



The contribution of corporate policies to the creation of competitive advantage: the case of the Unimed de Paranaíba corporate organization

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Abstract

In the competitive global context, organizations in a sector are seeking to develop different strategies to stand out from their competitors. Thus, they seek organizational policies as plans of action to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, the main objective of the present study is to analyze corporate policies and their contribution to the creation of sustainable competitive advantage in a cooperative organization. The object of study is Unimed de Paranaíba, in Paraná State. The research is predominantly descriptive and qualitative. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation, with a sample of employees of the Administrative area and Personnel Department of the organization in question. According to the data analysis, the results show the importance of corporate policies in organizations, as Unimed has established flexible, comprehensive, coordinated and ethical policies. All the stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process, which is very important and helps the organization to generate a form of competitive advantage.

Keywords: Strategies. Organizational policies. Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

Introduction

As the market has become more fiercely competitive, organizations in general and cooperatives in particular face the challenge of developing differentiating strategies and an effective managerial structure to ensure good economic performance to satisfy the needs of their customers, shareholders and cooperative members, depending on their statutory and corporate structures. Like other business organizations, cooperatives act to exploit their unique internal capabilities and available resources to achieve efficiency and improve their competitiveness (BARNEY, 1991; WHITTINGTON, 2002; MINTZBERG; AHLSTRAND; LAMPEL, 2010; BARNEY; HESTERLY, 2011; ROCHA, 1999).

In other words, it can be said that organizations seek to create a competitive advantage, and a number of studies have sought to understand these creative sources. In this sense, Duarte, Lopes and Santos (2016) observed that most of the studies on cooperatives are methodologically characterized as exploratory, suggesting the need for further knowledge on this subject.

Brazilian studies have sought to understand the creation of competitive advantage in cooperatives. For example, Kelm, Sausen and Kelm (2015) researched the creation of competitive advantage in a cooperative and identified two creative focuses. The first is the farmer, through differentials in terms of qualified technical assistance and the relationship between the cooperative and its members as a partnership. The second focus is the final consumer, through the supply of a quality and original product as a competitive differential. In another study, Colla, Yamamoto and Reis (2015) studied the creation of competitive advantage in credit unions through the management of organizational knowledge.

Another study on the theme was conducted by Vesco, Tarifa, Pacheco and Dall`asta (2014). The authors sought to understand strategic cost management as a factor in the creation of competitive advantage in cooperatives in Paraná State. Lopes, Kniess and Ramos (2015) studied the factors that led to the adoption of strategic management tools in an agro-industrial cooperative. Furlan (2014) studied how cooperatives in Paraná formed scenarios to determine their strategic planning.

In this milieu, observing business policies may be an important element when it comes to understanding strategic management. In this case, business policies, understood as guidelines for administrative action to achieve the goals set for the organization (GIUZI, 1987), may be an essential element for planning the creation of competitive advantage. This creates an opportunity for new explanations of the phenomenon in question.

This study proposes to analyze the contribution of business policies to the creation of competitive advantage in a cooperative. The cooperative in question is UNIMED de Paranavaí, a provider of medical services located in the northwest of Paraná State.

The study is structured as follows. In the next section, the theoretical framework is presented, demonstrating the importance of clearly defining strategy and competitive advantage. This is followed by the concept of business policies and their role in a company's plan of action, followed by the context of cooperative organizations and their structure. The methodological procedures of the study are then presented. The study closes with an analysis and conclusions.

Theoretical Framework

Strategy

The definition of strategy requires several analyses, with a broad scope of views and approaches, demonstrating that there is no single definition of the term. Its definition can take several forms that adapt according to the context in question. Due to the diverse concepts that encompass the field of strategy and its constant reshaping, there is no consensus regarding the meaning of the word (BULGACOV et al., 2007; Mintzberg et al., 2006). This complexity is not due to difficulty in finding definitions but rather the multiple aspects involved in the concept and its practical application (WHITTINGTON, 2002; MINTZBERG; AHLSTRAND; LAMPEL, 2010; BULGACOV et al., 2007).

However, it is conceivable that the aim of a business strategy is to create differences between a company and its competitors. Thus, strategy can be understood as an integrated and coordinated set of commitments and actions to exploit essential competences and gain a competitive advantage (HITT; IRELAND; HOSKISSON, 2011). Therefore, when a company defines its strategy, it will be prioritizing the goals it wishes to achieve and the means it will employ to do so.

