



Resource dependence and transaction costs: towards a convergent model

Dependência de recursos e custos de transação: rumo a um modelo convergente

Arleson Eduardo Monte Palma Lopes¹

Abstract: The present study addresses the process of inter-organizational relationships from two theoretical perspectives: resource dependence and transaction costs. First, the text presents a bibliographic review on the two theoretical constructs; next, it discusses how the use of these theories can contribute to understanding the interorganizational phenomenon. Despite the divergence between the two perspectives, the authors conclude that they are convergent based on the bibliographic review. The convergence of these conceptions relates to the fact that organizational relations are a key factor for the functioning of companies. The resource dependence perspective suggests that resources are distributed in the environment and that firms develop organizational relationships to obtain them; in contrast, the perspective of transaction costs refers to the relations of economic exchange between organizations. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the assumptions of these two theoretical perspectives to understand inter-organizational relationships.

Keywords: Resource dependence; Transaction costs; Inter-organizational relationships.

Resumo: No presente trabalho abordaremos o processo das relações interorganizacionais utilizando em sua análise duas perspectivas: a dependência de recursos e a teoria dos custos de transação. No primeiro momento, o texto apresentará uma revisão bibliográfica sobre os dois construtos teóricos e em seguida será feita uma discussão de como a utilização dessas teorias pode contribuir para a compreensão do fenômeno interorganizational. Apesar das divergências entre as duas perspectivas, os autores, na revisão bibliográfica feita, concluem que elas são convergentes. Na convergência de suas concepções, discorrem a respeito de as relações organizacionais serem o fator-chave para o funcionamento das empresas. A perspectiva da dependência de recursos sugere a distribuição dos recursos no ambiente e, para obtê-los, as organizações desenvolvem relações organizacionais. Já na perspectiva dos custos de transação, discorrem sobre as relações de trocas econômicas entre as organizações. Portanto, para compreender as relações interorganizacionais é preciso considerar as suposições das perspectivas.

Palavras-chave: Dependência de recursos; Custos de transação; Relações interorganizacionais.

1 Introduction

In recent years, theories of organizational studies have increasingly moved to see organizations as open systems. When viewed as open systems, organizations conceive their support in the interactions they develop with the environment. Thus, organizations acquire throughout the process the ability to adapt to and manipulate the environment (Morgan, 2002; Thomazine & Bispo, 2014).

Therefore, the tight leverage of competition in the market has required organizations to be quick and flexible, creating less centralized environment structures. Organizations end up in this way creating a set of relationships and links between them (Puffal & Puffal, 2014).

As they seek to influence their environment, organizations draw strategic alliances and adjustments that allow them to efficiently control resources. The establishment of interorganizational links implies directly in negotiations and concessions, therefore, there is a relative loss of freedom and for this the organizations develop strategies with the intention of achieving greater stability and at the same time control over the resources of which they look for the maximum to maintain on their guardianship (Motta & Vasconcelos, 2015).

The perspective of resource dependence starts from the position that organizational management acts efficiently, seeking alternatives to the implications related to the distribution of critical resources the

¹ Universidade Federal do Pará – UFPA, Rua Três Maria, 115, Vila Nova, CEP 68600-000, Bragança, PA, Brazil, e-mail: arlesonlopes93@gmail.com

Received Mar. 16, 2016 - Accepted July 14, 2016

Financial support: None.

activities of organizations in a given environment (Rocha et al., 2011). The organizational capacity to catalyze vital resources and interorganizational management are fundamental tools in this perspective (Pfeffer, 1972; Rossetto & Rossetto, 1999).

Thus, according to Thomazine & Bispo (2014, p. 2)

[...] organizations must trade relations with other organizations, they can change structures and behaviors to acquire and maintain the necessary resources.

Transactions that arise from the exchange relationship between organizations involve costs, as well as control and power. The transaction costs perspective is based on analysis of the importance of organizations for economic appreciation, given that the increasing failures that can arise in the market increase transaction costs (Williamson, 1979; Balestrin & Vargas, 2002; Pereira et al., 2014; Thomazine & Bispo, 2014).

Thus, the starting point of this article is a theoretical essay that seeks the comparative discussion of the two theoretical approaches: resource dependence and transaction costs, as well as its potential for complementarity to explain the dynamism of interorganizational relationships.

Although the two theoretical currents adopt divergent views in their analysis basis, in the bibliographic review it can be noted that they intertwine when they recognize the effects of the exchange relations that arise in the organizational field.

