The influence of TMT in promoting trust within organizational networks

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Abstract. *The rapid technological changes, the shifting patterns of international trade and the different competition modes forced the birth of a new organizational form called "dynamic network" by Miles and Snow (1986). This paper, of conceptual nature, aims at analyzing the importance and role of Top Management Teams, according to Hambrick (1984), in creating an organizational culture favorable to the establishment of dynamic networks, in the development of trust and in promoting commitment within the network by reviewing a set of concepts like networks, trust, commitment and organizational culture. Therefore, the role of top management teams in building strong form trust will be analyzed by using the existent theory to establish the relation among the concepts of "dynamic networks", top management team, commitment and the concept of trust introduced by Sabel (1993). As networks are not discrete events in time, they involve continuous relationships and this means commitment among all the members of the network. It then presents a discussion of some empirical and theoretical implications of the analysis. The originality is in the combination of the various theories, namely the "dynamic network" of Miles and Snow (1986), the Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and the concept of "trust" of Sabel (1993) to prove that top management teams have influence in the development of trust. While some authors argue that top management actions have direct implications in the company's performance, others argue that the strategic success of a business depends on the ability of the top management team to build strong forms of trust within global networks, and then by being part of a network companies will have access to a wider variety of resources, to more knowledge, capabilities and technology. The challenge abides on showing how an organizational culture, trust and commitment in exchange relationships within a dynamic network can enhance or be a source of competitive advantage for organizations.*

Keywords: *top management teams; network; trust; commitment; organizational culture.*

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Introduction

The shifting patterns of international trade, the new forms of competition and the rapid technological changes have forced many firms to rethink their market approaches, and consequently their strategies, structures and management processes have been combined and resulted in a "dynamic network" (Miles & Snow, 1986).

A change can also be observed in the focus of organizational theory away from the internal processes of organizations towards the organization–environment interface (Häkansson & Snehota, 2006).

According to Hambrick and Quigley (2014) executive actions substantially shape the fate of enterprises and as Hambrick (1987) argues the strategic success of a firm depends not only on one person, but on the entire top management team, therefore the relevance of exploring the role and the importance of the top management team within organizations and even more importantly when relating to other firms and members of the same network.

In fact, Kiessling and Harvey (2004) defend the idea that the top management team (TMT) will be central in the development of networks between organizations, in particular the personal interactions that are of great importance for building strong forms of trust.

For all this, it is very important to analyze the available literature regarding top management teams, network and dynamic network, trust, commitment and organizational culture to be able to determine how TMT influence the creation of an organizational culture that promotes trust and commitment among individuals and other organizations.

This topic is particularly interesting as some researchers, like Bower (1970) have highlighted the role of CEOs in shaping organizational architecture through their decisions about structure, executive staffing, incentives and metrics. Others, such as Hambrick and Finkelstein (1990) focused their attention on establishing a relation between TMT tenure and organizational outcomes. Or, Hambrick and Quigley (2014) who have studied for twenty years the influence of the CEO on a firm's performance. There appears to be a substantial lack of research in exploring the role of TMT in creating an organizational culture capable of promoting a strong form trust within dynamic networks.

Literature Review

Once the aim of this study is to understand the role and importance of top management teams in creating an organizational culture favorable to the establishment of dynamic networks, a review of the main contributions, approaches and theories related to the "role of top management teams in the organizations", "network", "organizational culture", "trust" and "commitment" will be carried out. The concepts of "trust" and "commitment" will also be reviewed as they are intimately connected to the definition of networks and as top management teams may have a huge influence in creating trustworthy relations within a network and therefore committing to the other members. In fact, Kiessling and Harvey (2004) argue that the top management team is instrumental in the development of trust between organizations, and that the personal interactions have an important contribution for building a strong form of trust. These authors also defend that strong form trust will open the network to more knowledge exchanges and therefore reduce any opportunistic behavior.