To Quinn (2006), strategy can be defined as a pattern or plan that integrates the main goals, policies and actions of an organization as an integrated whole. Thus, when a strategy is defined, it indicates which alternatives were chosen by the company and its competitive actions. The author highlights the importance of considering the strategic process and the organizational strategy involved as deriving from bounded rationality. In other words, predictability is limited and allows space for reviews and unforeseen events.

When effective, a planned strategy integrates a set of carefully planned goals, policies and programs for the allocation of the organization's resources to set it on a feasible course to determine what will be achieved and when. In this context, organizational goals and the direction the company will take are defined. As for the rules that determine the limits in which actions occur, those that steer the company in a certain direction or determine its feasibility are designated as strategic policies. Finally, programs specify the sequences of action required to achieve the main goals determined at the outset, ensuring that resources are committed to achieving them within the limits of organizational policy (MINTZBERG et al., 2006).

To Porter (2004), competitive strategy formation is the development of a broad formula defining goals and the policies required to achieve them. These goals correspond to how the organization wishes to compete, together with its economic and non-economic objectives and the company's basic operational policies.

Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (2010) conducted an analysis using ten theoretical schools of thought related to strategy, showing how a decision can be adopted by the organization in accordance with its perception of current conditions and the context in which it is embedded, adapting to the environment. Regarding this idea, Porter (2004) claims that the essence of competitive strategy formulation is combining the company with its environment. Thus, a company strategy should be capable of identifying its goals and relating them to the environment of opportunities. This should

be consistent with its business capacity and the way it will react to the competition to achieve a competitive advantage.

Competitive Advantage

When addressing competitive advantage, it is worth citing one of the first researchers to discuss the theme in Brazil. Bethlem (1998, p. 241) classified two basic types of competitive advantage: “sell cheaper (generic products or services); or sell a unique product or service”. According to this author, the three types of generic strategies identified by Porter (2004) that are used by organizations to achieve a competitive advantage are derived from this classification, i.e., competitive advantage and organizational strategy are directly related.

It should be emphasized that, to Porter (1990), competitive strategy aims to establish a profitable and sustainable position against the forces that determine competition in industry. This is a challenge for organizational management to seek skills and internal resources to gain an advantage over competitors. Thus, advantage emerges from the value the company creates in the eyes of its customers and surpasses manufacturing costs. This value is the price that buyers are willing to pay. A higher value than this is a consequence of lower prices than those of the competition with equivalent benefits that compensate for a higher price. Thus, the author typified competitive advantage in two basic types of strategy: cost leadership, when the company can obtain a cost advantage through cheaper products or services, or differentiation, when the company is viewed as exclusive, with attributes that are more highly valued by customers.

Consequently, Porter (2004, p. 37) emphasizes that, “while both strategies create advantages, there may be some risks in the case of firms that opt for cost leadership, which provides a defense against rivalry and places the firm in a favorable position vis-à-vis substitutes relative to its competitors in the industry”. According to Barney and Hesterly (2011), strategic management involves choosing and implementing strategies that create competitive advantage. A company obtains competitive advantage when it is able to create greater economic value in comparison with its competitors. Economic value is the difference between the perceived benefits obtained by customers in the purchase of products or services and the total economic cost of these products or services to the company. The difference in size of the economic value that the company succeeds in creating in comparison with its competitors determines the size of its competitive advantage.

A company that opts for cost leadership focuses on gaining advantages by reducing its costs below those of its competitors. A company that opts for a differentiation strategy focuses on seeking competitive advantage by increasing the perceived value of its products and services in relation to other companies (BARNEY; HESTERLY, 2011).

Barney and Hesterly (2011) emphasize that a company seeking a competitive advantage has to excel in the development and exploitation of its own resources and capabilities. When a company develops rare resources and capabilities that are valuable and hard to imitate and aligns them with its organizational forces, it gains a sustainable competitive advantage.

“A firm has a competitive advantage when it implements a strategy competitors are unable to duplicate or find too costly to imitate” (HITT; IRELAND; HOSKISSON, 2011, p. 4). To Mintzberg (2006), creating a sustained competitive advantage depends on the firm’s unique resources and capabilities to handle the competition and the environment. The managerial challenge is for executives to be attentive and look within the company for valuable resources that are rare and costly to imitate and exploit all of these resources and capabilities in the organization as a whole.

