

The Conceptual Domain of Export Planning: Case Studies of Brazilian Firms

Abstract

Empirical results about the relationship between export planning and performance have been inconclusive. In part, contradictory findings may be a consequence of the simplistic way in which most studies have modeled the export planning construct. This study proposes a comprehensive conceptual model of the construct, built from the interplay between an integrative review of literature and in-depth investigation of the export planning practices of five Brazilian firms.

Keywords: export planning, strategic planning, Brazil

Introduction

While some scholars (e.g., Andrews, 1980; Barney and Hesterly, 2011; Porter, 1985) have suggested that planning would be good for the performance of firms because it would allow for environment scanning and identification of opportunities and threats, others (e.g., Mintzberg and Waters, 1985) have argued that planning can bring strategic rigidity and consequent loss of opportunities and thus it might be detrimental to firm performance. An indication of the complex relationship between planning and performance is the fact that empirical studies have uncovered conflicting findings (Boyd, 1991; McIlquham-Schmidt, 2010; Miller and Cardinal, 1994; Pearce, Freeman & Robinson, 1987).

In part, such controversial results may be due to the diverse ways in which the strategic planning construct has been conceptually defined and operationally measured in empirical research.

Regarding the related construct of “export planning”, the picture is also gloomy. There has been no agreement on how to define the conceptual frontiers and the particular indicators of the construct and, consequently, the literature has advanced little on the relationship between export planning and (export or firm) performance. Given that exports represent a relevant proportion of world GDP (30.7% in 2011, according to World Bank, 2013) and are the foreign market entry mode most frequently chosen by firms, it is worth understanding whether and how exporters deal with export planning and whether there seems to be any relation between export planning and export (and also firm) performance.

Since “theories cannot develop unless there is a high degree of correspondence between abstract constructs and the procedures used to operationalized them” (Peter, 1981:133), it is paramount to develop a conceptually sound and empirically validated model of the export planning construct. This paper addresses the first part of this quest and its main objective is to advance a (preliminary and subject to further screening) conceptual model of the export planning construct, which is more comprehensive and theoretically sounder than representations of the construct found in the literature to date.

Such conceptual model was developed from an integrative literature review and an in-depth study of the export planning practices of five Brazilian firms.

The main contribution of this study is the advancement of a conceptual model of the “export planning” construct, which can help future studies to empirically assess the relationships of the phenomenon with its (argued) antecedents and consequences.

Literature Review

Strategic Planning

In his meta-analytical study, McIlquham-Schmidt (2010) argues that a definition of strategic planning should partly or fully encompass one of the following elements of the strategic planning process: 1) determine vision, mission and objectives, 2) analyze the environment, 3) analyze the internal resources 4) analyze and select strategic alternatives, 5) implement the strategies, and 6) evaluate and control performance.

However, each of the conceptual and empirical studies on strategic planning to date have considered, in most part, only a few aspects of the construct and have, thus, covered only a partial view of its domain map.

Some researchers have proposed “dimensions” or aspects of strategic planning and represented the construct in terms of the “degree” in which the firm used each dimension or aspect. Other have preferred to employ (multichotomous) “levels” of some of the component dimensions of the construct. Other researchers have instead just represented the construct by “levels” of planning.

Among the researchers that espoused the first approach, the following dimensions or aspects can be found:

- perceived **importance** of planning (Boyd, 1991)
- degree of **formalization** of the planning process as a whole (Boyd, 1991)
- degree of **formalization** employed in each of five components (either phases or aspects) of the strategic planning process (Armstrong, 1982): setting objectives, generating strategies, evaluating strategies, monitoring results, and obtaining commitment
- extent of written documentation or, in other words, degree of **formalization** employed in components of the strategic plan (e.g. business plans, goals or budgets) (Brinckmann et al., 2010, who classify this as the *outcome* of business planning)
- degree of **intensity** and analytic complexity of planning activities (e.g. economic forecasts, scenario analysis) (Brinckmann et al., 2010, who classify this as the *process* of business planning)
- degree of **intensity** (emphasis) placed on each of three phases of the strategic planning process (Hopkins and Hopkins, 1997): formulation, implementation, and control