Top management team (TMT)

The concept of "Top Management Team" appeared in the academic literature around the eighties, with the Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) as a reference, and now it is widely used by both academics and practitioners representing an important advance since the management of a firm is commonly a team activity. In fact it usually refers to a small group of the most influential people within an organization. Sometimes this group can be named after "management committee" or "executive committee" (Hambrick, 1995).

Kiessling and Harvey (2004) defend that the Top Management Team (TMT) must be included in strategic decisions as they influence the attitudes within their firm and in their future relationships. Hambrick (1995) argue that the Top Management Team task is rather complex, once they are bombarded with information, some are ambiguous and for this reason it is relevant to focus on the role of the TMTs. As a result the characteristics of the top team will largely influence the way they scan and interpret the environment and the decisions they make. To reinforce this aspect, Hambrick (2007) state that the executives' values and personalities have great influence on the way they interpret the situations they face, and how this can determine their decisions.

In fact, the Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick, 1984) defends the idea that the organizational outcomes, in terms of strategic choices and firm's performance levels are partially influenced by the top management background characteristics, namely their values and cognitive bases. The central idea of this seminal paper is focused on how executives behave based on their personalized analysis of the strategic situations they face, and that these analysis are a product of the executive's experiences, values and personalities.

Bowman and Kakabadse (1997) argue that the Upper Echelons perspective appeared as opposition to the argument of Hall (as cited in Hambrick & Mason, 1984, p. 194) that "large organizations are swept along by events or somehow run themselves" and also to put into a more coherent framework a set of fragmented literature on the characteristics of top managers.

Later in 1987, Hambrick recognizes that it is possible to reconcile these two opposing views depending on how much managerial discretion exists. One implication of managerial discretion for the Upper Echelons approach is that this theory offers good predictions of organizational outcomes in a direct proportion to how much managerial discretion exists. Managerial discretion refers to the field of action available to top executives and discretion refers to the different levels of constrain that different TMTs face. When managerial discretion is low, the action of the top management is limited, when high top managers are allowed to "shape the organization", and leave their marks on the organization (Hambrick, 1990).

Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987) state that managerial discretion can be determined by three sets of forces. Firstly, the degree to which the environment allows change and variety; secondly, the extent to which an organization allow the top executives to plan and implement the strategy; and lastly, the degree to which the top manager is capable of creating multiple paths.

However the resource availability and the presence of some inertial forces may limit or enhance managerial discretion. Large organizations and inertia tend to inhibit managerial flexibility in some critical domains. And the same happens when the firm offers a reduced number of options to managers (Hambrick & Finkelstein, 1987).

In 1981, Hambrick had already distinguished two main sources of relevant contingencies for organizations: strategy and environment and defended that executives who could cope with both would have relatively great power within their organizations. The author also noticed that there are four parts of the environment that managers can scan, following the classification of the three top management tasks introduced by Miles and Snow (1978): Entrepreneurial task - related to the identification of market/product trends; Engineering Task - focused on external developments that can contribute to the improvement of processes; Administrative environment - concerned with the impact of external developments on the roles and relationships in the organizations; Regulatory environment: related to taxes, government regulations, accreditations and sanctions.

TMT by performing the top management tasks identified by Miles and Snow (1978) and screening the environment will notice the rapid technological change, the shifts in competition modes and international trade and recognize the need for a new organizational design. In this case, the administrative task happens as a consequence of the entrepreneurial and of the engineering tasks.

According to Miles and Snow (1986) there is a new organizational form called “dynamic network”, hence the importance of trying to fully understand what they represent, how do they work and what is their impact in an organization.

