

Cooperation Networks: Competitive Motivators in Training, Facilitators, and Hinders of Interorganizational Relationships

Redes de Cooperação: Motivadores Competitivos na Formação, Facilitadores e Dificultadores dos Relacionamentos Interorganizacionais

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Abstract

Based on the cooperation networks approach, this article analyzes how small and medium-sized biscuit producing and trading companies in the Southwest region of Bahia seek new learning, competitiveness and business opportunities. The study evaluates and characterizes the competitive factors that have motivated the formation of the cooperation network and stimulated the establishment of interorganizational links, describing the facilitators and obstacles to referrals. The results found links agree that the market competitive motivators are related to the search for representativeness, credibility and complementarity, professional visibility and prospecting for new business. In addition, the decision to join interorganizational services has been facilitated by associations, local culture and participation of local development agents, with prominence for the participation of Sebrae (BA), finding, however, difficulties in strengthening trust in social relations and there is no commitment from the actors in joint actions.

Keywords: cooperation network, competitiveness, interorganizational relationships.

Resumo

Com fundamento na abordagem de redes de cooperação, este artigo analisa de que modo pequenas e médias empresas produtoras e comercializadoras do biscoito, na região Sudoeste da Bahia, buscam novos aprendizados, competitividade e oportunidades de negócios. O estudo avalia e caracteriza os fatores competitivos que tem motivado a formação da rede de cooperação e estimulado o estabelecimento de vínculos interorganizacionais, descrevendo os facilitadores e os dificultadores dos relacionamentos. Os resultados encontrados permitem concluir que os motivadores competitivos de mercado estão relacionados à busca por representatividade, credibilidade e complementaridade, visando a visibilidade e a prospecção de novos negócios. Além disso, a decisão por ingressar em relacionamentos interorganizacionais tem sido facilitada pelo associativismo, cultura local e participação de agentes de desenvolvimento locais, com proeminência para a participação do Sebrae (BA), encontrando, no entanto, dificultadores no estreitamento da confiança nas relações sociais e no comprometimento dos atores nas ações conjuntas.

Palavras-chave: rede de cooperação, competitividade, relacionamentos interorganizacionais.

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INTRODUCTION

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The business environment has been characterized by rapid transformations from globalization, interdependence, and technological advances. The characteristics of this new competitive environment have driven transformations within organizational configurations due to the associated benefits (Freitas Filho *et al.*, 2018).

In this perspective, research involving the subject supports that organizations in a cooperation network are more effective in the market, since each company, as a member, begins to develop capacities and competencies quickly, i. e., new learning, which increase their competitiveness power and, consequently, raise new business opportunities (Holubčík & Soviar, 2021).

New forms of organization based on cooperation strategies enable access to information, resources, markets, and technologies, connected to the advantage of learning and promoting economies of scale and scope. This enables the achievement of strategic objectives, such as sharing risks and outsourcing stages of the production chain and organizational functions (Balestrin & VerschoorE, 2016).

The collective efficiency resulting from network cooperation strategies has motivated small and medium-sized companies from various productive sectors to seek the competitive advantages arising from these types of configurations, based on the sum of efforts of actors' joint actions, involving entrepreneurs, institutions, and local development agents (Leme; Aguiar & Rezende, 2019).

The study on cooperation networks, mainly about small businesses, has rebounded important contributions to the competitiveness of traditional manufacturing industries and the retail industry, as well as to the development of production chains (Klein & Bortolaso, 2020) contributing to the dissemination of this theoretical field.

The combined articulations arised from interorganizational relationships are also important to promote the strengthening of production chains and regional development, promoting the production of primary goods and providing strategies that prioritize local autonomy and broad objectives of improvement in the regional community (Fante & Dallabrida, 2016; Rudder, Aguiar, & Rezende, 2019).

In addition, there are gaps related to investigations about behaviors and interactions of social actors in the process of assigning meanings to interorganizational relationships, producing value for the global chain (Kano, 2018). The importance of understanding the facilitators and hinders inherent to social interactions bases the perception of the social capital of the network, which results in competitive edges for the member organizations (Macedo, *et al.*, 2017).

Both the scientific field and companies have a high interest in understanding the predominant roles in the creation of networks and their effects, as well as the importance of interorganizational relationships and their advantages for network development. Particularly for organizations, the contributions generated by the results of the studies are convenient to support strategic decisions to a better commercial, economic, political, social, or other desired performance.

This research analyzes how small and medium-sized companies producing and marketing biscuit, in the Southwest region of Bahia, seek new learning, competitiveness and business opportunities from the creation of a network of cooperation and the establishment of interorganizational relationships.

