UNIVERSITY OF QUEBEC IN MONTREAL

A RESOURCE AND COMPETENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVE OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCES: AN APPLICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF FOOD RETAILING IN QUEBEC

DISSERTATION
PRESENTED
AS PARTIAL REQUIREMENT
OF THE DOCTORATE IN ADMINISTRATION

BY
VINCENT BEAUSEJOUR

MARCH 2012

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

LES COMPÉTENCES ORGANISATIONNELLES SOUS L'ANGLE DE LA PERSPECTIVE BASÉE SUR LES RESSOURCES ET LES COMPÉTENCES: LE CAS DU COMMERCE DE DÉTAIL DANS LE SECTEUR QUEBECOIS DE L'ALIMENTATION

THÈSE
PRÉSENTÉE
COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE
DU DOCTORAT EN ADMINISTRATION

PAR
VINCENT BEAUSÉJOUR

MARS 2012

REMERCIEMENTS

Après plusieurs années, j'ai terminé ma thèse de doctorat, non sans fierté. Ce fut un long processus, pas toujours heureux, mais assurément formateur.

Je tiens d'abord à remercier mon directeur de thèse, M. Gilles Simard, professeur titulaire au département d'Organisation et Ressources humaines de l'ESG-UQAM. Son aide et son soutien m'ont été indispensables.

Mes remerciements s'adressent aussi à M. Jocelyn Desroches, professeur titulaire au département de Management et Technologie de l'ESG-UQAM. Son amitié, son inébranlable confiance en moi et ses encouragements ont été essentiels à la conclusion de ce long projet.

Je tiens également à remercier chacun des membres du jury, Mme. Véronique Bouchard (EM Lyon), M. Michel G. Bédard (ESG-UQAM) et M. Claude Marcotte (Concordia University), pour avoir accepté d'évaluer cette thèse.

J'exprime finalement toute ma reconnaissance à mes enfants, Laurianne et Nicolas, et à Caroline, pour leur patience, leur compréhension et leur support. Je remercie également mes parents pour leur soutien indéfectible et pour la confiance qu'ils m'ont témoignée. Si la réalisation de cette thèse est une réussite, c'est grâce à eux.

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

LISTE DES FIGURES

LISTE DES TABLEAUX

RÉSUMÉ

Le management stratégique a toujours été au cœur des préoccupations des entreprises. (McGrath et al., 1995). De manière plus spécifique, la recherche d'un avantage concurrentiel durable permettant d'atteindre une performance supérieure à la moyenne représente un enjeu clé pour les entreprises qui ont non seulement besoin de se différencier de leurs compétiteurs, mais qui cherchent également à se positionner comme leader dans leur secteur d'activités. Conséquemment, les chercheurs dans le domaine du management stratégique ont développé différentes approches théoriques pour expliquer ce que les entreprises font et/ou devraient faire pour répondre avec succès à cet enjeu majeur.

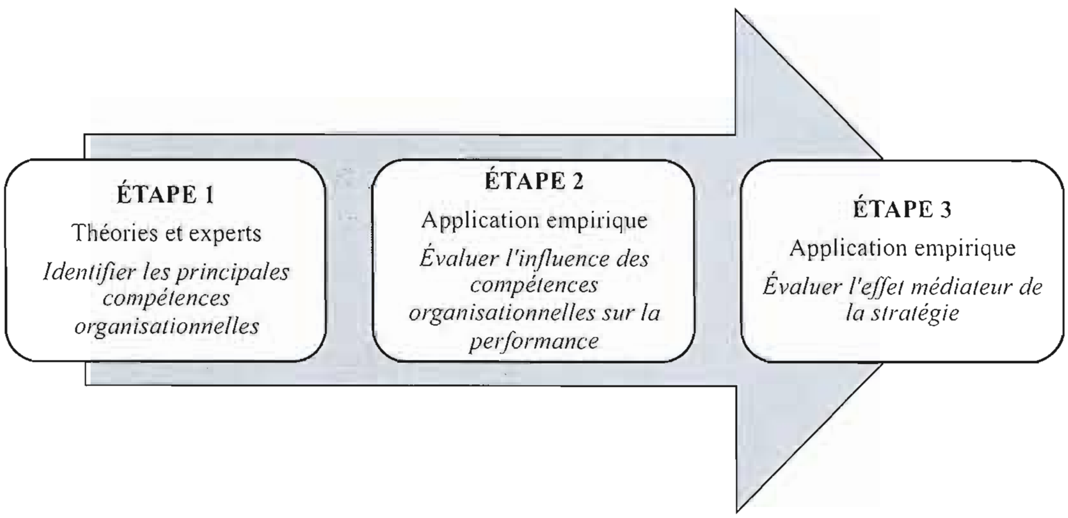
Parmi les différentes perspectives proposant l'intégration de différentes approches de la théorie stratégique, la perspective basée sur les ressources (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991), et les deux autres approches qui en résultent – la perspective basée sur les compétences (Sanchez, 1996) et l'approche des compétences dynamiques (Teece, et al., 1997; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993) –, offrent un cadre cohérent qui sous-tend des concepts clés tel que les ressources, les compétences, les compétences dynamiques et l'avantage concurrentiel (Sanchez, 2000; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). En conséquence, de nombreux chercheurs se sont penchés sur ces concepts afin de mieux comprendre en quoi ils pouvaient avoir une influence sur le développement et le soutien d'un avantage concurrentiel, et ultimement sur la performance des entreprises (Barney, 1995; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993).

Si la majorité des recherches réalisées sur le sujet ont été conduites dans le secteur industriel, peu nombreuses ont été celles réalisées dans le secteur du commerce de détail bien qu'il s'agisse d'un secteur économique très dynamique et particulièrement concurrentiel (Morshett et al., 2006; Moore, 2005; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001). C'est

donc en ayant comme toile de fond l'approche basée sur les ressources et les compétences que cette étude pose la question de recherche globale suivante : « Comment les compétences organisationnelles impactent-elles la performance des détaillants en alimentation? ». Pour y répondre, la présente recherche a été structurée en trois étapes distinctes mais interreliées correspondant aux trois articles composant cette thèse.

Figure i.

Une démarche exploratoire



La première étape (Article 1) repose sur deux modèles génériques des compétences organisationnelles (Thompson & Richardson, 1996; Lado & Wilson, 1994). L'objectif est de recueillir l'opinion d'experts dans le domaine du commerce de détail sur la base de ces deux modèles. Ces experts, choisis sur la base de leur expérience et de leur expertise du secteur du commerce de détail, sont davantage à même de déterminer quelles sont les compétences organisationnelles de leur entreprise respective qui influencent la performance organisationnelle.

La deuxième étape (Article 2) porte exclusivement sur le secteur du commerce de détail en alimentation et focalise principalement sur l'une des trois principales chaines en alimentation au Québec, Métro. Trois objectifs sont poursuivis dans le cadre de cet article. Tout d'abord, nous voulons soumettre nos échelles de mesure au test de l'application empirique. Puis, nous désirons évaluer l'influence de trois compétences organisationnelles spécifiques sur la performance de supermarchés. Ces trois compétences organisationnelles sont : (1) l'orientation client, (2) les compétences de coopération externe, et (3) la loyauté / satisfaction des employés. Le choix de ces trois compétences organisationnelles a été déterminé en fonction des entrevues réalisées préalablement auprès d'experts dans le domaine du commerce de détail et ayant fait l'objet de l'article 1. Comme dernier objectif, nous proposons une comparaison préliminaire de nos résultats obtenus chez Métro avec ceux issus d'un échantillon combiné de répondants employés chez Loblaws et Sobeys.

La troisième étape (Article 3) est une analyse complémentaire de la seconde puisqu'elle intègre la stratégie comme troisième variable dans la relation entre les compétences organisationnelles et la performance. Tel que suggéré par Edelman, et al. (2005) dans leur étude, nous avons opté pour une perspective de médiation, laquelle apparait comme étant la plus pertinente pour déterminer la force de la stratégie dans le processus d'évolution des ressources et compétences vers la performance organisationnelle. Il s'agit donc, dans cet article, de tester cette hypothèse et de déterminer à quel point le choix de la stratégie influe sur l'impact des compétences organisationnelles dans la relation avec la performance d'entreprise.

La contribution conjointe des trois articles qui composent cette thèse fournit non seulement des indications pratiques et utiles sur la façon dont les compétences organisationnelles influencent la performance des entreprises œuvrant dans le domaine de la distribution alimentaire, mais permet également de déterminer et d'évaluer la relation entre les compétences organisationnelles et la stratégie.

A. Une perspective basée sur les ressources et les compétences des compétences organisationnelles et de la performance d'entreprise

La plupart des études portant sur les compétences ont focalisé sur les ressources humaines et ont été menées pour évaluer les compétences individuelles ou collectives, les capacités et/ou les habiletés tout en gardant l'individu comme unité de mesure. Cependant, en terme de management stratégique, c'est l'organisation qui est la principale unité d'analyse. Jusqu'au développement de la perspective basée sur les ressources et les compétences (PBRC), l'organisation a été étudiée selon une approche *outside-in* en fonction de laquelle les facteurs externes à la firme sont les principaux déterminants de son positionnement stratégique. En d'autres termes, l'avantage concurrentiel d'une entreprise est fonction des menaces et opportunités présentes dans son environnement ainsi que de ses forces et ses faiblesses eut égard à ce même environnement (Porter, 1985). Avec la PBRC, l'accent n'est plus mis sur l'environnement externe de l'organisation mais plutôt sur son environnement interne. La conviction prise pour acquis par les tenants de cette théorie suggère que l'avantage concurrentiel d'une entreprise soit plutôt basé sur ses actifs internes, ce qui inclut les compétences et capacités organisationnelles (Teece et al, 1997; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Prahalad et Hamel, 1990). Bien qu'il n'y ait toujours pas de consensus dans la littérature à savoir laquelle de la théorie de l'organisation industrielle ou de la PBRC est la plus efficace pour expliquer la performance des entreprises (Henderson & Mitchell, 1997), cette thèse a été structuré sur la base de la PBRC et positionne le concept de compétence au niveau de l'organisation pour étudier son effet sur la performance des entreprises.

Tel que suggéré par la PBRC, et illustré par de nombreux auteurs (Grewal & Slotegraaf, 2007; Zehir et al, 2006; Edelman et al, 2005; Brush & Chaganti, 1998), le développement et la pérennité des compétences organisationnelles comme source d'avantage compétitif a constitué une préoccupation permanente pour tous les détaillants questionnés dans le cadre de notre recherche. Plus intéressant encore, les trois compétences organisationnelles, sélectionnées par les experts dans la partie qualitative de cette recherche, impliquent toutes des interactions humaines: (1) la relation entre le détaillant et le consommateur via l'orientation client, (2) la relation entre le détaillant et les fournisseurs détaillants par le biais des compétences de coopération externe, et (3) la relation entre le détaillant et ses employés à travers la loyauté / satisfaction des employés. Dans une perspective basée sur les ressources et les compétences, les résultats de notre étude contribuent à faire partiellement la lumière sur le rôle central joué par les ressources humaines au sein des compétences organisationnelles. En effet, dans le contexte de la distribution alimentaire, ce type de compétences organisationnelles répond non seulement aux exigences de valeur, de rareté, de non-substituabilité, et de non-imitabilité, mais réfèrent également à la notion de complexité sociale, inhérente aux interactions humaines, qui les rend plus difficilement imitables par les concurrents (Barney, 1991; Fiol, 1991).

a. *Identifier les compétences organisationnelles comme source d'avantage compétitif pour les entreprises*

Le premier article, intitulé "Building on Organizational Resources and Competences to Reach Performance: The Case of the Retailing Industry", s'appuie sur une démarche déductive en suggérant au préalable une série de compétences organisationnelles (Thompson & Richardson, 1996; Lado & Wilson, 1994) à quatre experts dans la vente au détail[1] rencontrés lors d'entrevues d'une durée moyenne de deux heures dans leurs locaux respectifs.

Techniquement, les entrevues ont été enregistrées et une copie le leur a été transmise en même temps que le verbatim de l'entrevue. Le tableau suivant présente quelques

[1] Voir Annexe A, p. 199.

caractéristiques d'intérêt pour chacun des experts. Tous les verbatim ont été traités avec le logiciel Atlas TI pour en assurer la codification et l'analyse.

Selon Lincoln & Guba (1985), quatre critères doivent être rencontrés pour reconnaître la valeur d'une étude qualitative: (1) la crédibilité, (2) la transférabilité, (3) la dépendance, and (4) la confirmation. La *crédibilité*, ou la mesure dans laquelle les constructions multiples de la réalité sont représentées de manière adéquate - en fonction des opinions des personnes ayant construit ces réalités multiples d'origine - a été assurée par plusieurs moyens. La position des personnes interrogées, leurs connaissances et leur vaste expérience dans le domaine a permis de dessiner un portrait juste du contexte. Mon expérience personnelle de consultant externe pour le ministère québécois de l'Industrie et du Commerce m'a également aidé à développer une compréhension globale du secteur de la vente au détail. En outre, les données ont été recueillies sur les mêmes phénomènes et ont été comparés pour tester la cohérence de ceux-ci. Les données ont ensuite été analysées en utilisant des approches à la fois, qualitatives et quantitatives. J'ai aussi profité d'une critique soutenue et rigoureuse à la fois de la part de contacts personnels dans le domaine et d'examinateurs anonymes, qui ont évalué cette première partie de travail trois fois puisqu'elle a été soumise à des conférences au cours des deux dernières années. Ceci m'a aidé à clarifier mes arguments et bien documenter mes conclusions. Depuis que j'ai envoyé des copies des verbatim aux personnes interrogées qui ont été invités à faire des corrections qui ont été dans l'ensemble mineures. Ces corrections et des clarifications ont été ajoutées aux verbatim et seules es versions corrigées ont été utilisées pour mon analyse.

La *transférabilité*, ou la mesure dans laquelle les résultats peuvent être utiles pour la compréhension des compétences organisationnelles / des relations stratégiques avec la performance des détaillants, a été assurée par la variété des sous-secteurs de la vente au détail dans desquels proviennent les experts: matériel d'artistes, magasin à rayons, détaillant en alimentation, et magasin général. Puisque les conclusions de l'étude sont basées sur des conclusions communes énoncées par les experts, elles peuvent être partiellement appliquées à d'autres sous-secteurs du commerce de détail que celui de la distribution alimentaire. Le recours à plusieurs méthodes, tel que décrit précédemment, a contribué à assurer la fiabilité de l'étude. La combinaison de tout ce qui précède a permis de garantir un niveau acceptable de confirmabilité des résultats de l'étude, ce qui a été prouvée par l'enquête formelle qui a suivi.

Table i.

Détails sur les experts

	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4
Poste	PDG	PDG	PDG Québec	Consultant
Sous-secteur	Matériel d'artiste	Magasin à rayons	Alimentation	Alimentation
Nombre de magasins	26	65	175 (Québec seulement)	n/a
Zone(s) géographique(s)	Québec / Canada	Québec	Québec / Canada	Québec
Entreprise familiale	Oui	Oui	Non	Non
Connaissance du secteur de l'alimentation	Oui	Oui	Oui	Oui

Il est également important de souligner que cette première partie de notre étude (cf. Article 1) a fait l'objet d'une communication lors du congrès de l'AIMS (Association Internationale de Management Stratégique) de juin 2009 et a été publié dans les actes de colloque. Cette communication a donc bénéficié d'une évaluation par les pairs.

En faisant l'a priori que les organisations possèdent des compétences tout comme les individus, même si certaines sont incarnées à travers les individus, ces compétences demeurent dans l'organisation bien que les individus qui la composent changent. Dans cette optique, l'hypothèse centrale de cet article suggère que les détaillants peuvent créer un avantage concurrentiel, basé sur des compétences organisationnelles, afin de générer de la performance. Dans une perspective exploratoire, quatre experts de la vente au détail ont été invités à déterminer quelles compétences organisationnelles pourrait influencer positivement la performance des entreprises dans ce secteur.

Les entrevues en profondeur réalisées auprès des experts ont révélé un choix unanime quant à l'identification des trois compétences organisationnelles ayant le meilleur potentiel pour fournir aux détaillants un avantage concurrentiel: (1) l'orientation client, (2) les compétences de coopération externe, et (3) la loyauté / satisfaction des employés. Du point de vue de la théorie basée sur les ressources et les compétences, nos résultats ne sont pas surprenants. Effectivement, plusieurs recherches antérieures ont démontré l'influence de l'une ou l'autre de ces trois compétences organisationnelles sur la performance des entreprises (Ganesan et al 2009; Huddleston et al, 2008; Paulraj et al, 2008; Brown & Lam, 2008; Merlo et al, 2006; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001). L'identification, parmi une liste de quinze, de ces trois compétences organisationnelles spécifiquement considérées comme ayant le plus d'influence sur la performance des détaillants demeure cependant d'un grand intérêt. Ces résultats représentent une contribution pragmatique pour les détaillants qui souhaitent investir dans le développement de leurs ressources et de leurs compétences afin d'améliorer leur performance. Selon les experts, proposer une offre de service à la clientèle et/ou de produits meilleurs que la moyenne, construire et maintenir de solides partenariats avec les fournisseurs, et contribuer à la satisfaction des employés dans le but de réduire autant que possible la rotation du personnel, représentent des investissements utiles pour les détaillants, davantage que dans tout autre domaine.

Ce premier article a également une contribution méthodologique en plus du choix de la grande distribution comme champ d'investigation pour étudier les compétences organisationnelles. En effet, l'utilisation de la représentation graphique mentale, ou carte mentale (en anglais *mind mapping*), pour l'interprétation et l'analyse du contenu des entrevues réalisées auprès d'experts, nous a permis, à la fois, d'identifier les compétences organisationnelles principales et secondaires et de proposer des liens perceptuels entre elles. De façon plus extensive, cet article a également contribué à mieux définir le rôle des compétences organisationnelles pour les entreprises du commerce au détail et à améliorer notre compréhension des interactions entre ces compétences, lesquelles favorisent une meilleure performance des entreprises.

Comme point de départ de cette thèse, l'article 1 a permis d'identifier les compétences organisationnelles antérieures à la mesure empirique de leur impact sur la performance des détaillants québécois en alimentation. La stratégie d'entreprise a également été considérée par les experts comme un facteur d'influence sur la performance. Idéalement co-alignée avec les compétences organisationnelles, son impact a été mesuré dans le troisième article en tant que médiateur de la relation entre les compétences organisationnelles et la performance.

b. Mesurer l'influence des compétences organisationnelles sur la performance des détaillants en alimentation du Québec : le cas de Métro

Bien que le secteur du commerce de détail soit un domaine d'étude pertinent pour cette recherche, il s'agit d'un secteur trop vaste et trop hétérogène pour y réaliser cette seconde phase empirique. Pour ce second article, intitulé : “Organizational Competences as a Performance Lever for Food Retailers: An Empirical Study”, nous avons donc décidé de nous concentrer sur le sous-secteur du commerce de détail en alimentation. Cette décision repose sur certaines raisons pratiques. D'abord, il s'agit d'un sous-secteur beaucoup plus homogène. Et, tel que nous l'avons mentionné précédemment, les compétences organisationnelles sont souvent véhiculées par les ressources humaines. Les gestionnaires de première ligne, tel que les gérants de rayons et chef caissières, sont donc particulièrement bien positionnés pour évaluer ce type de compétences et leurs effets alors que les directeurs de magasin ont une meilleure perspective pour évaluer la performance des entreprises. Le choix de ces deux groupes d'employés pour répondre à nos questionnaires nous a permis d'éviter les problèmes de variance commune et de recueillir des données pertinentes pour évaluer l'influence des compétences organisationnelles sur la performance des détaillants en alimentation.

En plus d'opter pour deux groupes distincts de répondants, nous avons également porté notre attention sur l'une des trois grandes chaînes québécoises de distribution en alimentation, Métro. Notre recherche a donc, comme échantillon principal, des répondants provenant de cette bannière, dont les résultats sont comparés par la suite à un second échantillon composé d'employés travaillant au sein des deux autres principales bannières présentes au Québec, Loblaws et Sobeys.

Méthodologiquement, cet article a abordé le problème lié à la mesure de caractéristiques non observables, dans le contexte de la PBRC, suivant la méthode suggérée par Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar (2005). Nous avons mesuré les compétences organisationnelles précédemment identifiées par le biais de variables de substitution et ainsi déterminer l'influence relative de chacune de ces compétences sur la performance des épiceries. Ce faisant, nous avons proposé des échelles de mesure pour chaque compétence, ce qui représente une contribution méthodologique en soi.

Ce deuxième article présente également une évaluation statistique des trois compétences organisationnelles retenues en fonction de la bannière Métro et Loblaws / Sobeys conjointement. Cette opération a été une occasion de comparer les chaînes et nous a donné un aperçu intéressant des différences et des similitudes liées aux perceptions respectives des répondants de ces bannières et de l'impact des compétences organisationnelles sur leur performance.

Selon les résultats obtenus par chaque échantillon de bannière, l'orientation client constitue la compétence organisationnelle expliquant le plus de variance de la performance. L'orientation client se traduit notamment par la façon dont les épiciers mettent les clients au cœur des préoccupations de l'entreprise, les satisfont grâce à une offre de produits intéressante, mais surtout par un service de haute qualité.