Barney and Hesterly (2011) proceed with their concepts, claiming that competitive advantage can be temporary when it does not last for a long time, or sustainable when it has a lasting effect, although this does not mean that it will always exist. “Firms must understand that no competitive advantage is permanent” (HITT; IRELAND; HOSKISSON, 2011, p. 4).

Business/Organizational Policies

To Mintzberg (2006), policies are present, like the hierarchy in the whole organization. They are the contingent rules that provide guidelines to resolve conflicts between specific goals. Oliveira (2011) claims that these policies provide parameters that help to reduce the number of alternatives involved in decision-making. The author demonstrates the limitations and actions that help guide the company when materializing its strategies to achieve competitive advantages.

From a decision-making perspective, Amaral and Franco (2005, p. 70) claim that, “policy is the general directive for decision-making” at any organizational level. It plays an essential role for the organization, guiding decisions and judgements required to implement strategy. Thus, policies can be classified by source of concept: (i) Established policies result from the goals, challenges and objectives set by the top management, as strategies to guide subordinates in their decision-making processes; (ii) Solicited policies result from the requests of subordinates to superiors to guide how certain decisions should be handled; (iii) Imposed policies stem from factors in the environment, such as the financial system, government and unions (OLIVEIRA, 2007).

Regarding their form and how clearly these policies are expressed, according to Umeda and Trindade (2004, p. 6) they can be “explicit policies when written and formalized in documents such as a corporate charter, internal regulations and operating principles. Implicit policies are unenforced guidelines”, based on traditions and customs that reflect part of the organizational culture. Corroborating this statement, Oliveira (2007) highlights that implicit policies involve situations where they are not formalized, i.e., written. Regarding these aspects, theoreticians recommend that policies should be clearly expressed to everyone involved in the organization so that general objectives and individual performance should be understood and followed. This also helps to gain the trust of customers and the public through an impression of stable behavior (UMEDA; TRINDADE, 2004; OLIVEIRA, 2007).

According to Ziegler (1972, p. 42 apud, OLIVEIRA, 2007), policies should be: (i) Flexible, as the firm is constantly interacting with its environment; (ii) Comprehensive, to cover the various aspects and difficulties that arise in company operations; (iii) Coordinated, leading efforts to achieve tasks; and (iiii) Ethical, in compliance with the

ethical standards of conduct set by the firm. When policies are established as such, they constitute a basis for sustainable strategic planning (OLIVEIRA, 2011).

According to Amaral and Franco (2005, p. 70), together with policy “are all the types of operational plans (actions) that serve as instruments for implementing strategy”. These plans are reflections of decisions based on what explicit and explicit strategies the firm wishes to put into practice. For this purpose, organizations in general seek to develop their business through consistent and coherent operational plans that pave the way for strategies for gaining a competitive advantage over competitors.

Umeda and Trindade (2004) claim that the creation of business policies is influenced by three factors. The first is the external environment, consisting of actors such as competitors, consumers and suppliers. The second is the evaluation of current operations, knowing the internal capabilities of the firm, adapting to its goals. However, policies should also observe competing operations and the way they function. The third factor is the values of the management, affected by the perception of the individuals involved and influenced by the personal characteristics of those who formulate the policies. Therefore, the strategy will guide the behavior of the firm within its policies in relation to the environmental conditions that involve the whole organization.

Reis (2014) claims that political factors affect the organizational strategic process. Of these, it is worth highlighting interest groups and groups involved in bargaining and negotiation, political coalitions and interpersonal relationships. The author states that these political factors are directly linked to the internal organizational environment and, in Brazil, they are influenced by the social culture, i.e., by the influence of the individual on the organization.

In this sense, business policy plays an essential role in organizations, facilitating the unfolding of plans of action, limiting and raising the main characteristics necessary for strategic directives, seeking to achieve long-term organizational goals.

Cooperative Organization

One of the main authors to show concern over the theme, Pinho (1977) claims that a cooperative is a human society aiming to provide services to its members. This author states that the distinction between cooperatives and other organizations is fourfold: (i) a cooperative is a non-profit company, i.e., its net surplus is returned proportionally to its members; (ii) cooperative members have equal rights and duties that are unrelated to their share in the social capital. In this sense, every member has the right to vote, irrespective of the capital he holds in the cooperative; (iii) the capital is treated as a factor of production and is at the disposal of the membership; and (iv) members are users and entrepreneurs at the same time.