More precisely, the research focused on the theoretical reasons related to competitive market factors (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2008; 2016) that has motivated the creation of the biscuit cooperation network and stimulated the establishment of interorganizational bonds,



describing relationship facilitators and hinders (Júnior *et al.*, 2016; Albano, Araujo, & Reinhard, 2017).

The research involves the creation of a cooperation network between biscuit producers/traders and local development agents to the legal recognition of geographical indication. In this sense, the actors engaged in a project called Projeto do Biscoito (Biscuit Project), to aware, mobilize, and articulate the members of the production chain, as well as governments, development institutions, business entities, universities, and civil society, regarding the intangible value of biscuits and their potential for the regional socioeconomic development.

The study proposes to evaluate and characterize the competitive factors that have motivated the creation of the cooperation network and stimulated the establishment of interorganizational bonds, describing relationship facilitators and hinders.

COOPERATION NETWORKS

Cooperation networks are business management mechanisms resulting from the dynamics of the competitive environment. They are stimulated by the synergistic effects that emerge for the organizations involved, from the creation of common values, including conditional – objective – or unconditional expectations – aggregate effects (Holubčík & Soviar, 2021).

Incentives for strategic network cooperation include cost savings in manufacturing and research, increased market presence, access to intangible assets of other companies – management skills and knowledge of markets and customers (Soviar, Holubčíka, & Vodáka, 2017). The cooperative process provides flexible strategies, allowing companies to respond to changing market conditions and emergence of new competitors.

As a central point, networks focus on structuring and standardizing actions, based on organizational attributes and collective characteristics, as a way to obtain and/or maintain competitive advantages over non-associated companies. Network articulating also provides the satisfaction of other business needs, such as the improvement of purchasing power, the development of skills and know-how, and the improvement of products and services, which is not done unconnectedly. (Wegner, Durayski, & Verschoore Filho, 2017).

Interorganizational relationships are inherent to the cooperative process, acting as a competitive market force, since, despite a given openness to the implementation of isolated actions, the individuals who represent organizations are socially involved in webs and networks of relationships that condition them to cooperate (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2016). This is translated into the perspective that networks promote social relations, reflected in reciprocity and information sharing among economic actors.

Cooperation networks assume a broad organizational perspective (Véras *et al.*, 2019), represented by the conjunction of companies, some of them uses the geographical agglomeration to acquire advantages (Wilkinson, Cerdan, & Dorigon, 2017). In this way, cooperation networks overcome barriers and adversities that are now shared by different kinds of governance (Kano, 2018).

This governance, also conceived in the territorial context, can be implemented through formal social systems, as well as through organizational forms and processes used for the coordination and control of economic activities (Fante & Dallabrida, 2016). Network governance is necessary to face organizational and environmental contingencies, as well as to coordinate and preserve transactions (Mantovani & Guidone 2017).



In the context of social relations, the formalization of norms and procedures is a necessary measure for a better control of collective actions and efficiency in the management of a network, including as a mechanism for neutralizing opportunistic behaviors that weaken the confidence and commitment of actors (Freitas Filho *et al.*, 2018).

Creation of cooperation networks

The networking perspective strategy has motivated the cooperation relationships, interactions, and results from joint actions between small and medium-sized enterprises (Klein, Bortolaso, & Minà, 2020). Cooperation networks derive from the creation of groups of companies that establish lasting relationships, developed through bonds and social relations to the detriment of common or complementary purposes, although legally separated (Júnior *et al.*, 2016).

According to Balestrin and Verschoore (2016), cooperation networks emerge because of the need to better meet current market demands, with effective skills to complement those of one organization isolated. Organizations have different capacities and resources that distinguish them from each other, which contributes to flexibility and agility to face market demands and environmental uncertainties.

Some authors point to the essential benefits for training, maintenance, and development of networks, such as access to information, resources, markets, and technologies. Also, the advantage of learning and promoting economies of scale and scope is added, which allows the achievement of strategic objectives, such as sharing risks and outsourcing stages of the chain and organizational functions (Soviar, Holubčíka, & Vodáka, 2017).

Studies indicate motivating factors that influence the creation of cooperation networks related to the search of companies to obtain and/or sustain different resources to face competitors outside the network (Freitas Filho *et al.*, 2018). The motivating factors related to market competitiveness were systematized by Balestrin and Verschoore (2008; 2016), based on a literature review about the following propositions: scale and market power; access to solutions; learning and innovation; reduction of costs and risks, and social relationships, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - Competitive motivating factors in the creation of cooperation networks