Alors que les répondants du Métro accordent plus d'importance à la loyauté / satisfaction des employés, ceux de Loblaws / Sobeys ont considéré plus influente la compétence de coopération externe. La loyauté / satisfaction des employés envers l'entreprise se réfère à des mesures prises par le détaillant en alimentation pour optimiser la rétention du personnel et ainsi réduire le taux de roulement. Pour ce faire, un distributeur en alimentation fournit à son personnel un environnement de travail et des avantages sociaux valorisés par les salariés. La participation des employés et leur engagement dans le processus de prise de décision ainsi que dans l'identification et la mise en œuvre des objectifs contribuent aussi à la performance des détaillants. Les compétences de coopération externe sont axées sur la relation entre le distributeur et le fournisseur, et les moyens par lesquels les épiciers peuvent améliorer leur performance grâce au partage de l'information, à la collaboration, au partenariat ou à l'échange de ressources et de compétences.

Selon nos échantillons et nos résultats, et en regard de la PBRC, nous pourrions éventuellement affirmer que Métro est davantage tourné vers la valorisation de ses ressources et de ses compétences internes que Loblaws / Sobeys puisque la loyauté / satisfaction des employés représente une compétence organisationnelle entièrement orientée sur l'organisation elle-même. La compétence de coopération extérieure étant, quant à elle, davantage basée sur la qualité de la relation et la volonté des fournisseurs.

c. *Évaluer l'effet médiateur de la stratégie*

Dans le troisième article, "The Mediator Effect of Strategy on Organizational Competences and Firm Performance: A Model for the Food Retailing Industry", la variable *stratégie* a été ajoutée à notre cadre conceptuel. Dans l'ensemble, le modèle proposé représente une contribution intéressante sur le plan de la méthodologie puisque sa structure et les échelles de mesure ont été correctement validées et pourraient donc être reproduites.

Selon le PBRC, la stratégie est conçue non pas comme une adaptation à l'environnement externe, mais comme un renforcement des ressources, des compétences et de l'expertise accumulées au sein de l'entreprise. Il s'agit d'un passage d'une logique stratégique d'adaptation à une approche proactive où l'entreprise détermine elle-même les conditions, les ressources et les compétences nécessaires à son propre développement. C'est dans cette optique que les experts interviewés dans le cadre du premier article ont mentionné la nécessité de développer une stratégie en conformité avec les compétences de l'organisation. Cette idée est également soutenue par la littérature où est démontré la pertinence des tests de la relation entre les compétences organisationnelles et de stratégie (Mullaly & Thomas, 2009; Rivard et al, 2006; Edelman et al, 2005; Slater et al, 2006; Zajac et al, 2000; Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984). Pour évaluer le rôle et l'influence de la stratégie dans la relation entre les compétences organisationnelles et la performance, deux possibilités ont été envisagées: (1) la logique de médiation, et (2) la logique de modération. Si la plupart des études antérieures ont mesuré l'effet intermédiaire de la stratégie selon une logique de modération de la relation entre les actifs internes et la performance, nous avons plutôt suivi la suggestion de Edelman et al. (2005) qui ont préféré évaluer l'effet médiateur de la stratégie puisqu'ils considéraient cet ajustement plus précis et pertinent dans le contexte de la vente au détail. Nos résultats ont été mitigés. Bien que l'effet médiateur a été observé et prouvé statistiquement significatif, l'effet de co-alignement a été marginal. En effet, nous avons obtenu une médiation partielle et la plus large part de la variance expliquée de la performance provient de l'influence directe des compétences organisationnelles.

Même si nos résultats tendent à démontrer l'importance pour les détaillants en alimentation de se différencier de leurs compétiteurs, nous considérons cette conclusion plutôt paradoxale. En effet, il n'existe pas de possibilités illimitées pour les épiciers de mener une stratégie de différenciation puisque le degré de différenciation n'est pas infini. En d'autres termes, tout en suivant une stratégie de différenciation, les épiciers proposent des services similaires et offrent des produits et une expérience de magasinage comparables. Dans une perspective basée sur les ressources et les compétences, un détaillant en alimentation ne pourrait fonder son avantage concurrentiel sur une telle stratégie car, en quelque sorte, il serait trop facile pour ses concurrents de l'imiter. Comme nos résultats l'ont démontré, la nature idiosyncratique des compétences organisationnelles constitue un levier de performance plus fort que la stratégie. De plus, une offre de produits standardisée, des prix équivalents et des politiques de coûts similaires appliqués par les différentes bannières conduisent aussi à cette conclusion.

Toutefois, le résultat principal de cet article concerne plutôt la faiblesse du lien trouvé entre les compétences organisationnelles et la stratégie, et entre la stratégie et la performance. En effet, malgré la médiation significative mais partielle de la stratégie de différenciation, la faiblesse relative de ces relations tend à démontrer une importance tout aussi faible de la stratégie d'entreprise sur la performance pour le sous-secteur de l'alimentation au Québec. On peut supposer qu'un meilleur co-alignement de la stratégie avec les compétences organisationnelles aurait peut-être conduit à un effet plus important sur la performance des entreprises.

B. Conclusion

Il est devenu un truisme, en regard de la PBRC, de mentionner que les actifs internes des organisations sont des sources potentielles d'avantage concurrentiel. Bien que la littérature ait fourni de nombreux articles scientifiques critiquant cette approche stratégique et soulignant l'aspect tautologique de l'opérationnalisation des ressources et des compétences (Priem & Butler, 2001a; Priem & Butler, 2001b; Williamson, 1999), il n'en demeure pas moins que la PBRC reste encore l'une des deux principales approches stratégiques et donne un cadre théorique cohérent pour analyser, de l'intérieur de l'entreprise, les raisons du succès d'entreprise.

Notre recherche s'ajoute à la littérature en management stratégique, et plus précisément à celle portant sur le secteur de la distribution alimentaire. Cette thèse suggère que les entreprises ayant la volonté de procéder à une identification proactive de leurs compétences organisationnelles et de développer ces celles-ci auront un niveau de performance supérieur. Si nos résultats ne démontrent pas l'importance de co-aligner ces compétences et la stratégie d'entreprise, il est permis de penser qu'un échantillon de meilleure qualité aurait pu nous présenter des résultats plus concluants. Néanmoins, cette thèse ne représente pas une fin en soi, mais une étape supplémentaire sur la route de la connaissance.

ABSTRACT

Strategic management has always been a core preoccupation for businesses (McGrath et al., 1995). More specifically, the quest for a sustainable competitive advantage that leads to a superior performance represents the key element for the firms who need not only to differentiate themselves from their competitors, but to get a leading position in their industry (Barney, 2007; Porter & Kramer, 2006). In response, researchers in the field of strategic management have developed theoretical approaches for explaining what firms should do to address this major issue.

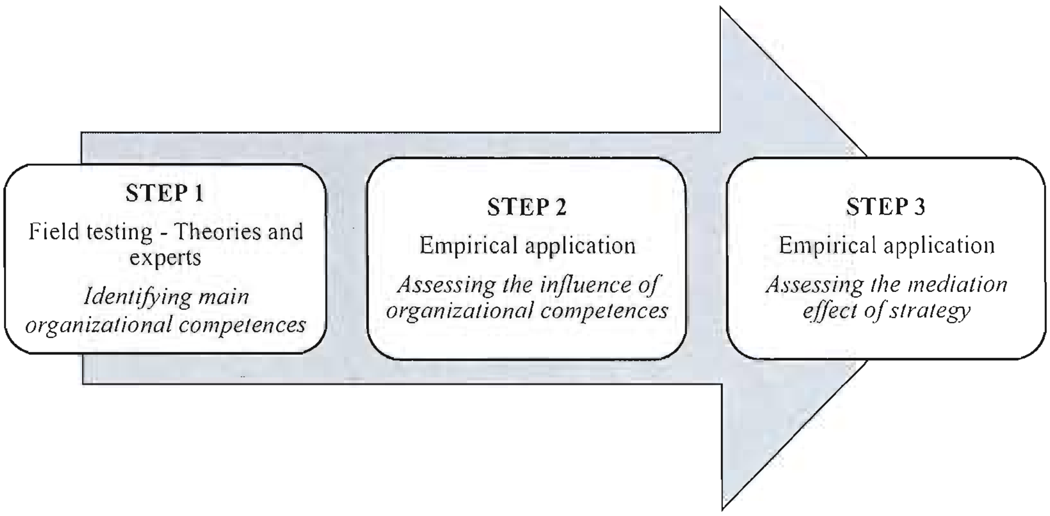
Among the diverse perspectives that propose a synthesizing integration of different approaches to strategy theory, the resource-based view (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991) and the two others perspectives resulting from it – the competence-based view (Sanchez, 1996) and the dynamic capabilities approach (Teece, et al., 1997; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993) – offer a coherent framework which underlies concepts such as resources, dynamic capabilities and competences as sources of competitive advantage (Sanchez, 2000; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Accordingly, numerous researchers have found relevant to understand how these concepts could have an influence on competitive advantage and, ultimately, on firm performance (Barney, 1995; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993).

If most of these researches have been conducted in the industrial sector, little has been done in retailing even if it represents a very dynamic economic sector with a high level of competition (Morshett et al., 2006; Moore, 2005; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001). Moreover, in order to be more specific in our study of organizational competences, the focus has been on the food retailing sector. Since the food retailing field remains too large because of the several disparities existing at the geographical and socio-economical levels, the accuracy of our research field has focused on the

Quebec food retailing. Therefore, using the resource and competence-based view as our overarching conceptual framework, the present study proposes to examine one global research question: **"How organizational competences impact Quebec food retailers performance?"**. To do so, this study follows a three steps structure.

Figure i.

An exploratory process



The **first step** (presented in Article 1) starts with two generic models of organizational competences (Thompson & Richardson, 1996; Lado & Wilson, 1994). The objective is to highlight the opinion of some Quebecer experts in retailing in regard of these frameworks. Well-informed individuals, calling on their insights and experience and selected on the basis of their well-known expertise in the context of retailing, and some in the food retailing sector, are better equipped to determine those organizational competences in their own organization that influence performance.

The **second step** (presented in Article 2) aims to evaluate the influence of three specific organizational competences on the performance of one of the top three supermarket banners in Quebec: (1) customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction. The choice of these three organizational competences has been determined by the qualitative results obtained in the previous interviews conducted for the first article. Having questioned two distinct groups of respondents – (1) store managers and assistant store managers, and (2) department managers, assistant department managers, heads of cashiers, and assistant heads of cashiers – results were analyzed according to the three major grocery retailing banners in Quebec, taking Métro as our main case study and proposing a preliminary comparison with a joint sample of respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys.

The **third step** (presented in Article 3) proposes a complementary analysis while integrating strategy as a third variable in the relationship between organizational competences and performance. It must be noted that little has been done using quantitative methodology for studying this issue, and lesser when including strategy as one of the key variable (Kuivalainen & Taalikka, 2004). As for Edelman, et al., 2005 study, we opted for the perspective of a fit as mediation. It is the most relevant and testing it indicates the power of strategy in translating resources and competences into firm performance. The aim of this third article is to test this hypothesis and determine to which degree the choice of competitive strategy can influence the impact of organizational competences on business performance. Again, we have proposed a preliminary comparison between Métro and Loblaws/Sobeys.

The in-depth interviews allowed us to identify the three main organizational competences considered as potential sources of competitive advantage for retailers (customer orientation, external cooperation skills, and employee loyalty / satisfaction). For assessing these qualitative results, two different samples of respondents were questioned (store managers, and department managers / head of cashiers) and we proceeded to our analyses in accordance with the Quebec grocery retailing banners.

Our main results confirm the positive influence of customer orientation for both banner samples. However, employee loyalty / satisfaction was considered relevant and significantly impacting performance only for Métro whereas respondents from Loblaws/Sobeys rather focused on external cooperation skills. When integrating strategy as a mediating variable in the relation between organizational competences and performance, results were the same for both samples since none of them acknowledged strategy, cost leadership or differentiation, as a mediator in the organizational competences performance relation.

INTRODUCTION

A. The resource and competence-based view: An overview of a strategic management approach, the concepts, and the theoretical framework

Since the beginning of the 1980s, we can identify two main theoretical approaches in strategic management who got interested in analyzing the firms' sustained competitive advantages: the industrial organization perspective (IO) and the resource-based view (RBV). In this section, the focus is on these two perspectives but mainly on the RBV, which constitutes the theoretical core of this thesis. The major concepts related to this specific approach are discussed as well as the other strategic outlooks resulting from the RBV (i.e. the dynamic capabilities, the competence-based view and the core competences).

a. One common objective, two different approaches

The IO perspective is an outside-in approach focusing on the industry structure and its effects on firms' performance.

> *Within this framework the firm is viewed as a bundle of strategic activities aiming at adapting to industry environment by seeking an attractive position in the market arena. The sustainability of rents stemming from such a position is critically dependent on the relative influence of competitive forces encountered by the firm (Spanos & Lioukas, 2001: 907).*

According to Porter (1980), there are five external forces influencing the strategic position of a firm: (1) the threat of substitutes, (2) the entry barriers, (3) the power of suppliers, (4) the competitive rivalry, and (5) the power of buyers. Taking these forces into consideration, the firm must adopt either a defensive or an offensive strategy: finding a protected position or trying to alter the forces in presence.

Since a firm's activities are essential to its competitive advantage, resources are not isolated from the logic of competitive strategy perspective. Even though some theorists do not consider those as properly valuable, resources constitute intermediates in the activities and processes that lead the firm to performance (Porter, 1980). This supports the premise that resources specific to an industry are equally distributed and perfectly mobile, and the idea that competition results from the characteristics of the industry and not from firms (Von Krogh & Roos, 1995). Essentially, the IO perspective suggests that a firm's competitive advantage relies on the structure of the industry and the position of the firm within this structure, but also in its capacity to recognize opportunities and counter threats, and to influence external forces (Porter, 1985).

If Porter's five forces framework is considered to be fundamental in the external environment analysis, and in strategic management in general, nevertheless, it remains questionable for several reasons. First, it underlies rhetoric of confrontation and focuses more on threats and opportunities, leaving little room for collaboration strategies. Second, it is an endogenous perspective that systematically excludes internal assets as potential sources of competitive advantage since strategy is the only result of the adaptability of the firm to its external environment. It also tends not to recognize the idiosyncratic nature of businesses. While each firm is unique, the analysis is the same for all competitors on a given market. It could also be improved, adding public power as a sixth force. Finally, this framework is more or less relevant for SMEs and seems more adapted to large businesses.

The RBV proposes an alternative founded on the idea that firms are unique and composed of idiosyncratic sets of resources (Barney, 1991). It focuses on the firm's assets for determining how competitive advantage is achieved and how it might be sustained over time (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991; Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Wernerfelt, 1984).

> *[...] competitive advantage, whatever its source, ultimately can be attributed to the ownership of a valuable resource that enables the company to perform activities better or more cheaply than competitors. [...] Superior performance will therefore be based on developing competitively distinct set of resources and deploying them in a well-conceived strategy (Collis & Montgomery, 1995: 120).*

More specifically, Barney (1991: 102) argues that the development of a competitive advantage can be carried out only in one quite precise case: "[...] *when a firm is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors*". Therefore, if a competitive advantage represents a major strategic element for a firm, it is necessary that this advantage must be sustainable and that all the firm's competitors ceased their attempts for duplicating this advantage (Lippman & Rumelt, 1982).

b. The question of rents

The main purpose of strategic management has always been the creation and the sustainability of a competitive advantage for the firm and both, the IO perspective and the RBV, tend to define sources of such an advantage and determine how business can reach higher than average rents (Porter, 1985) "[...] *where rent is defined as return in excess of a resource owner's opportunity costs*" (Mahoney & Pandian, 1992: 364). As shown in the following table, these rents can be of different types but, in each case, they result from an above-normal rate of returns.

As mentioned previously, the IO perspective suggests that competitive advantage takes root outside the firm and supports the idea that resources specific to an industry are equally distributed and perfectly mobile (Von Krogh & Roos, 1995). The RBV rather tries to identify internal sources – resources and competences – of the firm's competitive advantage (Barney, 1995; Lado et al., 1992; Wernerfelt, 1984). Moreover, the RBV is based on two fundamental assumptions: the heterogeneity and immobility of the resources on the market (Barney, 1991). In other words, various businesses have various resources and these resources are not easily transferable from one to another and such transfer wouldn't be done without cost. The distribution of the resources is unequal and so is the efficacy of the firms in their capacity to mobilize their resources. Thus, the rents appropriated by a firm depend on the resources distribution and its use (Peteraf, 1993).

Table a.

Definitions and types of rent

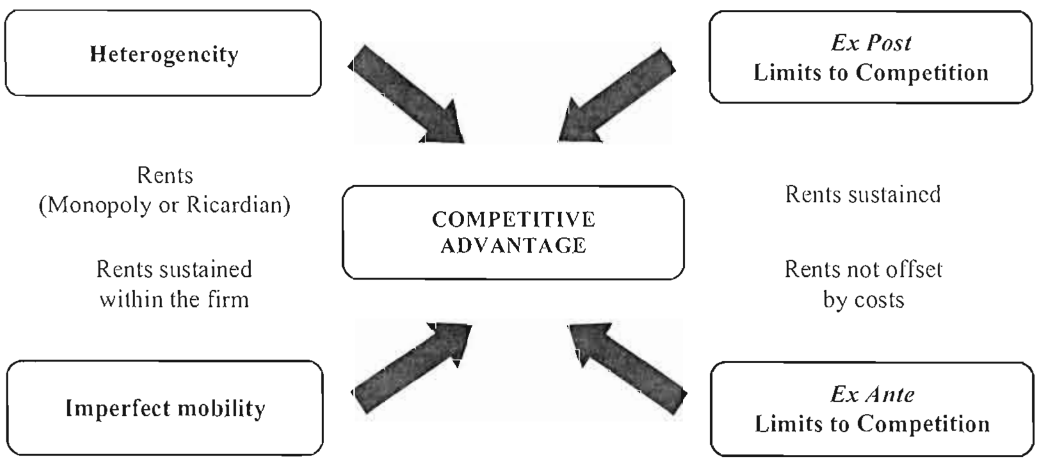
Types of rent	Definitions
Ricardian rent	Achieved by owning a valuable resource that is scarce.
Monopoly rent	Achieved by government protection or by collusive arrangements when entry barriers to potential competitors are high.
Entrepreneurial (Schumpeterian) rent	Achieved by risk-taking and entrepreneurial insight in uncertain/complex environment. Dependent on the development of new resources or to new forms of use.
Quasi-rent	The amount that a firm may appropriate to achieve above-normal returns. It comes from the difference between the value of acquisition of a resource and the value generated by its use

(Mahoney & Pandian, 1992)

In addition to the heterogeneity and the imperfect mobility of the resources, it is also relevant to underline two other cornerstones that also contribute to the creation / preservation of the rents. Peteraf (1993) talks about *ex ante* limits to competition – which help the firm to attain a competitive advantage – and *ex post* limits to competition – which help it to sustain this advantage (Wade & Hulland, 2004; Priem & Butler, 2001). *Ex ante* limits suggests that "[...] prior to any firm's establishing a superior resource position, there must be limited competition for that position" (Peteraf, 1993: 185). *Ex ante* limits "[...] mean that subsequent to a firm's gaining a superior position and earning rents, there must be forces which limit competition for those rents" (Peteraf, 1993: 182).

Figure a.

The cornerstones of competitive advantage



(Peteraf, 1993: 186)

c. *Main concepts and theoretical perspectives*

If optimal resources endowments and deployments lead to a sustained competitive advantage for the firm, not all the resources can be source of such an advantage (Lado & Wilson, 1994; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991). It is thus critical, in the context of the RBV, to define the concept of *resource* and, at the same time, the notion of *competence,* which is tightly linked to it.

Defining and analyzing these two concepts appear to be particularly important; since these notions suffer from a lack of common terminology (Kristandl & Bontis, 2007; Bontis, 2001), it is relevant to propose a clear comprehension.

> *One of the difficulties of the literature on skills-based management is the range of terms writers in this field use to describe their ideas. Similar terms – strengths, skills, competencies, capabilities, organizational knowledge, and intangible assets – are used interchangeably by different authors (Campbell & Sommers Luchs, 1997: 5).*

Some authors also confer to these notions different significances according to the reference unit of analysis (individual/organization), the organizational structure (centralised/decentralised) or the desired aim (increase the performance or monopolize new market shares for example) (Garavan & McGuire, 2001).

It is admitted that the authors do not get along on only one definition, what involves important differences and sometimes contradictions (Arrègle & Quélin, 2000). However, the heterogeneity of the definitions and the instability of the framework of analysis are typical for an emergent theoretical field and testify the absence of a common criterion distinguishing the concepts of *resource* from that of *competence* or *asset*. Since the differences between these central terms are too often unclear, it contributes to the misunderstanding of this global strategic management theory (Freiling, 2004; Hafeez, et al., 2002). Indeed, confusion comes not only from the various definitions attributed to these terms but also from the use of these central terms. In order to avoid an over extensive discussion, the following table presents a formal terminology corresponding to the resource and competence-based view (Freiling, 2004; Sanchez et al., 1996).

