



The role of Agility and Institutional Barriers in the relationship between Learning Orientation and Performance

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Abstract

Learning oriented organizations possess unique characteristics that allow them to be ahead of competitors and achieve competitive advantage. These firms are able to gather, process and use cutting-edge information and knowledge that take them to a higher baseline, developing competences able to transform members' mindsets, foresee and adapt itself according to the environment adversities, promote internal and external innovations and, as a consequence, achieve superior performance outcomes. The field literature about the relationship between learning orientation (LO) and performance (PE) points out the benefits of mediators in order to enhance results. Based on previous empirical research results, two important and unpublished constructs of these relationship are investigated in this article: Agility, relating to the speed knowledge is used in organization's favor, and Institutional Barriers, obstacles that tend to block the learning process impeding to achieve better results. Therefore, this study purpose was to identify the roles of agility and institutional barriers in the relationship between LO and PE, through a literature review. It was possible to conclude that there is no study that relates this two relevant constructs to the LO-PE relationship, what highlight the relevance of this research and show scarcity of research around the theme. Finally, agility, as well as institutional barriers appeared to assume different roles in the considered relationship.

Keywords: Learning Orientation. Agility. Institutional barriers. Performance.

Introduction

Choosing a convenient strategic orientation to follow is crucial to the organizational success to occur. Learning oriented organizations are guided by a shared vision that is focused on the acquisition and use of information and knowledge in order to enhance competitive advantages (Baker and Sinkula, 2005, Garcia and Calantone, 2002).

These firms monitor competitors' behaviors in order to understand and learn about their strengths and weaknesses, and to change behaviors, processes, mindsets and attitudes in a progressive and long term way, developing organizational competences and abilities that will stimulate organizational members to question procedures and norms and the way this organization might behave before the marketplace (Al-tindag et al., 2011; Hult et al., 2002; Ross and Grace, 2012).

This strategic orientation offers a unique distinction in adapting and reorganizing internal processes, supporting the existence of the relationship between this orientation and performance. In the field literature, this relation between learning orientation and performance is supported in different ways and is, in its majority, indirect, requiring mediation in order to reach superior performance (Degeus, 1988; Senge, 1990; Kungwansupaphan and Siengthai, 2014, Katsikeas et al., 2015).

Based on an extensive literature review and in depth interviews (Vieira, 2015), it was possible to categorize several mediators of this relationship. However, the results of the mentioned research pointed out, through the interviews, to some unpublished and relevant mediators of this relationship. Agility, as the speed learning oriented organizations execute the knowledge gathered (Berghman et al., 2013; Defee and Fugate, 2010), and Institutional Barriers, as the obstacles firms face during the learning process in the way to superior performance (Jussili et al, 2012; Schilling and Kluge, 2009), can be considered important factors when relating learning oriented organizations reaching form top results. It means that these constructs might assume different roles in this relationship and the literature in the field does not offer any study that considers them into the relationship between learning orientation and performance.

Thus, this research aims to identify the role of agility, considering that this construct could affect the mentioned relationship in a positive or negative way (the lack of agility) and the institutional barriers construct compulsorily will relate to negative effects in the LO and PE relationship. So, in order to fill the literature, gap a literature review around the learning orientation and performance relationship papers was made. Among these researches there was no one showing these constructs playing any role, confirming the previous literature review results and the relevance for further investigation. Also, Farrell, Oczkowski and Kharabsheh (2011) called for more study around the barriers to learning organizations.

Therefore, this article is presented in the following order: first, the relationship between learning orientation and performance, together with its main identified mediators is presented; then the roles of agility in this relationship, based on the literature review is shown; after, the institutional barriers roles are also displayed; next, the theoretical framework built and, finally, conclusions.

