

Exploring the Relationship Between Decentralised Organisational Design and Knowledge Acquisition Capacity

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Abstract: Business firms face challenges in maintaining their sustainability in the global market. As a result, it is increasingly necessary for them to focus on ensuring sustainable performance by balancing financial, social and environmental outcomes. One of the efforts companies make to achieve sustainable organisational performance and gain a competitive advantage is by increasing their utilisation of knowledge. According to the knowledge-based view, performance differences among organisations result from their different knowledge stocks and their different capabilities for knowledge use and development. Therefore, the ability to acquire and manage knowledge internally becomes essential. It enhances the organisation's competencies, sustains them, and contributes to achieving a competitive advantage. As a vital resource for organisational success, managing knowledge through practices is necessary. Organisational design refers to how power is distributed in an organisation. Previous research has examined the effects of knowledge management on absorptive capacity and organisational performance. However, few studies have investigated how the relationship between decentralised organisational design and knowledge acquisition capabilities works. To fill this gap, this study aims to investigate the relationship between decentralised organisational design and knowledge acquisition capability in achieving sustainable performance. A sample of 125 responses was collected from companies in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, through an online questionnaire. The data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling applied to validate the model and test the hypothesis, through the free and open source SEMinR package of the R language. The results indicate that a decentralised organisational design has a positive and significant impact on a company's knowledge acquisition capability. Therefore, for companies to achieve sustainable organisational performance, they must adopt appropriate organisational design methods that allow for a clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities, as well as promote learning and problem-solving and encourage the creation of a culture of knowledge sharing among employees.

Keywords: Knowledge Management Practices, Organisational Design, Knowledge Acquisition, Sustainable Performance, SEMinR.

1. Introduction

Companies strive to enhance organisational performance through effective knowledge utilisation, a strategic resource as per the knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant, 1996). Knowledge acquisition (KA) capacity, a component of absorptive capacity (ACAP), is vital for enhancing skills and gaining a competitive edge (Zahra and George, 2002).

Given knowledge's critical role in organisational success, effective management through various practices is essential (Andreeva and Kianto, 2012; Inkien, Kianto and Vanhala, 2015; Qader et al, 2022). Knowledge management (KM) practices facilitate value extraction from knowledge-based assets, supporting efficient and effective knowledge management for organisational benefit (Andreeva and Kianto, 2012; Inkien, Kianto and Vanhala, 2015). Inkien, Kianto and Vanhala (2015) categorise KM practices into areas like supervisory work, information technology (IT), and organisational design (OD).

OD significantly impacts KA within companies. It encompasses the arrangement of people and positions to facilitate work processes (Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland, 2004). OD complexity, formalisation, and centralisation are key factors (Lin, 2008). Centralised ODs limit decision-making to a select few, whereas less centralised structures foster dispersed decision-making and individual autonomy (Raziq et al, 2020).

Decentralised OD serves as a crucial KM practice to enhance knowledge utilisation within an organisation. This approach involves delegating authority and decision-making responsibilities to knowledge workers, forming and utilising cross-functional teams, and endorsing diverse communities of practice (Inkien, Kianto and

Vanhala, 2015). Susanty, Yuningsih and Anggadwita (2019) suggest that while hierarchical structures impede knowledge dissemination, endorsing multiple communities of practice fosters a robust knowledge development environment that can bolster organisational performance.

Previous research has explored the impact of KM practices on ACAP and organisational performance (Inkinen, Kianto and Vanhala, 2015; Qader et al, 2022; Susanty, Yuningsih and Anggadwita, 2019). Additionally, studies have delved into the direct influence of ACAP on innovation and financial performance (Kostopoulos et al, 2011; Liu et al, 2021).

Nevertheless, there remains a scarcity of studies examining the interplay between decentralised OD and KA capacity. Hence, this study endeavours to elucidate the connection between OD and KA capacity and to assess how these practices can foster firms in attaining sustainable performance.

In addition, in the context of emerging countries, such as Brazil, besides global competition, companies face other institutional and regional challenges that are characteristic of these countries (Dávila, Andreeva and Varvakis, 2019). However, the literature lacks studies that investigate KM practices in this context.

This paper is structured into five sections, in addition to this introduction. Section 2 provides a concise definition of each construct and research hypothesis, followed by the methodological approach outlined in section 3. Subsequently, section 4 elaborates on and discusses the results, while section 5 presents the primary conclusions.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

This section provides a brief review of KM practices and ACAP, with a focus on the constructs of OD and KA capacity. The review is followed by the presentation of the research hypothesis.