Reading the following table allows establishing a ranking between these three concepts. Indeed, the broader and more general concept of *asset* includes the more specific concept of *resource*, which results in *competence* once deployed and combined.

Table b.

Definitions of central terms

Asset	Homogeneous external or internal factors, serving the firm as input for value-added processes.
Resource	Result of successful asset refinement processes, producing sustainable heterogeneity of the owning firm in competition and enabling the firm to withstand competitive forces.
Competence	Organizational, repeatable, learning-based and therefore non-random ability to sustain the coordinated deployment of assets and resources enabling the firm to reach and defend the state of competitiveness and to achieve goals.

This semantic problem contributes, to a certain extent, to support the confusion despite the numerous theoretical works focused on the nature and definitions surrounding the concept of *competence* (Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Moreover, continuing in the subtle refinements that add to the confusion by redefining the terms of resource, competence and capability, or by creating new ones, causes erosion in the field and entails a risk of implosion (Arrègle & Quelin, 2000).

i. The notion of resource and the resource-based view (RBV)

The RBV paradigm concentrates on some firm's specific internal resources in order to understand performance gaps between businesses evolving in the same environment, and to identify the factors explaining these differences. Penrose (1959) has been the first addressing this issue and using the term *resource* in its analysis of the firm which she considered as the firm's productive components. The nature of the resources is human and material, and the firm's growth is created by the interaction of the resources that it possesses. In this sense, Penrose supports the ricardian rent and assumes that what drives performing corporations is not as much the choice of an attractive industry as the strategies being based on unique and rare resources. Almost 30 years should have been waited before Wernerfelt (1984) got interested again in the concept of resource. For him, resources constitute as many tangible and intangible assets for the firm embedding individual and collective competences. Referring to an important body of literature, Chatterjee & Wernerfelt (1991) classified resources into three different categories: physical, intangible and financial. If there has been almost no disagreement over what encompasses physical and financial resources, defining intangible resources appeared to be more problematic.

> *Organizationally embedded intangibles have in earlier literature also been referred to as tacit knowledge (e.g. Polanyi, 1964); experiences, reputation and goodwill (e.g. Berg & Friedman, 1981; Duncan, 1982), organizational routines and skills (e.g. March & Simon, 1958; Nelson & Winter, 1982) (Andersen & Suat Kheam, 1998: 164).*

Barney (1991) argued for a broader definition by suggesting the concept of *capability*. During the same decade, the RBV has been developed and has constituted a major breakthrough for the strategic management field of study. Today, many researchers in the domain have adopted this strategic perspective and the concept of *resource* has profited from it in terms of popularity and relevance in explaining firms' performance without, however, being consensual on a definition.

The table c. presents a list of definitions and typologies of the concept of resource in the context of the RBV. From this list, it is possible to underline three major elements for understanding the main essence of this concept.

- First of all, a resource is an asset of variable nature (tangible or intangible – material, financial, human, etc.) used by a firm with an aim of achieving a goal;

Table c.

Definitions / Typologies of resources

Authors	Year	Definition / Typology
Penrose	1959	Firm's productive components (physical, human and organizational resources).
Wernerfelt	1984	"By a resource is meant anything which could be thought of as strength or weakness of a given firm. More formally, a firm's resources at a given time could be defined as those (tangible and intangible) assets which are tied semipermanently to the firm."
Barney	1991	"All assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, etc., controlled by the firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness."
Grant	1991	"Resources are inputs into the production process –they are the basic units of analysis. The individual resources of the firm include items of capital equipment, skills of individual employees, patents, brand names, finance, and so on." Assumes the typology of Hofer and Schendel (1978) and add a sixth category. - financial - technological - physical - human - organizational - *reputation*
Hall	1992	Resources are tangible and intangible. "Intangible resources can be classified as assets or skills."
Verdin & Williamson	1992	Define five broad resource classes: - customer assets - channel assets - input assets - process assets - market knowledge assets
Amit & Schoemaker	1993	"The firm's resources will be defined as stocks of available factors that are owned or controlled by the firm. Resources are converted into final products or services by using a wide range of other firm assets and bonding mechanisms such as technology, management systems, incentive systems, trust between management and labour, and more. These resources consist, *inter alia*, of know-how that can be traded (e.g., patents and licenses), financial or physical assets (e.g., property, plant and equipment), human capital, etc."
Black & Boal	1994	Two types of resources: - Contained resources: "is comprised of an identified *simple network* of resource factors that can be monetarily valued." - System resources: "is created by a *complex network* of firm resource factors."

Table c. (continued)

Authors	Year	Definition / Typology
Nanda	1996	"Resources are the fixed, the firm-specific input factors of production. […] Resources may be physical or intangible."
Sanchez et al.	1996	"Firm-addressable resources. These are firm's available assets and capabilities to perceive market opportunities." Firm-addressable resources' are classified in operations such as applications of existing capabilities for research and development, tangible or physical assets such as machines and intangible assets such as knowledge.
Teece et al.	1997	"Resources are firm-specific assets that are difficult if not impossible to imitate."
Combs & Ketchen	1999	"[…] assets that engage in interfirm cooperation in order to grow are tied semi-permanently to the firm."
Barney & Arikan	2001	"Tangible and intangible assets a firm uses to choose and implement its strategy."
Helfat & Petaraf	2003	"A resource refers to an asset or input to production (tangible or intangible) that an organization owns, controls, or has access to on a semi-permanent basis."
Kraaijenbrink, Spender & Groen	2010	"[…] resources that are inputs to the firm and the capabilities that enable the firm to select, deploy, and organize such inputs."

- Secondly, a resource is used in the context of a strategy which must contribute to obtaining a competitive advantage;

- Finally, a resource must be controlled by a firm without the obligation of being owned by this firm, which represents a mean for excluding the competitors.

These conclusions raise an important question for the researchers of the RBV school: 'What resources will generate rent for the firm?'[1] Thus, it becomes essential to determine which of the resources possessed by a firm are strategically important so they can be considered as a potential source of sustainable competitive advantage and of performance (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993). Therefore, attributes of resources that distinguish a strategic resource from an ordinary one must be identified.

> *[...] typologies have been proposed by Amit & Schoemaker (1993), Black & Boal (1994), Collis & Montgomery (1995) and Grant (1991). Although, the terms employed across these frameworks are somewhat different, all attempt to link the heterogeneous, imperfectly mobile, and inimitable, firm-specific resources sets possessed by firms to their competitive positions. (Wade & Hulland, 2004: 115)*

According to Barney (1995; 1991), resources must meet four essential attributes in order to be considered as strategic, and thus confer a sustainable competitive advantage to the firm: (1) value, (2) rarity, (3) inimitability, and (4) non-substitutability. As presented in the following table, some authors have suggested

[1] At this point, it is important to understand that we do not intend, in this thesis, to determine who will appropriate the rent resulting from the competitive advantage. We rather want to evaluate if, indeed, resources, and more precisely organizational competences, are source of competitive advantage and, ultimately generate a rent for the organization.

other attributes to complete or substitute those proposed by Barney (1991)[2]. The latter still remains the most used.

Table d.

Typologies of resources attribute

Resource attribute	Terminology
Ex ante limits to competition	
Value	Value (Barney, 1991; Dierickx & Cool, 1989)
Rarity	Rare (Barney, 1991) Scarcity (Amit & Shoemaker, 1993) Idiosyncratic assets (Williamson, 1979)
Appropriability	Appropriability (Amit & Shoemaker, 1993; Collis & Montgomery, 1995; Grant, 1991)
Ex post limits to competition	
Imitability	Imperfect imitability: history dependent, causal ambiguity, social complexity (Barney, 1991) Replicability (Grant, 1991) Inimitability (Amit & Shoemaker, 1993; Andrews, 1971; Collis & Montgomery, 1995) Uncertain imitability (Lippman & Rumelt, 1982) Social Complexity (Fiol, 1991) Causal ambiguity (Dierickx & Cool, 1989)
Substitutability	Non-substitutability (Barney, 1991) Transparency (Grant, 1991) Substitutability (Collis & Montgomery, 1995) Limited substitutability (Amit & Shoemaker, 1993; Dierickx & Cool, 1989) Substitutes (Black & Boal, 1994)
Mobility	Imperfect mobility (Barney, 1991) Transferability (Grant, 1991) Low tradability (Amit & Shoemaker, 1993; Dierickx & Cool, 1989) Tradability (Black & Boal, 1994)

(Wade & Hulland, 2004)

[2] Among the various attributes exposed in table d., *mobility* refers to the RBV assumption of *imperfect mobility* previously discussed in the section A.b., p.3.

Value

The value of a resource is determined by its contribution as well to the firm's objectives as to the fulfillment of consumer's needs. Indeed, the value of a resource is function of both firm's internal and external environment: different firms confer different value to a resource. Changes in the environment such as technology, price levels or consumer tastes can involve variations in the perceived value of a resource. Hence, there must be a fit between the firm's ability to do something and the opportunity to do it (Russo & Fouts, 1997).

At the internal environment level, a firm should ideally possess a resource in order to support or enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. In other words, the resource must add value to the firm by helping it to neutralize the threats and exploit the opportunities present in a specific market environment (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991). Therefore, the firm must stay aware of the changing business environment in which it evolves. Moreover, the transaction costs related to the investment in the resource cannot be higher than the rent resulting from the acquisition of this resource (Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). Hence, the value of a resource must lead to lowered costs, increased revenues, or both. To be considered as valuable in the external environment, a resource must produce something valued by consumers (Bogner & Thomas, 1994; Verdin & Williamson, 1994) at a price they are willing to pay depending on their preferences, and the possible alternatives (Peteraf, 1993; Barney, 1986). Consequently, the link between the value of a resource and the demand is essential (Collis & Montgomery, 1995).

Rarity

The rarity of a resource depends on its uniqueness. The less there are firms holding a resource, or the less it is available to numerous firms, the more rare the resource is considered. (Amit & Schomaker, 1993). However, there is something pleonastic in the sense that what is valuable is generally rare and what is rare is usually considered valuable (Foss & Knudsen, 2003).

As suggested in the strategic management literature, it is interesting to differentiate resources that help the firm attaining a competitive advantage from those that contribute to sustain this advantage (Wade & Hulland, 2004; Priem & Butler, 2001). Although rare and valuable resources lead to competitive advantage, it is not enough for a firm to consider this advantage as sustainable (Barney, 1995). Resources must also simultaneously meet some other important criteria to be considered as sustainable. Accordingly, rarity and value can be considered as *ex ante* limits to competition but it remains necessary to add *ex post* limits in order to sustain a firm's competitive advantage (Peteraf, 1993).

Non-imitability

The question of imitability refers to the replicability of the resources. A resource is considered not easily replicable by other firms when they must pay important costs for developing that resource or acquiring it. Barney (1991, 2001) identifies three different sources of imperfect imitability: (1) causal ambiguity, (2) history, and (3) social complexity.

- *Causal ambiguity*

  It indicates the difficulty for a competitor to know which are the resources at the origin of the performance of a firm (Lippman & Rumelt, 1982). It limits the identification and the understanding of the strategic resources that make firms successful (Arrègle & Quélin, 2000; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990; Dierickx & Cool, 1989). In other words, causal ambiguity exists when the bonds between the resources controlled by a firm and its competitive advantage are not well understood. In this case, it becomes difficult for a competitor, who tries to copy the strategy of a successful firm, to know which resource it should imitate. Globally, causal ambiguity relies on three characteristics:

> *Tacitness refers to the implicit and noncodifiable accumulation of skills that results from learning by doing. Complexity results from having a large number of interdependent skills and assets. Specificity refers to the transaction specific skills and assets that are utilized in the production processes and provision of services for particular customers (Reed & DeFillippi, 1990: 89).*

- *Social complexity*

  Resources are considered very complex social phenomena, beyond the ability of firms to systematically manage and influence (Barney, 1991). Social complexity is related to all the interrelationships established between people, space and other resources. Hence, certain resources such as interpersonal relations and firm's reputation for instance can be true social phenomena, not easily imitable.

- *History / path dependency*

  The present choices are conditioned by the choices carried out in the past (Nelson & Winter, 1982). Consequently, the inimitable character of a resource can be explained by the idiosyncratic historic conditions under which the resource was created or acquired. Indeed, a competitor can't easily enjoy the same environment and conditions that were necessary to the creation of the resource because firms evolve via a path dependency, which is hard to replicate. Hence, the history of a firm is impossible, or extremely expensive to reproduce for a competitor unless it takes an identical path over time (Bowman & Collier, 2006).

- *Time compression diseconomies*

  The imitation of a specific stock of assets can be long and/or costly (Dierickx & Cool, 1989). If the competitors want to catch up their delay on a firm possessing the resources whose development required several years, they won't be able to get the same result while allocating the same investments without waiting for the same lapse of time; tempting to compress this length entails lower results (Prévot, 2005).

- *Erosion*

  To preserve the strategic value of resources, they must be maintained in time. It is therefore essential that firms invest in their maintenance and their renewal if they do not want to decline compared to their competitors (Dierickx & Cool, 1989).

All these factors can increase the cost of imitating a firm's resource and consequently support RBV assumptions about resources heterogeneity and immobility.

Non-substitutability

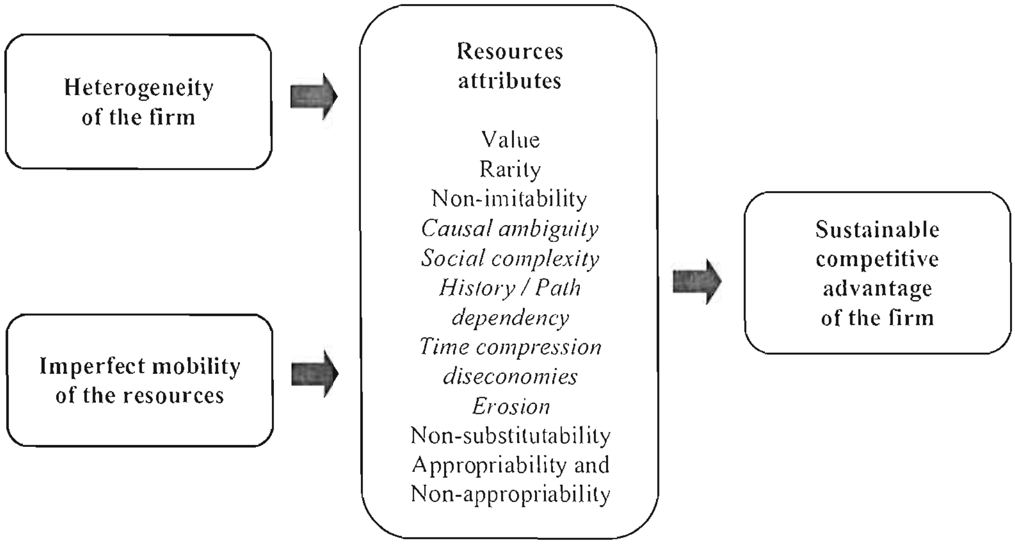
Even though a resource is considered valuable, rare and inimitable, it should not exist either a substitute to this resource so that it confers a sustainable competitive advantage to the firm (Barney, 1991; Dierickx & Cool, 1989). Resources cannot fulfill the same function. In other words, firms that do not possess this resource cannot use a different one or a comparable one to reach the same results as the firm who possesses it.

Appropriability and non-appropriability

It addresses two issues: the question of ownership and the question of rent. Appropriability can be determined by the ease with which a firm can appropriate a competitor's resource. It is also about the potential of rent earning by the firm and the importance for the firm to appropriate the returns related to its competitive advantage (Collis & Montgomery, 1995; Grant, 1991).

Figure b.

The conditions for the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage



The theoretical framework presented in the previous figure combines at the same time the main elements included in the respective models of Peteraf (1993) and Barney (1991), and some other important characteristics regarding the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage. Based on the assumptions of heterogeneity of the firms and the imperfect mobility of the resources between firms, strategic resources – i.e. those who are valuable, rare, non-imitable, non-substitutable, non-appropriable – lead to sustainable competitive advantage in the condition that the firm can earn the rent resulting from its advantage.

ii. The notion of competence / capability and the competence-based view (CBV) / the dynamic capabilities approach (DCA)

If there was confusion with the definition of the notion of *resource*, the situation is as problematic with the notion of *competence* (Schmiedinger et al., 2005; Sanchez, 2004; Freiling, 2004; Garavan & McGuire, 2001; Jubb & Robotham, 1997; Nordhaug

& Gronhaug, 1994). Indeed, the literature does not propose any universally accepted definition for *competence*. On the contrary, several discrepancies exist in definitions that are due to a semantic choice, the type of competency, or the level of analysis. Three terms are used in the literature for defining the concept of competency: (1) *competence(s)*, (2) *competency(ies)*, and (3) *capability(ies)* (Prévot, 2005). Some authors use them in an interchangeable way while some others draw clear distinctions between each one of these terms.

Born at the crossroads of human resources management and strategic management, the notion of *competence* refers to different levels of analysis depending on the field of study; HRM tends to focus on the micro level (individual competences), and to a lesser degree on the meso level (collective competences), while strategic management is turned on the macro level (organizational competences) (Rouby & Thomas, 2004). Although some authors got interested in the concept of *competence* from an organizational perspective before the 1990s, it was initially developed from the perspective of the individual (McClelland, 1973; Boyatzis, 1982) and competences were defined as "[...] a set of knowledge, abilities and attitudes that justify superior performance. There is also an assumption that better performance is based on intelligence and on personality of individuals. Competence is considered as the stock of an individual's resources (Fleury & Fleury, 2005: 1641)". Selznick (1957) is the first having introduced the term *competency* on the organizational level by using the concept of *distinctive competencies* to define activities in which an organization is really good at (Schmiedinger et al., 2005).

> *[...] Hall (1993) classifies intangible resources as 'assets' or 'competencies': Intangible assets include 'having' capabilities, which typically are regulatory (e.g. patents) or positional (e.g. reputation) while intangible skills or competencies are related to 'doing' capabilities, which include functional capability (e.g. know-how) and cultural or organizational capability (e.g. routines) (Andersen & Suat Kheam, 1998: 164).*

Likewise, competences have also been referring to firm's capacity to develop and mobilize all of its resources and network through organizational routines that reflect accumulated knowledge (Grant, 1991; Teece, et al., 1997).

Then, the question of competences has been put slightly asides during the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, leaving the room to new approaches such that of Porter (Campbell & Sommers Luchs, 1997). Although there have been few authors in the 60s, 70s and 80s to address the issue on competences (Ansoff, 1965; Hofer & Schendel, 1978; Hitt & Ireland, 1986), it is only at the end of the 1980s that competences took all their importance in the strategic management field. While the RBV becomes more and more the dominant approach in strategic management (Foss & Knudsen, 2003), Amit & Schoemaker (1993) suggest that RBV should not only establish an endowment of firms in terms of assets and resources, but also highlight how different organizational capabilities will allow some of the firms building a significant and sustainable competitive advantage. Accordingly, firms must use competences in a more rapid and skilful way than the market itself (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

Prahalad & Hamel also added an important contribution in their seminal article published in 1990, suggesting that some specific capabilities, named core competences, are critical to an organization in order to achieve a competitive advantage. Rather then considering strategy in terms of strategic business unit, they rethought it in terms of development and valorization of core competences (Durand, 2006). Essentially, a core competence underlies five specific characteristics:

1. Lifetime exceeds that of any product;
2. A single individual can possess in itself a core competence;
3. Create value to customer;
4. Make a differentiation from competitors;

5. Lever for entering new market.

With their concept of core competence, Prahalad & Hamel (1990) and Hamel & Prahalad (1993, 1994) aimed to shed a light on how the creation and support of a competitive advantage depend on firm's capabilities to manage the creation and the use of resources and knowledge. The real breakthrough of this concept relies on the importance granted on the firm's ability to identify those core competences more than on the idea that competition is based on competences (Hamel, 1994; Tampoe, 1994).

If several authors agreed over the time with the idea of embedding the concept of *competence* in the heart of the organization's competitive advantage (Garavan & McGuire, 2001; Jurie, 2000; Hendeghem & Vendermeulen, 2000; Bergenhenegouwen et al., 1996; Nordhaug, 1996; Lado & Wilson, 1994), to explicitly discuss the concept at the organizational level, authors have used various terms: distinctive competences (Reed & DeFillippi, 1990), core competences (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990) organizational competences (Lado & Wilson, 1994) and organizational capabilities (Collis, 1994). The table e. presents various definitions and typologies for the notion of *organizational competence* and clearly demonstrates this diversity.

The reading of these definitions and typologies enables us to identify disparities, but more importantly, certain similarities. In almost every definition, competences refer to the capacity of an organization to deploy its resources and ensure their combination with an aim of achieving organizational goals, sustainable competitive advantage and/or above average performance (Grewal & Stolegraaf, 2007; Collis, 1994; Grant, 1991; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Dierickx & Cool, 1989). Indeed, the question of coordination of the resources is a major issue insofar as it enables a better operationalization of strategies (Lado & Wilson, 1994).

Table e.