- degree of **intensity** (emphasis) placed on each of seven components of the strategic planning process (Boyd and Reuning-Elliot, 1998; also later adopted by Andersen, 2000): mission statements, trend analysis, competitor analysis, long-term goals, annual goals, short-term action plans, and ongoing evaluation
- degree of **intensity** (emphasis) placed on each of 10 components of the strategic planning process (Rudd et al., 2008, adapted from Boyd and Reuning-Elliot, 1998): mission statement, analysis of competitor trends, analysis of supplier trends, analysis of market trends, internal analysis, long term corporate level strategies, medium term business level strategies, short term functional level strategies, barriers to strategy implementation, analysis of contingencies, on-going evaluation and control.

Among the researchers that employed multichotomous levels of some component dimension(s), the following representations can be cited:

- **formalization** (i.e., written: yes / no) of each of three components of the marketing strategic plan (Claycomb et al., 2000): marketing mission statement, distribution strategic plan, and distribution mission statement
- Implementation (yes / no) of each of four components of the plan (Delamr and Shane, 2003): development of financial projections, collection of information about the market and competition, formulation of a business plan, and formalization (i.e., writing) of a business plan document

Among the researchers that characterized the export planning construct as a whole in terms of “levels” (i.e., in a Guttman scale fashion, where each higher point in the scales encompasses all lower points), the following representations can be cited:

- **formal** planners vs. **informal** planners (Thune and House, 1970)
- **unstructured** plans, **intuitive** plans, **structured operational** plans, and **structured strategic** plans (Bracker and Pearson. 1986)
- **non-planners**, **partial** planners, **comprehensive** planners (Wood and LaForge, 1979)

Export Planning

The literature on exports has also provided only a partial coverage of the export planning construct.

Bijmolt and Zwart (1994) took a dichotomous (yes /no) approach to characterize export planning in terms of 11 aspects to be potentially encompassed: description of the export country, analysis of the foreign market, analysis of the competitors, definition of export goals, evaluation of distribution channels, evaluation of possible trading partners, definition of foreign price policy, definition of promotion plan for abroad, investigation of the needs to be satisfied abroad, adjustment of the organizational structure, and formulation of a long-range export plan.

Walters (1993) suggested three major “dimensions” of export planning: **strategic planning** (definition of customers, strategies, goals and guidelines for export markets), **functional planning** (product, promotion, pricing, distribution and production policies, as well as R&D and financial plans) and (detailing and sophistication of) **budgeting**.

Nakos and Brouthers (2005) considered only one particular aspect of export planning: **systematic** of foreign country selection (based on answers to nine questions). Lukas et al. (2007) characterized export planning by the degree of **formalization**, “**structuring**” and **dissemination** (across the firm) of the planning and the extent to which the firm refers to the plan to direct export activities.

Shoham (1999) asked respondents to rate the extent to which each of six planning tools were used by their firm (1 = we hardly use this planning tool ... 7 = we use this tool all the time):

- The firm has a short-range (approximately one year) export profit plan
- The firm has an export planning process, such that the final plans are accepted by those responsible for their attainment
- There is a person or group whose time responsibility is to coordinate a firm wide export strategic planning effort
- The firm's top management has developed a climate in the firm that supports the export planning effort
- The firm's top management has developed a formal statement of what export business the firm is in, or wants to be in
- The firm's export plans are used to judge export managers' performance

It should be noted that Shoham (1999) mixed up aspects that in fact are not part of the conceptual domain of the export planning construct, but rather could be posited to be antecedents to the construct.

Olson and Newell (2001) characterized export planning in terms of **substance/beliefs/values/norms** (Do leaders believe formal planning improves performance? Do leaders value formal planning? Do leaders expect organizational members to be formal planners?) and in terms of **forms/practices/behaviors** (Are written plans prepared? Are planning advisors used? Are customers frequently contacted?). But some of these aspects are not in fact part of the conceptual domain of the construct, but instead they may be part of the “atmosphere” that would affect how the planning process is conducted.