Network

The network approach developed by the Industrial and Marketing Purchasing Group (IMP Group) describe the industrial systems in terms of three basic variables; actors, activities and resources (Häkansson, 1987, as cited in Brito & Roseira, 2005). This is called the ARA (Actors, Resources and Activities) model (Häkansson, 1987, as cited in Brito & Roseira, 2005). The actors are those who perform activities and control resources according to their goals and they can be individuals, firms, and groups of individuals, groups of firms or even parts of firms. The activities can be either transformation or transfer (Häkansson & Snehota, 1995). The first ones are directly controlled by one actor and change or improve the resources, the transfer activities link transformation activities and transfer the direct control over a resource from one actor to another. The resources can be subdivided into three main categories: physical, like equipment and buildings, financial and human resources such as labor, knowledge and relationships. Resources can be accessed directly through ownership, or indirectly through relationships (Brito, 2006). And, it is the structure of the relationships established among these three elements that can be referred to as networks. This happens because activities can be linked in a great variety of ways, providing "the backbone of any organization or inter-organizational relationships" (Geoff and Leney, 2009, p. 553). Actor bonds, as they are social in nature and tend to create, nurture and sometimes destroy relationships through interaction with other actors. Resources can also tie in once they are in contact with different resource types both tangible, like equipment and intangible like knowledge and skills (Häkansson & Snehota, 1995).

The ARA model represented a major step forward in terms of conceptualizing B2B relationships and networks. Although each ARA element is different from the other, their close relationship offers an excellent overview of how both organizations relate within a network (Geoff & Leney, 2009).

However, according to Brito (2006), the dependence between the members and the possible complementary objectives may conduct to a division of tasks within the network that makes the coordination of all activities an important issue in industrial networks.

In fact, Davies, Leung, Luk and Wong (1995) argue that the management of a network constitutes an important element of strategic behavior and the networking paradigm is a way of understanding the totality of relationships. These authors also defend that networks may help a firm to enhance their competitive advantage once a network provides external access to tangible and intangible resources of other network members.

Furthermore, Scott and Laws (2010) present two approaches to the concept of a network: it may be a sensitizing metaphor (a purely descriptive label given to an activity such as a networking meeting); or it can be a conceptual representation of social structure and how it is manifested based on theorizing of social interactions. These two approaches cover a wide range of inter-organizational networks since formal structured alliances, joint-ventures and partnerships to informal information gathering and support networks, being in their opinion, the most relevant elements of the actors and the relationships.

A network can also be defined as an organizational form featured by repetitive exchanges among semi-autonomous organizations that rely on trust and embedded social relationships to protect transactions and reduce their costs (Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

Miles and Snow (1986) go further by introducing the concept of "dynamic network", as a way firms have to react to the new competitive environment. This new organizational form is "a unique combination of strategy, structure and management processes" (Miles & Snow, 1983, p. 62). The dynamic network suggests that its main elements may be easily assembled and reassembled so as to meet the changing competitive requirements. The characteristics of a dynamic network are: Vertical disaggregation (Business functions as product design, marketing and manufacturing.); Brokers (Business groups); Market mechanisms (contracts and payment for results are frequently used); Full-disclosure information systems (broad access to information systems).

The dynamic network can be viewed either from the perspective of each individual element or from the network as a whole. For a firm, the main advantage of being part of a network is the opportunity to gain access to a particular resource, so each member should be seen as complementing rather than competing with the other members.

If the network is seen as a whole, then when a part is missing or performing poorly it means that the network may be performing below the desirable levels for a while, however as organizational relationships are a result of the relationships established among people working in the organizations, and not among organizations, the more people interact, the more they will be contributing to the success of the dynamic network.

The arrival of this concept forced managers, especially the ones in position to redesign their organizations, to change the way they viewed the future directions of their firms and also the approaches they used to manage the existing structures (Miles & Snow, 1986). So, the ability to develop trust and commitment and a strong organizational culture favorable and open to the outside world is most relevant to the success of networks.

Trust

The concept of trust has been used in a large number of research domains with various methods and measurement instruments, however it has seldom been explicitly examined (Geyskens, SteenKamp & Kumar, 1998).

Menkoff (1993, p. 44) comments: "To be trusted by others and to maintain one's trustworthiness are frequent explanations for success to business affairs and the continuation of commercial relations".

The trust building between businesses is rather difficult in particular when assumptions about anybody's goodwill are made. However, Kiessling and Harvey (2004) believe that trust within global relationships may result from two main sources: the context and the relationship. In the first case, trust comes naturally as a consequence of having adopted a relevant behavior or knowledge of how effective the interaction and/or communication is with the other members. When trust appears as a result of the relationship it is a product of the actors' interactions.