2 Resource dependence

Analogously to the theory of open systems and contingency theory, the theory of resource dependence assumes that firms are dependent on the environment when it comes to obtaining the resources necessary for their survival and development (Rossetto & Rossetto, 1999; Bucelli et al., 2014; Motta & Vasconcelos, 2015).

According to Balsini et al. (2005), the theory of resource dependence has as its conception the fact that organizations are not able to produce all the resources they need for their survival. That is, not all the activities carried out by the organizations are self-sufficient. Additionally, Rossetto & Rossetto (1999), Andrade & Amboni (2011) e Veiga et al. (2014) stand out that the resource dependence theory recognizes the effects caused by the environment on the results of the strategies adopted by the organizations, but also, they admit the importance of the managerial role in knowing how to raise the necessary resources to obtain a satisfactory performance.

Thus, for Motta & Vasconcelos (2015) due to the difficulties that organizations have in capturing the resources in the environment necessary for their survival, they draw strategic alliances with other

companies that have access to those resources that they need to compete in the market. In this context, the resource dependence theory focuses on the complexity, dynamism and level of wealth of the environments where the organizations operate. For the authors, the level of control of the indispensable resources that the company depends on is a crucial factor in the approach to resource dependence.

Already Cunha (1993) e Medeiros & Paiva (2012) detach that the expansion of organizations' dependence on resources depends on four attributes: (1) the influence of resources offered by another company; (2) the distribution of resources in the environment, this may increase the degree of difficulty in obtaining them; (3) the existence or otherwise of a monopoly of a given group of organizations over resources; (4) existence or lack of substitute resources / services. According to Pfeffer (1972), organizations adopt several strategies for the efficient management of environmental interdependence. Thus, the author highlights three factors for the environmental management process: organizations should minimize symbiotic interdependence; Reduction of commercial or competitive interdependence relations through strategies to obtain resources and diversification in order to avoid dependence on the environment.

Rocha et al. (2011, p. 37) emphasize that in

Resource Dependence, organizations would be constantly seeking discretion, understood here as a capacity for action freed from rules or limits imposed and controlled by society and other organizations.

Therefore, organizations need to be more strategic about using their resources, making it more difficult to imitate those resources. In this circumstance, companies that are able to discover the most effective way to develop a certain activity in relation to their competitors will present superior performance in this field (Souza, 2011). According to Abbade (2010), strategies represent an alternative for organizations to minimize dependence on the environment, exchange new resources, markets, achieve economies of scale and gain competitive advantage.

In this sense, organizations are dependent on the resources they need, and, in turn, are dependent on the environment in which they are inserted. The resources in which companies are dependent are: technology, raw materials, financial resources, personnel, among others (Sacomano & Truzzi, 2002). According to Trevisan (2013), the level of companies' dependence on critical resources ends up influencing strategic actions and the decision-making process of organizations, emphasizing that these can be explained in a particular way.

Rossetto & Rossetto (2005), Cardenas & Lopes (2006) stand out that organizations must strategize in order to capture resources in the most efficient

way possible, as resources are scarce and difficult to imitate and substitute, leading companies to make strategic alliances. Therefore, when a company needs a certain resource for its production or operation in the market, there are three ways to achieve it: producing it, seeking it in the market or achieving through strategic alliances with organizations that have these resources. According to Motta & Vasconcelos (2015), companies must develop a symbiotic interdependence that is integral, but not competitive or exclusive. As an example of this interorganizational relationship, it is possible to highlight the interlacing between suppliers and customers, when output or product of an organization is to constitute a supply of raw material or input to another company.

Trvisan (2013) corroborates that organizations develop, among their strategic choices, ways of acting towards the environment, with the intention of manipulating it. In this way, organizations create product/service demands or seek alliances with other companies in order to govern the competition.

In synthesis, the resource dependency theory adopts a voluntarist view when it comes to the strategies of organizations to face the contingencies imposed by the environment. The adherents of resource dependence theory emphasize that organizations seek to capture resources in the environment, emphasizing the interorganizational relationship in the acquisition of these resources.

3 Theory of transaction costs

The Economic Theory of Transaction Costs arises from the studies of Coase and later formulated in the decade 1940 by Williamson, considering that the organizations in the opportunism like a subtle and generalized base of the human species, establish interorganizational relations. Thus, the transaction was the basic point of analysis of the organization and the central purpose of the economic organization was constituted through the relations of exchange (Costa, 2009; Schubert, 2012).

The transaction costs perspective makes an analytical cut that privileges the efficient analysis of contractual relations between organizations, and the probability of the study of organizations as “institutional arrangements” that lead to transactions, through formal contracts (rigid by laws) or alliances Informal (Cunha et al., 2015).