Competitive Motivating Factors	Definition	Elements
Market scale and power	Benefits obtained as a result of the growth in the number of network members. The larger the number of companies, the greater the network's ability to achieve gains in scale and market power.	Bargaining power. Broad business relationships. Representativeness. Credibility. Legitimacy. Market strength.
Access to solutions	Services, products, and infrastructure available as a network for the development of its members.	Training. Business consulting. Shared marketing. Prospecting opportunities. Credit guarantee. Digital inclusion. Marketing structures.
Learning and innovation	Sharing ideas and experiences among the members and the innovative	Dissemination of information and experiences. Collective innovations. Generation of differentials. Internal and



Competitive Motivating Factors	Definition	Elements
	actions developed together by the participants.	external benchmarking. Value-added expansion.
Reduction of cost and risk	The advantage of dividing among the associates the costs and risks of certain actions and investments common to participants.	Shared activities. Confidence in new investments. Complementarity. Transactional facility. Productivity.
Social relationships	It concerns the deepening of relationships between individuals, the growth of family feeling, and the evolution of the group's relationships beyond those purely economic.	Limitation of opportunism. Increased trust. Accumulation of social capital. Family ties. Reciprocity. Internal cohesion.

Source: Adapted from Balestrin and Verschoore (2008, p.1053; 2016).

The understanding of the factors presented by the authors implicates the gains that companies want from the establishment of cooperation networks. According to Verschoore and Balestrin (2008; 2016), rational agents who act through networks are driven by the possibility of obtaining benefits collectively.

Thus, it is relevant to understand the importance of competitive motivating factors related to the establishment of networks and their implications in the interorganizational relationship. This understanding is part of one stage of the research conducted to identify the competitive factors that have motivated the formation of the biscuit cooperation network and stimulated the establishment of interorganizational bonds between companies, moved by the social actors representing them.

Facilitators and hindlers of interorganizational relationships

In addition to identify the market factors that motivate the creation of networks, it is important to understand the conditions of interorganizational relationships and how they induce companies to develop joint actions, since the motivations inherent to social relationships can impact the level of trust and commitment and, consequently, the development of the network (Klein, Bortolaso, & Minà, 2020).

Studies point to the facilitating and hindering factors, which can be analyzed both at the organizational and interorganizational levels, which instigate or encourage the formation of cooperation networks, as well as influence the development and maintenance of relationships between organizations (Freitas Filho *et al.*, 2018).

For Albano, Araújo, and Reinhard (2017), facilitating factors are present in negotiations, agreements, and organizational routines; power, governance, reputation, information exchange, and specific assets can be analyzed. In Table 2, the authors take back some facilitating factors from empirical studies, as below:



Table 2 - Facilitating factors of interorganizational relationships

Facilitating Factors	Importance
Power	When an organization participates in a network and/or relationship, it must be aware of its effective positioning on this network. The power of the organization can be measured by some factors, such as independence from its suppliers and strategic positioning in the network.
Governance	Participating organizations seek to solve any conflicts that may arise, especially in complex environments.
Reputation	Reputation is established through a series of past behaviors, the more successful the attitudes, the better the reputation and even the search for certain partners.
Information Exchange	A key factor for two or more organizations to establish a relationship. An efficient information exchange facilitates other aspects such as trust and governance. When this process takes place efficiently, also provides better resource utilization and access to markets and other partners.
Specific Assets	The investments made by the partners to achieve the partnership. These investments can be in technology, processes, human resources, and others. The more a partner makes investments in a relationship, the more it encourages the other partners, facilitating the development of the relationship.

Source: Adapted from Albano, Araújo, and Reinhard (2017 p.80).

Albano, Araújo, and Reinhard (2017) relate the power with the organization's ability to hold some necessary resources for the other participants of the network, so the property can sustain its position and participation in the network.

Governance relates to the management of network relationships (Mantovani & Guidone, 2017), which involves definition of roles, as interaction and collaboration between organizations, coordination mechanisms, competencies and resources involved, relational and financial risks, costs of transactions, strategic intention, and the complexity of the environment (Wegner, Durayski, & Verschoore Filho, 2017).

Also, as a facilitating factor of relationships there is emphasis on reputation, consolidated through recognition of honesty, when the partner acts as agreed (Soviar, Holubčíka, & Vodáka, 2017). In addition, the exchange of information generates impacts on power relationships and specific assets are assumed as investments for transactions (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2016).

To understand interorganizational relationships, it is also necessary to understand the factors that hinder the occurrence of interactions. Empirical evidence has revealed the main factors that hinder the creation of interorganizational relationships (Júnior *et al.*, 2016; Silva Filho *et al.*, 2017; Freitas Filho *et al.*, 2018).

Table 3 relates the hinders, their importance, and the authors who refer to these factors in several studies.

Table 3 - Hindering factors for interorganizational relationships

Hinder Factors	Importance	Authors
Joint actions	They facilitate relationship practices that rebound mutual benefits. The lack of closer relationships inhibits participation in the network.	Freitas Filho <i>et al.</i> (2018); Klein, Bortolaso, and Minà (2020).