Samiee and Waters (1990) used a dichotomous approach to characterize export planning construct as a whole: planners vs. non-planners. Similarly, Katsikeas et al. (1996) just asked whether export planning and control activities were used or not by the firm. Carneiro et al. (2011) characterized export planning in terms of: degree of **formalization**, extent of active **search** for international opportunities and frequency of **visits** to foreign markets.

Preliminary conceptual model

While each study has covered only a small portion of the several aspects that would comprise the export planning phenomenon (or strategic planning in general, for that matter), the set of studies provides a wide-ranging coverage. We reflected upon these several aspects in order to advance a comprehensive view of the structure of the phenomenon.

We can conceive of two major dimensions of (export) planning: **content** (what is covered / encompassed) and **process** (how planning is developed), as suggested by Shoham and Kropp (1998). Regarding, in particular, the **content** dimension, we can argue that specific aspects of what is covered in the plan will vary according to the following two main phases of the planning exercise: (origin al) *formulation* of the plan and *execution* of the plan.

We now propose a conceptual model of the export planning construct (Figure 1), in which each aspect of the content and process dimensions would be rated in terms of the emphasis of emphasis/importance applied to it, except for “temporal horizon, which could be measured in terms of number of years covered in the plan (1 year ... 5 or more years).

Content	Formulation	Definition of (export) objectives		Process	Systematization	Discipline
		External analysis				Formalization
		Internal analysis			Centralization	
		Evaluation and selection of strategic options			Flexibility	
	Execution	Communication and information flow			Temporal Horizon	
		Monitoring				

Figure 1 – Conceptual Model of the Export Planning Construct

The *Formulation* dimension of the **Content** macro-dimension would encompass (i) the clarity with which the firm defines its export objectives and sets its export goals, (ii) the intensity of information search about the external environment (countries, competitors, clients), (iii) the depth of the comparison made between the firm and its competitors, and (iv) the details with which the firm generates, evaluates and selects among strategic alternatives.

The *Execution* dimension of the **Content** macro-dimension would refer to (i) the intensity of communication of the plan across areas and levels of the organization, and (ii) the extent of monitoring and control that the firm employs as it runs the plan.

The Process macro-dimension would encompass the following dimensions:

Systematization - The degree to which the export planning exercise is conducted in a regular and disciplined way and is formalized (Wood and LaForge, 1979);

Centralization - The degree to which analyses and decisions related to export planning are concentrated in one or few managers. Although not explicitly mentioned in the literature on planning reviewed by us, centralization is indirectly mentioned by Madsen (1987) who contends that there is an association between export performance and the degree of decentralization of responsibility and decision-making power;

Flexibility. The degree to which the firm feels that the plan can be modified in order to be adapted to new information and circumstances, as they become known to the firm. While Baker (2003), Brinckmann et al. (2010) and Robinson and Pearce (1983) believe that flexibility of the export plan would be beneficial to performance, Rudd et al. (2008) actually regard (operational, financial, structural and technological) flexibility as a consequence of planning.

Methods and Data

This exploratory study aimed at uncovering how small firms conceive of and execute export planning. The conceptual model presented here is tentative and quite ambitious in terms of the comprehensiveness of aspects of export planning covered. So, instead of applying the model in a structured questionnaire, we believed it was better to run in-depth interviews in order to get some preliminary face validation of the model. For the conceptual definition of a construct to have face validity, it must make sense and reflect the meaning attached to it by those that in fact are involved with the phenomenon of interest and therefore use the construct in practice. Thus, in order to uncover the aspects encompassed by a phenomenon, Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) suggest the use of phenomenological interviews – to assign meaning to the phenomenon as the executives see it, not as the researchers perceive it.

We ran five in-depth personal interviews with export managers (some of them were the firm owners) in order to uncover how they conceived of export planning and to understand what their actual export planning practices were.