2.1 Knowledge Management Practices and Organisational Design

KM practices are not confined to a single approach (Hussinki et al, 2017; Inkinen, Kianto and Vanhala, 2015; Kianto and Andreeva, 2014). They are organisational aspects that can be consciously manipulated by management to efficiently utilise knowledge for organisational benefit (Andreeva and Kianto, 2012).

Targeted at achieving organisational objectives, these practices can confer a competitive advantage (Hussinki et al, 2017). They can be classified into dimensions such as Organisational Development (OD), strategic knowledge management, organisational culture, human resource management practices, and information and communication technology (Kianto and Andreeva, 2014).

OD involves decisions related to work distribution and task coordination to foster learning and problem-solving (Abdelwhab Ali et al, 2019; Inkinen, Kianto and Vanhala, 2015; Kianto and Andreeva, 2014). These decisions can either facilitate or hinder knowledge processes (Abdelwhab Ali et al, 2019; Kianto and Andreeva, 2014). Research indicates that a highly centralised environment can impede knowledge sharing (Raziq et al, 2020). To enhance knowledge sharing, managers should consider a less centralised structure, promoting open workspaces, increased communication, and informal meetings (Abdelwhab Ali et al, 2019).

In the Brazilian context, Dávila, Andreeva and Varvakis (2019) found that OD mechanisms had the most significant positive impact on innovation performance, compared to ICTs, rewards, and organisational culture.

2.2 Absorptive capacity and Knowledge Acquisition

To Cohen and Levinthal (1990), the ACAP refers to a firm's ability to recognise the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends. They argue that firms that conduct their research and development are better equipped to use externally available information effectively.

Based on these authors, Zahra and George (2002) define ACAP as the dynamic capability related to knowledge creation and utilisation that enhances a firm's ability to gain and sustain a competitive advantage. The ACAP of an organisation depends on the ACAP of its members (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990).

According to Flatten et al (2011), a firm's ACAP is composed of four distinct but complementary capabilities: (i) acquisition, refers to the firm's ability to identify and acquire external knowledge and information from the environment; (ii) assimilation, involves the firm's ability to understand and interpret the new knowledge and information acquired; (iii) transformation, refers to the firm's ability to integrate and recombine the new

knowledge with existing knowledge to create new ideas and products; and (iv) exploitation, involves the firm's ability to use the new knowledge and ideas to improve its products or services and gain a competitive advantage.

Zahra and George (2002) categorise the four dimensions of ACAP into two categories: (i) Potential ACAP, which refers to the ability to recognise and acquire external knowledge that is valuable to the organisation. This includes the KA capacity (gathering new knowledge) and assimilation (integrating new knowledge with existing knowledge); and (ii) Realised ACAP, which refers to the organisation's ability to effectively utilise the knowledge that has been acquired and assimilated. This includes the processes of knowledge transformation (modifying existing knowledge to create new knowledge) and exploitation (using existing knowledge to create value for the organisation).

The greater the organisation's capacity to acquire and assimilate information obtained from external sources, the greater the possibilities to respond to the high competition of the external environment (Flatten et al, 2011). In this article, we focus specifically on KA capacity, which plays a key role in enabling organisations to renew their stock of knowledge and continuously innovate.

According to Zahra and George (2002, p. 189), "acquisition refers to a firm's capability to identify and acquire externally generated knowledge that is critical to its operations". Flatten et al (2011, p. 100) define acquisition as "a firm's ability to identify and obtain knowledge from external sources".

2.3 Knowledge Management Practices and Absorptive Capacity

Studies that address the relationship between KM practices and absorptive capacity are scarce (Dávila and Dos Anjos, 2021). Such studies show that there is a positive relationship between these constructs (Valentim, Lisboa and Franco, 2012).

Valentim, Lisboa and Franco (2012), when investigating 4,534 firms in Portugal, concluded that these firms are committed to the use of KM practices executed through collaboration with business partners, favouring experience-based learning processes, knowledge transfer to staff and/or knowledge absorption by staff.

Dávila (2016) analysed the relationship between KM Practices, ACAP, and organisational performance. The results showed that KM practices related to strategic management of knowledge, organisational culture and organisational design influence potential ACAP; while KM practices about strategic management and information and communication technologies influence realised ACAP.