Transaction costs are necessary for the process of negotiation, monitoring and control of exchanges between the organizations and economic agents involved, as well as the guarantees of compliance with a contract (Ilha, 2010; Diniz & Marconatto, 2011; Motta & Vasconcelos, 2015). Thus, the transaction cost perspective discusses the importance of organizations for economic analysis, given the growing imperfections that arise in the

market, impacting on the increase in transaction costs (Balestrin & Vargas, 2002; Pereira et al., 2014).

The factors that develop the constructs of transaction cost economics are: opportunism as a central perspective on transaction costs, opportunism in economic activities involving investments in physical and human activities, and efficient information processing that is one of the important concepts for Measurement of transaction costs (Williamson, 1979).

In this sense, organizations need to establish strategies to prevent the opportunism of their trading partners, as explained by Viana & Añez (2008, p. 68) in the following approach:

Organizations are seen as the answer to uncertain environments, and commercial partners whose reliability is unknown and who may act opportunistically are included in these environments. Placing transactions under the organization’s hierarchy allows monitoring of behavior through direct supervision, auditing, and other control mechanisms.

Lopes (2004, p. 10) states that

[...] the market is regarded as the classic structure of governance, in which anonymous (faceless) buyers and sellers find themselves for an instant exchange of standardized goods from the perspective of price equilibrium.

The theory of transaction costs is crucial to the decision-making process, since institutions are permeable both internally and externally by the relations of exchange between economic agents, whether individuals or firms. In an environment where it requires a strong degree of specialization and a rational division of labor in which the transaction is the focal point, transaction reduction encourages cooperation and attenuates opportunism, increasing production mechanisms efficiently (Schlabitz, 2008).

The constructs analyzed by the Economic Theory of Transaction Costs are the specificities of the assets involved in the transaction, the degree of frequency in which the transactions occur and the level of uncertainty of the contracts. However, the theoretical approach considers, on the other hand, aspects related to human behavior: limited rationality and opportunism. Uncertainty and level of competitiveness may vary according to market nuances (Gary & Spencer, 2000; Arbage, 2004; Silva, 2006; Schubert, 2012).

Organizations should draw up a contingency plan to prevent opportunism and uncertainties, minimizing risks and therefore transaction costs. Therefore, some tools are used: contracts, guarantees, insurance and higher prices (Cavalcanti et al., 2002).

Thus, companies seeking to prevent opportunism, write contracts well detailed, providing greater guarantees and predictability. However, even if the contracts are well detailed, they will never be

complete and will predict all the contingencies that may arise in an environment with constant complexity (Cavalcanti et al., 2002). For Kato & Margarido (2000), the contingencies that are not part of the ex-ante add ex-post costs, causing the economic agents involved to renegotiate the contracts when the contingency factors are manifested.

When organizations choose to verticalize their production chain, they do not only understand that the transaction costs of the market will be lower, but because they believe in a degree of prominent recognition (Santos et al., 2014).

In synthesis, the Economic Theory of Transaction Costs highlights that economic agents and organizations, in complex and dynamic environments, seek to manipulate the changes and influence their course through the mechanism of exchanges (Motta & Vasconcelos, 2015).

4 Comparative analysis of theories the dependence of resources and transaction costs

The theoretical contributions that the two approaches have caused in organizational studies are quite relevant, however, due to the market dynamics that organizations face in order to support themselves in the market; To use only one approach to analyze the various facets that involve the organizational field, would not give us the necessary evidence to understand market dynamism. Thus, the theoretical propositions made are analyzed from a comparative perspective identifying the divergent and convergent attributes between them, of which they can be used as a complementary model in the organizational process.

The correlation between resource dependency theory and transaction cost theory highlights that the greater the degree of dependence of the organization on the resources offered by the other, the greater will be the control that organization will exercise over the company of which it Depends on resources, with the aim of minimizing uncertainty and the level of dependence. Thus, the greater the degree of control an organization seeks to exert over another to reduce uncertainty, the greater the transaction costs involved in the operation (Dimaggio & Powell, 2005; Camilo et al., 2012; Thomazine & Bispo, 2014; Motta & Vasconcelos, 2015).

In view of the above, Medeiros & Paiva (2012, p. 6) explain the vulnerability of organizations in the environment and the strategies that organizations adopt to minimize this dependence.

The greater the dependence of particular resources on the part of an organization, the greater its vulnerability to the market. Therefore, in order to reduce this vulnerability, the company aligns with other agents, which gives it greater access to the

resources it needs, reducing its dependence on the environment.