Trust is “the mutual confidence that no party to an exchange will exploit the other’s vulnerabilities” (Sabel, 1993, p. 1133). This author refers to three different types of vulnerabilities: “Adverse Selection Vulnerability” – exists when parties find it difficult to evaluate the quality of resources or assets of the other member; “Moral Hazard Vulnerability” – appears when the elements find it costly to evaluate the quality of the resources; and “Hold-up Vulnerability” – is found when members make large or asymmetric transactions.

Despite being a precondition of social life and an attribute of relationship between exchange partners, if trust is missing, no one will be tempted to risk and move first.

Barney and Hansen (1994) found three types of trust in exchange relationships. The first - Weak form trust – happens when there are no vulnerabilities, so chances for opportunistic behavior are limited, and also when the quality of goods and services is not costly to evaluate; the second form - Semi-strong trust – is found when significant exchange vulnerabilities exist and so parties should be protected with some governance devices to limit opportunistic behaviors from other members; the third - Strong form trust - Emerges in the face of significant vulnerabilities, whether there are any governance mechanisms or not. Geyskens, SteenKamp and Kumar (1998) find that trust contributes to satisfaction and long-term orientation over and beyond the effects of economic outcomes of the relationship.

Berry and Parasuraman (1991) sustain the idea that relationships are developed on the basis of existing mutual commitment. Following the idea of Morgan and Hunt (1994) that commitment and trust encourage the existence of relationship investments through the cooperation between exchange partners, limit the attraction of short-term alternatives once higher long-term benefits are expected. So, commitment and trust lead to cooperative behaviors. Therefore, the need to find out what the concept of commitment means and what it implies becomes essential.

Commitment

The concept of “commitment” has been defined several times according to the area of research. The most common definition comes from the Human

Resources field and is related to the commitment of an employee to the organization, however this is not the definition that matters for this study, this research is more focused on the commitment among organizations.

Wilson (1995) defines commitment as being the desire to maintain a relationship and ensure that it lasts. For Ramasamy and Goh and Yeung (2006, p.134) a relationship commitment relates "to the desire to continue a business partner relationship and the willingness to put in the effort to ensure long-term relationship".

Lenney and Easton (2009, p. 553) define commitment as "agreements between two or more social actors to carry out future actions" and range from the specific and everyday actions to the general and strategic ones. According to these authors the concept of commitment happens among actors, as one may be fully committed to another and the other actor may not be committed at all. Additionally this term may be used to enrich the ARA (Actors, Resources and Activities) model, by showing why actors, resources and activities are linked and helps to explain interaction and network outcomes. Following these authors' idea, actors are usually driven by goals, which imply actions.

Goals are seldom reached in isolation. They are realized and achieved by continuously creating and maintaining business relationships.

Nevertheless, this study will focus on the commitment among organizations. Morgan and Hunt (1994) are of the opinion that if a committed partner believes that an ongoing relationship is working on and makes all the efforts to sustain and endure it indefinitely, then it is a relationship commitment. The definition of commitment of Morgan and Hunt (1994) was also applied to the organizational commitment scales they developed. These authors recognize that commitment among exchange partners are fundamental to achieving "valuable outcomes" for themselves, and so partners will make all the efforts to develop and maintain their relationships. So, they state that commitment is fundamental when relational exchanges occur between a firm and its partners.

Geoff and Leney (2009) argue that commitments can be considered a resource within the network, but a resource that orients the activities and reflects the goals of members (actors).

Commitment can be caused by tangible elements such as large and irreversible capital investments or intangible elements like wanting to seem consistent with their prior actions and pronouncements (Hambrick, Geletkanycz & Fredrickson, 1993). When it is caused by intangible elements, it requires a further research on what the firm values and beliefs are behind the actions taken or the behaviors adopted, therefore, it would be valuable to develop a research on the organizational culture.