Communication	Promotes the sharing of information and closer relationships on the network. If network communication is not satisfactory, relationships are weakened.	Balestrin; Verschoore (2016); Júnior <i>et al.</i> (2016); Klein, Bortolaso, and Minà (2020).
Competition	The purchasing power of large companies or networks impacts the competitiveness of smaller companies/networks. One of the motivations of companies when entering network relationships is related to cost reduction in purchases.	Balestrin; Verschoore (2016); Júnior <i>et al.</i> (2016); Silva <i>et al.</i> (2017).
Market dynamics	The changes that occur in the market are motivated by complex factors related to the environmental, political, and social context, the quality of products and/or services, logistics in the delivery of something, in addition to costs. These dynamics influence interorganizational relationships.	Balestrin; Verschoore (2016); Júnior <i>et al.</i> (2016); Freitas Filho <i>et al.</i> (2018).
Centralization of decisions	Interorganizational relationships are strengthened as decision-making is shared among network members. The centralization of decisions is opposed to group behavior.	Balestrin and Verschoore (2016); Júnior <i>et al.</i> (2016); Silva <i>et al.</i> (2017).
Suppliers	The management of collective purchases and the strengthening of relationships with suppliers influence interorganizational relationships.	Williams (2005); Hennart (2008); Marion <i>et al.</i> (2014); Freitas Filho <i>et al.</i> (2018).
Lack of network knowledge	Knowledge about interorganizational relationships create opportunities for companies, such as access to key resources, incentives for adding value to activities, and increasing the willingness to explore new opportunities.	Schilk and Cook (2013); Cheng and Fu (2013); White, Currie and Lockett (2014); Balestrin and Verschoore (2016).
Participation of network members in meetings	Active participation in network meetings enables members to expand knowledge about networks, as well as favor relationships. The frequency of meetings keeps participants more integrated into network actions.	Silva (2012); Júnior <i>et al.</i> (2016); Macedo <i>et al.</i> (2017).

Source: Elaborated by the authors from the theoretical research (2020).

Based on the theoretical/empirical evidence shown in Table 3, it is observed that cooperation between companies is not always balanced and easy to manage, since intense and recurrent interactions produce conflicts, for example, those related to the retention of benefits (Freitas Filho *et al.*, 2018). In cooperation networks relations must be kept close and harmonious in order to support joint actions.

Another issue related to the establishment of relationships concerns the obstacles originated when asymmetries are revealed, such as the rise of leaders who start to exert a strong influence on strategies of other companies in the network, inhibiting group cooperation actions (Klein & Bortolaso, 2020). The management of the network must flow from the decentralization of decisions, corroborating the group behavior, in addition to the decision-making process being more structured and formalized.

Interorganizational relationships are also strongly influenced by the level of cooperation. Thus, knowledge about the structuring and constitution of network relationships need to be clarified and improved among network members, in order to promote active participation in meetings and events, enhancing collaborative levels (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2016).



Both facilitating and hindering factors are important perspectives to be analyzed, since they imply the starting point for articulation and cohesion of interorganizational relationships (Macedo *et al.*, 2017). This understanding also integrates one of the stages of the research conducted to analyze the establishment of interorganizational bonds, describing facilitators and hinders to relationships.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES AND DATABASE

This study adopts the qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive method, under the interpretative bias (Creswell, 2014), to understand behaviors and interactions of actors in the creation of a biscuit cooperation network and, consequently, in the establishment of interorganizational relationships (Kalof, Dan, & Dietz, 2008).

As qualitative research, the study follows a typical inductive process, since, despite starting from a generic theoretical design, and proposes new theoretical contributions through insights from data collection and analysis (Kalof, Dan, & Dietz, 2008). The case study is applied as a research strategy, since it has the benefits from the previous development of theoretical propositions directing data collection and analysis (Gil, 2008).

The research was conducted by a single case study (Yin, 2015), represented by the Rede de Cooperação do Biscoito, located geographically in the Southwest Region of State of Bahia, Brazil. The network includes the municipalities of Condeúba/BA and Vitória da Conquista/BA, the latter city is considered the central place of meetings and headquarters of most companies and institutions, i. e., the stage of the main social relations.

Characterizing the selected case, Vitória da Conquista and Condeúba are municipalities in the state of Bahia, unit of the Brazilian Federation pointed out as a highlight in the national scenario in 2019 due to the growth (1.2%) of gross domestic product (GDP) having been higher than Brazilian GDP (1.1%), according to data released by the Superintendência de Estudos Econômicos e Sociais (Superintendence of Economic and Social Studies - SEPLAN, 2020).