Relationship between Learning orientation and Performance

The relevance and benefits of Learning Orientation (LO) for organizations have been, gradually, recognized by the academic field (Slater and Narver, 1995) not only as a knowledge gatherer, but also as a mean of processing all data acquired in favor of these firms (Calantone, et al., 2002). These information, such as consumer needs and feedbacks, are essential tools to build important capabilities and competences to the organization development, also influencing the degree to which these firms tend to promote generative learning in the long run (Sinkula et al., 1997).

Senge (1990) supports the idea that organizations that seek for transformations and superior performance should focus on learning, just as De Geus (1988) that argues that the common point among successful organizations is its ability to learn, as learning facilitates behavior and structures changes, enhancing business performance (Mahmoud and Yusif, 2012; Slater and Narver, 1995). One of the main singularities of learning oriented organizations is its skill to forecast environment and market changes, and transforming itself in order to adapt and adjust the firm to these new realities (Senge, 1990). Thereby, these organizations are able to drive the market instead of being driven by it through attitudes, behaviors and strategies that would take to performance improvement (Kungwansupaphan and Siengthai, 2014).

Some researchers advocate that in order to improve performance, learning oriented firms need to learn, know and satisfy its consumer's demands (Day, 1994; Narver and Slater, 1990). Besides that, these organizations must monitor its competitors and market behaviors, aiming to understand and learn about its weaknesses and strengths (Calantone et al., 2002). Others, state that organizations with a high level of learning orientation usually stand out from its rivals, especially in turbulent and high competitive markets, enhancing performance and decreasing production costs, given experience accumulation (Baker and Sinkula, 1999b; Calantone et al., 2002).

However, the literature in strategic marketing shows that the relationship between LO and PE is supported in several different ways. Some authors such a Baker and Sinkula (1999a, 1999b), Jantunen et al. (2008), Altindag et al. (2011) and Frank et al. (2012) stand up for the direct and positive effect between this strategic orientation and business performance. In addition, other authors as Calantone et al. (2002), Hult et al. (2004), Sinkula (1994), Day (1994), Narver and Slater (1990) and Slater and Narver (1995), and others, presented results showing that a learning oriented firm need mediators in order to achieve superior performance.

Thereby, learning oriented organizations tend to be engaged in innovation activities that increases its member's and internal processes productivity (Kungwansupaphan and Siengthai, 2014). Besides that, it is possible to observe that firms that adopt this strategic orientation are better able to create efficient and effective work structures, to better use technological tools in order to decrease internal expenses and develop innovative training techniques, and also open communication channels that will allow a better distribution and quality of shared information (Bake and Sinkula, 1999a).

As the literature in the area shows, the relationship between LO and PE is, in its majority, indirect. It became clear after a literature review in order to detect the main mediators of this relationship, as shown below.

At first, a learning oriented organization that monitors its competitor's behaviors (Gatignon and Xuereb, 1997) attempting to understand and learn about them (Calantone et al., 2002) is able to detect and correct its own mistakes (Altindag, 2011) and also develop abilities such as recognize and explore future opportunities (Ross and Grace, 2012).

Other mediators found are related to human resources. Learning oriented firms are able to easily adapt to environmental conditions through its members knowledge, and becoming flexible and dynamic institutions in a constant state of changes and renovation (Kungwansupaphan and Siengthai, 2014). Each organization member is considered a fundamental part of working with mental models, building shared vision, team learning and thought systems, known as important factors to take firms to become leaders in its markets (Tanriverdi and Zehir, 2006). These organizations tend to develop an effective and efficient intraorganizational communication process, allowing the sharing and dissemination of information and knowledge and reflecting in superior performance, as visions are shared, teams are learning together and thinking systems are being adopted (Tanriverdi and Zehir, 2006). In addition, learning commitment (Wang, 2008), satisfaction (Yilmaz et al., 2005), team work and information and knowledge Exchange among members (Zhang, 2009) and, at last, the correct use of knowledge acquired, favoring the organization performance (Santos-Vijande et al., 2005).