Organizational Culture

There are many definitions of organizational culture, however organizational culture usually refers to the values and beliefs that provide norms about expected behavioral patterns that employees might follow (Schein, 1992). Those shared values work most of the times as guidelines to members' behavior. Mumford, Scott, Gaddis and Strange (2002) reinforce this idea by arguing that the senior management of a firm can exercise influence within the organization through values. In fact, by emphasizing certain values and by creating norms for expected behaviors, managers can build an organizational culture with a powerful influence on employee behavior. Values and norms can in turn manifest itself in artifacts (e.g., organizational rituals, language and stories, and physical configurations) and lead to desired or accepted behaviors.

Edgar Schein (1985) presents culture as a set of assumptions one makes about a group they belong to. The assumptions are grouped into three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions differentiating the levels at which organizational culture manifests. Organizational norms derive from values and manifest in artifacts, which represent the most visible layer of the organizational culture once they became evident in symbols, rituals, physical workspace evidence and type of language (Schein, 1992).

Although organizational culture is a largely invisible social force, it is very powerful within an organization. For this reason, Hogan and Coote

(2013, p. 1609) state that "organizational culture is a powerful means to elicit desired organizational outcomes".

Theoretical framework

Once this paper is of conceptual nature, the research started with a literature review to be able to develop some propositions, which can be tested in a following stage.

For now, this research paper intends to address the following propositions taking into account the general theoretical approach/framework applied:

First Proposition - Top Management Teams are able to create and promote the organizational culture

Second Proposition – Top Management Teams are crucial in the developing of trust and commitment

Third Proposition – The role of trust and commitment in the management of a firm's network

Anderson, Rungtusanatham and Schroeder (1994) defended that top management leadership is important to create and communicate a vision for continual improvement in order to enhance the viability of the organization. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1990) argue that it is important to understand the background, the experiences, and values of top managers to explain the choices they make. And, the Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) is based on the idea that top management teams highly influence a firm's outcomes, in fact it is expected that strategies and performance reflect the management characteristics. Furthermore, Finkelstein and Hambrick (1990) noticed that a management team tenure in an organization influence their commitment to status quo, their attitude to risk and its informational diversity, which will affect the organizational outcomes. So, firms with long tenure teams will tend to follow persistent and stable strategies due to long-term acculturation of the managers which creates a common organizational vision and also because they are not willing to take unnecessary risks.

The values, behaviors and experiences of the Top Management Team, following Schein (1992) concept of culture will shape the culture of the organization, as organizational strategy, actions and decisions will reflect the visible layer of the organizational culture.

Culture represents a collective social construction over which Top Management Teams have a relevant influence on, in fact Schneider (1987) argues that the kinds of people in a place determine the organizational behavior, in other words, people define the way the places look, feel, and conduct's itself. Therefore, leaders define the culture of the organization.

Once trust within global relationships result mainly from context and/relationship, then according to Kiessling and Harvey (2004), if managers adopt a relevant behavior or have knowledge on how to effectively interact and communicate (context), and/or are aware of the consequences of their interpersonal interactions (relationship), then a favorable atmosphere is created within which trust can be developed in an organization. In fact, these authors defend that the top management team is crucial in the development of trust among organizations, in particular because the personal interactions are highly important for building strong forms of trust.

Trust grows with repeated use over time so it is usually studied and observed in long-term relationships; therefore it is most likely to create commitment in turn (Kiessling & Harvey, 2004). According to Salancik (1977), commitment molds people's attitudes and maintain their behavior even when possible tangible rewards or positive feedback is absent, so there is commitment when one is bounded to his acts. Salancik (1977) recognizes commitment as being a "powerful and subtle form of coopting the individual to the point of view of the organization" (Salancik, 1977, p. 80).

Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that when both commitment and trust are present, they produce outcomes that promote efficiency, productivity and effectiveness. In short, commitment and trust lead directly to cooperative behaviors, the kind of behaviors firms should have when they are members of a network.