Definitions / typologies of organizational competences – capabilities

Authors	Year	Definition / Typology
Prahalad & Hamel	1990	"The core competence refers to the unique intellectual, process, and product competencies associated with market competitiveness."
Nelson	1991	Capabilities: "A hierarchy of practiced organizational routines, which define lower order organizational skills, and how these are coordinated, and higher order decision procedure for choosing what is to be done at lower levels."
Grant	1991	"A capability is the capacity for a team of resources to perform some task or activity. While resources are the source of a firm's capabilities, capabilities are the main source of its competitive advantage."
Amit & Schoemaker	1993	"Capabilities refer to a firm's capability to deploy resources, usually in combination, applying organizational processes to affect a desired end. They are information-based, tangible or intangible processes that are firm specific and are developed over time through complex interactions among the firm's resources."
Jüttner & Wehrli	1994	"Competences – being components of a higher level – result from the idiosyncratic combination of the various resources."
Bogner & Thomas	1994	"Therefore, competencies can be defined as the abilities and specific skills that the firm possesses in the deployment of its resources, as well as its cognitive characteristics, which are geared toward the accomplishment of activities that permit the attainment of certain objectives."
Lado & Wilson	1994	Competences: "Firm-specific resources and capabilities that enable the organization to develop, choose, and implement value-enhancing strategies. Organizational competencies include all firm-specific assets, knowledge, skills, and capabilities embedded in the organization's structure, technology, processes, and interpersonal relationships". Propose 4 types of competences: - managerial competences - transformational-based competences - input-based competences - output-based competences
Bergenhengouwen et al.	1996	"The core competence of an organization is a unique combination of business specialism and human skills that give expression to the organization's typical character. Core competences are the company's characteristic areas of expertise and consist of the synergy of "resources" such as motivation, employee effort, technological and professional expertise, and ideas about collaboration and management."
Sanchez et al.	1996	"Competence is the ability (the power to do something) to sustain the coordinated deployment of assets in a way that helps a firm achieve its goals; to be recognized as a competence, a firm activity must meet the three conditions of organization, intention and goal attainment."

Table e. (continued)

Authors	Year	Definition / Typology
Thompson & Richardson	1996	Suggest 3 types of generic competences - Awareness and learning competences - Content competences - Process – change – competences
Teece et al.	1997	*Core competences:* "We define those competences that define a firm's fundamental business as core. Core competences must accordingly be derived by looking across the range of a firm's (and its competitors) products and services." *Dynamic capabilities:* "We define dynamic capabilities as the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments. Dynamic capabilities thus reflect an organization's ability to achieve new and innovative forms of competitive advantage given path dependencies and market positions."
Lindsay & Stuart	1997	"Integrated sets of behavior which can be directed towards successful goal achievement within contribution domains."
Doz	1997	"Underlying process routines that allow the combination of skills, systems, assets, and values, to result in predictable high-level performance of specific tasks, which yield an advantage over competitors, and provide valued functionalities for customers. Competencies are thus integrative task performance routines that combine resources (skills and knowledge, assets and processes, tangible and intangible) to result in superior competitive positions."
Hendeghem & Vendermeulen	2000	"Competency management looks at competencies as a collective characteristic of an organization. Competency management delivers in this context, a sustainable competitive advantage by unique combination of SKAs [skills, knowledge and abilities] structures, management systems, technologies, and procedures and personnel instruments. This category of competencies is known as organizational competencies."
Murray & Donegan	2003	"The competencies of a firm are what it can do as a result of resources working together whereas capabilities involve complex patterns of coordination between people, and between people and other resources that lead to sustainable competitive advantage over time."
Kaplan & Norton	2004	*Organizational capital:* the company's culture, its leadership, how aligned its people are with its strategic goals, and employees' ability to share knowledge.
Teece	2007	"Dynamic capabilities, by contrast, relate to high-level activities that link to management's ability to sense and then seize opportunities, navigate threats, and combine and reconfigure specialized and cospecialized assets to meet changing customer needs, and to sustain and amplify evolutionary fitness, thereby building long-run value for investors."
Kraaijenbrink, Spender & Groen	2010	"[…] resources that are inputs to the firm and the capabilities that enable the firm to select, deploy, and organize such inputs."

Therefore, competences must make it possible to carry out at the same time strategic activities but also some specific organizational objectives.

Over the years, two main streams in the RBV emerged; on one side, researchers are interested in "[...] internal and external resources of a firm, the economic perspective of market, hierarchies and networks, or the different implications of transaction cost theory. The other group of researchers emphasizes how to make the best use of the available resources [...] (Franke, 2002)". The competence-based view (CBV) was developed in the wake of this second stream of the RBV and the whole competence movement developed during the 90s (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990; Sanchez et al., 1996; Teece, et al., 1997).

According to this extension of the RBV, not only the discrete individual assets but also mainly the core competences of the firm represent the source of a sustainable advantage. The control of strategic resources – valuable, non-imitable, non-substitutable and rare – is considered insufficient to provide the firm with a competitive advantage, contrarily to what Barney (1991; 1995) suggested. It's actually the combination and the coordination of these resources that constitute the source of such an advantage (Grant, 1991). Moreover, internal resources are not the only roots for firm-specific competences (Freiling, 2004; Hafeez et al., 2002; Teece et al., 1997). Following the logic of firm as an open boundaries system, firm-addressable resources (Sanchez & Heene, 1997) and relational competences (Dyer & Singh, 1998) are also necessary to attain the objectives.

The dynamic capabilities approach (DCA) takes its roots in two fundamental aspects: (1) the notion of path dependency, i.e. the evolution of the firm is conditioned by its decisions and the stock of resources accumulated in its history, and (2) innovation, i.e. the firm is a place for learning by experience, for constructing and acquiring new competences that enable innovation. While the RBV and the CBV are focused on the analysis of competences operating modes, the DCA is more interested in the development of competences (Sanchez, 2000). Basically, the DCA takes into account the notion of flexibility, which refers to "[...] the firm's capacity to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environment (Teece et al., 1997: 516)". As for the CBV, the DCA argues for a competitive advantage based on the deployment of resources and competences and their coordination (Teece et al., 1997). The following table presents a summary of the salient features of these approaches.

Table f.

Comparison of the contemporary strategic management approaches

	RBV	CBV	DCA
Concept of the firm	A bundle of *resources* and *capabilities* comprising - Tangible assets - Intangible assets - Capabilities *Activities*	An *open system* of *asset stocks* and *flows* comprising - Tangible assets - Intangible assets - Capabilities *Managerial process*	A system formed by *processes*, *routines*, and *resources* comprising - Tangible assets - Intangible assets - Capabilities *Organizational / Managerial processes*
Competitive strategy	*Controlling* and exploiting strategic resources manifested in assets or capabilities	*Deploying, protecting* and *developing* competences resulted from the integration of assets and capabilities	*Deploying* and *exploiting capabilities* embedded in *processes*, and *continual reshaping* of the portfolio assets
Attributes of resources / competences	- Valuable - Rare - Inimitable - Non-substitutable	- Valuable - Rare - Inimitable - Non-substitutable *Robust (for new market)*	- Valuable - Rare - Inimitable - Non-substitutable *Dynamic*
Development method	Development of intangible assets	Development and *integration* of intangible assets and *capabilities*	Development and *integration* of intangible assets and *capabilities*
Development environment	Internal	Internal and *external*	Internal and *external*

(Hafeez et al., 2002)

Interestingly, some authors specifically differentiate these three perspectives arguing for a dynamic capabilities approach, a competence-based perspective or a resource-based view independent one from the other, whereas several others propose an integrative approach of resources and competences (Freiling, 2004; Sanchez, 2004; Duscheck, 2004; Halldórsson & Skjøtt-Larsen, 2004; Taylor Coates & McDermott, 2002). Recognizing the contributions of the DCA and the CBV to the RBV, these perspectives shouldn't be regarded as mutually exclusive as they illustrate a progressive conceptual development. Therefore, there is theoretical support for a resource and competence-based view (RCBV) as an integrative strategy theory proposing a systemic, dynamic, cognitive and holistic framework (Sanchez & Heene, 1997).

d. The challenge of measurement

In addition to the conceptualization and definition of competences, one of the main critics addressed by researchers in the field of strategic management about the resource and competence-based view (RCBV) is related to the operationalization and the measurement of competences since they are multidimensional constructs by nature (Dutta et al., 2005; Camisón, 2004).

> *The quantification of internally generated intangible assets, for which there are as yet no commonly recognized and validated scales of measurement, is particularly complicated. At the root of this problem lies the fact that the most valuable competences are highlighted by the RBV, intangible assets, are by their very nature not directly observable (Camisón, 2004: 27).*

As mentioned by Godfery & Hill (1995), three main strategic management theories are concerned by this problem: the transaction cost theory, the agency theory, and the RBV of the firm. According to this latest theory, the sustainability of competitive advantage relies on the speed with which the changes in the environment occur and the capacity of the firm to renew its resources, the availability of substitutes and the inimitability of the resource. Hence, the more unobservable is the resource, the higher are the barriers to imitation and the more sustainable is the competitive advantage based on this resource (Godfrey & Hill, 1995). However, it remains impossible to measure the level of unobservability of unobservable resources. Reed & DeFillippi (1990) addressed this issue determining the degree of unobservability through observable variables. In other words, in order to measure a construct such as a competence, one must proceed to the assessment of observable indicators related to this construct. Therefore, if a factor π is function of the degree of unobservability of a resource Φ and that this resource Φ can be determined by a set of observable variables $X_1, X_2 \dots X_n$ then it means that the factor π is function of the variables $X_1, X_2 \dots X_n$.

$$\pi = \Phi$$

and then,

$$\pi = f(X_1, X_2 \dots X_n)$$

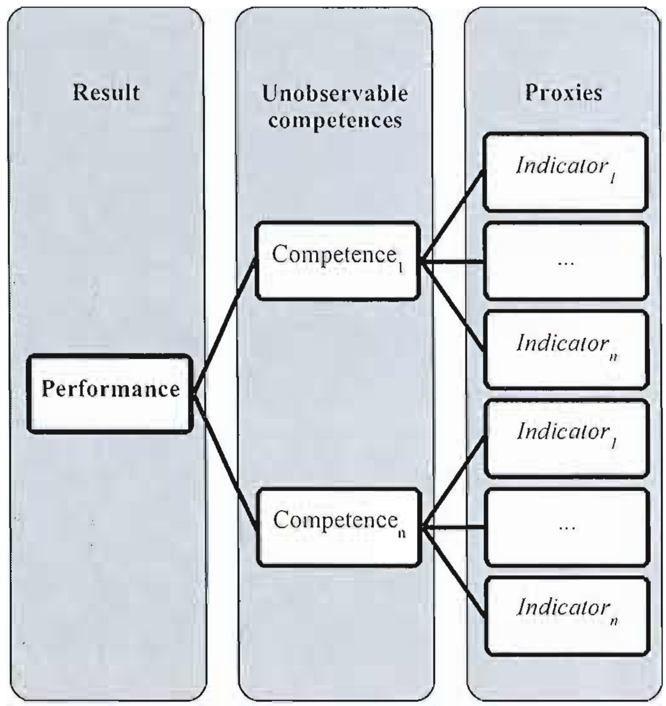
However, the use of proxies for evaluating firm-specific resources and competences requires scrutiny as for the construction of the proxies and the construct validity (Truijens, 2003). Since competences are the result of resources deployment and coordination with an aim of goal attainment (Sanchez et al., 1996; Lado & Wilson, 1994; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993), Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar (2005) suggested that competences might appear in some activities or results.

> *[...] competencies can be related to activities and can be deduced from the activities themselves and from the consequences that arise from them. In this way competencies can be operationalized by identifying and evaluating the activities and the results arising from them (Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005: 231).*

The figure c. presents the theoretical model using proxies in the measurement of unobservable competences.

Figure c.

Factorial model of the multidimensional construct



According to Camisón (2004), the literature offers two approaches to measure competences: (1) using quantitative approximation, or (2) using means of subjective self-classification scales. If both approaches seem to be used in empirical studies evaluating the impact of competences on performance, most of the researchers have chosen the self-classification scales as demonstrated in table g. The inherent difficulty to elaborate quantitative indicators and the limit imposed by the samples size can explain the predominant use of this scale of measurement type. It is also possible to identify different subjective scales: (1) comparing objectives and results, (2) valuing the possession or the characteristics of certain strategic assets, (3) comparing with competitors (Camisón, 2004), and (4) analyzing the consequences for the firm of possessing a competence (Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005).

B. Linking resources and competences with competitive strategy

Strategic management has always tried to figure out what were the different determinants of firm's profitability. Both, IO and the resource and competence-based view (RCBV), acknowledged the importance of acquiring a sustainable competitive advantage as an outcome of strategic choices and activities. For this reason, competitive strategies have been one of the most important subjects of enquiry in the field (Spanos & Lioukas, 2001; Spanos et al., 2000).

According to the RCBV, firms possess limited resources and out of this bundle of resources, those considered as rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable can lead firms to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). However, firm's competences do not come only from resources *per se*; resources need to be accessed, deployed and combined (Fleury & Fleury, 2005; Moran & Goshal, 1999; Jüttner & Wehrli, 1994; Bogner & Thomas, 1994; Grant, 1991; Reed & De Fillippi, 1990). Managers' challenge is thus to build organizational competences through interconnections of the firm's strategic resources (Mills et al., 2002).

This resource and competence-based perspective has long been considered in opposition to the industrial organization approach, which rather supports the necessity for firms to have good understanding of their strategic positioning for developing their strategy formulation and ultimately improve their competitive position on the market (Porter, 1985).

Table g.

Scales of measurement, contribution and results of empirical studies on competences / capabilities

Authors	Scale of measurement	Contribution / Results
Zehir et al. (2006)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Proposed and validated a research model - Found evidence that increasing of the level of organizational competences has significantly positive effects on growth and firm performance
Escrig-Tena & Bou-llusar (2005)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Methodological contribution by proposing a scale of measurement - Confirmed the influence of competences on the achievement of better results by firms.
Galbreath (2005)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Found that organizational assets (culture, HR policies, corporate structure, etc.) and reputational assets had a significant positive influence on firms' success. - Capabilities more than any other tangible or intangible assets contribute significantly to firm success.
Camisón (2004)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale in relation to competitors	- Methodological contribution by proposing a scale of measurement - Found empirical evidence supporting the predictive ability of distinctive competences on performance variability
Wilcox King et al. (2001)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Demonstrated linkages between competences characteristics and firm success and developed a specific way to assess competences in organizations.
McGee & Peterson (2000)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale in relation to competitors	- Found a high degree of relatedness among competences and a positive relationship between competency and firm performance
Yeoh & Roth (1999)	Quantitative approximation	- Found that firm capabilities in terms of R&D and salesforce expenditures have indirect and direct effects, respectively, on sustained competitive advantage in pharmaceutical industry.
Hamilton et al. (1998)	Quantitative approximation	- Methodological contribution by creating a framework that can be used to plot the competitive dynamics of markets in multiple industries.
Sharma & Vredenburg (1998)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Unique organizational capabilities appear to account for more than 50 percent of the firms' self-reported variance in competitive benefits.

Table g. (continued)

Authors	Scale of measurement	Contribution / Results
McGrath et al. (1995)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Methodological contribution by evaluating the fit between objectives and results.
Smart & Conant (1994)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Demonstrated that 'entrepreneurial orientation' is positively and significantly related to distinctive marketing competences and organizational performance.
Dröge et al. (1994)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Found that innovation-related competences were key source of competitive advantage in the furniture industry.
Conant et al. (1993)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Demonstrated linkages between capabilities and performance without being able identifying which capabilities or activities were related to it.
Conant et al. (1990)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Methodological contribution by proposing a strategic types scale of measurement. - Starting with Miles and Snow's (1978) strategic typology, the found evidence that marketing competences of *prospector* type were superior to those of all three other types.
Hitt & Ireland (1985)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale	- Methodological contribution by proposing a scale of measurement - Suggested that distinctive competences associated with performance vary according to the grand strategy used and the firm's principal industry.
Hambrick (1983a)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale for measuring the strength of firm's certain functional activities	- Methodological contribution by proposing a scale of measurement. - Focusing on Miles and Snow's (1978) *prospector* and *defender* strategic types, he found that there must be a fit between strategy choice and environment requirements. - Provided a better profile of *prospector* and *defender* types.
Snow & Hrebiniak (1980)	Means of a subjective self-classification scale for measuring the strength of firm's certain functional activities	- Methodological contribution by proposing a scale of measurement. - Starting with Miles and Snow's (1978) four strategic types, they found and analyzed differences between these types in regard of distinctive competences.

Researches conducted in the recent years tend to demonstrate that both perspectives are not mutually exclusive since firms must analyze their internal and external environments for reaching a competitive advantage (Furrer, et al., 2008). For Fleury & Fleury (2005) this supports the premise that the competences and resources of a firm command its strategy. Aligning strategic resources, and consequently organizational competences, with strategy then appears essential for explaining business performance (Black & Boal, 1994).

a. Co-aligning resources and competences and strategy

Introducing strategy as a variable in the equation linking resources, competences, and performance suggests the notion of 'strategic fit', which expresses the match between internal resources and competences, and the external business domains such as firm's competitive strategy (Rivard et al., 2006; Venkatraman & Camilius, 1984). As mentioned by Andrews (1971), focusing on organizational competences needs to underlie the role of strategic fit since corporate resources and competences represent one of the four components of strategy. Indeed, resources and competences are considered as a basis for the elaboration, the execution and the support of strategy. Likely, Teece et al. (1997) consider strategy formulation as a major organizational capability that must match the firm's environment and its strategic orientation in order to provide a competitive advantage.

> *We begin with the premise that the quality of a firm's strategy cannot be judged independently of the firm resources upon which it is based (Barney & Zajac, 1994). This is a contingency perspective, which argues that firm strategies co-align or fit the corresponding internal capabilities or resources (Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984) (Edelman et al., 2005: 361).*

Contingency theory supports the idea that each strategic orientation corresponds to a configuration of organizational characteristics, i.e. resources and competences, which should fit strategy for reaching higher performance (Slater et al., 2006; Zajac et al., 2000). These capabilities can be either inside-out or outside-in focused to contribute to the strategic fit between the firm and its environment (Sharma et al., 2007). Contingency theory abandons the idea of one universal strategy and appropriate management styles and rather considers strategy as the result of an in-depth analysis of the internal factors and external context of the organization (Mullaly & Thomas, 2009; Chorn, 1991).

> *The resource-based school accepts that an organization's history and experiences, its character and culture, and its strengths and capabilities all contribute to its strategy and, indeed, are crucial in determining the success of that strategy (Campbell & Sommers Luchs, 1997: 8).*

The notion of fit also supports the dynamic dimension of competitive situations. Since organizations as well as their environments are in constant change, corporate resources and competences, and the resulting strategy must also change in time (Mullaly & Thomas, 2009; Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984). For Miles & Snow (1984), successful and sustainable organizations are those able to assess the fit over a long term and define the changes to be made in order to keep their competitive advantage. A lack of attention toward changes can lead to a misfit and harm the firm's position in its environment. Among the other reasons that could create a misalignment, we can identify the inadequate processes and structure, the bad internal communication from the leadership, the incapacity to present a clear big picture to everyone in the organization, the inability to develop or acquire the necessary resources and competences that can support the strategy, and the inadequacy between the organization's time frame and some internal stakeholders' time orientation (Mullaly & Thomas, 2009).

Even though there have been several studies verifying empirically the links between resources and competences, and firm performance, little has been done using quantitative methodology and lesser when including strategy in the equation (Kuivalainen & Taalikka, 2004). Furrer et al. (2008) explored with significant positive results the parallels between resource-based and competitive strategy theories in new industry. Hughes & Morgan (2008) demonstrated a fit between strategic resources of marketing organizations and product-market strategy leads to greater performance. Edelman et al. (2005) determined that small firms reach greater performance when fitting their strategies with available resources. O'Regan & Ghobadian (2004) showed that organizational abilities aligned with strategic planning generated higher level of performance. Zajac et al. (2000) suggested a fit between organizational and environmental contingencies through strategy. Chandler & Hanks (1994) demonstrated that a fit between available resources and strategy lead the firm to enhanced performance. Cool & Schendel (1988) concluded that firms with a fit between their strategy and their accumulated assets (resources and skills) are more effective than their competitors.

b. The mediating influence of competitive strategy in the relationship between resources, competences and performance

In the literature, the discussion about the importance of a fit between business strategy and internal competences started at the end of the 1980's (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Dierickx & Cool, 1989). As mentioned previously, the RCBV suggests that strategy selection and development should be primarily based on a meticulous evaluation of available resources and competences (Spanos & Lioukas, 2001; Brush & Chaganti, 1998). Moreover, these resources and competences also need to be complementary (Trispass, 1997) and must interact with strategy inputs and outcomes to provide the basis for a sustainable competitive advantage and affect firm's performance (Hitt et al., 2001).

However, the business environment is constantly changing thus managers must remain aware of the impacts on their strategic decisions. Therefore, it would be erroneous to fall into any deterministic rigidity over firm's strategic behavior. On the other hand, the firm's strategic options or alternatives will always be restrained to its idiosyncratic stock of available resources and competences.