Innovation is shown as a consolidated mediator in the relationship between learning orientation and performance in several researches (Calantone et al., 2002; Hult et al., 2004; Keskin, 2006; Luo and Liu, 2002; Sinkula et al., 1997). It could be explained by the ability of innovation tools in helping organizations to deal with ongoing internal and external environmental changes (Langerak et al., 2004; Rhee et al., 2010), being considered the construct that appears with more frequency in studies about LO and PE (Altindag et al., 2011; Hult et al., 2004; Kaya and Patton, 2011; Nybakk, 2012; Shoham et al., 2012).

In addition, the relationship with the consumer is also considered as a relevant mediator in the literature of the field. In learning oriented firms, the maintenance and strengthen of long term relationships with its costumers tend to be more effective (Santos-Vijande et al., 2005). The need to learn about its public and competitors, take to a higher degree of satisfaction and loyalty of the organization's clients (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Hence, a quality and lasting relationship with its consumer also contributes to achieve superior performance (Lages et al., 2009). It is also important to highlight the relevance of an open channel between the organization and its consumers (Nasution et al., 2011), consumer retention and the ability to focus on the understanding of their latent and declared needs and satisfy them through new products, services and others (Farrell, 2000; Mavondo et al., 2005)

Considering that most authors support that the relationship between LO and PE requires a mediator and based on previous research about the reasons of the relationship between this strategic orientation and business performance, it was detected unpublished – in the literature- and relevant mediators of this relationship. The agility (of execution and change) and institutional barriers (that blocks learning) called attention as they appeared to be essential to the organizational learning process in order to achieve superior performance.

According to the strategic orientation literature it is possible to infer that the relationship between LO and PE is significant.

P1: There is a positive relationship between learning orientation and organizational performance.

The role of Agility in the relationship between LO and PE

Agility can be defined as a measure of the firm's ability to determine and quickly respond to changes (Winter, 2003; Defee and Fugate, 2010) or as the capacity to efficiently change states in response to uncertain and changing markets and conditions (Braunscheidel and Suresh, 2009). It involves some types of flexibility, including the ability to do unexpected activities in response to market demands and changes or customer needs. (Narasimhan et al., 2006; Braunscheidel and Suresh, 2009).

In the strategic orientation literature there is scarcity when relating to the role of agility in the relationship between learning orientation and performance of an organization. Based on the literature review, agility assumes different roles in the mentioned relationship.

For Defee and Fugate (2010) agility, as being considered a capability of an organization, can be marked by learning and constant improvements. It means that this ability provides advantages to the learning organization when acquiring knowledge favoring the achievement of top performance. (Defee and Fugate, 2010).

But for Braunscheidel and Suresh (2009), in their study proposing a theoretical framework about agility in supply chains and the implication of some organizational practices and cultural antecedents, support that as enhancing agility the organization is, in the same time, managing risks that enable to quick respond to market transformations and also anticipating possible critical situations. It implies in the fact that, in a learning oriented firm, agility has the critical role to mediate the relationship with performance as it is able to protect and forecast the organization from several types of situations and adversities (Braunscheidel and Suresh, 2009). Therefore, it is possible to infer, based on studies, that organizations must develop agility as a relevant skill in order to reach superior performance and also manage and exert the knowledge achieved (Kleindorfer and Saad, 2005; Swafford et al., 2006).

The dynamic capabilities are considered important assets for successful organization as it allows firms to make new business and strategies; to enter new markets; to learn new abilities; to surpass inertia and others (Defee and Fugate, 2010; Winter, 2003). These actions tend to increase the firm agility and responsiveness to the marketplace (Winter, 2003; Zahra et al., 2006).

The integration between strategies and capabilities development enhances the organization possibility to exploit its knowledge and discoveries faster and implement strategic alternatives, such as adopting learning orientation, increasing the organization's competitive advantages and, consequently, performance (Defee and Fugate, 2010; Winter, 2003; Zahra et al., 2006; Zollo and Winter, 2002). Nevertheless, agility can also play a different role. When placed as a mediator, agility may reduce time lapses between the acquisition and execution of new knowledge and strategies, enhancing performance (Zahra et al., 2006).