A firm is nothing more than a complex network of internal and external relationships among people, functions, and departments that constitute the starting point to develop and implement strategies (Ritter, Wilkinson & Johnston, 2004). And, Davies, Leung, Luk and Wong (1995) argue that managing a network is an important aspect of any strategic behavior and networking which implies an understanding of the totality of the relationships.

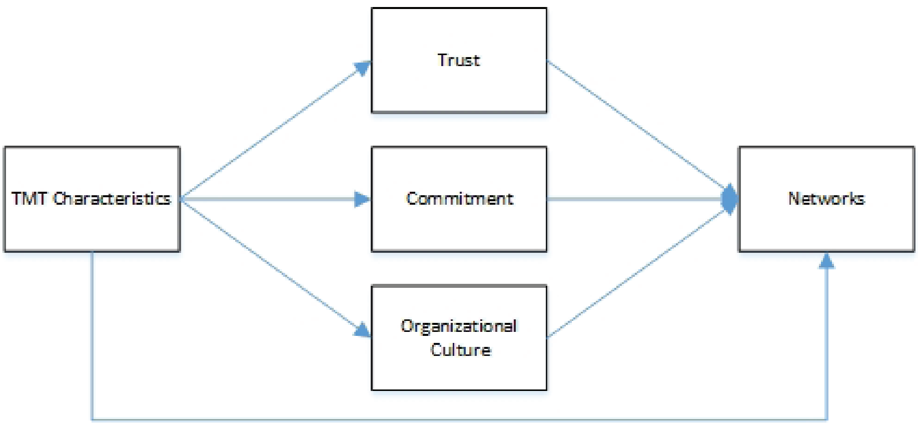
Hence, two more propositions come up:

Fourth Proposition – Top Management Teams characteristics impact on network of business relationships

Fifth Proposition – The type of organizational culture may influence the management of networks.

Managers who can combine the two sources of critical contingencies: environment and strategy, are likely to have greater influence within their management teams (Hambrick, 1981). The dynamic process of adjusting to environmental change and uncertainty involves a wide range of decisions and behaviors (Miles & Snow, 1978). Usually, managers make their strategic decisions based on their views of the environment and of the resources of their organizations, which implies that if managers perceive the network approach as being a competitive advantage then they will make all the necessary efforts to configure the organizational structure and resources to meet the new environmental challenges (Miles & Snow, 1986).

If, according to Schneider (1987), top managers shape the culture of an organization through their beliefs, actions, values and behaviors and if they understand the network approach as a possible competitive advantage, once the organization gains access to other members' resources (tangible and intangible), then when taking decisions and configuring the organizational structure, top managers will also consider the resources available in the network into their actions and behaviors (Miles & Snow, 1986). Actions and behaviors that help to influence the organizational culture are as follows.



1. **Figure 1. Design of the theoretical framework**

Therefore, if Top Management Teams' values, beliefs, actions and behaviors influence organizational culture, if the culture of an organization reflects the characteristics of their leaders according to Schein (1992), if their Top Managers manage to build trustworthy relationships and create commitment within the organization, then it is most likely that Top Management Team characteristics will have an important role to play in the management of dynamic networks, as shown in figure 1.

Conclusions

This conceptual paper uses the available literature to extract some prepositions for further research.

This paper is a first attempt at understanding all the complexities in relation to the impacts of Top Management Teams on creating and promoting organizational culture and on the management of business networks. It is also expected to acquire an understanding of the role of trust, commitment and of the culture of an organization on a firm's network of business relationships.

So far, the literature has been used to extract and confirm the propositions, however this paper lacks some empirical confirmation. In any subsequent papers on this subject area, more research on the importance of culture as a mechanism of behavior control, on the role of commitment in the management of networks, on the process of building strong forms of trust and on the process of creating or shaping organizational culture by top management will have to be carried out. The idea of the subsequent second stage when conducting further research to collect some empirical data through semi-structured interviews, and then confront continuously the theoretical framework with some empirical work, until it reaches a theoretic saturation and the propositions are confirmed.

However, further theoretical framework may be necessary in order to frame the empirical data in the second stage of this research.

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