> *Furthermore, the value creating potential of strategy, that is the firm's ability to establish and most importantly sustain a profitable market position critically depends on the rent generating capacity of its underlying resources (Conner, 1991). In other words, this perspective's contention is that persistent differences in firm profitability require that either the firm's product be distinctive (i.e. differentiated), or attain a low cost position relative to its rivals (Spanos & Lioukas, 2001: 910).*

For Venkatraman (1989), this contingent logic comes in six different perspectives of fit.

a) *Fit as matching*

The fit is represented by a simple interaction between two explanatory variables.

b) *Fit as moderation*

In a form of linear regression between an independent variable, a moderator, and a dependent variable, the fit is represented by the interaction between the independent variable and the moderator.

c) *Fit as mediation*

According to a causal perspective, in the process linking an antecedent factor to a consequent factor, the fit plays the role of the intermediate variable.

d) Fit as gestalts

According to this holistic and systemic perspective, the fit emerges from the internal congruence between several variables.

e) Fit as profile deviation

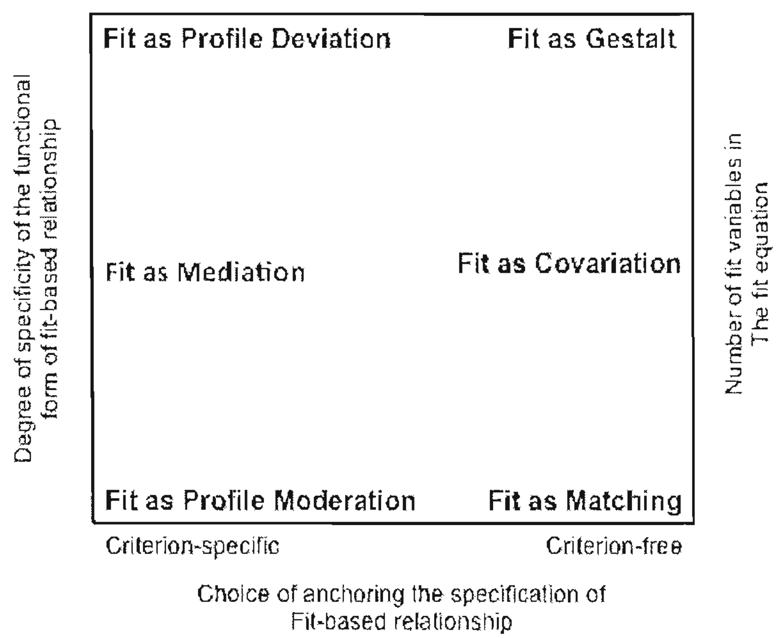
The fit is considered as the degree of adherence of a standard profile. This form may be considered as too simplistic and reductive in regard to the firm's behavior and its strategy.

f) Fit as covariation

All factors simultaneously interact to influence performance. No factor precedes the other in the causal process, nor is the role of moderator.

Figure d.

Six perspectives of fit



(Venkatraman, 1989)

A significant number of the research in strategic management explored the importance of fit by exploring different forms of co-alignment putting in relation strategy and external environment (Griffith, 2010; Tan & Tan, 2005; Covin & Selvin, 1989), industry (McDougall et al., 1994), organizational structure (Veliyath & Shortell, 1993), or information systems (Chan et al., 1997). Most of the previous researches studying the co-alignment between organizational resources and capabilities, strategy and performance postulated a fit as moderating effect. However, the industry type may influence the choice of perspective to be adopted.

> *Fragmented industries, such as retail and services, are characterized by low-entry barriers (Porter, 1980), low degrees of private or asymmetric information, and low levels of resources with limited strategic substitutability (Barney, 1991). In addition, these firms may be unable to develop the human capital of their employees to respond to dynamic changes in the environment (Meyer & Heppard, 2000) (Edelman et al., 2005: 361).*

The food retailing industry in Quebec doesn't totally correspond to this description. With three major players owning more than 90% of the grocery stores market shares (Hubert, 2003), the industry is rather characterized by high concentration, high-entry barriers, and high competition. [1] However, the issues related to strategic substitutability and human capital remain. In this context, the appropriability of the resources and competences is less important than their use through effective and efficient strategies (Brush & Chaganti, 1999; Chandler & Hanks, 1994). Accordingly, when facing a lack of strategic resources and competences, organizations cannot translate them directly into competitive advantage. Hence, "[...] carefully selected strategies serve as generative mechanism through which resources influence firm performance" (Edelman et al., 2005: 383). For Baron & Kenny (1986), fit as mediation explains how or why certain external events occur whereas fit as moderation focuses on when certain effects take place. This thesis follows the

[1] Voir tableau h. p. 40.

suggestion of Edelman et al. (2005), who consider more relevant to assess mediating hypotheses when studying the retail industry.[2]

The mediation effect imposes three different paths for illustrating the causal relations as presented in the figure e. (Kenny, et al., 1998; Venkatraman, 1989; Baron & Kenny, 1986). The direct effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable (δ_1) are an efficiency effect and report the influence of the strategic organizational competences of the firm on performance. The second path is the mediator effect (δ_2), which is related to the impact of strategy, either cost leadership or differentiation, on firm's performance (Rivard et al., 2006). The next path (δ_3) refers to the impact of the independent variable on the mediator, i.e. the firm's capacity to use organizational competences to develop and design its strategy (Mata et al., 1995). Finally, the last path (δ_4), is the mediation path, which considers the mediating effect of competitive strategy in the organizational competences – performance relationship.

Testing the mediation effect can demonstrate either a complete mediation or a partial one. In the case of a complete mediation, strategy is necessary for firm's strategic resources and competences to influence performance.

> *Complete mediation is the strongest test, indicating that, the mediator-firm strategy plays a critical role in translating resource bundles into firm performance (i.e. resources → strategies → performance) (Edelman et al., 2005: 371).*

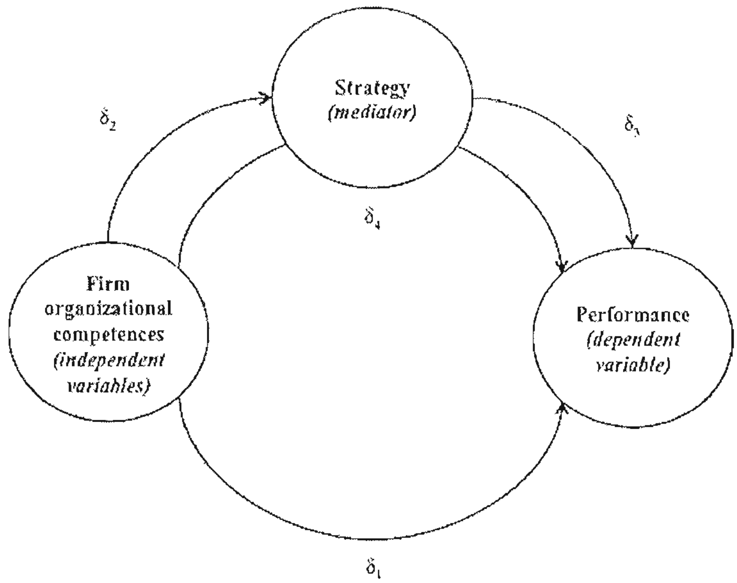
The mediation can also be partial if there are both, direct effects between the independent variable and the dependent one, and indirect effects through the mediator.

---

[2] cf. Chapitre 3 – Article 3 p. 115.

Figure e.

Co-alignment model (organizational competences, competitive strategy, and performance): fit as mediation

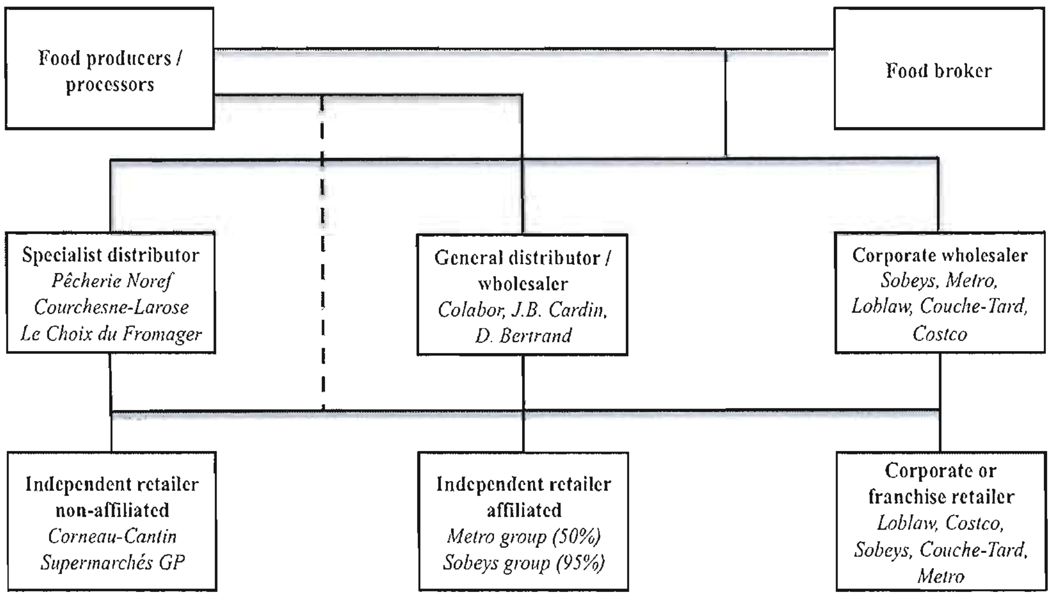


C. The food retailing industry as a field of study

This thesis examines the relationship between organizational competences, strategy and business performance of food retailers. Because the heterogeneity of the sector is very important, we focused our study on a very narrow segment. Indeed, the structure of the food retailing sector differs from one country to another and, in Canada, important disparities exist between provinces. For the purpose of this study we focused on independent (affiliated or not), franchise or corporate Quebec food retailers.

Figure f.

Structural links in Quebec food retailing sector (2005)



Source: Table Agro-alimentaire de Chaudière-Appalaches, 2006

Two major reasons explain the choice of Quebec food retailing sector as our field of study. First, it has been very few studied in academic research contrarily to other retailing subsectors and the manufacturing sector. Second, it has a major contribution to the global retailing sector of the province, but also to the whole Quebec economy. Overall, there are 9381 food retailers of all type in Quebec representing 22,4% of the global retailing market sales, and supermarkets specifically counts for 16,1%.[3] The food-retailing sector employs nearly 160 000 people for total sales reaching around 17,3$ billions[4].

[3] Statistics Canada, 2008.
[4] Statistics Canada, 2006.

Table h.

Sales in supermarkets, grocery stores and convenience stores with the type of property

	Quebec	Ontario	Canada	Canada without Quebec
Total sales (million$)	17 335	23 534	71 561	54 226
Canadian market shares	24,2	32,9	100	75,8
Corporate and franchise market shares (banners) (%)	36,7	62,5	60,7	68,4
Affiliated independent market shares (%)	59,2	31,7	34,7	26,9
Non-affiliated independent market shares (%)	4,1	5,7	4,6	4,8

Source: Statistics Canada and Canadian Grocer, National Market Survey, February 2006

It is also interesting to mention that the Quebec food retailing industry has the highest market concentration after Sweden and Norway. Indeed, three major banners (Métro, Sobeys and Lowlas) own more than 75% of all market shares in the sector.[5] Despite these important statistics, the sector remained an object little studied by researchers in both strategic management and human resources. However, this service sector is central to many changes in our societies such as flexible working, rapidly changing technologies or competitive pressure.

Most studies in strategic management have been conducted in the manufacturing industry and little has been done in regard of retailing yet it represents a particularly interesting and fertile field of study when focusing on sustainable competitive advantage (Harris & Ogbonna, 2001). It is also admitted that the structure of retailing and the retailer strategies have been more studied than the relationship between strategy and performance in this sector (Lewis & Thomas, 1990). However, the constant increase of competition in the retailing industry, both locally and

[5] Table Agro-alimentaire de Chaudière-Appalaches, 2006.

internationally, and the dynamism of the sector have led the retailers to give more importance to their competitive capabilities and strategies (Morshett et al., 2006; Moore, 2005; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001).

Table i.

Number of food retailers in Quebec (2006)

	Superstores / Supermarkets		Grocery stores		Convenience stores	
Métro	230	Métro and Métro Plus	107	Richelieu	812	Gem SOS Extra Budget Main-Soir
			85	Marché Ami		
	56	Super C	2	Les 5 Saisons		
Sobeys	252	IGA and IGA Extra	29	Tradition	465	Omni Le Dépanneur Boni Soir Sertard
			83	Bonichoix		
Loblaws	106	Provigo	35	Intermarché	294	Axep Atout-Prix Proprio
	37	Loblaws				
	112	Maxi and Maxi & Cie				
Costco	17		---		---	
Couche-Tard	---		---		565	

Source: Table Agro-alimentaire de Chaudière-Appalaches, 2006

a. Determining organizational competences for retailers

Among the several different propositions of organizational competences typologies previously shown[6], we have chosen to apply to the retailing industry the models of Lado & Wilson (1994), and Thompson & Richardson (1999). Since the literature didn't offer any typology specific to the retailing sector, we chose these two models

[6] See table e. p. 21.

for their generic nature, i.e. their applicability to the manufacturing sector as that of retail. Lado & Wilson's model appeared to be relevant to retailing since the suggested categories of competences – managerial, input-based, transformational, and output-based – reflect the systemic nature of organizations such as retailers and stores. Thompson & Richardson's model comprises a generic requirement for all organizations. Organized into three global clusters, the suggested competences are as well turned on the internal and external environments of the firm.

With the intent of determining, for retailers, what are the most relevant organizational competences contained in the chosen models, we conducted interviews with experts in the domain.[7] Over all the organizational competences they were interrogated on, experts clearly mentioned three of them as essential for retailers: (1) customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction toward their organization. These organizational competences are well discussed in the literature and professionals in the retailing industry underline their potential as being a major source for competitive advantage. In the precise sector of food retailing, they are considered as core capabilities and performance levers that must be systematically translated into actions in the grocery stores.

i. Customer orientation

For retailers, responding to customers' needs in a more effective and efficient way than its competitors represents a major path to success. The objective of such an orientation is the customer satisfaction which influences attitude, purchase behavior, repurchases, customer retention, and ultimately profit (Huddleston et al., 2008). In its sense, the shopping – i.e. the retail mix of product offering, service offering, retail pricing, location, atmosphere, store marketing and hospitality – experience and its

[7] cf. Chapitre 1 – Article 1, p. 61.

perceived and valued qualities by the customers are highly related to customer satisfaction.

For a grocery retailer, as for other types of retailers, customer satisfaction can be reached through service and/or product orientation. In other words, satisfaction will vary according to the type of services offered and the type of product offered, the way they are offered, the pricing, and the global shopping environment. Several authors consider the development of a high quality relationship with customers as a major source of competitive advantage (Merlo et al., 2006; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001; Rowe & Barnes, 1998; Hunt, 1997). The relationship can be expressed through customer service: if the customer's perception of the service quality is higher than the service quality he expected, then the service is considered excellent; if it's equal, the service is adequate; if it's lower, the service is considered deficient (Vasquez et al., 2001). However, customer satisfaction cannot be reached through a single specific relationship with someone from the personnel; it is related to the whole shopping experience and the related retail mix. Being service-oriented requires more than individual behaviours ensuring the quality of the service, "[...] it also requires a culture where deeply entrenched values reinforce a customer focus and pervade the organization (Merlo et al., 2006: 1216)".

The product orientation also aims to satisfy customers but instead of focusing on the relationship with the customer, it concerns the product offer. Following this approach, the retailer proposes products valued by the customer, independently from the intrinsic quality of the products, as long as it corresponds to an adequate quality/price perceived ratio. For a supermarket retailer, offering new or innovative products, having a discount line of products or proposing products answering non-expressed needs represent as many ways as a retailer can be product-oriented. This said, it is very important to note that these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Quite the contrary, the majority of successful grocery retailers answer their customers' needs by proposing both a high quality service and an above average products offer.

ii. External cooperation skills

The management of the supply chain represents a real challenge for grocery retailers, which face high competition, rapid expansion of mass merchandisers, and consolidation of the market. Hence, the firm's relational capacity to maintain good relations with its external partners represents also an important source of competitive advantage.

> *[...] closer and more collaborative relationships allow buyers and sellers to share resources and obtain mutually beneficial economic outcomes that are superior to those that each party may be able to achieve separately. In grocery retailing, the managerial literature echoes these relational exchange theory notions and advocates more collaborative retailer relationships with suppliers [...] (Morgan et al., 2007: 513).*

These relationships may involve not only information sharing, but also core resources and competences exchange (Elg & Paavola, 2008). As stated by Ganesan et al. (2009), retailers need to integrate resources and capabilities of their suppliers and customers in order to create and maintain competitive advantage.

In the Quebec global food retailing sector, almost 80%[8] of the sales are done by supermarkets and three major firms possess more than 90% of the supermarkets market shares: Sobey's (23%), Loblaws (39%) and Metro (32%) (Hubert, 2003). This represents a very high level of concentration in the food distribution and influences deeply the relationship between grocers and their suppliers.

[8] Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre du commerce de l'alimentation (CSMOCA), 2002.

The control held by these three companies on the food market in Quebec is particularly high and leads them to define the rules to be applied in terms of quality, variety and origin of the products sold in the supermarkets. Consequently, in the supply chain the suppliers have experienced a strong dependency of their business from a few buyers. If supermarkets delist them, they are very often unable to find another outlet. At first sight, we could think that the grocers are in power position and dictate the way business must be done in the sector. Actually, the reality is more subtle. Three reasons explain practically why grocers need to maintain good relationships with their suppliers. On a logistical point of view, both, the retailer and the supplier, control a part of the supply chain management. Hence, they have a common goal in optimizing the performance of the chain. That's an important reason why retailers and suppliers have integrated processes and systems that facilitate the flow of products (e.g. just-in-time management). The second reason is of commercial nature. Once again, it starts with common objectives for the retailer and the supplier: selling products as much as possible and maximizing the profit margins. To do so, grocers and suppliers use marketing tools that promote the banner and the product brand at the same time (e.g. grocery flyer). A third reason is about shopper marketing. The aim of shopper marketing is using marketing mix tools in such a way that it affects positively the shopper behavior and drives the consumption of a brand. This is a win-win situation for retailers and suppliers since it leads to the purchase of a specific brand (Ailawadi et al., 2009).

iii. Employee loyalty / satisfaction

Workforce loyalty / satisfaction represent another major source of competitive advantage for retailers. It is expressed, in particular, through employee mobilization behaviours – i.e. (1) behaviours related to compliance with the work contract, (2) contextual performance behaviours directed towards the task, and (3) the behaviours of contextual performance relationship, directed towards others or the organization

(Tremblay & Simard, 2005; Tremblay & Wils, 2005) –. However, not enough retail studies got interested in the loyalty / satisfaction of employees toward their employer even if personnel turnover is an important issue for retailers since it involves important costs in terms of recruitment and training of new employees for instance (Foster, et al., 2008; Peterson, 2007, Hendrie, 2004). Amongst all types of employees of grocery stores, turnover is mainly problematic for the frontline staff category for several reasons. First of all, working in retailing is considered as a low-status occupation in Quebec. The vast majority of front-line workers are composed of part-time employees, often young and students, which do not want to start a career in this sector. Secondly, salaries are very low and grocers usually propose minimum wage for this job category. According to Booth & Hamer (2007), store managers must be aware of staff absences and keep attrition rates low in their assessment of performance, which is no more about sales only.

Employee loyalty / satisfaction are relevant for retailers not only because it impacts labour turnover, but also because it influences customer satisfaction. In fact, several researches have focused on investigating the relationship between job satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Brown & Lam, 2008). By extension, it posits the question on the relative influence of job satisfaction, through workforce loyalty / satisfaction toward the firm, and customer satisfaction. A high level of loyalty / satisfaction would be positively related to customer satisfaction and a low level would lead to customer dissatisfaction. Following this logic, Meyer & Allen (1991) proposed that firms should offer incentives that would increase their personnel job satisfaction and commitment such as career progression, pleasant workplace and interesting work conditions. Other studies in the retailing sector also suggested that perceived organizational support, employee satisfaction and personal achievement contribute to reduce turnover significantly (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoads et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2001).

Employee loyalty / satisfaction not only reduces workforce turnover and increases customer satisfaction, but it also benefits the banner promotion. Foster et al. (2008) talk about 'walking talking brand agents' for expressing the committed front-line staff willingness to deliver high quality service to customer and promote the organization's values and image. However, studies have also demonstrated that loyalty / satisfaction of employees are first expressed toward the store, to a lesser degree to the retailer, and finally to the industry (Foster et al., 2008). In this context, the energies spent by the committed workforce in terms of promotion primarily promotes the store where he works, maybe the banner of the store, but very few efforts will be done to promote the whole retailing industry.

b. Competitive strategy in the context of retailing

As for the whole strategic management field, former researches studying the strategy selection, resources and competences, and business performance were principally focused on the manufacturing industry and fewer got interested in retailing (Megicks, 2007; Moore, 2002). However, it would be an error to consider strategies applied to manufacturing sector being unchanged and used for retailing. Of course, typologies such as those of Porter (1985) and Miles & Snow (1978) may be appropriate for both sectors. But, the retailing and manufacturing environments are different and so is the application of strategies. According to Helms et al. (1992: 4), significant differences in the choice of strategy are based on "[...] the advantage of relative size; the lack of traditional barriers to entry; differences in the effectiveness of traditional low-cost and differentiation techniques; and shifts in successful strategies, brought on by changes in industry structure and customer profiles". As a result, differences in terms of strategy may be identified not only between retailers and manufacturers, but between retailers of a same sector as well and even retailers of a same banner. For instance, in the food retailing sector, it is possible to make distinctions between conventional and specialty format stores (Huddleston et al., 2008).