The organizational structure process is based on several attributes, which include elements such as: increased interactions between organizations; Advent of domination architecture and interorganizational co-ordinations; The resourcefulness of the information load that organizations must deal with; And the expansion of mutual awareness between organizations operating in the same niche market (Dimaggio & Powell, 2005; Gonçalves; 2008).

Similarly, when the organization runs the risk of running out of resources that it needs, it will enter into a formal agreement with another organization on which it depends. This resource dependency ratio will increase transaction costs (Motta & Vasconcelos, 2015).

Organizations develop exchange relationships with other institutions, and can modify structures and behaviors to catalyze and maintain resources. The interorganizational relationship between organizations involves costs and a perspective of power and control. Therefore, the emphasis given to the organizational relationship has unified aspects to the costs of contract management and governance structures, which is what developed the Transaction Costs Theory (Thomazine & Bispo, 2014).

Thus, organizations are controlled through relationships of interdependence with their environment. The relationships of interdependence between organizations are associated with the patterns of exchange of resources and activities of the organization, where these relations partially explain the profitability of the companies (Pfeffer, 1972; Jacobs, 1974; Viana & Añez, 2008).

Bataglia et al. (2009) affirm that the more uncertain the structure of the environment, the greater the degree of vulnerability of organizations in the constitution of exchanges and, consequently, greater efforts will be directed to control uncertainty through the establishment of contracts. Contracts can be structured explicitly and formally, as well as contracts of exhaustive or implicit distribution, as in the case of the formation of informal strategic alliances. This mechanism causes the increasing need to obtain information, negotiation base and control ease, substantially increasing transaction costs.

Therefore, when organizations develop strategic alliances, they generate a relationship of interdependence, which seeks to obtain the resources they need or the formulation of contracts with other organizations in order to prevent opportunism.

Strategic alliances involve voluntary agreements aimed at interorganizational cooperation, most often characterized by the very instability arising from the uncertainty of future partner behavior and

the application of authority to ensure commitment. The high level of authority is related to the governance structure, adopted to monitor, monitor the relationship and established transaction costs (Williamson, 1979; Gary & Spencer, 2000; Arbage, 2004).

Organizations can develop various mechanisms of strategic alliances, as they explain Motta & Vasconcelos (2015, p. 381):

[...] strategies like outsourcing of goods and services, strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions, among other different types of contracts, imply different types of transaction costs, also providing larger or smaller controls of one organization over another.

The assumptions shared by the two theoretical currents bring a great contribution of analysis of the organizational practice. The two approaches converge when they recognize the effects of interorganizational relationships on organizational performance.

Despite the convergence between the two theoretical constructs, when the Transaction Costs Theory is analyzed in isolation from other theoretical currents, it produces a subsocialized view of the organizational field phenomena. In the theory of transaction costs, the absence of considering the social factors and social structures of the processes of the productive chain, distribution and organizational consumptions creates a highly abstract and simplified model of reality. However, this theoretical approach presents a set of attributes, from which it justifies the understanding of the phenomena of the organizational field (Lopes, 2004).

While the resource dependency theory emphasizes organizational decisions and actions and the constant monitoring of the environment (Bucelli et al., 2014). The theory of transaction costs has as presuppositions the relations of exchange between the organizations and the other agents of the environment (Bataglia et al., 2009).

Thus, transaction costs theory views organizations as a governance composition, considering the mechanism of minimizing transaction costs. Therefore, the construction of organizational structures that seek to minimize the implications of limited rationality and protect transactions against opportunism by the various agents involved are crucial for organizations (Dolci & Maçada, 2011).

On the other hand, the resource dependency theory seeks to understand the relationship of organizations and the dependence between institutions reciprocally. Dependence arises when managers perceive the implications that a determining external actor imposes restrictions on the performance and efficiency of their organization, that is, the dependence became inadvisable, because, it threatens the stability and existence (Gueraldi, 2006; Veiga et al., 2014).

Another relevant aspect of resource dependence theory is the process by which organizations seek to reduce the relationship of dependence on the environment, using various strategies, in order to increase their power within the system (Balestrin & Vargas, 2002). In this sense, Veiga et al. (2014) detach that the strategies used by organizations to minimize the interdependence and uncertainties of the environment are: mergers, acquisition, cooperation between companies, exchange of resources or exchange of professional experience between organizations.

Resource dependency theorists adopt a non-deterministic view, considering that managers can manipulate the environment in order to catalyze the resources that organizations need.