Vitória da Conquista/BA is the third largest among the 417 municipalities in the state of Bahia, behind Salvador and Feira de Santana, and the fifth largest city in the interior of the Northeast, after Feira de Santana/BA, Campina Grande/PB, Caruaru/PE, and Petrolina/PE (IBGE, 2020).

The unit of analysis (Yin, 2015) of this research comprises the formation of the network of cooperation analyzed at the organizational levels, because it focuses on organizations to understand the motivating factors to the assumption of new business forms based on cooperation, and the interorganizational, since it seeks a deepening in the understanding of social relations, through mobilizations and interactions between actors.

The subjects of analysis are the actors that represent the companies producing and marketing the biscuit, as well as by local development agents representing institutions such as Sebrae/BA, Movimento Pro-Conquista, Commercial and Industrial Associations of the municipalities of the region, Banks, Development Agencies, Business Entities, and Municipal Governments.

The subjects were identified through a list provided by the biscuit project manager, representative of Sebrae/BA. The list indicated 23 (twenty-three) actors between producers and traders, 10 (ten) of them with more actions in the cooperation network. In addition to the producers/traders, three other actors were identified among local development agents. The 13 (thirteen) actors identified as more involved with the actions of the cooperation network were selected for the application of the research instrument.



The research instruments used in the case study were the draft of the case study protocol, for recording the notes from direct observations, and the semi-structured script for conducting the interviews, both elaborated from the literature review and the theoretical framework. The draft and the interview script are part of the case study protocol (Yin, 2015). The semi-structured interview script consisted of 41 (forty-one) questions addressed to producers/traders and local development agents.

The sources of evidence for the case study were analysed by three techniques, documentary research, direct observations, and semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2015), and it was necessary to explore these techniques through data triangulation (primary and secondary) and information (Creswell, 2014) in order to make the study valid and reliable.

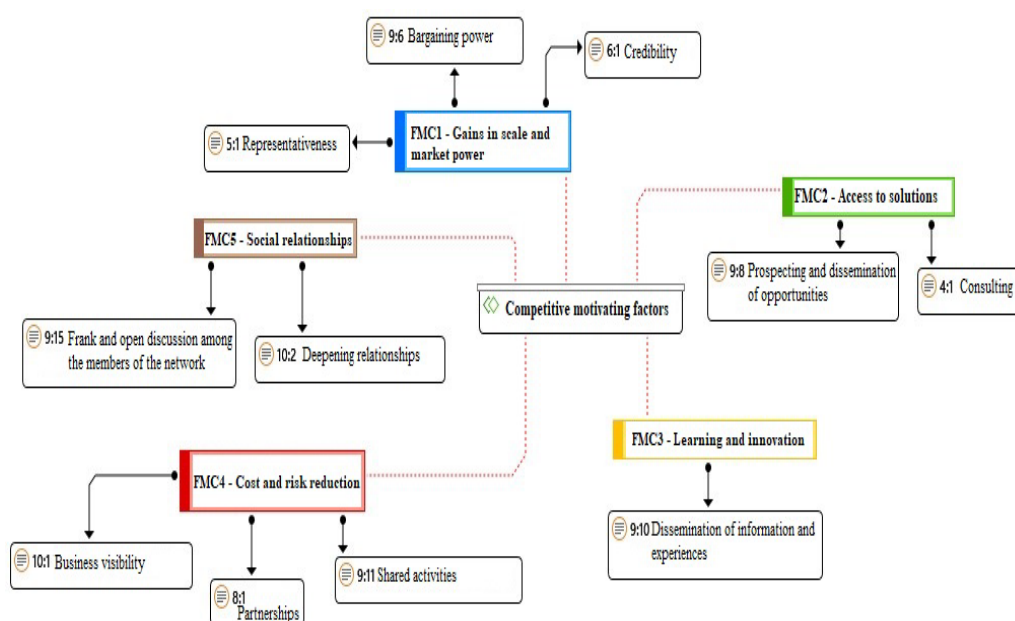
The multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2015) were verified through the place where social relations, actors, events, and processes take place (Creswell, 2014). The method of data processing was conducted from content analysis, a set of methodological instruments applicable to descriptions, inferences, and interpretations of communications (Silva & Fossá, 2015; Bardin, 2016).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Competitive motivating factors in the creation of cooperation networks

The research investigated the incidence of competitive motivating factors for the creation of the biscuit cooperation network. According to Verschoore and Balestrin (2008; 2016), the factors that motivate these new business configurations are related to market competitiveness, supported by the assumptions (A1) gaining scale and market power, (A2) access to solutions, (A3) learning and innovation, (A4) reducing costs and risks, and (A5) social relations. The meanings found in the statements of the actors of the biscuit production chain in relation to competitive motivating factors are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Network of meaning of competitive motivating factors



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data, content analysis from Atlas.ti®

Table 4 provides a synthesis of the main evidence regarding the competitive motivating factors of the biscuit cooperation network and the theoretical-practical importance.