Considering knowledge as a resource capable of helping companies overcome economic challenges and the importance of acquiring and managing this knowledge through an adequate organisational structure, to achieve sustainable performance, we propose the following hypothesis: The decentralised OD is positively associated with the firm's KA capacity.

3. Method

This article takes a positivist approach and employs a quantitative methodology to explore the relationship between OD and the KA capacity.

3.1 Sample

To answer this research question, we collected research data in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, using scales previously validated in an international context. Santa Catarina is located in the southern region of Brazil, which Hofstede et al (2010) describe as more hierarchical, less formal, more individualistic and more achievement-oriented.

The target companies were selected through a database of the Federation of Industries of Santa Catarina. The data were collected with top or middle-level managers of the companies. From this, we obtained 146 responses, representing a response rate of 9.3%. After excluding 21 incomplete or uncoded responses, we had a usable sample of 125 for further analysis.

The most represented industries were food and drink (32.8%), textile and clothing (19.2%), capital equipment (7.2%), metal-mechanical industry and metallurgy (6.4%), and chemical (4.8%). In terms of the number of employees, the largest group (44%) was micro and small businesses with up to 99 employees. Most respondent companies have been in the market for between ten and thirty years (45%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of Firms and Respondents

Respondent characteristics	Frequency	(%)
<i>Sector</i>		
Food and drink	41	32.8
Textile and clothing	24	19.2
Capital equipment	9	7.2
Metal-mechanical industry and metallurgy	8	6.4
Chemical	6	4.8
Others	37	29.6
<i>Number of employees</i>		
20-	6	4.8
20-50	35	28.0
51-99	14	11.2
100-200	17	13.6
201-500	16	12.8
501-1000	9	7.2
1000+	28	22.4
<i>Age</i>		
10-	13	10
10-30	56	45
31-100	49	39
100+	7	6
<i>Respondent's position</i>		
Director	39	31.2
Owner	12	9.6
Manager	33	26.4
Others	41	67.2
Total	125	

3.2 Measures

In this study, the dependent variable was the KA capacity, which was examined through three indicators from Flatten et al (2011). The independent variable was DO, which was investigated using five indicators from Kianto and Andreeva (2014). Both the dependent and independent variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree".

3.3 Analysis

To ensure the accuracy of our results and control for common method bias (CMB), we implemented a series of solutions following the recommendations of Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012). Our hypothesis was tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), which was chosen due to its suitability for small sample sizes and lack of distributional assumptions (Hair et al, 2021). To perform the analysis, we used the SEMinR package in the R programming language, which offers user-friendly syntax and intuitive functions (Hair et al, 2021).

As the indicators from both scales are highly correlated, it was necessary to evaluate the reflective measurement model. This evaluation is based on several criteria, including indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al, 2021).

Having assessed the reflective measurement model, the structural model was evaluated. It was, therefore,

necessary to analyse the significance and relevance of the relationships in the structural model, as well as the explanatory and predictive power of the model (Hair et al, 2021).

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the application of CMB remedies, the results of the analysis of the measurement model and the structural model, for testing the hypothesis developed.

4.1 Remedies for Common Method Bias

We utilised some procedural remedies suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012). The online survey was managed and conducted by the Federation of Industries of Santa Catarina. By doing so, we ensured that the respondents were provided with the same data collection standards they were accustomed to (e.g. ethics, privacy, communication style, and channel), thus increasing the likelihood of obtaining honest responses. We selected respondents who possessed knowledge of innovation and business management issues. On the statistical side, we tested a model that included an additional unmeasured latent factor to represent CMB. As recommended by Liang et al (2007), we confirmed that the loadings on the unmeasured latent factor were lower than the loadings on the construct factors. Additionally, we verified that the variance inflation factors (VIF) for each construct factor in each latent variable were lower than 3.3 (Kock, 2015). Taken together, these procedural and statistical procedures reduced the risk of CMB being a significant concern in this research. We also compared the responses from early and late respondents to test for nonresponse bias using discriminant analysis (Armstrong and Overton, 1977), and no significant differences were detected.

4.2 Measurement Model

In reflective measurement models, it is essential to estimate the relationships between the reflexively measured constructs and their indicators, which are known as loadings. Indicator loadings above 0.708 are recommended as they suggest that the construct explains more than 50% of the indicator's variance, indicating acceptable indicator reliability (Hair et al, 2021). Table 2 displays the loadings for each indicator.

