalance power relations causing an informational and power asymmetry, which consequently would affect the relationship between economic actors. There is a lack of scientific investigation to fill this gap satisfactorily. However, assuming that a RO is forged based on behaviors focused on organizational commitment, trust and shared values (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), this study starts from the logical premise that the RO is positively related to LO and, consequently, to MO and IO.

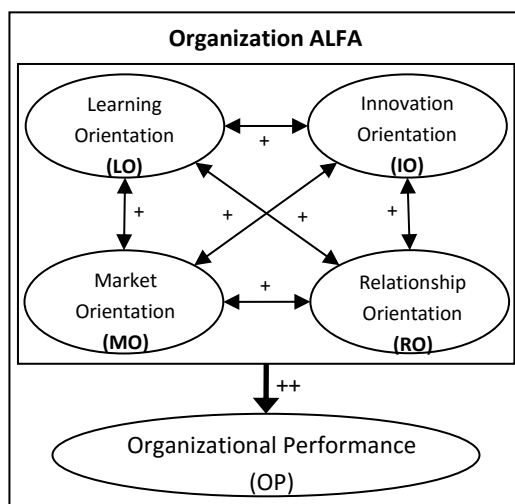
Aiming to relate the strategic orientations addressed here with organizational performance, there are empirical evidences that corroborate this positive relation. Investigations report that the LO and MO provide an increase on organizational performance (Baker & Sinkula, 1999a; Mavondo, Chimhanzi and Stewart, 2005; Perin et al., 2004; Sinkula et al., 1997; Sujan et al., 1994). Furthermore, evidences also suggest that innovation increases organizational performance, considering that product innovation is a key factor to the organizational success (Baker & Sinkula, 1999b; Han et al., 1998).

Additional evidences also suggest that RO has a positive impact on organizational performance (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ramani & Kumar, 2008; Vlosky & Wilson, 1997). Indeed, evidence suggests that communication and personalization, as well as other dimensions of customer relationship orientation, have significant effect on satisfaction and trust of consumers (Abubakar & Mokhtar, 2015; Salojärvi et al., 2015). Through a focus on relationships with stakeholders, organizations are more likely to



obtain a transaction costs reduction and develop a higher level of commitment and interdependence. Thus, the joint performance and competitiveness can be improved. Figure 1 illustrates the relations between the strategic orientations addresses in this study and their impact on organizational performance.

**Figure 1.** Integrating strategic orientations in organizational level.



This study aims to contribute to the theoretical field, provoking a discussion about the possible impacts of the strategic orientations alignment along a supply chain. The arguments are based, in the first instance, on a theoretical discussion about the effects of these orientations addressed in this essay on organizational performance as well as the alignment of these strategic orientations, shared by the agents of a supply chain on interorganizational performance. The theoretical assumptions are grounded and supported by a few empirical studies that aimed to investigate the relationship between the strategic orientations discussed in this paper.

Considering that the strategic orientations addressed in the organizational model (figure 1) positively affect organizational performance individually, it is assumed that these orientations can provide a synergic effect when implemented together in organizations. Thus, the performance of these organizations that adopt these strategic orientations jointly can be faced as superior. This is due to synergy between the market orientation, learning orientation, innovation orientation and relationship orientation. So, the performance at the organizational level is leveraged. Furthermore, by sharing those orientations along a supply chain (suppliers and buyers addressed in the framework), the results of the performance obtained in an interorganizational level can be also leveraged. This logic of

leverage interorganizational performance is based on the logic of the value chain with systemic effects throughout the supply chain. However, the strategic orientations shared by stakeholders in a supply chain may possibly create some conflicts, harming the collective gains and interorganizational performance. The proposed framework, considering the strategic relations in an interorganizational level, is presented in figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Integrating strategic orientations in organizational and interorganizational level.