Among generic typologies of strategies proposed in the literature, Miles & Snow (1978) and Porter (1985) have probably proposed the mostly studied. If there has been an extensive application of these typologies in the context of manufacturing, fewer studies have done so in the context of retailing. Over the years, and particularly during the 1990s, researchers have then proposed and tested empirically several retailing strategies typologies (Morschett et al., 2006; McDowell Mudambi, 1995; Chandler & Hanks, 1994; Conant et al., 1993; Helms et al., 1992; Ellis & Kelley, 1992).

In this thesis, we have chosen Porter generic strategies: (1) cost leadership, (2) differentiation, and (3) focusing (anchored through one or the other type). The simplicity and the relative antinomic nature of the strategies suggested would help respondents to answer and force them to position themselves on either strategies. We must also take for granted that the strategy adopted by supermarkets comes from the headquarters of the banners and defines the global positioning of the stores on the market, in regards of their competitors. In this context, the evaluation of strategies inspired by the RCBV wouldn't be relevant. We have constructed a specific scale of measurement with indicators totally oriented on retailing. If we can identify examples of retailers for each of these three strategy types, in the grocery retailing sector, cost leadership and differentiation are more relevant than the focus approach, which is considered as too narrow (Koistinen & Jarvinen, 2009), and have been consequently been discarded. But, even if Porter's typology has been applied in researches on the retailing sector, Morschett et al. (2006) underlined two limitations for this application: (1) Porter doesn't consider strategies combining several competitive advantages, and (2) limiting possible competitive advantages to two basic types is simplistic when it is admitted that differentiation advantages, for instance, can be reached through different ways.

If Porter doesn't argue for the combination of strategies, Helms et al. (1992) made the opposite hypothesis and suggested that a combined approach could be relevant in the retailing sector. They actually found that retail businesses combining cost leadership strategy and differentiation were performing better than those focusing on only one strategy and this, in terms of financial and operational performance. Accordingly, it would be erroneous to put these two strategy types in total opposition and one might admit the possibility that certain retailers could implement characteristics from one or the other.

c. *Measuring performance in the grocery retailing*

As for several other management fields of study, strategic management is concerned about performance measurement since it helps the organization establishing its objectives and determining its future actions in terms of strategy, tactics and operations. However, it is widely admitted that performance is not a unitary concept. As a multidimensional construct, researchers refer to a wide variety of variables. Studies conducted in the retailing industry have also suggested several different measures of performance from one single financial performance variable to more than a dozen variables related to financial and operational performance, at the firm, store and merchandise levels.

The table j. shows some constant among several authors considering the same indicators of performance, i.e. sales per square foot, cash flow management, sales per employee, net income after taxes, total sales growth over the past three years, overall store performance/success. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the chosen performance indicators were mainly inspired by those used by Grewal & Slotegraaf (2007) because these indicators are more appropriate for assessing a retailer performance since most of them are specific to the sector. However, instead of evaluating the firm performance – i.e. the performance of the banner – the focus remained on indicators of store and merchandise management performance because the initial intent was to determine the performance in regard of the stores' organizational competences. In this context, traditional performance variables related to the external environment, such as market shares or catchment area, haven't been taken into account. Thereafter, it's been possible to have a broader view of the banner based on the aggregate mean ratio of the stores individual performance. This methodological choice has also been based on firm structure since the Quebec food retailing sector is mainly comprised of affiliated stores.

Table j.

Performance measurement for retailing

Authors	Year	Performance variables / variables clusters
Conant et al.	1990	- Organization profitability toward its competitors - Return on investment (ROI)
Helms et al.	1992	- Operational performance - Financial performance
Smart & Conant	1993	- Sales per square foot - Cash flow management - Effectiveness of cost containment - Sales per employee - Net income after taxes - Total sales growth over past 3 years - Overall store performance/success
Conant et al.	1993	- Sales per square foot - Cash flow management - Effectiveness of cost containment - Sales per employee - Net income after taxes - Total sales growth over past 3 years - Overall store performance/success
Kean et al.	1998	- Return on sales (ROS)
Brush & Chaganti	1998	- Net cash flow - Change in employee size

Table j. (continued)

Authors	Year	Performance variables / variables clusters
McGee and Peterson	2000	- Financial performance comparisons with competitors o Gross profit o Net income after taxes, o Total sales growth over the past 3 years o Overall store performance and success
Edelman et al.	2005	- Change in return on sales (ROS) on a 4 years period
Moore	2005	- Sales per square foot - Cash flow management - Effectiveness of cost containment - Sales per employee - Net income after taxes - Total sales growth over past 3 years - Overall store performance/success
Grewal & Slotegraaf	2007	- Firm performance - Store management performance - Merchandise management performance Including measures on: - Major competitor performance - Growth rate objectives - Return-on-investment objectives - Market share objectives
Ton & Huckman	2008	- Store performance o Overall customer service score o Profit margin

D. A note on methods

A detailed methodology section is included in each of the three articles. The following note presents an overview of the study's design and explains the reasons supporting our methodological choices. The overall study design consists of in-depth interviews followed by a field inquiry in the Quebec food-retailing sector.

a. Choice of method and design

This thesis includes qualitative (Article 1) and quantitative data (Articles 2 & 3). The objective of the first article was to determine which organizational competences, relevant for the retailing industry, could be considered as performance drivers. To do so, two different typologies of organizational competences have been chosen (Thompson & Richardson, 1996; Lado & Wilson, 1994). Since literature doesn't offer any typology of organizational competences that have been specifically designed for the retailing industry, the choice of these typologies is explained by the generic nature of the proposed organizational competences. After having made a first selection among the suggested organizational competences, rejecting those that focused mainly on manufacturing and not corresponding to the retail context, four in-depth interviews have been conducted with experts in retailing who were questioned on the value of organizational competences for their organization. The choice of interviews proved to be a suitable method to analyze the construction of meaning, the analysis of the processes described by the experts, and developing constructs. Interviews allowed going more into detail and more accurately capture the sentiments and nuances expressed by the experts.

Out of the competences upon which interviews were conducted, three appeared to be especially relevant for the retailing sector. The notion of strategy was also considered of great interest to explain business success in retailing. To empirically verify the experts' statements, interviews were followed by a survey of retailers. However, the high degree of heterogeneity in the retailing sector has forced the investigation to be focused among the food retailing subsector only. Moreover, only supermarkets in this subsector were targeted in the sample.

For the purpose of this survey, two questionnaires were used for two different groups of respondents: (1) store managers, assistant store managers, and (2) department managers, assistant department managers, heads of cashiers, assistant heads of cashiers. Each group of respondents answered a survey of its own. Only the questions of control were the same. This methodological choice enabled us to avoid problems of common-factor variance. Hence, store managers evaluated strategy and performance and department managers and heads of cashiers evaluated organizational competences. Store managers were chosen for their knowledge of the firm performance and strategy indicators and because they are well positioned to self-report subjective feedback on these indicators. As presented in the next table, these respondents answered the following clusters of questions: (1) control, (2) strategy, and (3) performance.

Table k.

Survey design

Sample	**Quebec supermarkets**	
	Group 1	**Group 2**
Respondents	Store managers Assistant store managers	Department managers Assistant department managers Heads of cashiers Assistant heads of cashiers
Questions	Control (13) Strategy (11) - Cost leadership - Differentiation Performance (9) - Store management - Merchandise management	Control (13) Organizational competences (17) - Customer orientation - External cooperation skills - Employee loyalty and satisfaction

Control questions were about personal aspects (e.g. gender, age, studies, position), and organizational aspects (e.g. number of employees under supervision, store's status, banner, retail space). Strategy has been measured according to Porter's categories (cost leadership and differentiation). As proposed by Grewal & Stolegraaf (2007), store and merchandise management has been used to evaluate performance. Indicators for the measurement of these organizational competences were based on

Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar (2005) and the interviews previously conducted with experts in retailing. Department managers and head of cashiers were asked to answer the clusters of questions related to (1) control and (2) organizational competences – i.e. (a) customer orientation, (b) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction. They have been chosen on the basis of their understanding of firm's competences and their awareness about the organization's needs in terms of resources and capabilities. But again, for avoiding problems of common-factor variance, we only used their answers evaluating organizational competences.

The global empirical process, qualitative interviews and quantitative survey, is described systematically in the following parts.

i. Conduct of the interviews

Interviews were done with four experts in retailing.[9] These interviews all last around two hours. They took place in each expert's office. They have been recorded and a copy of the recording has been sent back to the respondent with the transcript. The following table presents some important characteristics of the experts. All the transcripts were treated with Atlas TI for codification and analysis.

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), four criteria must be met to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative studies: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability. *Credibility* or the extent to which multiple constructions of reality are represented adequately – according to the opinions of the constructors of those original multiple realities – was assured by several means. The position of the interviewees, their knowledge and their long experience of the domain helped drawing a real portrait of the context. My personal experience of external consultant for the Quebec Ministry of Industry and Trade in the Trade and Retail

[9] See Annex A, p. 160.

department also fed me into my overall understanding of the retailing sector. In addition, data were collected on the same phenomena and were compared to test for consistency. Data were then analyzed using both, qualitative and quantitative approaches. I also benefited from sustained and rigorous debriefing both from personal contacts in the domain and anonymous reviewers, who reviewed this first part of this work thrice since it has been submitted to conferences over the last two years. It helped me clarifying my arguments and properly documenting my findings. Since I sent copies of the transcripts to the interviewees, they were asked to make corrections, all of which were minor. These corrections and clarifications were added to the transcripts and the corrected versions were used for my analysis.

Table I.

Details on experts

	Expert 1	**Expert 2**	**Expert 3**	**Expert 4**
Position	CEO	CEO	CEO Quebec operations	Consultant
Subsector	Artist material	Department store	Food	Food
Number of stores	26	65	175 (Quebec only)	n/a
Areas	Quebec / Canada	Quebec	Quebec / Canada	Quebec
Family business	Yes	Yes	No	No
Knowledge of the food retailing sector	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Transferability, or the extent to which findings can be useful for understanding the organizational competences / strategy relationships with retailers performance, was assured by the variety of retail subsectors in which experts come from: artists' material, department store, food retailing, and general retailing. Since the study findings are based on common conclusions stated by the experts they can be addressed to other retail subsectors than food retailing. The overlap of methods, as described earlier, helped ensure *dependability*, i.e. reliability. All of the above in combination helped guarantee an acceptable level of *confirmability* of the study results, which has been proved by the formal inquiry that followed.

It should also be noted that this first part of the study (cf. Article 1) was presented at the AIMS (Association Internationale de Management Stratégique) conference in June 2009 and published in proceedings. It thus benefited from peer review.

ii. Conduct of the survey

Following the construction of the questionnaires, they have been presented a dozen of respondents per category for pre-test. No major adjustments were made thereafter. Essentially, changes were about simplifying the phrasing of few statements.

In order to promote this study and get sufficient data, I tried to make it as simple as possible for the potential respondents. First of all, a website has been created for explaining the nature of the study[10], and linking the two online questionnaires[11], one for each category of respondents. Questionnaires were answered anonymously with e-mail protection. In order to reach potential respondents, faxes have been sent to every IGA, Provigo, Axep, Intermarché, and Lowlaws, and e-mails were sent to Metro and Super C supermarkets.[12] Several phone calls have also been made in order to incite store managers to answer my questionnaire and transmit my demand to department managers. I also communicated directly by phone to several store directors. I have had direct communication also with both Metro and Provigo Directors of corporate affairs department. Our inquiry has been supported by the one of Metro but rejected by the one of Provigo for several administrative reasons. I also contacted the General Director of ADAQ (Association des Détaillants en Alimentation du Québec / Quebec Food Retailers Association) who presented the study on the association website. I

[10] See Annex E, p. 177. – URL: www.alimentation-quebec.webs.com
[11] We used Questback as for the online questionnaire platform. See Annexes B, p. 203, and C, p. 209.
[12] See Annex D, p. 176.

finally got in touch with the General Director of the CSMOCA (Comité Sectoriel de Main-d'œuvre du Commerce en Alimentation / Food Retailing Labour Sectoral Committee) but haven't been able to make him committed to my research. Finally, several supermarkets in the metropolitan area have also been visited directly and questionnaires were left in place and recovered three weeks later.

Table m.

Category of respondents per banner

Banner		Category of respondents	Respondents per category	TOTAL
Loblaw Loblaws Provigo Intermarché Maxi Maxi & cie	A	Store director Assistant store director	19	**36**
	B	Department manager Assistant department manager	12	
	C	Head of cashiers Assistant head of cashiers	5	
Sobeys IGA IGA Extra Bonichoix Tradition	A	Store director Assistant store director	10	**27**
	B	Department manager Assistant department manager	7	
	C	Head of cashiers Assistant head of cashiers	10	
Métro Métro Métro Plus Richelieu Super C Les 5 Saisons Marché Ami	A	Store director Assistant store director	43	**80**
	B	Department manager Assistant department manager	23	
	C	Head of cashiers Assistant head of cashiers	14	
TOTAL	A	Store director Assistant store director	72	**143**
TOTAL	B	Department manager Assistant department manager	42	
TOTAL	C	Head of cashiers Assistant head of cashiers	29	

Globally, data have been gathered on a 10 months period. The process has been long due to the slow pace in the questionnaires reception. Unfortunately, despite considerable efforts, it has not been possible to gather a sample as large as we would have desired. The table m. presents the results of the data gathering according to the banner and the category of respondents. Among the descriptive statistics, it should be mentioned that more than half of the respondents in both categories are from Métro. This statistic reflects the fact that I had the support of the Métro's Director of Corporate Affairs and that she has passed an internal e-mail urging the potential respondents to participate in this research. Accordingly, it's been decided to focus our study on Métro banner, using it as a specific case study, and suggestion a primary comparison with the two other major banners in Quebec, Loblaw and Sobeys. Indeed, the sample size and concentration data obtained from one of the three major banners wouldn't allow us to generalize our results to the whole food retailing sector.

The number of respondents for each category of respondents is almost the same. However, in the department manager / head of cashiers category, two third of the respondents are managers and one third, cashiers. According to the answers, supermarkets directors are predominantly male. However, it appears that there are few more woman in the category of department managers / heads of cashiers. it is mainly because almost all cashiers are woman. Considering department managers only, the ratio is quite different since men are three times more numerous than women.

Following the data gathering, they have been processed in SPSS and several statistical analysis have been conducted in order to determine, furthermore, the internal validity, the reliability and the objectivity of our scales. I also procceded to exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. I finally used structural equation for assessing the mediation effect of strategy in the competence – performance relationship.

E. Conclusion

The contribution of the resource-based view (RBV) represents an important breakthrough to the strategic management field of study. By proposing and inside-out perspective of organizations strategy, it complements Porter's industrial organization perspective. The relevance of the RBV has resulted in numerous theoretical discussions and the publication of numerous researches, which have led to different conceptual propositions all trying to explicit the theoretical basis of the RBV with varying degrees of accuracy, scientific depth, quality and creativity. Out of these various propositions, this thesis integrates in one the classic resource-based view, the competence-based view and the dynamic capabilities approach. The suggested resource and competence-based view (RCBV) wish to explain organizations competitive advantage through firm's intangible assets.

In an effort of theoretical precision, the classic problem of semantic confusion has been faced. Too often researchers use concepts with taken for granted definitions while in fact the precision in the choice of words is essential to the understanding of studies. This is especially true with common terms such as 'asset', 'resources', and 'competences'. Therefore, in order to avoid misunderstandings, meanings of the main concepts used in this thesis were clarified. Since the focus has been directed on the specific category of organizational competences as potential source of competitive advantage, Lado & Wilson (1994: 702) definition has been chosen; it considers organizational competences as "firm-specific resources and capabilities that enable the organization to develop, choose, and implement value-enhancing strategies". Once the main concepts defined, it has been important to discuss how the challenge of measurement should be faced. Since competences are intangible, the relevance of having processed to their assessment through observable indicators related to these competences has been demonstrated.

Because this thesis integrates the strategy variable in the equation between organizational competences and performance, it appeared relevant to discuss the status of this third variable. While most of the previous researches posit strategy as a moderation variable, it has been preferred to postulate a fit as mediating effect. As suggested by Edelman et al. (2005), it is more appropriate to consider mediation when studying industries such as retail and services.

Finally, the reasons why the retailing has been chosen as to be field of study have been specified. Even if it is an important sector of Western economies, retailing remains less studied than several other sectors. Moreover, the dynamism and the high level of competition make retailing a relevant field for studying organizational competences, strategy and performance. After proceeding to interviews with experts, it has been possible to identify three major organizational competences. At this point, the focused has switched to a more homogeneous part of the broad sector of retailing, namely the Quebec food retailing subsector, and more precisely supermarkets. An empirical inquiry has been conducted asking two types of respondents to answer online questionnaires: supermarket directors, and their assistants, for the strategy and performance questionnaire and department managers, chief of cashiers and their assistants, to answer the questionnaire on organizational competences.

The following three articles present each step of the process and their respective analysis: (1) the interviews, (2) the organizational competences and performance evaluation, and (3) the strategy mediating effect.

CHAPITRE 1

BUILDING ON ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES AND COMPETENCES TO REACH PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF THE RETAILING INDUSTRY[1]

ABSRACT

Adopting the resource and competence-based perspective, this paper looks at how organizational competences can be considered as potential sources of competitive advantage for businesses in the retailing industry. The in-depth interviews of four experts in the domain demonstrates the utility of three major organizational competences: (1) the customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction.

RÉSUMÉ

En s'appuyant sur la perspective basée sur les ressources et les compétences, le présent article s'intéresse aux compétences organisationnelles comme source potentielle d'un avantage compétitif pour les entreprises œuvrant dans le secteur du commerce de détail. Sur la base de quatre entrevues en profondeur menées auprès d'experts dans le domaine, trois compétences organisationnelles ont été retenues comme étant incontournables : (1) l'orientation client, (2) les compétences de coopération externe, et (3) la loyauté / satisfaction des employés.

Key words: resource and competence-based view; organizational competences; retailing; customer orientation; external cooperation skills; loyalty; employee satisfaction.

---

[1] A previous version of the current article has already been published in the AIMS conference proceedings in 2009.

1.1. Introduction

From the study of industry-level factors to the analysis of firm-level attributes, strategic management has always focused on the ways businesses can reach a position of success. Since the beginning of the 1990s, numerous researchers got interested in resources and competences as possible sources of sustainable competitive advantage for firms producing greater profits than their competitors (Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005; Edelman et al., 2005; 2002; Camisón, 2005; McGee & Peterson, 2000; Lado & Wilson, 1994). Several industrial contexts have been chosen as field of study. However, very few got interested in the retail industry even though it represents a dynamic sector for studying such a topic (Harris & Ogbonna, 2001), particularly because of its high and constantly increasing level of competition (Morschett et al., 2006). Taking the resource and competence-based view as the overarching theoretical framework, our aim is to determine if some organizational competences contribute in a particular way to the creation and the sustainability of a competitive advantage for retailers.

The retailing was chosen as our field of study because of its economic importance in the whole economy of the province and because few studies have focused on this industry even though the retailing industry is the second largest job provider in Quebec. It is a key driver to the vitality of the Quebec economy. With total sales of more than $ 94 billion per year, it generates over 450,000 jobs in Quebec in more than 56,000 commercial establishments located in all regions of Quebec. The economic benefits generated by the presence of retailers in the economy of all Quebec regions are also estimated in billion of dollars.[2]

In order to achieve our objective, we have proceeded to interviews with experts in the retailing industry in Quebec and asked for their opinion about some resources and

[2] Conseil Québécois du Commerce de Détail, 2011.

competences embedded in two distinct but complementary typologies. Based on Lado & Wilson's (1994) theoretical framework, Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar (2005) proposed a typology that highlights competences and resources related to quality management, which are considered as capable of sustaining a competitive advantage. Thompson & Richardson (1996) proposed a broader typology presenting 30 generic organizational competences applicable to the retail industry.