In their study, Doz and Kosonen (2010) brought the concept of strategic agility, considered the ability to transform and renew business models. In other words, this strategy is able to anticipate, experiment, distance, abstract and reframe strategic sensitivity, making the organization more precise accurate about perceptions (Doz and Kosonen, 2010). It can also influence in making members of the firm more alert about the internal and external environment, besides enhancing leadership, dialogue, integration, engagement throughout organizations (Doz and Kosonen, 2010). Firms that follow this strategy are able to develop abilities that enable learning orientation's characteristics to better flow through the firms, as the strategic agility is about internal behaviors, processes and procedures (Berghman et al., 2013). Thus, as this strategy provides the necessary capacities to learning orientation, it is possible to preview, as consequence, superior performance (Berghman et al., 2013; Doz and Kosonen, 2010).

The speed or agility of change can be considered a crucial factor to those organizations which the learning orientation is the strategy to reach competitive advantages and top performance (Sharifirad and Ataei, 2012). Only learning and not executing the acquired knowledge is not enough to be a head of competitors. Learning organizations, considered as adaptable, must translate knowledge into action, taking risks and learning from its mistakes, and, in the same time, having the ability to change and transform (Sharifirad and Ataei, 2012; Senge, 1990). Learning through its own and others experience and try new possibilities, sharing and improving knowledge provide organizations to follow the dynamic market agility in its constant changes and technological advances, which are critical factors to firm's survival and performance in competitive markets (Tanriverdi and Zehir, 2006).

The agility which the organization acquires and uses knowledge is crucial to positive consequences and results. In other words, once the firm have all the tools (internal and external) to have competitive advantages (Doz and Kosonen, 2010), it must put it in practice in order to obtain advantages through what it have learned before others (Sharifirad and Ataei, 2012). Besides, as much alert and internally well-structured an organization is, more transformation and positive effects it will have (Berghman et al., 2013).

The role of individual is also an important factor when superior performance is desired as the positive results in learning oriented organizations are due to their agility in making changes (Tanriverdi and Zehir, 2006). The speed in putting in practice the knowledge gathered is one of the most important part for learning oriented organizations, as knowledge without action do not mean anything to an organization seeking for superior performance (Defee and Fugate, 2010).

If an organization has the ability to be faster than its competitors and understand, quickly, what is happening in the market it will be able to use the knowledge acquired and reach positive results (Berghman et al., 2013). But if the learning oriented firms do not have this agility in making important changes, if the organization took longer to offer a product or service, for example, the expected outcomes would be more distant as other firms, that also learn, will act faster, getting the desired competitive advantage (Berghman et al., 2013; Doz and Kosonen, 2010).

The velocity of learning and placing this knowledge into practice also has a direct impact in market opportunities (Tanriverdi and Zehir, 2006). As learning oriented organization adopt a constant change culture, this agility is critical when relating to the

competitors and the market dynamism (Braunscheidel and Suresh, 2009). Thus, the pace in which the organization put in practice what it learned takes these firms to a higher level, differing and standing out from the rest of the market because of its spot-light position and its ability of forecasting possible risks (Sharifirad and Ataei, 2012; Zahra et al., 2006).

The transformation and adaptation skill is determining in a learning oriented organization (Calantone et al., 2002). Change mindsets and process according to the market demand is not simple if the organization is not structured to do it properly. So, in adverse or new situations firms need to be ready to change with the necessary agility (Braunscheidel and Suresh, 2009; Doz and Kosonen, 2010; Tanriverdi and Zehir, 2006). However, it is crucial that all members get involved in this process and be agile, otherwise it will be too late and the information will be already obsolete (Berghman et al., 2013; Defee and Fugate, 2010; Sharifirad and Ataei, 2012).