Table 4 - Evidence related to competitive network motivating factors

Competitive motivating factors	Key evidence in the biscuit cooperation network	Theoretical-practical discussion
Market scale and power	Representativeness; Credibility; Bargaining power.	The search for representativeness, credibility, and market power increase public exposure and the growth of the number of associates, contributing to a greater capacity of cooperation network to generate opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises to enjoy greater power in the market they integrate and participate in (Balestrin; Verschoore, 2016; Kano, 2018).
Access to solutions	Prospecting and dissemination of opportunities; Consulting.	Access to solutions is an aspect that helps, especially small businesses, in solving usual business management issues (Balestrin; Verschoore, 2016), as the decisions for marketing investments aimed at prospecting and disseminating opportunities. In addition, the identification of opportunities, as well as weaknesses, can be made possible through training and consulting (Júnior <i>et al.</i> , 2016).
Learning and innovation	Dissemination of information and experiences	Interactions and continual practices of collaboration among the actors have repercussions on the construction of new concepts, methods, styles, and ways to approach the management, problem solving, and development of their business, from information and knowledge dissemination (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2016). About innovation, cooperation networks enable rapid access to technologies through information circulating in the chain (Holubčík & Soviar, 2017).
Cost and risk reduction	Shared activities; Partnerships (complementarity); Business visibility.	Cooperation networks enable the division of common actions and investments among members, with the sharing of expenditures and results of collective efforts (Soviar, Holubčíka, & Vodáka, 2017). Complementarity between companies, observed in shared activities and in establishment of partnerships, enable the exploration of new opportunities for producers/traders from the visibility of the business, such as events and fairs, based on the sharing of costs and risks from these initiatives (Freitas Filho <i>et al.</i> , 2018).
Social relations	Closer relations (expansion of trust); Frank and open discussion among the members of the network (internal cohesion).	Another motivating aspect of cooperation networks is social relations that, when deepened, can promote the accumulation of trust and social capital, important elements that stimulate the individual and collective capacity of companies in the network (Wegner, Durayski, & Verschoore Filho, 2017; Klein, Bortolaso, & Minà, 2020).

Source: Survey data (2020).

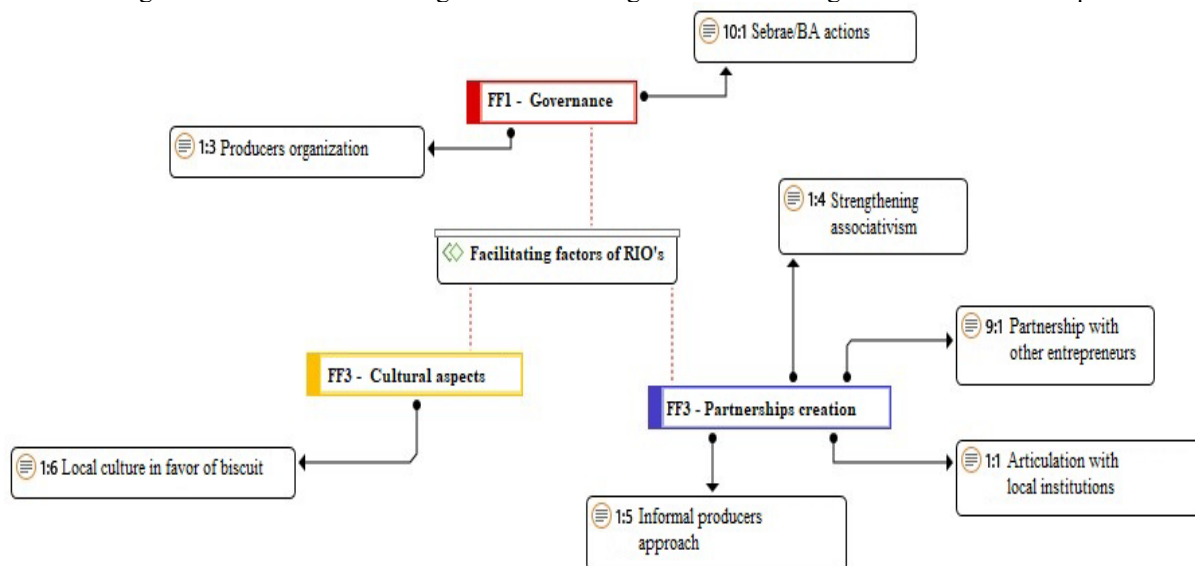
Facilitators of interorganizational relationships

The investigation on the factors related to the creation of the cooperation network also reaches the facilitating factors of interorganizational relationships, present in negotiations, agreements, and organizational routines. Empirical studies reveal power, governance,



reputation, information exchange, and specific assets, as main facilitators incidents on interorganizational networks (Albano, Araújo, & Reinhard, 2017). The meanings found in the statements of the actors of the biscuit production chain in relation to the facilitating factors of interorganizational relationships are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Network of meaning of the facilitating factors of Interorganizational relationships



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data, content analysis from Atlas.ti®.
 Legend: Facilitating factors of RIO's = Facilitating factors of Interorganizational relationships

Chart 5 provides a synthesis of the main evidence regarding the facilitating factors of interorganizational relationships of the biscuit cooperation network and its theoretical-practical importance.