By reflecting upon the literature review, we were able to discern (preliminary) dimensions and respective aspects of export planning – as present in the “Preliminary Conceptual Model” section. This framework served as a flexible guide for the interview script, which aimed at identifying the degree of emphasis employed (or importance attribute) to each aspect of the content dimension of export planning and also at detecting the degree of emphasis applied, in general, to the other aspects of the export planning process (systematization, centralization and flexibility). We also tried to uncover the temporal breadth of the export planning exercise considered by each firm.

We did not want to impose our conceptual framework upon the practicing managers, but rather to check whether it could reasonably be used to represent their mental models and practices regarding export planning. So, we started the conversation with general questions aimed at getting the interviewees to talk “spontaneously” about how they conceived of

export planning. For example: “When did your firm start exporting?” “Why did you decide to export in the first place?” “Those same motives reflect the reasons why your company exports today?”

Then, we moved to other general questions that would help us identify whether each aspect of the content dimension of export planning (definition of export objectives, analysis of the external environment, analysis of the internal environment, and evaluation and selection of strategic options) was covered at all and with which emphasis. For example, in order to uncover how the firm ran the analysis (if any) of the external environment (countries, competitors, clients), we used questions such as:

- What was the last country to which your company started to export? Why did you choose this country?
- What you expected from that country corresponded to the reality that you found there?
- Think of the last customer to whom your company started exporting. How did you come to this customer (or Why did you decide to sell to this customer?)
- What you expected from that customer corresponded to the reality that you found?
- When you compare the beginning of exports with the present time, have there been changes in the aspects that you consider when selecting countries and clients?

So, instead of asking direct questions about the specific dimensions and sub-dimensions of export planning depicted in our conceptual model, we chose to ask questions that would be closer to the practical world of managers. Then, two researchers interpreted the answers in order to map them into our conceptual model.

Given that it has been argued that the export planning exercise would depend on the characteristics of the people involved and on some organizational characteristics of the firm, we included the following aspects in the interview script: degree of commitment of the people involved in the planning (Armstrong, 1982; Boyd, 1991; Fossen et al., 2006; Leontiades and Tezel, 1980; Pearce et al., 1987), extension of the organizational structure dedicated to exports (Bijmolt and Zwart, 1994; Shoham, 1999), and the level of association between export results and managers’ evaluation and compensation (Shoham, 1999). But hardly any information could be obtained about the level of commitment and about managers’ evaluation and compensation policies.

For convenience reasons, we searched for target firms in the city of Rio de Janeiro, where the two researchers live. To be eligible for the study, firms had to have a minimum of export intensity, which we arbitrated in 10% of total sales. We pre-selected the firms from our own business network, previous contacts with firms that had participated in a survey by one of the authors six years before, and the indication of professional colleagues (in the relational Brazilian culture, it helps quite a lot to have some personal connection in order to get people to dedicate their time to a research study). We also employed theoretical sampling, in terms of searching for different types of firms (in terms of industry and export intensity),

but also similar in terms of size (small or medium). Before we contacted potential firms, we checked information about them on the internet. If they seemed a proper target for the study, we would telephone their owner or their export manager.

All five interview took place in January 2013. The interviews lasted 60 minutes on average and were transcribed.

In order to obtain information about the size of the firms, we asked about their turnover in ranges, not precise figures.

Firm #1 is a manufacturer of steel pipes, mainly for the oil & gas industry. They sell between US\$ 25 million and US\$ 100 million a year. They started exporting in the early 70's and now export sales represent around 30% of the firm's turnover. They have an organizational unit responsible for international sales.

Firm #2 is a meat producer and exports around 15%-20% of its production, to almost 20 countries. The export manager and an exports analysis participated in the interview (they are the only employees dedicated to exports).

Firm #3 produces organic coffee for gourmet consumers. The business is all dedicated to exports (since its establishment nine years before), which represents 95% of total sales, spread through 15 countries. Annual turnover is between US\$ 1 million and US\$ 5 million.

Firm #4 produces high-pressure cylinders mainly for fire extinguishers and vehicles propelled by natural gas and exports around 60% of its production to 28 countries. Six people of the commercial division are dedicated to exports. The President of the Board (and former Executive President) accepted to give the interview.