Based on the fact that, in the literature, agility is presented by having different roles, it is possible to infer that agility is an antecedent of the relationship between LO and PE by offering organizations specific capabilities to properly be learning oriented and also as mediator, enabling the knowledge and experience acquired through learning orientation to be executed, generating superior performance. Thereby:

P2: Agility has an antecedent role in the relationship between learning orientation and performance.

P3: Agility has a mediator role in the relationship between learning orientation and performance

Table 1 summarizes the studies found in the literature review involving the relationship between learning orientation and performance and the identified role of agility.

Table 1 - Summary of articles and Agility Role

Author(s)	Article	Year	Agility Role
Tanriverdi, H. Zehir, C.	Impact of learning organizations' applications and market dynamism on organizations' innovativeness and market performance	2006	Mediator
Zahra, S. Sapienza, H. Davidsson, P.	Entrepreneurship and Dynamic Capabilities: A Review, Model and Research Agenda	2006	Mediator/Antecedent
Braunscheidel, Michael J. Suresh, Nallan C.	The organizational antecedents of a firm's supply chain agility for risk mitigation and response	2009	Mediator
Defee, C. Fugate, Brian S.	Changing perspective of capabilities in the dynamic supply chain era	2010	Antecedent
Doz, Y. Kosonen, M	Embedding strategic agility: A leadership agenda for accelerating business model renewal	2010	Antecedent
Sharifirad, M. Ataei, V.	Organizational culture and innovation culture: exploring the relationships between constructs	2012	Mediator

Source: Author.

The role of Institutional Barriers in the relationship between LO and PE

Institutional barriers could be defined as factors that even prevent or impede learning activities practicability in organizations (Hernández-Mogollon et al., 2010). There are several types and ways that these obstacles might negatively affect the relationship between learning orientation and performance.

In their study, Shilling and Kluge (2009) divide different types of barriers to learning organizations in three big blocks. The first is the actional-personal barriers, which involves individual ways of thinking, their attitudes and behaviors towards the firms they belong. The second block is named structural-organizational barriers where organizational strategies, technology, culture and formal rules are taken into account. The third and last group of barriers is defined as societal-environmental, referring to LO processes such as implications related to customers, suppliers, competitors, socio-political environment and others. The authors, in order to better explore these blocks, split them in four other categories: intuiting barriers, interpreting barriers, integrating barriers and institutionalizing barriers.

The intuiting to actional-personal barriers refers to psychological aspects about the individual in his environment, as biased perception, lack of motivation, fear of problems and professional identity. For structural-barriers, intuiting basically relates to level of freedom to think further, in other words, to openmindedness due to the lack of defined goals or job definitions, strict standards and rules and organizational identity. The societal-environmental barriers relate to the ambiguous organizational knowledge, market and performance criteria and cultural misinterpretations (Kuznetsov and Yakavenka, 2005).

The employees' aspect as an important barrier to learning oriented organization that seek for to performance. The individual deficiencies and biases cause several negative outcomes (Huber, 1991). It includes the propensity to search for specific information that would confirm their own convictions rather than the opposite or even show lack of expertise about critical knowledge for the organizational, what is called superstitious learning – interpreting firm's prosperity as a result of managerial activities, discouraging members actions and hiding real results, as success is overestimated and failures are underestimated showing fake results (Schilling and Kluge, 2009; Huber, 1991).

Another relevant institutional barrier to the LO and PE relationship to successfully happen is when the knowledge to be acquired is originated from different cultural backgrounds from the organizational employees (Schilling and Kluge, 2009; Kuznetsov and Yakavenka, 2005). In a joint venture, for example, between an US and Japanese firms it is possible that internal process occurs in different ways, making the learning process quite complex (Schilling and Kluge, 2009).