Table 5 - Evidence related to factors facilitating relationships

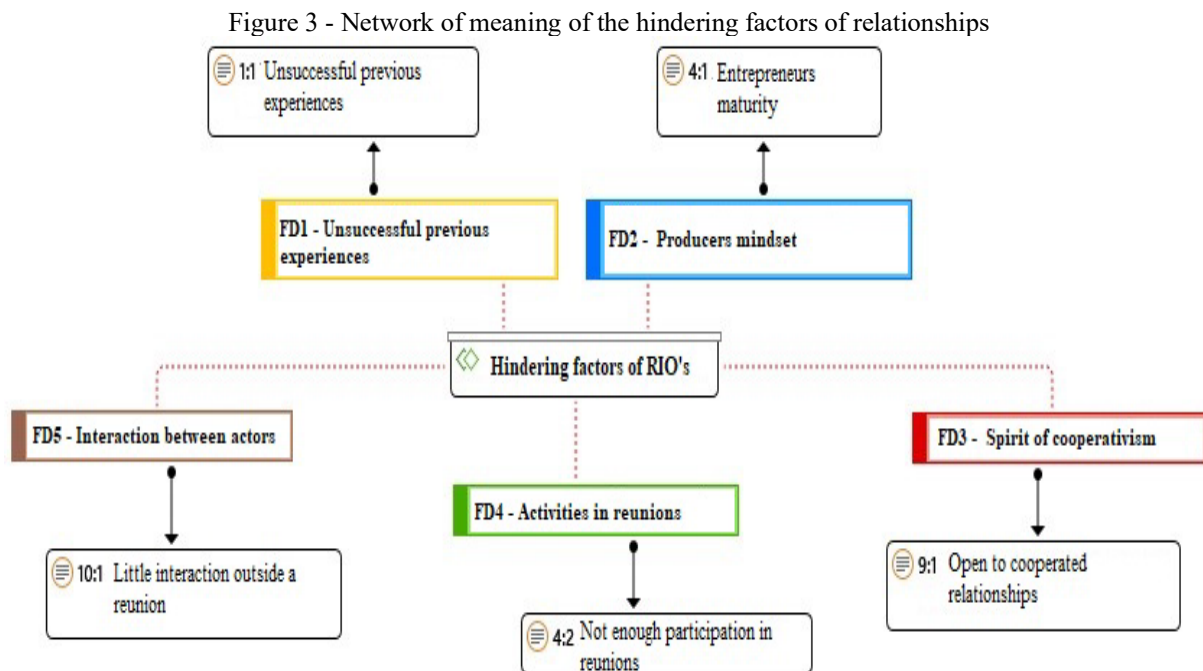
Facilitating Factors	Key evidence in the biscuit cooperation network	Theoretical-practical discussion
Partnerships	Strengthening associativism from partnerships between producers/traders and institutions, closing informal producers.	Partnerships are important elements in the field of coordination of cooperative network actions, influencing resource management for the desired joint results (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2016).
Governance	Creation of the forum of debate and discussions between producers/traders, still intense performance of Sebrae.	The organizations participating in the networks seek to resolve any conflicts that may arise, especially in complex environments discussing with the actors involved (Wegner, Durayski, & Verschoore Filho, 2017).
Local culture	Producers/traders and local community involved with the value of the biscuits produced.	The networks stimulate the transformative capacity of the producing regions, prioritizing local autonomy and the authenticity of production, as well as the peculiarities related to their history, culture, or tradition, achieving the broad objectives of improvement throughout the community (Leme, Aguiar, & Rezende, 2019).

Source: Survey data (2020).

Interorganizational relationships hinderers

As for the hindering factors of relationships, empirical evidence points out the main elements involving the creation of interorganizational relationships, such as joint actions, communication, competition, market dynamics, centralization of decisions, suppliers, lack of knowledge of networks, and effectiveness in participation in meetings, among others (Júnior *et al.*, 2016; Silva Filho *et al.*, 2017).