Firm #5 sells products for hair treatment. It is a three-employee business that sells a bit less than US\$1 million/year, of which around 30% from exports to over 10 countries. The owner and one analyst participated in the interview.

Findings

We will now present detailed evidence of how much emphasis and intensity (if any) each of these five firms employs in specific aspects of two content dimensions of export planning: formulation and execution. We will also present data on the process by which they run export planning, specifically in terms of the (degree of) systematization, centralization and flexibility. Finally, we will address the time horizon covered in their export planning exercise.

Formulation of the export plan

- Definition of export objectives

Firms #1 and #2 do not set any objectives for exports in advance. In fact, they consider exports as a marginal activity (although exports represent a relevant proportion of total sales, respectively 30% and 20%) and report that exports would be a convenient outlet to sell excess production (or meat cuts undervalued in Brazil in the case of Firm #2) or to

occupy idle capacity in times that the domestic market is retracted. On the other hand, Firms #3 and #5 were founded with the foreign arena as their target and they set targets for exports. Firm #4 also regards the foreign market as an important avenue for growth and they set ambitious targets for exports, but they say it is difficult to forecast demand (although they try hard) since several clients do not inform how much they expect to buy.

- Analysis of the external environment (countries, competitors, clients)

Firms #3 and #4 carefully screen foreign countries in search of attractive business environments and potential clients. Firms #3, #4 and #5 regularly go to international trade shows and they talk with current and potential clients. Besides, Firms #3 and #5 have sought assistance from APEX (Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, <http://www2.apexbrasil.com.br/en>), which supplies them with market data and even with foreign sales office support. Firm #5 also has an active agent in France, who supplies them with information; besides they are associated with a trade association (ABIHPEC, Brazilian Association of Personal Cosmetics, Toiletry and Fragrance, <http://www.abihpec.org.br/en/>), which supplies them with market data. Firm #3 collects extensive data on market demand, consumer habits, biodynamic factors, production by countries, and also some information about individual competitors; in fact, they did extensive market research even *before* they started producing their special coffee for export, so that they already had clients before they produced their first coffee sack.

Interestingly, the two firms (#1 and #2) that are less interested in exports, and as a consequence do not actively seek information about the external environment, see more threats “out there” than the other three. Nonetheless, Firm #1 is aware of the technical specifications required in foreign markets and checks in which countries Chinese competitors are present. Firm #2 also monitors sanitary requirements, but they find it quite difficult to learn about foreign competitors.

- Analysis of the internal environment (strengths and weaknesses)

Four firms consider that their product is superior to those of foreign competitors, even though some firms (#1 and #2) do not actually monitor competitors; firm #4 considers their product of good quality, but acknowledges that some competitors are better. Firms #3 and #5 actually believe that their products have unique characteristics.

- Evaluation and selection of strategic alternatives

Apparently, no firm builds up full-laid strategic (export) plans that could be compared, so that the firm would decide the best course to take among them.

Execution of the export plan

- Communication and information flow

Firm #1 reports that all areas are effectively involved in the planning exercise (interestingly they had reported that they do not have any structured export planning process). In Firm #2, decisions (basically, operational, not strategic, decisions) are taken by the owner, together with the director and the commercial manager; then all other areas are informed.

Firm #3 is small enough in terms of employees and its production is concentrated in one single farm, so the owner or the firm's manager personally talk to employees about their plans.

Firm #4 elaborates the export plan in extensive meetings with the participation of several employees. This means that communication of the plan is done simultaneously to elaboration.

Firm #5 has only three employees (including the founder), so open communication is routine.

- Monitoring

Firms do not appear to have any clearly structured follow-up and control activities. All of them follow production schedules, but are not strict regarding export targets. Firms #3 and #5 actually talk to clients regularly and follow-up on them about their demand prospects; as for updating of macro-environment projections, they get some data from market reports and visits to trade shows.

Systematization of the export planning process

- Discipline of the export process

Firm #4 holds regular meetings. Firms #3 and #5 regularly go to trade shows in order to get information about clients, competitors and market trends. No other indication of a disciplined and regular process of planning could be found.