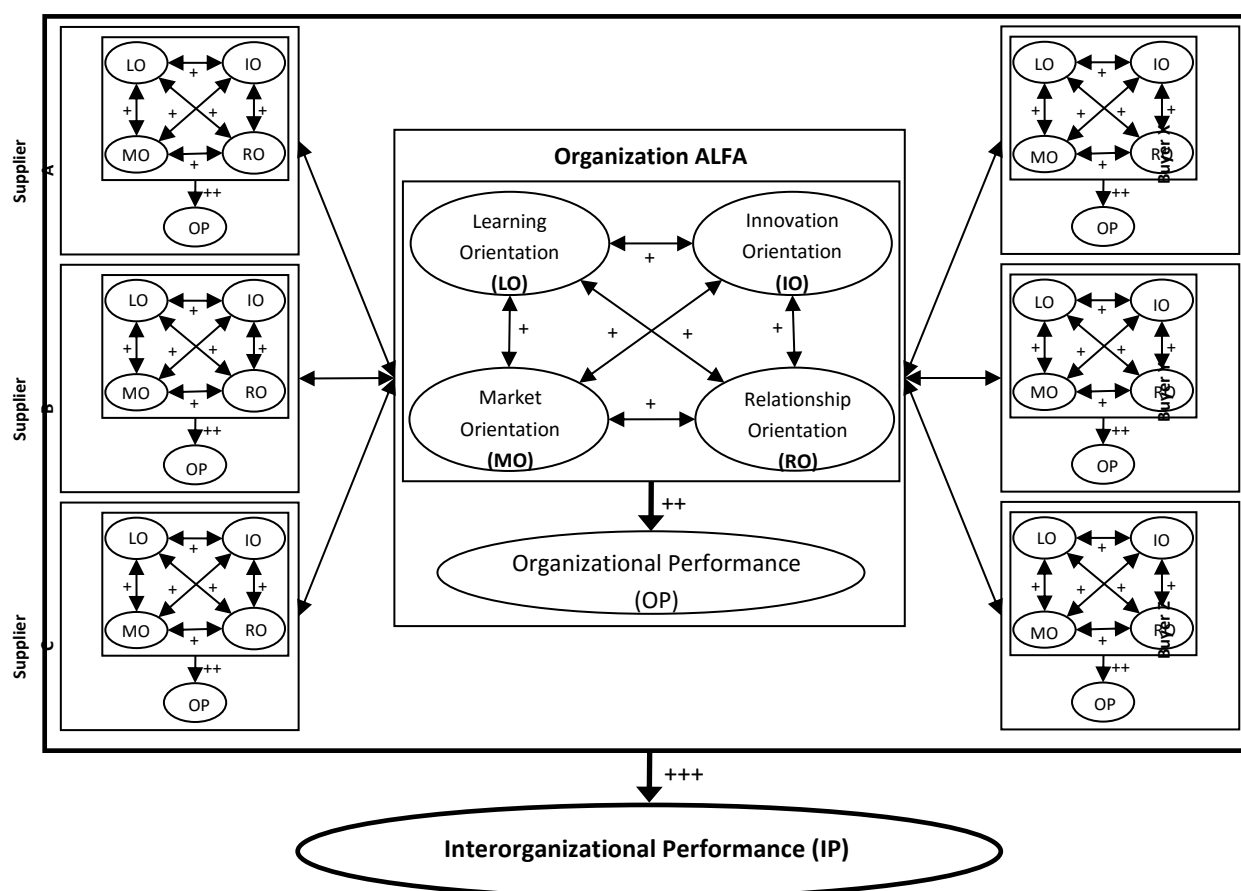


Figure 1 illustrates arguments defending that strategic orientations have a synergic effect in the organizational level. However, this synergic effect can or can not be observed in the interorganizational level (Figure 2). Considering learning orientation, for example, economic actor could assume opportunistic and protective behaviors defending their knowledge acquisition. Assuming that market information and knowledge should conduct organizations to a better competitive condition, these resources can be faced as a unique values that should not be shared with other organizations, even that these organizations are partners in a supply chain. This organizational behavior focused on individual gains probably will reduce the cooperative efforts of actors in a supply chain and, consequently, will result in a lower interorganizational performance. Innovative orientation and market orientation also represents strategic orientations that should not produce synergic effects in interorganizational level if organizational actors are not completely compromised with collective interests.

However, relationship orientation shared in an interorganizational level can attenuate these effects producing a more cooperative behavior.

Considering the arguments presented above, learning orientation, faced as antecedent of market and innovative orientations, should be analyzed as organizational and interorganizational learning orientation. Therefore, evidences related to learning orientation can be distinguished between organizational and interorganizational interests and strategic behavior. Only an implemented organizational learning orientation should not be sufficient to improve the interorganizational performance. On the other hand, an advanced interorganizational learning orientation can improve knowledge and market information sharing, developing an interorganizational market and innovative orientation. As result of these interorganizational strategic orientations, achieved through interorganizational learning orientation and sharing knowledge, improved by a sharp relationship orientation, the interorganizational performance should present superior levels based

on the synergic effects of the strategic orientations addressed in this study.

Complementing the arguments, some implications of a strategic alignment based on the strategic orientations discussed can be highlighted and suggested. One reasonable possible result of the strategic alignment defended in this paper is the development of an interorganizational environment that enhances the Open Innovation (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Gassmann & Enkel, 2004; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) through sharing of an innovation orientation. It is also reasonable to assume that the interorganizational alignment based on the RO may reduce the risk of opportunistic behavior of economic agents, as transaction costs and expenditures for coordination mechanisms and governance structures (Williamson, 1975; Williamson, 1985). On the other hand, some strategic orientations like innovation orientation or learning orientation should probably affect the governance structures resulting in a need for governance restructure. Thus, considering some possible positive effects, the sharing of market and learning orientations can generate more efficient interorganizational strategic responses to competitors from competing supply chains through better knowledge of the market and a sharing of information about competitors and consumers. In addition, the development of an interorganizational learning can generate leveraged gains to participants of a supply chain that shares the strategic postures addressed in the theoretical model.