The meanings found in the statements of the actors of the biscuit production chain in relation to the facilitating factors of interorganizational relationships are shown in Figure 3.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data, content analysis from Atlas.ti®
 Legend: Hindering factors of RIO's = Hindering factors of Interorganizational relationships

Table 6 provides a synthesis of the main evidence scans in relation to the hindering factors of interorganizational relationships emerged in the biscuit cooperation network and the theoretical-practical importance.

Table 6 - Evidence related to the hindering factors of relationships

Hindering Factors	Key evidence in the biscuit cooperation network	Theoretical-practical discussion
Unsuccessful previous experiences	Past experiences imply current relationships.	The establishment of trust, based on the understanding of the "two way street" in the relationship between the actors, can favor the overcoming of barriers to achieve the cooperative goals (Macedo <i>et al.</i> , 2017).
Business mindset	Producers/traders do not understand massively the new cooperative business dynamics.	The adoption of business initiatives based on cooperation relationships can help meet the needs not met individually (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2016).

Spirit of cooperativism	The prospect of cooperation has been raised by producers/traders and development agents.	The cooperative relationship builds the bases of social capital, which, in turn, generates a better performance of institutions (Klein, Bortolaso, & Minà, 2020).
Participation of network members in meetings	Not all network members attend all meetings.	Active participation in network meetings enables members to expand knowledge about networks, as well as favor relationships. The frequency of meetings keeps participants more integrated with network actions (Soviar, Holubčíka, & Vodáka, 2017).
Little interaction between actors	The interactions between the actors are still incipient.	The relations established in a cooperation network must be kept close and harmonious in order to support joint actions (Mantovani & Guidone, 2017).
Lack of network knowledge	The actors have little knowledge about cooperation networks.	Knowledge about interorganizational relationships create opportunities for companies, such as access to key resources, incentives for adding value to activities, and increasing the desire to explore new opportunities (Holubčík & Soviar, 2021).

Source: Survey data (2020).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Cooperation networks emerge as differentiating factors for small and medium-sized enterprises, they take ownership of competitive advantages from new organizational configurations to quickly achieve skills and competences, i.e., new learning, which increase their competitiveness power and, consequently, create new business opportunities.

In this sense, the present research has achieved the goal of contributing in a theoretical-practical way, so entrepreneurs and agents of local development, related to the biscuit production chain, adapt the concepts and characteristics of the new business configurations based on network cooperation strategies to promote regional and market development in the Identity Territory of Southwest Bahia.

In general, from the results found, it is noted that the competitive market factors that have led to the creation of the cooperation network are related to the search for representativeness, credibility, and complementarity, aiming visibility and prospecting for new business, although, in practice, interorganizational relationships are quite limited.

In a network of cooperation, interorganizational relationships need to be promising, since successful cooperation is one of the elementary activities of the network and suitable for the strategic management of a group of companies, as suggested by Soviar, Holubčíka, and Vodáka (2017) in a study on the management of cooperation of soviet industry.

In addition, the decision to enter into interorganizational relationships in the biscuit cooperation network has been facilitated by associativism, local culture and the participation of local development agents, especially Sebrae (BA). However, the actions find hinders to strengthen the confidence and commitment of entrepreneurs in the joint actions of the cooperation network.

In a literature review, Kano (2018) raises the importance of engagement in a joint strategy, as well as the relevance of relational capital generation in the governance of a value chain. Although they are social mechanisms associated with challenges and limitations and, therefore, do not guarantee competitive success, when implemented in an integrative way, these



mechanisms facilitate coordination (saving on limited rationality), reduce the risks of imperfect effort of partners (saving on limited reliability), and stimulate innovation and the development of new capabilities.

Therefore, for the advancement of the actions of the biscuit cooperation network, it is recommended that entrepreneurs take the preponderance of the network, from their already elected representatives, with the creation of clear social rules and ethical conduct as a measure of containment to the opportunistic behaviors observed. The rule of the network's actions contributes to better levels of trust and commitment of the actors echoing on the future perspectives of the biscuit entrepreneurs.

When assuming the role, entrepreneurs also need to develop the strategic planning of the cooperation network, with provision of a systematic plan of actions to working groups and individual actors, as well as a calendar of cyclical meetings and awareness-raising and exposure programs with the local market.

Finally, the research developed has some limitations providing reflections on the research carried out, especially by the qualitative nature of the investigation itself. The method of information collection was based on an intentional non-probabilistic sampling for convenience and accessibility, providing restrictions regarding the generalization of the results.

As recommendations for future studies, it is suggested to carry out: a) research on biscuit production chains from other Brazilian regions; b) research on production chains of other branches of activity but valuing local territorial identities; and c) research on cooperation networks with more advanced stages of development. From this complementarity, it will be possible to comparatively analyze the process of creating cooperation networks in regions and productive sectors.

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