Non-cooperative organizations are based on work/production and the sale of products and services to build capital (profit). However, Borges and Romano (2009) show that cooperatives are founded on work and mutual goals and aid with open and transparent cooperative actions.

Other authors define a cooperative as “an autonomous association of people who unite voluntarily to achieve their aspirations and satisfy their mutual economic, social and cultural needs through a collectively owned and democratically managed firm”

(PICCININI et al., 2003, p. 1). Therefore, cooperative members have responsibilities to the cooperative and the community and, mainly, to the members of the cooperative themselves.

Nevertheless, a cooperative is not entirely unlike a non-cooperative firm, as both are embedded in a competitive market. This requires cooperatives to develop differentiating strategies efficiently to operate with a competitive advantage. The ideals of cooperatives are highlighted as practices to create value for the venture. These ideals, in turn, “are the principles resulting from cooperative values that accord cooperatives their legal status” (ROCHA, 1999, p. 18).

Borges and Romano (2009) corroborate this idea when they claim that organizations in general have to seek new managerial practices and new techniques to remain competitive. Cooperatives are embedded in this context and it is necessary to be flexible towards the changing environment. Managing growth strategies while preserving the organizational model is another challenge. In other words, “in the process of creating competitive advantages, it is necessary to align the competitive strategy and essential competence” of organizations (FLEURY; FLEURY, 2003, p. 136). Thus, a cooperative is an organization that operates in the market in the name of its members.

Methodology

Regarding the methodology used to achieve the goals proposed in the present article, it should be made clear that this is a descriptive study of a predominantly qualitative nature. According to Richardson (2001, p. 66) descriptive research occurs “when the intention is to describe the characteristics of a phenomenon”. In this case, the intention is to describe information on the business policies adopted by the cooperative in question and the process to create a competitive advantage. A qualitative study is characterized by a description of the adequate understanding of the social phenomena of the subjects that participate in the study (RICHARDSON, 2011).

The data were collected from three employees in the Human Resources (HR) section of UNIMED de Paranaíba. In addition to accessibility, the interviewees are able to describe the organizational structure of the organization. The data collection technique was a semi-structured interview and non-participant observation. According to May (2004), the method is open, enabling the interviewee to answer question from his point of view through his experience of the reality of the environment. Marconi and Lakatos (2003) claim that non-participant observation enables the researcher to experience the reality or group in question, but without joining it, observing the phenomenon from outside consciously and impartially.

The three UNIMED employees were interviewed in November and December 2015. The script was submitted to the HR coordinator and two employees from the same sector. In the interviews, information was sought on the interviewee profile, organizational policy and competitive advantage creation strategy. The interviews were transcribed for later analysis. For the non-participant observation, a protocol was used to register the observed data.

Regarding the data analysis, after the interviews were transcribed, a quadro was prepared for the most important statements and declarations. These statements are

presented side by side, with answers to the pre-defined questions. Data content analysis was then conducted, in accordance with the model of Bardin (2010), who claims that content analysis is a form of categorizing statements and attributing meaning to the information provided to decode it. In other words, it enables the researcher to understand, interpret and clearly show the results in his study.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In this section, we present the results of the study. The starting point is a brief characterization of the sample, organizational policy and strategies for creating a competitive advantage. Regarding the perception of the interviewees on the business and organizational management, the strategies and competitive advantage of UNIMED de Paranavaí, the highlights of the interviews with their perceptions and understanding of the questions asked are shown in quadro 1.

Quadro 1 – Organizational policy of UNIMED de Paranavaí

QUESTIONS	INTERVIEWEE 1	INTERVIEWEE 2	INTERVIEWEE 3
1. Who participates in the decision-making process?	At Unimed, we try to listen to all employees for fair and transparent decision-making, with final decisions made by the board and managers.	We try to listen to the employees for some decisions, but most of the time they are shared by the board and management.	Decisions are made by the board and management when they affect all employees, and by the management when they affect a sector.
2. How are the organization policies of the firm classified?	They are set and imposed by the top management.	They are set and imposed by the top management.	They are set and imposed by the top management.
3. Which areas influence organizational policy?	The administration of human resources.	The administration area.	The administration of Human Resources influences all areas and sectors.
4. What is the decision-making process like?	More participative, involving all organizational levels.	More participative, involving all organizational levels.	More participative, involving all organizational levels.
5. How do teams relate within the organization for decision-making, or is the work more individual?	All sectors have meetings where all employees take part and decisions are normally made jointly.	Decisions are made jointly and all sectors and employees voice their opinions in search of the best decision.	Everyone involved in the company takes part in the decision-making process.
6. What are the company's internal rules? How do they influence your work?	There are numerous rules, all involving good conduct and behavior by all to achieve the best possible process.	The firm has several internal rules that influence the employees and help to achieve the results expected by the organization.	Unimed has some not-so-strict rules, but they are obeyed. Employees from all sectors jointly work for all company processes to be achieved as best as possible.
7. How are the organizational policies of the	Flexible, comprehensive, coordinated and ethical. They are	Flexible, comprehensive, coordinated and ethical.	Flexible, comprehensive, coordinated and ethical.