Table 2: Loadings for each indicator

Constructs and Indicators	Loadings
OD - Organisational Design (Kianto and Andreeva, 2014)	
OD1 People from different parts of our organisation interact informally with each other in a frequent manner	0.735
OD2 In our organisation, open dialogs are common among/between employees and manager	0.763
OD3 In our projects, our organisation uses teams consisting of people with skills and expertise from diverse fields	0.875
OD4. In our organisation, we frequently use cross-functional teams and projects	0.838
OD5 In our organisation, we have purposeful overlap of functional responsibilities	0.689
KA - Knowledge Acquisition (Flatten et al., 2011)	
KA1 The search for relevant information concerning our industry is every-day business in our company	0.713
KA2 Our management motivates the employees to use information sources within our industry	0.880
KA3 Our management expects that the employees deal with information beyond our industry	0.761

Only the indicator OD5 remained below the recommended value of 0.708, indicating that the variance explained by its construct is 47.5% (0.689^2). However, even though the indicator loading was slightly below the recommended value of 50%, we chose to keep the indicator, considering that its exclusion could affect the content validity of the construct, which refers to how well each indicator represents a facet of the construct (Hair et al, 2021).

Internal consistency reliability is evaluated to determine whether the indicators that form the scales consistently measure their respective constructs. In PLS-SEM, three main measures are used for this purpose: (i) Cronbach's alpha; (ii) composite reliability (ρ_C); and (iii) consistent reliability coefficient (ρ_A) (Hair et al, 2021). While Cronbach's alpha is considered conservative, ρ_C can be considered too liberal, and the true reliability of the construct is usually found between these two extreme values, as assessed by ρ_A (Hair et al,

2021). To sum up, the recommended values for these three measures range from 0.7 to 0.9.

The assessment of convergent validity is based on the average variance extracted (AVE) values (Hair et al, 2019). Convergent validity is the extent to which a construct converges to explain the variance of its indicators (Hair et al, 2021). The minimum acceptable AVE is 0.5, which means that the construct explains 50% or more of the variance of the indicators that make up the construct (Hair et al, 2019).

Table 3 displays the three measures of internal consistency reliability and the measure of convergent validity.

Table 3: Measures of internal consistency reliability and convergent validity

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	ρ_c	ρ_A	AVE
Organisational Design	0.842	0.864	0.887	0.613
Knowledge Acquisition	0.700	0.759	0.830	0.621

All measures of internal consistency reliability are observed to be within the recommended values. Moreover, the measure of convergent validity (AVE) was higher than the recommended value.

SEMinR provides two methods to evaluate whether the measurement constructs exhibit discriminant validity: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio (Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015). However, it has been noted in the literature that the Fornell-Larcker criterion is not a reliable method for detecting discriminant validity issues (Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015; Hair et al, 2021).

Thus, in this study, we employed the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations to analyse discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015). As the constructs are substantially different, Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt (2015) propose that the HTMT should be less than 0.85. The HTMT between the two constructs in our study was 0.524.

The bootstrap analysis utilized 10,000 samples, applying the percentile method to derive confidence intervals at a 5% significance level, with estimated t-values (T Stat.) surpassing 1.96 (Hair et al, 2021). Table 4 displays that the upper bound of the 97.5% confidence interval is below 0.85, as suggested by Hair et al (2021).

Table 4: Bootstrapped HTMT

Constructs	Original Est.	Bootstrap Mean	Bootstrap SD	T Stat.	2,5% CI	97,5% CI
OD -> KA	0.524	0.532	0.106	4.965	0.324	0.732

Therefore, all measurements of the reflexively measured constructs are reliable and exhibit high levels of convergent validity. Once it has been established that the measurement of constructs is reliable and valid, the next step involves evaluating the results of the structural model.

4.3 Structural Model

The procedure for assessing the structural model involves evaluating issues related to collinearity, the significance and relevance of relationships, and explanatory power (Hair et al, 2021). However, in the case of this model, which has only one independent and one dependent variable, evaluating collinearity is unnecessary.

The assessment of significance involves using bootstrapping standard errors to calculate t-values of path coefficients (β) or confidence intervals (Hair et al, 2021). Therefore, Table 5 shows that the relationship between OD and KA is statistically significant at the 5% level based on bootstrapped standard errors, as the t-value (T Stat.) is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and its β is 0.432.