Although the Economic Theory of Transaction Costs is based on two pillars: behavioral assumptions (limited rationality, incomplete contracts and opportunism) and the basic characteristics that support the transactions (asset specificity). In this sense, the theory of transaction costs seeks to understand the doubt between internalizing or outsourcing certain means of production. Considering three factors: the uncertainty and difficulty of measuring the transaction; the level of frequency of these transactions and the specificity of the goods or services transacted (Kato & Margarido, 2000; Gueraldi, 2006).

Another relevant aspect of the transaction cost economy is that the prevalence of organizations is not related to the accumulation and exploitation of market power, but rather to the construction of market instruments that aim to minimize transaction costs (Astley & Van de Ven, 2005).

The resource dependence theory emphasizes the ability of organizations to maintain discretion and autonomy over the contingencies that arise throughout the process and the prerogative to control and manipulate the environment in accordance with the objectives proposed by the organizations (Rossetto & Rossetto, 2005).

Theorists of transaction cost theory emphasize the economic transactions that organizations operate by discarding the social context and the influence of these factors on business performance and trading relationships.

The two theoretical currents are divergent by virtue of their focus of analysis; while the resource dependence perspective recognizes the effects of the environment on organizational performance, transaction cost theory is based on the analysis of the economic transactions carried out by the organizations.

The resource dependency perspective also calls attention to the capacity of the environment to provide the resources that organizations need, ie, their main focus is on the ability to provide the resource scarce environment. This interdependence of the organizations with the environment of which they

act, conceive to the environmental factor a decisive role for the companies. Such interdependence may vary according to the availability of resources to organizations (Pfeffer, 1972; Andrade & Amboni, 2011; Thomazine & Bispo, 2014).

However, the theory of transaction costs emphasizes that it is the responsibility of economic agents to choose the appropriate market structure (market or hierarchy), which must take into account the minimization of the transactional difficulties generated by the limited rationality and the opportunism of the agents involved in the transaction (Cardenas & Lopes, 2006).

The idea that there are costs to manage the economic transactions of the market, and that the main challenge of organizations is to minimize the costs transacted in the exchange of resources in the environment and with other organizations, thus saving time and resources, are one of the assumptions of the Theory of transaction costs (Souza, 2011).

Resource dependency theorists postulate the premise that when organizations' acquisitions of resources and the essential character of the activity of this organizational process tend to be minimized when it becomes irrelevant to organizational objectives (Cunha, 1993).

The survival and prosperity of organizations are directly based on the control they have over the resources they need to carry out their activities (Medeiros & Paiva, 2012). Thus, the resource dependency perspective diverges from the theory of transaction costs when it does not consider the costs involved in a market operation.

Despite the above, it is observed that the relationship between the resource dependency perspective and transaction costs is established in the best way possible for a possible explanation of the dynamics of interorganizational relations.

At the same time that the resource dependence theory points to convergences and divergence from the perspective of transaction costs, taking as its analysis different theoretical constructs, it is noted that the theorists of each tend to move together when they recognize interorganizational relations.

The perspective of resource dependence arises from the voluntarist theoretical current, that is, organizations have the autonomy to make their own choices; while the perspective of transaction costs arises from a deterministic view, so it is the environment that determines how organizations should act in a given circumstance.

In synthesis, the two perspectives provide a convergent vision for understanding the dynamism that surrounds interorganizational relationships. Motta & Vasconcelos (2015) affirm that the two theoretical currents privilege the organizational group as base of analysis and that these shared presuppositions

must be studied for the total understanding of the organizational relations.

5 Conclusions

Studies on processes of interorganizational relations have been solidified more and more in the organizational studies. However, it should be emphasized that the isolation of theories to analyze the interdependence between organizations can not elicit consistent explanations in their entirety.

The theoretical essay reviewed the assumptions of resource dependency theory and transaction costs, identifying its potential for convergence between approaches, a fact that further enriches the already constructed studies on the processes of interorganizational relations. Despite the divergent view between the two approaches, their guiding thread of convergence is identified when they recognize the conception of interorganizational relations as a fundamental prerogative for their functioning.

In view of the above, when looking for differentiated views on the construction of interorganizational relationships, it is possible to generate different scenarios of possible explanations of relations between organizations, a fact that would rarely be admissible when using a single perspective as a basis for analysis.

We must also consider the constant changes that have occurred in the last years in the market, imposing increasingly that the organizations develop strategies consistent to meet the demands of the market. Therefore, in order to adapt to external contingencies, organizations often relate to other organizations to minimize the uncertainties of the future.

Thus, the two perspectives should be considered in the analysis of the processes of organizational relations development, evaluating the scope that each offers to explain the different forms of organizational relationships and interdependence.

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