company de- fined?	flexible to enable the work of the financial, operational and administrative sectors of the cooperative.		
8. How is the organization placed in the eyes of the internal and external public regarding its mission?	Committed to good service, quality work and payment of employees, ethical, sustainable and supportive.	Committed to good service, quality work and payment of employees, ethical, sustainable and supportive	Committed to good service, quality work and payment of employees, ethical, sustainable and supportive.

Source: research data, 2016.

The data on the organizational policy in question show that all employees at the organization are involved in decision-making and strategic processes in the pursuit of organizational objectives. All employees are abreast of company activities and decisions. According to the HR manager, meetings are held for this purpose, resulting in commitment and cooperation between managers and employees to achieve a common goal.

The corporate policies of the organization are classified as established and directed by the top management, i.e., the top-down style is predominant. To Oliveira (2007), established policies are very important and result from the goals and challenges set by the top management as strategies to guide employees in their decision-making. This shows the full commitment of the top management regarding regulatory and strategic decisions by the firm and the coordination of the team. Mintzberg et al (2006) claim that deliberate strategies seek to plan what might happen by a certain time and, for this purpose, evaluate future trends.

Concerning the definition of organizational policies, according to the data, the policies are flexible, as the company constantly interacts with its environment. They are also comprehensive and coordinated, as they cover and resolve conflicts and difficulties that the firm faces, with a great effort to use all the functions necessary to achieve tasks. They are ethical, as they are in agreement with the mission and ethical standards of conduct set by the company. On this point, the emergent strategy should be highlighted, as it is related to learning, unlike the deliberate strategy, as it is formulated. The emergent strategy emerges from experiences that the environment offers and promotes learning. People execute actions and respond to them, which creates opportunities to form patterns with the best actions (MINTZBERG et al., 2006).

To Oliveira (2007), the organizational policy of the firm is reflected in the organizational mission. The author claims that when policies are based on the mission, they make better use of the strong point of the organization. Therefore, UNIMED de Parana  is committed to providing good service, quality work and pay for its employees, ethically, sustainably and supportively. The vision and essential values of the company that govern the relationship of all involved are transparent. This helps form a basis for the development and sustainability of good strategic planning, and these values form a differential, leading the firm in a certain direction with a view to organizational growth and the achievement of a sustainable competitive advantage.

Regarding organizational strategy and competitive advantage, quadro 2 contains excerpts from the interviews reporting the perceptions of the interviewees on these issues.

Quadro 2 – Strategies for creating a competitive advantage for Unimed

QUESTIONS	INTERVIEWEE 1	INTERVIEWEE 2	INTERVIEWEE 3
1. What is the brand of the organization? (Characteristic).	Being a cooperative recognized for its excellent services in the supplementary healthcare sector.	Being a cooperative recognized for its excellent services in the supplementary healthcare sector.	Being a cooperative recognized for its excellent services in the supplementary healthcare sector.
2. Which implemented strategy or strategies characterize a competitive advantage?	Cooperativism; Social Responsibility; Everyone in the organization working jointly in decision-making is essential for a good differential.	Cooperativism and social responsibility.	Cooperativism and social responsibility.
3. Does the organization create value for its public (customers/associations) that leads them to pay a higher price for the benefits of the company's services? Which benefit(s)?	Yes, quality healthcare services and quality of life for people at a fair price.	Yes, quality healthcare services and quality of life for people at a fair price.	Yes, quality healthcare services and quality of life for people at a fair price.
4. Does the organization have its own unique resources and capabilities that are rare, valuable and difficult to imitate and associated with organizational forces?	Yes, by opting for social responsibility and cooperativism, I believe that Unimed manages to stand out from its competitors.	Yes, Unimed is a prime example of good conduct at work with everyone involved.	Yes.
5. Do you believe the organization is well placed in the competitive market?	Yes, compared with other cooperatives in the healthcare sector, Unimed is well placed.	Yes, it is one of the best medical care networks.	Yes.