Table 5: Path coefficient estimates, significance, and confidence intervals

Constructs	β	Bootstrap Mean	Bootstrap SD	T Stat.	2,5% CI	97,5% CI
OD -> KA	0.432	0.455	0.076	5.668	0.302	0.598

Given that β is equal to 0.432, it suggests a positive relationship between OD and KA. Specifically, an increase of one standard deviation unit in OD corresponds to a 0.432 standard deviation unit increase in KA.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) represents the fraction of variability in the dependent variable (KA) that can be accounted for by the independent variable (OD) in the model. This indicates the extent to which the

independent variable can explain the variation in the dependent variable. R2 ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a better model fit (Hair et al, 2021). In this case, the R2 value is 0.187 (adjusted R2 = 0.180), which indicates that OD explains approximately 19% of the variance in KA.

Finally, Figure 1 displays the bootstrapped model along with some details explained above, including: (i) the loading and significance of each indicator; (ii) the value (0.432), significance, and confidence intervals of β between OD and KA; and (iii) the R2 value of KA (0.187).

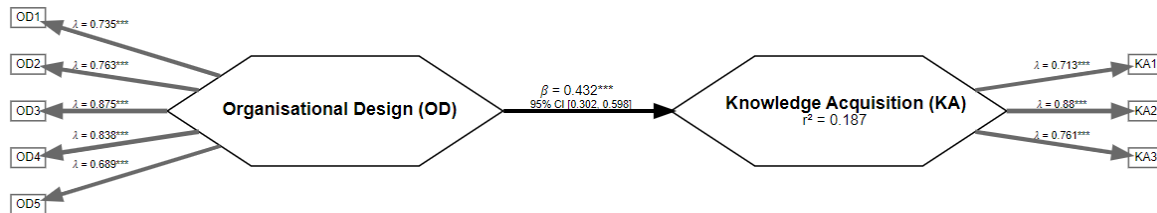


Figure 1: Bootstrapped Model

The findings of this empirical study reveal that OD plays a crucial role in KA capacity. To attain sustainable organisational performance, companies need to adopt appropriate OD strategies that enable the effective distribution of tasks and responsibilities, encourage learning and problem-solving, and promote a culture of knowledge sharing among employees. Furthermore, the implementation of a decentralised OD can lower hierarchical barriers, enhance collaboration and communication among employees, and foster an environment conducive to knowledge creation and transfer. These factors collectively contribute to strengthening companies' ability to acquire and utilise knowledge efficiently, ultimately resulting in improved sustainable organisational performance and increased capacity to adapt to changes in the business environment.

5. Conclusion

In an ever more dynamic and uncertain world, particularly in emerging economies, it is becoming progressively crucial for firms to engage in more effective KM. This empirical study has shown that OD has a positive and significant effect on the KA capacity of companies based in Santa Catarina, Brazil. Consequently, the implementation of OD can enhance KM efficiency within companies, such as by empowering knowledge workers to make decisions, creating cross-functional teams, and recognizing diverse communities of practice, all of which significantly contribute to the KA capacity of companies.

The hierarchical structure can sometimes impede knowledge flows, but a decentralised OD can enable companies to establish a resilient environment for knowledge development that can enhance sustainable organisational performance.

Through investigating the influence of OD on KA capacity, this study highlights the significance of establishing a conducive setting for knowledge workers to excel and enhance their knowledge. Furthermore, by exploring the association between these two constructs and sustainable performance, the study can contribute to the literature on KM and sustainability.

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The results of this research have significant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, investigating the influence of OD on KA capacity contributes to the overall understanding of KM. In practical terms, managers can use the findings to identify KM practices that can be adopted to enhance business capabilities.

From a practical perspective, the relationships between OD and the KA capacity can provide clues to how companies can promote the use of knowledge to leverage their sustainable performance.

This study proposes that managers should prioritise key dimensions of KM. Organisations can tailor their strategies to delegate decision-making responsibilities and encourage horizontal communication. Executives should promote initiatives to enhance OD to improve the KA capacity and, consequently, the company's performance.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The results of this research have a limited scope due to the small sample size. Additionally, as an applied research, it is cross-sectional. Future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach to investigate the factors that affect OD and its association with KA capacity.

Our study's research context is based on a specific country. Future research should examine our research hypothesis in a cross-country context to understand how OD and KA capacity operate across different cultural and institutional contexts.

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