- Formalization of the export plan

Naturally, formalization (i.e., writing down and officially communicating the export plan) only makes sense if a firm has some reasonably high level of emphasis / importance dedicated to export planning, which was not the case of Firms #1 and #2. In Firm #1, targets and initiatives related to exports (if set) are informally written on a white board in the director's room, but no formal documentation is circulated across the firm. Firm #3 writes a detailed plan and the manager is expected to follow it carefully. Firm #4 writes down the plan after the realization of a formal meeting that can take several days. Firm #5 also writes down the plan (in fact, this is a requirement for the firm to receive support from a trade association and a Government exports promotion agency) and has written contracts with its clients; detailed spreadsheets are prepared and frequently accessed.

Centralization of the export planning process

In Firm #1, the Board determines the plans (if any), but the executive directors have some freedom to run them. Firm #2 is family-owned and the family retains decision power. Firms #3 and #5 are quite small and the owner still takes the

decisions (but the owner of Firm #3 intends to decentralize decision power). In Firm #4, the export planning exercise is rather decentralized, such that all employees involved in exports participate in the elaboration of the plan.

Flexibility to change the export plan

Interestingly, Firm #2 believes that, by not dedicating efforts to building some export plan, it becomes more flexible to respond to changes. In fact, Firms #1 and #2 believe that planning would mean rigidity. Firm #3, on the other hand, has a very detailed export plan, but at the same time sees this plan as flexible enough to be changed as new circumstances show up. Although Firms #4 and #5 did not clearly address flexibility, it seems that they adopt a somewhat flexible attitude and would revise the plan whenever new information would recommend so.

Temporal horizon covered in the plan

Firm #1 said that they forecast overall sales for three years, but they did not seem to have any precise figure about exports. Firm #2 plans “on the fly” planning – 30 days ahead only. Firm #3 runs projections for three years. Firm #4 uses a one-year period because that few clients would give them a long-term projection of expected purchases. Firm #5 plans 1 to 3 years ahead.

Overall importance attributed to export planning

The importance that firms attribute to export planning seems to bear a positive association with the relevance of exports (export intensity) (see Figure 2). The only exception was Firm #5, who reported a very high importance, although their current export intensity is not yet very high (30%). One possible explanation comes from speech of the owner of Firm #5, who indicates that the firm is genuinely committed to grow exports and to make the international arena its most important market (they expected exports to represent 60% of their total sales in the year following our interview).

Export intensity	Importance attributed to export planning	Firm
30%	very high	#5
20%	low	#2
30%	medium low	#1
60%	medium high	#4
95%	high	#3

Figure 2 – Association between export intensity and importance of export planning

Perceived relationship between export planning and export performance

Three firms (#3, #4 and #5) consider that exports are relevant to their business and they treat this activity in a serious manner; they believe that export planning is beneficial to the firm. For the other two firms (#1 and #2), exports are

considered a marginal activity. These two firms do not establish objectives and goals for exports and, consequently, do not dedicate efforts to export planning; but their export sales have been growing nonetheless. Firm #4 believes that export planning is beneficial to the company's results. Firm #2 believes that it would make the company less flexible.

Discussion

This exploratory study provides preliminary evidence that our proposed comprehensive model of export planning may be appropriate to represent the construct, since no dimension or component of the model seemed to be illogical to managers and no other dimension emerged from the interviews. In order to have an idea of the configuration and arrangement of the dimensions of export planning, we propose the following pictorial representation (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – Pictorial representation of the conceptual model of Export Planning and some of its illustrative consequences

It should be noted that we considered that Formulation, Execution and Systematization would seem to co-vary together, as if they were determined by some overarching construct, such as “Importance of export planning”, for example. In contrast, Centralization and Flexibility could be conceived as not necessarily co-varying highly with the previous three dimensions or between themselves. Importance, Centralization and Flexibility may have distinct antecedents and also have distinct impacts on possible consequences (as depicted in Figure 3), so it would not make sense to think of a higher order construct that would tie them together (either reflectively or formatively); rather, they should be kept independent.