Source: research data, 2016.

An analysis of the data in quadro 2 shows that the firm in question seeks to stand out from its competitors. It has a strategy that focuses more on Social Responsibility, with a view to being recognized for the excellence of its supplementary healthcare services. The management model based on human values that the company uses is that of Social Responsibility. According to Carroll (apud BARBIERI; CAJAZEIRA, 2012), it is made up of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions. Social Responsibility was seen to guide ethical and transparent behavior with everyone involved (employees, cooperative members, suppliers, customers, society, government and other organizations). Corporate social responsibility is vital for the cooperative to sustain the tripod of sustainability, in social, economic and environmental terms. Observing the daily life of the organization and analyzing secondary documents, such as data from the institutional website, shows that this situation occurs in practice, and is

described among the values of the organization, which the employees constantly work to develop.

Another observed factor that could create competitive advantage for the organization is its business policy model. The organizational policy is set by the top management. However, there is space for all to participate in their respective areas, making it flexible, comprehensive, coordinated and ethical. These criteria contribute to the objective and values of the company because when we think of policy it is common for us to find policies that are perceived as having rigid characteristics rather than characteristics of effective participation. However, as seen in the interviews, the policies are flexible. This constitutes forward-thinking postures and actions at the cooperative, i.e., thinking of the future and adapting to the environment.

Regarding competitive advantage, a factor that makes a positive impact is the healthy and inclusive involvement of people in processes, especially participation in the decision-making process. This facilitates the development of the company's plan of action, with the main characteristics required to formulate good strategy with a view to achieving long-term goals.

This participation and involvement of the team provides knowledge of internal conditions, building a feeling of belonging and understanding of the management. This is strategic and creates an environment for a better alignment of the cooperative's goals. Among other factors, this allows a good business management to develop skills to solve the organization's problems. This organizational skill sustains the firm's competitive advantage, ensuring excellent customer service and healthcare.

Concern over the competition is also a strong element that influences business policies, explaining the balance between policies, cooperative principles and maintaining a position in the market. Strategies are implemented promoting an educational, economic and social commitment to society, offering quality services at fair prices, constituting a differential for the cooperative.

It should also be highlighted that organizational policies are part of the process of efficiently seeking to develop mechanisms to create barriers that protect Unimed de Paranavaí from the competition, making it easier to take advantage of all the resources that are rare, valuable, unique and costly to imitate. This organizational force enables the company to seek strategies that neutralize threats and take advantage of opportunities. The company strengthens its position on the market and thus builds a sustainable competitive advantage. This process originates in sources of resources and capabilities that Barney and Hesterly (2011) propose for companies that seek a sustainable competitive advantage over the competition.

Conclusion

Business policies help managers make assertive decisions on sustainable policies and strategies in organizational processes to create competitive advantage. In this respect, this study aimed to analyze the contribution of business policies to the creation of competitive advantage at UNIMED de Paranavaí, in the northwest of Paraná State.

UNIMED de Paranavaí has an established style of organizational policy, in which the top management defines the plans of action. Deliberatively, this policy sets the tone for the organization by defining the goals and challenges, and what each person can do in this process.

Based on the company's mission and vision, the policies define the organizational goals, enable the company to take greater advantage of its strong points and minimize its weak points. They determine the company's differential vis-à-vis its competitors. All are involved in the decision-making process, which is very important when it comes to achieving the goals of the organization. It can also be concluded that the organizational policies of the firm are flexible, comprehensive, coordinated and ethical, characterizing an emergent strategy. Collaboratively, the policies are explicit for everyone to understand well and put into practice in their daily actions.

A good organizational policy along with good strategic planning can create a sustainable competitive advantage for the company. At UNIMED, the business policy is well planned and understood by the employees. This aids strategic planning. Furthermore, the company is based on a policy of Social Responsibility, which confirms the presence of factors that create a competitive advantage for the organization over its competitors.

Concerning the limitations of the study, it should be highlighted that it does not include employees from different sectors of UNIMED, as access was restricted. This may have influenced the results of the study. The present study has a latent potential for more in-depth research to guide future studies, broadening the discussion through comparative studies of UNIMED Cooperatives in other geographical regions of the country.

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