1.2. A Resources and Competences Conceptual Integration

Tenants of the resource-based view do the assumption that resources are distributed heterogeneously across firms and remained imperfectly mobile (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993) while assuming that resources considered as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable lead the firm to achieve competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). An established body of the literature suggests that competences, as the firm capability to use resources and create new ones (Sanchez, 2000), must also be taken into account when determining the sources of a competitive advantage. This led to the emergence of the competence-based approach, which occurred at the beginning of 1990s. According to this perspective core competences represent a unique combination of resources and capabilities for organizations and generate competitive advantage while creating value for customers (Hamel, 1994; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

However, the distinction between the concepts of *resources* and *competences* remains narrow and blurred and may easily lead to confusion. Several authors consider a competence as a convenient combination of resources (Moran & Goshal, 1999; Jüttner & Wehrli, 1994; Bogner & Thomas, 1994; Grant, 1991; Reed & De Fillippi, 1990). Some others argue for an integration of resources in a broader definition of the notion of competence which could then be defined as assets, tangible or intangible, that enable organizations to develop and implement value-creating strategies (Sanchez et al., 1996; Lado &Wilson, 1994; Barney, 1991). At least three terms are used in the literature for expressing the concept of *competence – competence(s), competency(ies)* and *capability(ies)* (Prévot, 2005) – adding to the confusion. It even happens that some authors use these terms in an interchangeable way, whereas others assign them some different significances according to (1) the unit of analysis (individual / organizational), (2) the HR function (selection, remuneration or training for example), (3) the structure of organization (centralized / decentralized), or (4) the aim (to increase the performance or to monopolize new market shares for example) (Garavan & McGuire, 2001).

This confusing situation partly explain the reason why most of the theoretical works that have been written on resources and competences tend to focus on the nature and the definitions of these concepts and, in a more restricted way, on their measurement (Garavan & McGuire, 2001). In order to clarify as much as possible the situation surrounding the concepts of resources and competences and avoid semantic wanderings, we have chosen to adopt the position of Lado & Wilson (1994) who consider competences as firm-specific assets, resources and capabilities, knowledge and skills that permit the attainment of strategic objectives and value creation.

Table 1.2.1

Firm's distinctive attributes labels

Label	Authors
Distinctive competencies	Reed & DeFillippi (1990) Fiol (1991)
Core competencies	Prahalad & Hamel (1990)
Firm-specific competencies	Pravitt (1991)
Organizational capabilities / competences	Ulrich & Lake (1990) Stalk et.al. (1992)
Resources and capabilities	Lado & Wilson (1994) Barney (1991)
Assets and capabilities	Mahoney (1995) Kamoche (1996) Hooley, et.al. (1998)

Harris & Ogbonna (2001)

Following the idea of an inside-out approach of strategic management as suggested by the resource and competence-based approach, it becomes essential that the firm develops and maintains its organizational competences so that it can coordinate effectively its resources and translate them into competitive advantage. Accordingly, the firm's efforts for coordination are as important as the resources themselves. Hence, if resources can be considered as strategic – i.e. valuable, non-substitutable, rare, and inimitable – by extension, organizational competences should also correspond to these specific characteristics. For Prahalad & Hamel (1990), such type of competences are considered as core competences and must be distinctive, complex, difficult to imitate, durable and adaptable in order to provide sustained superior performance. It is also important that these competences are held by a small number of organizations in order to be considered as a potential competitive advantage (Lado & Wilson, 1994). This concern seems inherent to the nature of an organizational competence, which is structured on the basis of many resources that can hardly be held in their entirety by another firm. It is recognized that resources may have some mobility between organizations; it is different for competences since they are not as easily transferable (Grant, 1991). Indeed, it would be particularly complex to transfer the internal culture, the reputation or the routines from one business to another one (Lado & Wilson, 1994).

The transferability of organizational competences represents a complicated process. This is due to *ex post* forces limiting competition and protecting organizations from imitation and substitution of their competences. The complex and intangible nature of organizational competences is one of these forces. They are not a product, which one can take and easily copy. Indeed, as we have previously mentioned, they are immaterial and structured with several resources, such as the firm's organizational culture and its social structure.

The causal ambiguity is another barrier to imitation because the source of a competitive advantage is not easily identifiable (Reed & De Filippi, 1990). Because firms are socially complex, in several cases, organizational competences and competitive advantage result from unique social relations and historical conditions, which cannot be duplicated by another firm (Teece et al., 1997). This path dependency makes difficult for competitors not having the same history to obtain the same strategic resources and competences.

Finally, it is important to underline the possible erosion of organizational competences. They result from investments, which must be renewed timely. If they are not maintained, they are depreciated as time goes by (Tempoe, 1994). These barriers to imitation represent as many obstacles a firm must overcome in order to copy the organizational competences of its competitor (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Barney, 1991). Although the development of a similar organizational competency remains possible, it is still necessary that it leads to comparable results.

1.3. Two Distinctive Theoretical Frameworks

In an effort to determine the potential influence of human resource systems on facilitating and developing organizational competences, Lado & Wilson (1994) suggested four categories of competences – managerial, input-based, transformational-based and output-based competences.

Managerial competences "[...] include (a) the unique capabilities of the organization's strategic leaders to articulate a strategic vision, communicate the vision through the organization, and empower organizational members to realize that vision and (b) the unique ability to enact a beneficial firm environment relationship" (Lado & Wilson, 1994: 703). Input competences are made of all physical, organizational, human and financial resources as well as firm's knowledge, skills and capabilities (Lado et al., 1992). The transformational-based competences encompass the firm's capabilities to change inputs into outputs in such a way that they create value to customer. Finally, output-based competences contain all the intangible strategic assets such as firm's reputation or service quality (Lado & Wilson, 1994).

Figure 1.3.1

Lado & Wilson's (1994) theoretical framework in the context of quality management

Managerial
- Leadership
- Enacting organizational environment

Input-based
- Employee know-how
- External cooperation skills

Transformation based
- Creation of a collective mind
- Organizational commitment
- Enhancement of organizational learning
- Speed and flexibility in the design of new products and services

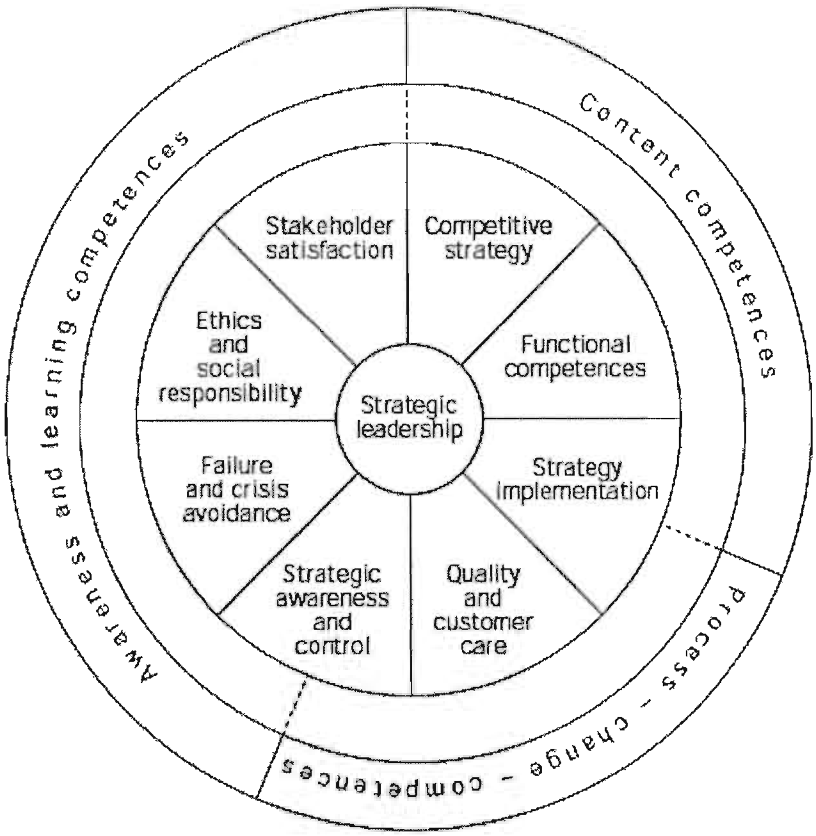
Output-based
- Reputation

(Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005)

Since the dynamic nature of environment requires firms to change their portfolios of competences over time today's core competences should evolve if the firm wants to keep its strategic advantage over its competitors. In order to survive in this constantly changing environment, Thompson & Richardson (1996) argue that firms must possess a threshold level of competence in certain areas. These organizational competences are manifested in firm's products and services, processes and people. Figure 1.3.2. shows their model, the clusters of generic competences and strategic leadership as hub. The outer rim categorizes competences in terms of content, learning and process. However, as mentioned by Thompson & Richardson (1996), this larger classification should not be seen as static because there are crossovers.

Figure 1.3.2.

Typology of generic competences



(Thompson & Richardson, 1996)

1.4. Methodology

The heterogeneity of the retail industry forced us to focus on a narrower segment of the retail industry. We have thus decided to study the food retailing subsector in Quebec only. Moreover, we only got interested in independent (affiliated or not), franchise or corporate Quebec food retailers. For assessing the relative influence of organizational competences on the performance of firms operating in the Quebec food retailing industry, four experts have been questioned on the two typologies with the purpose of identifying which ones may be considered as core competences, and how they impact, directly or not, on firm's performance. All of them have a large experience in the larger domain of retail, but also have a good knowledge of the food retailing industry in Quebec.

1.4.1. The choice of experts

The first expert is the CEO of a family business positioned in the field of artist material since 1980. In total, the company owns 26 stores, including 16 in Quebec and 10 in the rest of Canada. It is one of the oldest chain stores in Quebec, with more than 100 years of experience. He has been a member of the board of Directors of the Conseil Québécois du Commerce de Détail (Quebec Council of Retail) for ten years and the family business subsidizes a research chair in retailing in a business school based in Montreal. In addition to its extensive experience in the domain of retailing in general, he is pretty much aware of the specific sector of the food retailing as a member of the board of Directors of Metro since 2002.

The second expert interviewed is also owner and CEO of a family business established some fifty years ago. Working in the family business since the age of 7, he has held almost all the positions in the company before becoming CEO. This chain of department stores includes in the product offer non-perishable food, clothing, health and beauty, household products, tableware and kitchen accessories, gift items, toys and others. Today, the chain counts 65 stores across the regions of Quebec.

The third interviewee is President for operations in Quebec and Eastern Canada of one of the only two national grocery retailers in Canada. In Quebec alone, it represents one of the three major banners and it has 408 stores established all over the province, excluding convenience stores. With 16-years of experience in the retail marketing and management, he owned several position of manager in other companies before eventually joining one of the three major banners.

Finally, the person interviewed is a consultant in the food retailing sector for over twenty years. He has worked for Provigo when it took over the Dominion banner and has been an external consultant for Metro. He later worked with the Conseil Québécois du Commerce de Détail (Quebec Retailing Council) and led the retail and trade department of the Quebec Ministry of Industry and Trade. He has an extensive experience in the field and a specific expertise in food retailing.

1.4.2. The interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews have been conducted. This methodological choice enables to obtain information on the same topics from all our respondents. It allows the respondent the time and scope to talk about their opinion on a particular subject and encourage new concepts to emerge (Dearnley, 2005). It also permits the interviewer to go more in-depth on certain questions and gives, at the same time, more flexibility than a standardized open-ended interview. The interview is like a conversation and the objective is to understand the respondent's point of view rather than make generalizations about behaviours. Conversely, this flexibility is someway limited by the structure of the issues treated in the interview guide. This method leads to a positive rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee (Yoshikawa, et al., 2008). It is a simple and efficient way to get data about things that can't be easily observed. Since people are able to talk about something in-depth and in detail, it gives the method a high validity. It also enables to discuss complex questions and issues that would need to be clarified.

Semi-structured interviews also comprise some limits. The quality of the interview relies on the skill of the interviewer and the articulacy of the respondent. The interviewer can also unconsciously give some signals or directions that would guide the interviewee in its answers (Diefencach, 2009). The reliability can also be questioned since it is difficult to replicate the interview the same way. Because it's time consuming and usually costly, samples tend to be small. Finally, there is no real way to determine if the respondent is lying or not. It must also be noted that even if semi-structured interviews are flexible, nevertheless, issues beforehand selected tend to restrain them.

Interviews were performed over a period of six months. The interview guide contained 19 questions divided into four categories: the expert's experience, business strategy, organizational culture, leadership and future perspectives. For each one of these categories, there were questions related to organizational competences identified either by Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar (2005) in their application of Lado & Wilson' (1994) typology, or Thompson and Richardson' (1996). All these organizational competences are mutually exclusive and considered as potential sources of sustainable competitive advantage by the authors of these typologies. The interview guide has been elaborated on the basis of these two models and covers the entirety of the organizational competences exposed.

The methodology conducted for this study is based on a content analysis. The information gathered during the interviews, once processed with Atlas TI software, led us to determine the experts' perceptual mapping of organizational competences. Several readings of the transcripts led to consolidation of information highlighting the matches existing between both typologies and the reality of the retailing industry in Quebec as presented by the experts. The first level of codification is thus exclusively related to organizational competences. However, it appeared necessary to use some other codes in order to faithfully reflect the interviewees' comments. In other words, some important ideas or concepts mentioned by the experts were not organizational competences *per se* but rather determinants or additions to organizational competences. This second codification led us to a saturation level that allowed us to capture the whole set of ideas and concepts expressed during the interviews. It also permitted to go from a descriptive analysis to a more understanding one.

1.5. Results

According to the experts interviewed, three organizational competences for firms in retailing have been identified and qualified as core ones: the customer orientation, the external cooperation skills and the employee loyalty / satisfaction toward the company and conversely. This corroborates partially the above-mentioned frameworks used for the interviews. Indeed, whereas both frameworks proposed a numerous different competences, only three clearly emerged out of the comments of the experts. In the next pages, we discuss on each of these three organizational competences while presenting a perceptual mapping linking these competences to other concepts discussed in the interviews. Such links allow us to present a more detailed analysis of comments made by the experts.

Table 1.4.1.

Codes and description used for organizational competences

Codes – Organizational competences	
Communication	It is related to information sharing inside the firm.
Customer orientation	It focuses on both, the firm's capacity to take his customers and products/services into the business offer.
Ethics	It is about ethics and firm's social responsibility in its interactions with the environment.
External cooperation skills	It is the firm's ability to develop and sustain good relations with suppliers.
Failure and crisis avoidance	It is the firm's capacity of facing internal and external crisis.
HR selection	It refers to the importance for the firm to choose the proper HR with the desired competences.
Leadership	It is the capacity of the firm's strategic leaders to create, develop, apply and communicate the strategic vision throughout the organization (Lado and Wilson, 1994).
Learning process	It refers to the importance attached by the firm to employees' training or knowledge transfer between them.
Loyalty	It focuses on worker's loyalty and satisfaction vis-à-vis the organization or the organization vis-à-vis the employees

Table 1.4.1. (continued)

Marketing	It is related to marketing aspects such as promotion and advertising activities.
Mission and goals	It refers to the employees' knowledge of the firm's mission and goals.
R&D	It is about the importance granted by the firm to R&D and innovation.
Reputation	It is related to the importance of reputation as a strategic asset for the firm.
Strategic awareness	It is the firm's capacity to stay aware of its local, national and international environment.
Strategy implementation	It refers to the strategy development and implementation and the employees' participation in this process.
Codes – Other than organizational competences	
Competitive strategy	It is not a competence. It is rather related to the retailer's competitive strategy based on the importance of having prices lower than its competitors (cost leadership) OR on the importance of being different from its competitors (differentiation).
Core organizational competency	It refers to the most important competency as mentioned by the experts.
Family business	It underlines the influence of being a family business on various aspects such as performance, service, employee loyalty and satisfaction, etc.
Future perspectives	It is related to the possible or probable future developments in the retailing industry.
Participation	It refers to the importance granted by the organization to employees' participation.
Workplace	It is related to the quality of the working environment.

1.5.1. Customer orientation

It is true for every business that meeting the customers' needs is a major stake (Escrig-Tena & Bou- Llusar, 2005) and developing a high quality relationship with the customers to respond better than its competitors is an important source of competitive advantage (Merlo et al., 2006; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001; Rowe & Barnes, 1998; Hunt, S.D., 1997). For customer-oriented companies in the retailing industry, it means offering an above average quality service while proposing the right business offer and develop consequent strategies in order to attract and retain customers, to create recurrence in their purchasing patterns, to enhance their shopping experience and to develop their loyalty (Grewal et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2004). According to Rayport & Jaworski (2004), the specific relationship between the retailer and the customer represents the new frontier of competitive advantage.

Customer orientation can be adopted through a product-oriented perspective, which aims to propose the customer with a quality and valued product offering. Such an orientation also tends to respond to non-expressed needs. According to this orientation, products are considered as a profit center and retailers must have the range of products that meets the customers' needs (Panygirakis & Theodoridis, 2007). The objective is to sell more products in order to gain market shares. The service-oriented perspective is more focused on creating value for the customer by offering him a high quality service, answering its needs and preferences, and the relationship between the retailer and the client (Ryals, 2002). In the interviews, both schools were represented as shown in the figure 1.5.1.

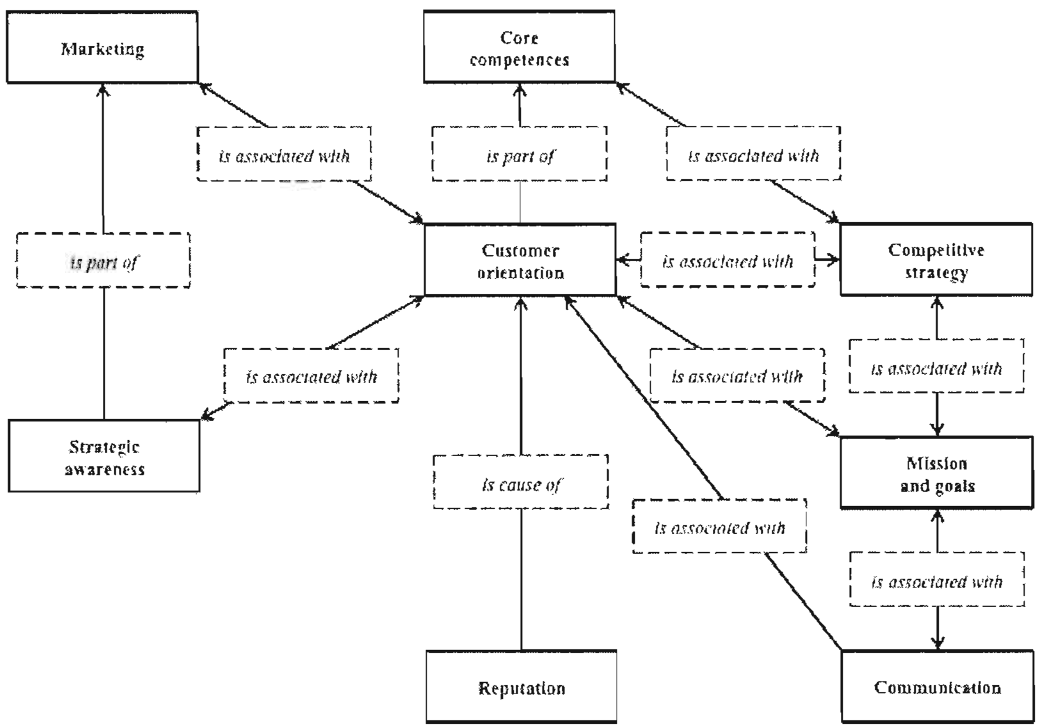
> *"[...] major distribution companies are much more focused on customer service with the needs of clients as a priority." (Expert 4)*
>
> *"The key competence is a strong customer focus. Think customer. Start any reasoning from the client, that's the key competence in the organization." (Expert 3)*
>
> *"I am not a tenant of the school which focuses on listening to the client. [...] We create. And the retailer has considerable influence to create [the needs]." (Expert 2)*
>
> *"The basic reason is to make the product available for the customers and the groundwork is to have a product that customer wants" (Expert 2)*
>
> *"Small independent retailers are more product-oriented. Their strategy is more product-oriented. It doesn't mean they don't care about the client, but the strategy is firstly based on selling a product [...]" (Expert 4)*

The business offer is structured on the basis of services and/or products and must be translated throughout strategies that take the competences of the firm into account and lead it to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors.

> *"We define the strategy starting with the offer proposed to the customer. In other words what defines the strategy is how we are able to create a fit between the targeted offer and the firm's capabilities." (Expert 3)*

Figure 1.5.1.

Experts' perceptual mapping of customer orientation



Moreover, it appears to be important for the firm to make sure that its customer orientation, and the associated strategies, are in accordance with its mission, goals and that the employees know and understand these. As Kaplan & Norton (2004: 4) mentioned, "Successful companies have a culture in which people are deeply aware of and internalized the mission, vision, and core values needed to execute the company's strategy".

> *"It is probably what is the most fundamental [that employees know about the firm's mission and objectives]. In a business, we would like our people to be in line with customers." (Expert 4)*

> *"The management of values. This is what's important. Learning to manage the values in the direction of the organization." (Expert 4)*

To ensure the employees' understanding about these fundamental elements of the company's strategy, the internal business communication must also be taken into account in the process (Kaplan & Norton, 2004).

> *"We meet the employees once a year to explain them where the company is going, the major elements of the offer. [...] what is the offer that we want in our stores [...]." (Expert 3)*

The company's offer in terms of products and services must also be supported by a marketing effort. Such effort reflects the chosen strategic orientation of the firm. Product-focused tenants prefer adopting a classic marketing mix. On the other hand, service-oriented ones will focus on customer relationship management (Dennis et al., 2005).