Strict norms and regulations tend to be crucial institutional barriers to learning (Schilling and Kluge, 2009). It is directly related to each member of the organization, as they are considered the working force for the learning process to happen (Kungwansupaphan and Siengthai, 2014). However, if these employees have no chance to learn through their own activities due to imposed internal rules and regulations, the organizations knowledge and learning process might not result in favorable outcomes

(Huber, 1991). The expected consequence of these limitations is, besides not achieving superior performance, that members of these organizations will develop resistance and difficulties in relation to changes as they did not have the chance to experience of flexible processes and routines, essential for successful learning oriented firms (Kuznetsov and Yakavenka, 2005).

Anxiety is also considered an institutional barrier in the learning orientation process (McCracken, 2005). Changes can cause the avoidance to learn new ideas and insights as members could feel hindered by past failure experiences, for example, when they could be seen as incompetent (Cannon and Edmond-Son, 2001). In learning oriented organizations, that promote significant changes in a constant way, employees might feel inhibited by dynamic routines due to his/her self-defense about their materialized formed concepts (Argyris and Schon, 1996; Brown and Starkey, 2000). What happens, in such cases, is the distortion or falsification of information in order to protect themselves of the unknown (new ideas and insights) and failure, directly blocking the process of learning of the learning oriented organization, taking to undesired performance results (Schilling and Kluge, 2009; McCracken, 2005).

In the interpreting process, barriers are mainly about interpersonal relationships, such as status, trust, liking or not, conflicts, relationship between the individual and the related group and, for the structural-organizational and societal-environmental barriers it is pointed barriers such as failure, avoidance, divergent goals, ego protection and different mindsets (McCracken, 2005). In these category of barriers, the main point is the achievement of shared understanding among member groups, leading to homogeneous and corporate activities within the firm. Barriers are identified when only some member units engage in learning processes while others do not, resulting in heterogeneous knowledge and the impossibility of practicing what was learned as the information flow was not even, obstructing superior outcomes (Schilling and Kluge, 2009). In order to surpass such barrier, the role of management is crucial, as integration must be stimulated among groups coordinated by the head manager (Sun and Scott, 2005).

Other relevant barrier is resistance. Resistance from units, resistance from members, resistance from changing, use to be an obstacle against integration. It impedes the knowledge sharing and flow across the organization, making the learning process incomplete. By refusing to adopt new perspectives and changes that were not conceived by them, resistance can also come combined with other negative feeling such as envy (Schilling and Kluge, 2009, McCracken, 2005).

In the institutionalizing category, barriers are shown as obstacles to implement shared knowledge in processes, structures, systems and rules, that may reflect in organizational innovation. The lack of ability of firm's members to store knowledge and use it to put learning in practice in order to seek for better results, is also considered an institutional barrier in the learning process (Schiemann, 1993). Management, in such cases, could be a positive or negative boost for for the learning organization. If managers do not have the necessary skills to institutionalize learning experiences, the organization tend not to make the needed transformations in thoughts and practice that would result in new mindsets and practices inside de firms, leading to top outcomes (Kluge, 2009; Kuznetsov and Yakavenka, 2005; Schilling and Kluge, 2009).

Cultural barriers, as previously stated when relating to joint ventures, for example, can also be seen as relevant obstacles to learning oriented firms, as it can moderate the relationship of LO and PE. It can arouse confusion, anxiety and also block innovation processes, considering that employees are not familiar with new habits, facts and are not able to anticipate consequences of their acts, showing insecurity (Hernández-Mogollon et al., 2010; Schilling and Kluge, 2009; Sinkula, 2002). In addition, when external knowledge is more complex, in different cultures, for example, barriers to learning and knowledge transfer could be heavier (Zhao et al., 2011), impeding the learning oriented firm to achieve superior results. It tends to happen when the organization do not have the necessary absorptive capacity to reconfigure, reintegrate and transform information into knowledge and capabilities that are helpful to the firm in order to reach better performance (Zhao et al., 2011).