Considering the proposed model as valid, it is noteworthy that the effects of strategic alignment of the orientations discussed will be conditioned to the structure of the supply chain and the relationships established by its agents (Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001; Granovetter, 1985; Rowley et al., 2000). Whereas the relationships explored occur in interorganizational networks, important elements can impact on the dynamics of such network relationships. Some elements need special attention so we can properly analyze the impacts of the strategic interactions in interorganizational networks. Among these elements, we can highlight (1) the number and type of actors involved, (2) the network function, (3) the network structure, (4) the institutionalization, (5) the conduct rules, (6) the existing power relations and (7) the strategy of the

actors (Van Waarden, 1992).

The positional analysis of the company in the interorganizational network presents potential impacts on relational dynamics of strategic orientations and its impact on performance. The positional analysis takes as premise the consideration of structural and relational aspects of networks. Related to that, we can rescue the concept of structural and relational embeddedness. The structural embeddedness emphasizes how the structural position of an actor can affect their behavior. However, the relational embeddedness emphasizes the dependence of the actor's behaviors with the structure of mutual expectations (Granovetter, 1985). Another important aspect inherent to network to be considered is the analysis of the relational position evaluated by cohesion of the actor with other stakeholders and the network density. The cohesion is a relational property between pairs of actors in a network and can be understood through the intensity of the relationship. The density is a variable of the general structure and cohesion is a variable concerning the relationship between pairs of network actors. Density and cohesion should be treated together, once the intensity of relationships (strong or weak) depends on the structure network (dense or diffuse) (Rowley et al., 2000).

Thus, the nature and strength of the ties that link economic actors (Granovetter, 1973), the density of the supply chain (Lazzarini, 2008; Rowley et al., 2000), the existence of structural holes (Burt, 1992) and the position of economic agents in the supply chain (Granovetter, 1985) are some of the aspects to be considered for the evaluation of strategic synergy between the strategic orientations. It is also possible to consider that the market segment of companies can potentially interfere with the strategic alignment to be established along the supply chain given the nature of the strategic objectives prioritized by economic agents.

### 3. Conclusion

This theoretical essay aims to join some main strategic orientations, which are constantly investigated empirically in business academic fields. However, some of these investigations are focused on the impacts of specific strategic orientations on organizational performance in an isolated perspective. Some researches are focused

on the linkages between strategic orientations as well on their impacts on performance. So, the first main objective of this paper was to highlight the positive and synergic relationships between some main strategic orientations (market, learning, innovation and relationship orientations) and their aggregated impacts on organizational performance. Secondly, it is highlighted the theoretical assumption of achieving a superior interorganizational performance through an alignment of these strategic orientations in a supply chain. It is assumed that economic agents in a given supply chain that shares these strategic orientations can achieve superior value, competitive advantages and high interorganizational performance.

A framework was designed to explain the theoretical implications of this paper. In the organizational perspective, the framework explores the synergic effects of the main four strategic orientations addressed. Then, it is proposed that this integration based on an organizational alignment of strategic orientations can impact positively on the organizational performance. Some empirical evidences presented in past investigations give support to the theoretical arguments presented in this paper. In addition, considering the interorganizational perspective, the framework presents the possibility of a superior interorganizational gain through a strategic alignment of the orientations addressed. It is adopted the concept of supply chain to illustrate this logic. There are just a few studies that focus on the impacts of strategic orientations on the interorganizational performance. However, a deductive logic supports the theoretical prepositions regarded to positive impacts of the strategic orientations alignment on the interorganizational gain.

Some implications can also be highlighted based on the framework proposed here. The interorganizational dynamic based on the strategic orientations alignment can effort trust and commitment between economic agents of a supply chain. However, some level of trust and commitment has to exist previously so the alignment can be successfully designed. Also, this interorganizational integration can efforts some strategic postures focused on innovation like Open Innovation actions and initiatives. On the other hand, a high level of dependency and integration can generate some opportunistic behaviors based

on information and power asymmetries. Therefore, the theoretical model proposed here, and the arguments presented in this paper, suggests that the strategic alignment of the strategic orientations addressed might result in some positive and negative effects. We can consider that learning orientation, associated to a sharp competitive environment, might harm the potentiality of joint performance. Some actors in a given supply chain might act opportunistically defending their knowledge acquisition and their competitive advantages. Thus, the adequacy of the governance structures adopted in a supply chain might be affected by the strategic alignment (or misalignment). So, some empirical investigations regarded to these arguments are needed.

Based on what was presented and argued in this paper, some restraints need to be highlighted. First, considering that this paper is a theoretical essay, its arguments and conclusions have to be faced in a theoretic perspective. Besides, considering that empirical evidences presented by other author gives limited support to the framework proposed in this paper, they do not integrate all the factors and elements that compose the theoretical model. Having these limitations in mind, some future investigations can be suggested. The main suggest for future investigations is a wide research for empirical evidences that might corroborate the theoretical framework proposed here. In addition, it is suggested the incorporation of new elements and constructs in the framework proposed, like presence of structural holes, information and power asymmetries, and the influence of the institutional environment.

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