The conceptual model presented in Figure 3 needs to be detailed into a measurement model that would show the specific operational indicators that would measure each dimension. From data collected about the five cases, some suggestions of operational indicators emerged (see Figure 4).

Definition of (export) objectives
<p>External analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in international trade shows • Purchase of, or access to public reports of, market research • Information about technical specifications or consumer habits in foreign countries • Information about (the presence of) competitors in foreign countries • Use of foreign agents or representatives • Record keeping about foreign markets (own sales, market sales, competitors, clients etc.) • Access to information / support from trade associations or Government export-promotion agencies
<p>Internal analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical aspects of the firm's products <i>vis-à-vis</i> competitors' products • Services to customers provided by the firm's <i>vis-à-vis</i> competitors' services • Brand / reputation image of the firm's products <i>vis-à-vis</i> competitors' brands / reputation
Evaluation and selection of strategic options
<p>Communication and information flow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do managers get information about the firm's plans? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They participate in the formulation of the plan - Personal communication by superiors - Phone communication by superiors - Written communication (e.g., e-mail) / Printed folders - Firm's website - Not at all
<p>Monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have reasonably updated information about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your own export sales - Competitors sales - Attainment of export objectives - Problems with exports - ...
<p>Systematization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularity (discipline) regarding data collection and realization of meetings • Regularity of visits to / conversation with clients
Centralization
<p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the degree to which the firm feels that the plan can be modified in order to be adapted to new information and circumstances, as they become known to the firm
<p>Temporal horizon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of years covered in the analyses and projections of the plan

Figure 4 – Preliminary suggestions of operational indicators of Export Planning

Conclusion

Anecdotal evidence and executive reports suggest that Latin American firms (in general) and Brazilian firms (in particular), especially small ones, would not place much emphasis on planning – although they may perform less "orthodox" planning formats, *cf.* Tanure and Ghoshal, 2004; Escobari and Sull, 2004 –, but rather would respond to new opportunities

and threats as they seem to “pop up”. In the specific case of exports, the picture may tend to be more blurred, since there is little evidence in the literature about what really is encompassed by export planning in the attitudes and actual actions of practicing managers.

This study has some academic and managerial contributions. From an academic standpoint, we have presented a more comprehensive and dimensionally structured conceptual model of export planning (that can easily be extended for the strategic planning construct as well) than has been proposed in the theoretical and empirical literature; in addition, the present study contributes to our understanding about the frontiers and the extent of export planning from the perspective of those that are involved with the phenomenon in practice. As such, this study contributes to bringing preliminary suggestions for the construction of a model of export planning that has face validity. From a managerial perspective, this study can be used by practitioners because it explicitly unveils several aspects of export planning (including the content of the phenomenon and the process by which it can be unfolded in practice) that managers should consider. Also, public policymakers can benefit by learning about export planning practices that can prove useful for more successful exports.

Exporters are not homogeneous in their planning activities. Our exploratory results indicate that export intensity seems to determine how much effort a firm will dedicate to export planning and, as such, it will affect the scope of dimensions and aspects of export planning that export managers will deal with. The review of the literature and the interviews with these five firms allows us to indicate some possible antecedents of the level of effort that firms would tend to dedicate to export planning: firm size, export intensity, level of turbulence / volatility of the industry, organizational commitment and employee commitment, among others.

It should be noted that some of these factors may also act as moderators of the impact of export planning on export performance (e.g., industry turbulence) and some of them may also be consequences of export performance itself (e.g., organizational commitment), which brings some endogeneity and reciprocity issues to a potential nomological model of the relationship between export planning and its antecedents and consequences.

In fact, there are still relatively few studies that have addressed the particularities of export planning and its implications to export performance and business performance. The conceptual model advanced in this study still needs to be detailed into operational indicators, and to stand the scrutiny of empirical validation, but it is arguably comprehensive and generic enough to be useful for the study of antecedents and consequences of export planning.

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