By controlling institutional barriers that would block the flow of knowledge and information, organizations tend to improve their skills in making fast changes as decisions and perform them in an effective way (Slater and Narver, 1995). Institutional barriers, in the relationship between learning orientation and performance, might directly affect the acquisition, dissemination and execution of knowledge originated from market information. Besides, these obstacles may inhibit the flow of customer demands, feedbacks and other important market news (Adams et al., 1998; Jussili et al., 2012)

Institutional barriers tend to negatively interfere in the organizations' learning process and could be considered as internal impediments to the information flow, knowledge sharing and others, crucial to the success of learning oriented firms and its achievement of superior performance (Schilling and Kluge, 2009). By overcoming these barriers, such as communication obstacles, bureaucracy or others, the learning organization is able to create mechanisms, through the knowledge acquired, that may overcome and surpass those impediments and the learning process is not harmed, so the final outcomes (Jussili et al., 2012; Schilling and Kluge, 2009). Finally, it is possible to infer that learning oriented organizations, as owner of cutting-edge information and knowledge being constantly renewed, have competitive advantages and better conditions to overcome institutional or internal barriers that could obstruct and complicate its way to reach superior outputs (Hernández-Mogollon et al., 2010).

Based on the gathered information from the literature in learning orientation and performance, it is then possible to propose that:

P4: Institutional barriers have a mediator role in the relationship between learning orientation and performance.

P5: Institutional barriers have a moderator role in the relationship between learning orientation and performance.

Table 2 presents a summary of studies found in the literature review that involved the relationship between learning orientation and performance and the identified roles of institutional barriers.

Table 2 - Summary of articles and Institutional Barriers Role

Author(s)	Article	Year	Institutional barriers Role
Slater, S. Narver, J.	Market Orientation and the Learning Organization	1995	Mediator
Schilling, J. Kluge, A.	Barriers to organizational learning: An integration of theory and research	2009	Mediator
Hernández-Mogollon, R. Cepeda-Carrión, G. Cegarra-Navarro, J. Leal-Millán, A.	The role of cultural barriers in the relationship between open-mindedness and organizational innovation	2010	Moderator (-)
Zhao, Y. Li, Y. Lee, S. Chen, L.	Entrepreneurial Orientation, Organizational Learning, and Performance: Evidence From China	2011	Mediator
Jussili, J. Kärjjäinen, H. Leino, M.	Learning from and with Customers with Social Media: A Model for Social Customer Learning	2012	Moderator (-)

Source: Author.

Based on the information provided, and the proposition stated, it was possible to build the following theoretical framework, see figure 1:

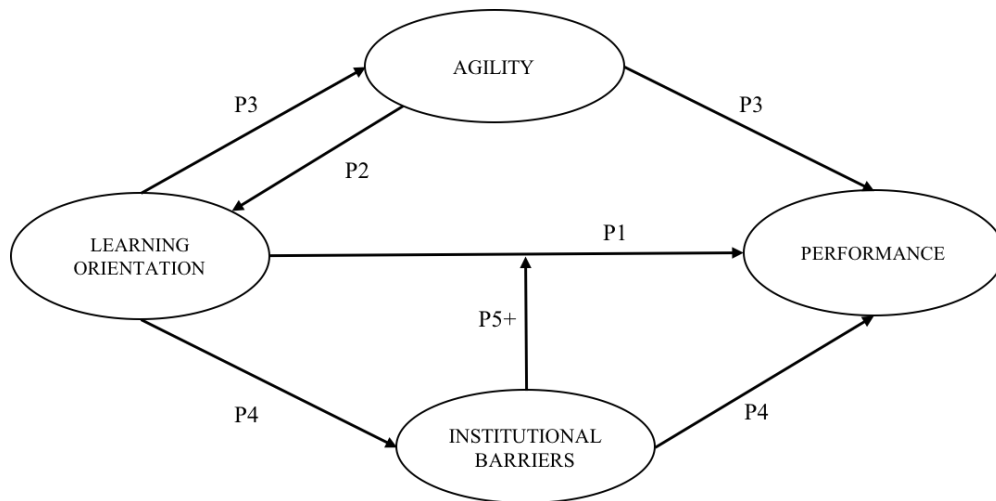


Figure 1- Theoretical framework

Source: Author.

Conclusion

Studies around the relationship between learning oriented firms and performance point out for several benefits that the organizations earn in adopting this type of strategic orientation in the pursuit of superior performance. Some of these are the

ability to foresee and protect the organization of market threats; to easily adapt itself to unexpected market changes; to perform internal process optimization; to have a better communication flow across all layers of the firms; to deeply know its consumers and their needs and, to be able to anticipate market information, warranting competitive advantages toward competition and getting closer to superior performance outcomes.

According to a previous empirical research, it was possible to detect that most authors support the idea that these relationship is indirect (Bell et al., 2012; Griese et al., 2012; Hao et al., 2012; Kaya and Patton, 2011; Mahmoud and Yusif, 2012; Nybakk, 2012; Ross and Grace, 2012), in other words, mediators are needed in order to learning oriented organization reach performance. For this reason, that study deepen research around the reasons (mediators) that facilitate the relationship between these two settled constructs. Results indicated some new and important reasons of this relationship that the literature did not showed, bringing up the necessity to continue research on the theme.

Thus, this literature review aimed to identify in the strategic orientation literature, more specifically in articles related to the relationship between learning orientation and performance, the role of two relevant and new constructs in these particular chunk of literature: Agility, considering the timing to execute all the information and knowledge processed by learning oriented organization in order to reach top performance; and Institutional Barriers, blocking mechanisms that would hinder or complicate the learning process in the goal of achieving superior outcomes. Findings show, at first, that there are no articles relating these constructs to the relationship between learning orientation and performance, what enhance the relevance and contribution of this theoretical review. Secondly, the search for the agility and institutional barriers study in order to relate and build robust arguments was hard, as there are little articles that offer proper content.

Agility, as the speed of putting in practice information and knowledge gathers by learning oriented organizations in the pursuit of top performance and to avoid it to become obsolete, took two different roles in the given relationship. First as an antecedent, when the timing to acquire and process information and knowledge become crucial for learning oriented firms in order to reach performance; and as a mediator, being agile enough to execute the information learned and processed and get competitive advantage. So, it is also possible to infer that agility can have a negative role in this relationship, as the organization is not fast enough and competitors use privileged information and knowledge first, or the expected positive role for learning oriented organizations in the natural way to achieve superior performance.

In the other hand, institutional barriers have negative role to the organization. It only becomes positive when these obstacles are overcome and surpassed, facilitating the relationship between learning orientation and performance. These barriers are presented in wide variety of ways, such as human resources barriers, sociopolitical barriers, management barriers, environmental barriers and others. They mostly appear as mediators in the studied relationship, when learning oriented firms need to deal with a diversity of obstacles to reach its final goal, but also have a moderator role, as institutional barriers, in its different forms, negatively influence the relationship between learning orientation and performance.

As limitations, this study is a theoretical research which limits its outcomes. Besides, it would be interesting to apply the given constructs in specific contexts, different types of industries (retail, service, telecom, IT, etc), for example, in order to obtain more precise results. Also, this research did not consider the effect of moderators (turbulences) in this relationship, as the role of agility and institutional barriers could change.

Finally, this article contributed to the extension of the strategic orientation theory, focusing in the relationship between learning orientation and performance, bringing up two new constructs for the literature in relation to the given relationship and proving its importance in the pursuit of superior performance for organizations. Firms, and managers, can benefit from these findings by preparing and adapting organizations highlighting the roles of agility in the learning oriented firms and creating mechanisms to surpass and avoid institutional barriers to come. For further research, it is proposed empirical tests for the theoretical framework proposed and other studies around new constructs that could affect this relationship.

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