> *"Advertising is to create traffic." (Expert 1)*

> *"Advertising serves as a business card. People come for the advertised products but once they are in the store we create new needs for them." (Expert 2)*

> *"[Marketing] therefore, it is to be the voice of consumers in the company and at the same time, there is a communication between us and the consumer." (Expert 3)*

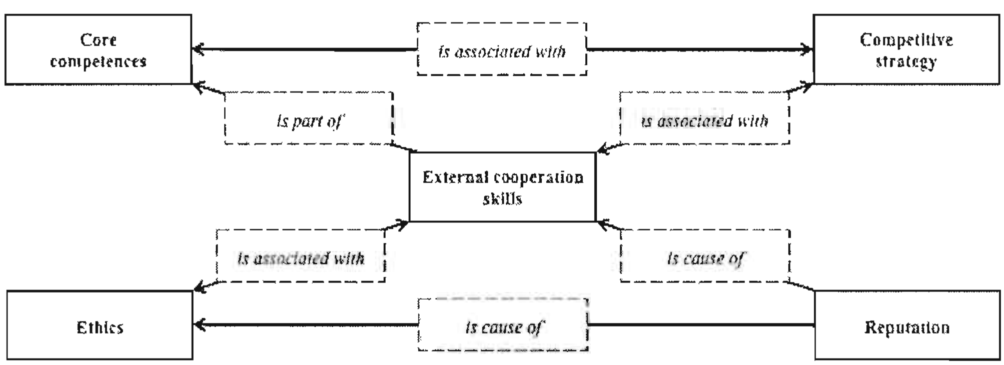
1.5.2. External cooperation skills

The firm's relational competence to maintain good inter-organizational relationships with its external partners results from collaborative communication with the suppliers and can lead to competitive advantage for both, the retailer and the supplier (Paulraj et al., 2008; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001). Indeed, the impact of supply chain management on competitive advantage as well as on organizational performance is partly based on strategic supplier partnerships (Li et al., 2004). Actually, "[...] retailers look beyond their organizational boundaries to evaluate and integrate the resources and capabilities of their suppliers and customers and thus create superior value and a competitive advantage that they might sustain over time (Ganesan et al., 2009: 84)."

> *"Business relations are very important. [...] It is based on confidence. [...] When you ask invoices that helps confidence. What is important for us is to be well quoted by our suppliers." (Expert 1)*

Figure 1.5.2.

Experts' perceptual mapping of external cooperation skills



> *"We don't complicate things unnecessarily. We seek win-win relations with our suppliers. [...] We believe that, in a medium term, rather work with us than with others." (Expert 3)*

It is also important to consider the relation between retailers and suppliers in the other direction since retailers have gained more control on the marketplace to such an extent that some of them are now largely bigger than several of their suppliers (Skinner et al., 1992). Companies like Dell and Wal-Mart, for instance, clearly demonstrate this situation.

> *"One particular feature in my case is that I'm one of the few in retailing industry which is bigger than its suppliers. My sales are more important than the biggest of my supplier." (Expert 2)*

> *"At one time manufacturers were more significant than retailers in terms of size and sales. Now the distributors have the information. So, as a retailer, I can greatly help my suppliers giving them market information, preventing them from certain situations [...] Suppliers should have a good relationship with me as I have interest in having a good relationship with them." (Expert 4)*

The rapidly changing business environment in retailing – new actors entering the market, some exiting, new technologies and practices – drives the retailers to build long-lasting win-win relations with suppliers in order to reach superior performance through brands, reputation, exclusive distribution or strategic information.

> *"He told me Wal-Mart bought some and Rossy as well. It works correctly. [In the end, you have privileged information.] Yes." (Expert 1)*

> *"When there is a deal, chances are that we offer first. [Do they give you strategic information when you have a privileged relationship like that?] Yes, of course." (Expert 2)*

> *"[Do you ask for exclusivity for basic products?] Often." (Expert 2)*

1.5.3. Employee loyalty / satisfaction

Employee loyalty / satisfaction toward the organization are the third core competence underlined in the interviews. At this point, it must be noted that the term loyalty, as used by the experts, does not reflect the definition of the concept according to the literature, which refers to the promotion or defense of the business values and taking stand in its favour (Tremblay & Wils, 2005). However, when the experts discuss about employee loyalty, they do not talk about employees defending the banner, they rather link it directly to HR turnover and employees' intention to stay in the company. Consequently, they translate loyalty into HR policies or practices that enhance employee satisfaction and ultimately lead to a reduced turnover. Since the use of loyalty has naturally emerged for expressing the employee satisfaction idea, we have decided to use both terms jointly in our research in order to not denature the wording used by the experts while expressing at the same time the underlain meaning.

Since the retailing industry experiences a very high turnover, staff retention represents a major issue (Peterson, 2007; Hendrie, 2004; Broadbridge, 2002; Good et al., 1988) because it involves important direct costs (e.g. recruitment and training of new employees) and indirect costs (e.g. operational disruption, demoralization of employees) (Ton & Huckman, 2008). For Booth & Hamer (2006) voluntary turnover – type of turnover that depends on the volition of the employee – can be based either on push or pull factors, i.e. employee has a lack of interest in its job or employee is attracted by another job.

> *"Loyalty is something that is increasingly difficult and it will be a challenge increasingly important. There is such a high turnover in*

retail. We must give more and more to employees and it doesn't necessarily mean wage." (Expert 2)

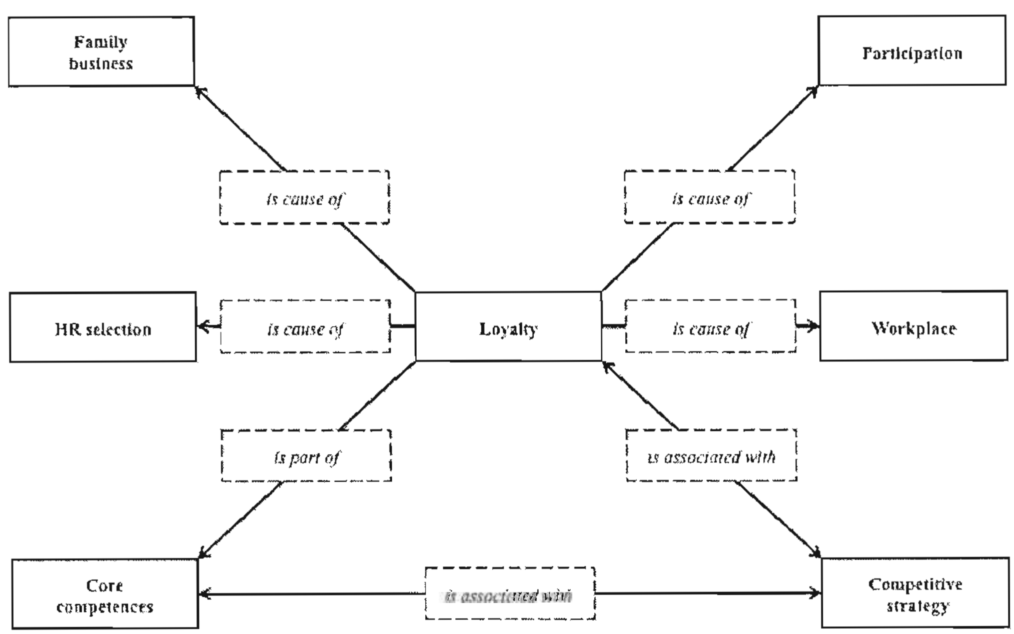
For retailers, the high staff turnover problematic is particularly true amongst front-line staff but to a lesser extent amongst middle and high managers (Foster et al., 2008; Hendrie, 2004). Moreover, the corporate level uses to let stores internal HR issues to stores managers.

"[...] the 18-24, there is no loyalty. [...] They are there because they need money. They are here 3 days a week and study the rest of the time, in another sector. [...] We need stability but the retail sector is increasingly part-time." (Expert 2)

"We lose very few managers year after year because people feel they have a lot of autonomy." (Expert 3)

Figure 1.5.3.

Experts' perceptual mapping of employee loyalty / satisfaction



> *"Grocers are in charge of staff or internal dynamics issues. We [the corporate level] support them but are not directly involved." (Expert 3)*

In order to support employee loyalty and satisfaction, retailers propose various incentives to their personnel such as career progression, a pleasant workplace and interesting work conditions. In other terms, increasing employee job satisfaction supports its commitment toward the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Nevertheless, more commitment does not necessarily lead to loyalty, i.e. the interest of an employee toward the organization he works for does not mean he shares the values and gets a positive experience from it.

Previous studies on retailing industry also mention that perceived organizational support, employee satisfaction and personal achievement contribute to reduce turnover significantly (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoads et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2001; Eisenberger, et al., 2001).

> *"The promotions, whether for buyers or supervisors, are always promoted from within." (Expert 1)*

> *"Sometimes, I get suggestions. Then I send a letter to everyone. Well, following the suggestion of an employee, that I don't name, we have decided to do this change." (Expert 1)*

> *"We have spent a lot of money to make the workplace suitable for retention." (Expert 2)*

As mentioned in the literature, family members feel more loyal to their organization than employees in non-family firms (Beehr et al., 1997). This is supported by two of the interviewees who mentioned being a family business influences positively the loyalty of their employees. According to Foster et al. (2008), the loyalty expressed by employees goes firstly to the store, than to the retailer and finally to the industry.

> *"[Do they feel part of a family?] Yes. And it provides stability. [...] It allows me to have a long-term vision. Employees feel comfortable to speak with me." (Expert 2)*

The interviewed consultant views the relation between the retailer and the employee in another way, considering the loyalty relation in the opposite direction.

> *"What the company is willing to do in order to be loyal to its employees? And I think in years to come when we will perhaps face a certain lack of jobs and where employees will have more power than what they have now, it will be different. [...] It's one thing that Wal-Mart asks its employees to be loyal to Wal-Mart. But that Wal-Mart is loyal to its employees is more meaningful and, in my opinion, it would bring more money to Wal-Mart in the long-term."(Expert 4)*

This perception refers to Eisenberger, et al. (1986) social exchange view of commitment: the perception of employees regarding the commitment of the organization toward them leads to better work behavior since the firm recognizes the valuable contribution of its employees.

Three out of four experts interviewed use to work at the corporate level and their sensitivity toward the stores front-line staff seems quite limited since the management of this category of employees is left to store managers. High turnover tend to be considered as an unchangeable phenomenon, inherent to retailing. Conversely, the consultant interviewed rather considers that front-line staff, and employees in general, are the most important vehicle of organizational culture and performance. According to him, employees must contribute to shaping organizational culture and not only be shaped by it.

> *"Demonstrating consideration and recognition to employees is, I think, more profitable for retailers than the opposite relation. [...] Retail businesses need leaders who will be open and flexible, not leaders who will only reinforce the same organizational culture. A*

> *leader must be an image of innovation and he must show his employees that he needs them to get there." (Expert 4)*

This part of the analysis is interesting since it demonstrates that loyalty and satisfaction of employees are mainly related to the quality of the work environment and some other actions taken for allowing down to top communication. Surprisingly, even though and other important concepts such as vision, customer needs, values and managing through values, the leadership issue has not emerged as one of the major issue related to employee loyalty and satisfaction. However, the literature says that leadership is one of the main vectors of organizational commitment and loyalty, and can consequently lead to performance (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Liao & Chuang, 2007; Joseph & Winston, 2005; Avolio & Bass, 1995). It must also be underlined that the term *loyalty* as used and discussed by the experts reflects more what relates to employee satisfaction. Indeed, three out of four experts considered loyalty as the main result of employee satisfaction. Interestingly, the use of *loyalty* has naturally emerged for expressing organizational policies or practices linked to satisfaction. The consultant has been the only expert to express and discuss about loyalty as it is defined in the literature, i.e. focusing on the underlain values that must be embedded into the concept of loyalty. For the purpose of this research and with the objective of not denaturing the wording used by the experts, we have kept the term *loyalty* in our further analyses but did add *employee satisfaction* for specifying what exactly it was all about.

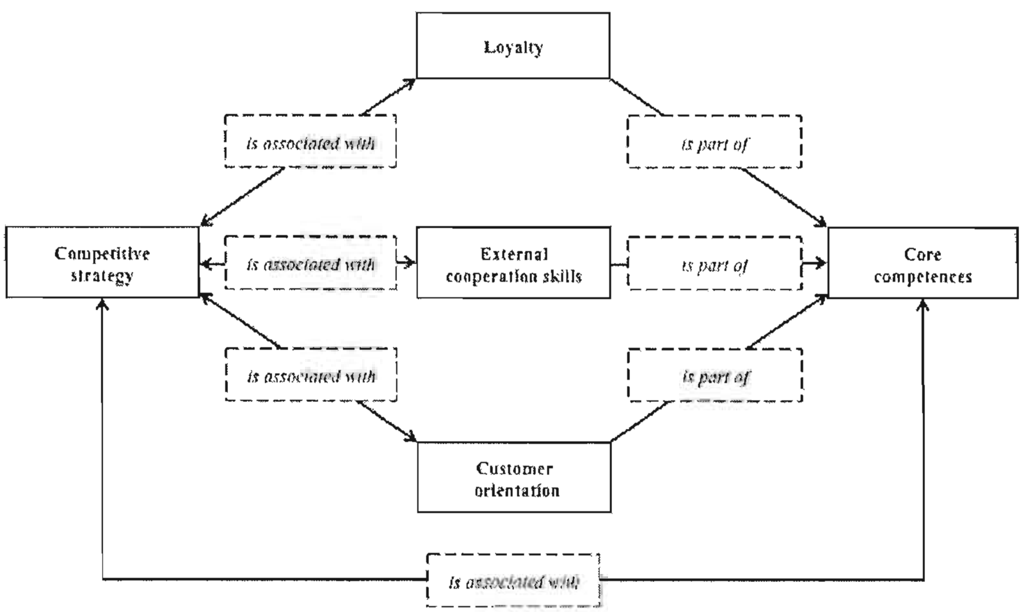
1.6. Conclusion

This paper first argues for the integration of resources and competences under a global strategic perspective that recognizes the idiosyncratic character of the firm, the importance of its intangible assets and their influence on organizational performance under the uncertainty of a constant changing environment. Among these assets, organizational competences constitute an important source of competitive advantage and therefore, it becomes strategic for the firm to determine the value of organizational competences.

The main contribution of this article is to identify core organizational competences in the domain of retailing according to experts particularly familiar with the food retailing subsector. Based on the resource and competence perspective and two theoretical frameworks focused on organizational competences, interviews with three high managers and one consultant in this industry have been conducted. In the light of these interviews, it appeared clearly that the customer orientation, the challenge of employee loyalty and satisfaction, and the external cooperation between a firm with its suppliers are core organizational competences for retailers.

Figure 1.6.1.

Experts' perceptual mapping of core competences



Following this study, we have proceeded to the construction of a questionnaire based on the contribution of expert discourse. Remaining systematically linked to statements made by the experts, we have thus put into perspective what is suggested by the theory.

This study also has some limitations. First, it would be hasty to generalize these conclusions to every retailer, in every sector of retailing. In this sense, more interviews could have indicated us possible differences with our results. Second, even if the list of organizational competences on which the interviews relied on is based on the literature review and more precisely on Lado & Wilson (1994) as well as Thompson & Richardson (1996) models, it cannot be considered as exhaustive and one could have chosen to extend or restrict it. Third, a more experienced interviewer could have been able to better target the concepts discussed and follow up the discussion. He could also have been able to avoid confusion about the concept of loyalty. Nevertheless, it represents an excellent starting point for further studies on the subject. Thus, the construction of an organizational competences theoretical framework dedicated to retail industry could be relevant to knowledge advancement as well as its empirical application.

CHAPITRE 2

ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCES AS A PERFORMANCE LEVER FOR FOOD RETAILERS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

ABSRACT

The present article proposes to examine the importance of some organizational competences for food retailers while focusing on one of the three major grocery chain in Quebec, Métro. To do so we first tested measurement scales. Then, focusing specifically on (1) customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction, we wanted to evaluate their effects on grocery stores reaching performance objectives and satisfaction with performance. Finally, we suggested a primary comparison of Métro with the two other major banners, Loblaws and Sobeys. Study findings confirmed the existence of positive and significant relationships between organizational competences and performance while presenting some differences according to the banner.

RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article s'intéresse à l'importance relative de certaines compétences organisationnelles pour les détaillants en alimentation et focalise sur une des trois principales chaines en alimentation au Québec, Métro. Pour ce faire, nous avons d'abord testé des échelles de mesure. Nous avons ensuite évaluer les effets sur la performance des détaillants en alimentation de trois compétences organisationnelles spécifiques : (1) l'orientation client, (2) les compétences de coopération externe, et (3) la loyauté / satisfaction des employés. Les résultats de l'étude confirment l'existence de relations positives et significatives entre les compétences organisationnelles et la performance tout en présentant des différences selon la bannière.

Key words: organizational competences; customer orientation; external cooperation skills; loyalty; employee satisfaction; retailing; performance.

2.1. Introduction

From the study of industry-level factors to the analysis of firm-level attributes, strategic management has always focused on the ways businesses can reach a position of success. Since the beginning of the 1990s, numerous researchers got interested in resources and competences as possible sources of sustainable competitive advantage for firms producing greater profits than their competitors (Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005; Edelman et al., 2005; 2002; Camisón, 2005; McGee & Peterson, 2000; Lado & Wilson, 1994). Several industrial contexts have been the basis of these studies. However, very few chose the retail industry for research field even if it represents a dynamic sector for studying such a topic (Harris & Ogbonna, 2001) especially because of its high and constantly increasing level of competition (Morschett et al., 2006).

Starting with the resource and competence-based view as the overarching theoretical framework, this exploratory research focuses on relationships among organizational competences and business performance in Quebec food retailing industry. More specifically we have focused on the Métro banner for some reasons. With annual sales exceeding $11 billion and over 65,000 employees, Métro is a leader in the food and pharmaceutical sectors in Quebec and Ontario where it operates over 600 food stores. Taking Metro as our reference group, we have also tried to compare the results with those of respondents from the two other major food retailing banners in Quebec: Loblaws and Sobeys.

Following a qualitative research on the identification and analysis of core organizational competences for companies in retailing (Beauséjour, 2009), the purpose of this article is to determine to which degree the previously identified organizational competences - (1) customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction – impact food retailers' performance. In order to proceed to this assessment, it appeared relevant to compare respondents' answers according to their role in the firm. Two groups of respondents have thus been taken into account in this study: (1) store managers and assistant store managers, and (2) department managers, assistant department managers, heads of cashiers, and assistant heads of cashiers. Our aim is to identify to what extent the perception of these two groups toward organizational competences and business performance differ between Métro and the other two banners. Nevertheless, the main objective remains more to test a measuring instrument and verify its psychometric qualities than testing the model *per se*.

2.2. Identifying organizational competences

Since executive behaviours are driven by competitiveness and that competitiveness is derived from within the organization through resources and competences management, focusing on organizational competences entails to adopt a firm-wide perspective, and to identify the knowledge, expertise and capabilities collectively learned by the company explaining its performance from that of its competitors. However, if the development and support of organizational competences represents a core source of competitive advantage, it remains a challenge for business managers to identify those organizational competences that really impact the firm performance. Even though several researches were made on the subject for demonstrating the positive relationships between organizational competences and performance (Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005; Edelman et al., 2005; 2002; Camisón, 2005; McGee & Peterson, 2000; Lado & Wilson, 1994), the identification of organizational competences refers at first to the definition of the concept of *competence* and the structure of organizational competences.

In a semantic perspective, the concept of competence is slightly unclear since terms such as *competence*, *competency*, *ability* and *capability* are used interchangeably

(Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004). In addition to this wording issue, several domains got interested in the concept of competence, and more specifically in organizational competences, since it refers to industrial economy, theories of organizations, HRM, or strategic management (Prévot, 2005). This partly explains the use of different words for explaining the concept (Rouby & Thomas, 2004). These two aspects contribute to confusion and therefore support the need for clarification.

Several authors have defined differently the term *competence* (Fleury & Fleury, 2005). For Bogner & Thomas (1994), it refers to firm's abilities and skills in the deployment of resources. Lado & Wilson (1994) define competences as resources and capabilities enabling the firm to develop, choose and implement value-enhancing strategies. More recently, Murray & Donegan (2003) consider competences as the result of the coordination between resources and people in the competitive advantage seeking. For Freiling (2004), competences are organizational, repeatable, learning-based and therefore non-random ability to sustain the coordinated deployment of assets and resources enabling the firm to reach and defend the state of competitiveness and to achieve goals. If definitions are numerous, organizational competences, in a strategic management point of view, always refer to the firm level; they are composed of collective skills and abilities, they are necessary in the combination and deployment of resources and other firm's assets, and aim to give the organization a sustainable competitive advantage.

2.3. Structuring organizational competences

According to the resource and competence-based view, those competences that can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage must meet certain requirements. Furthermore, they need to create value for both, the organization and the customers. Their development must be done in such a way that they are rare and difficult for competitors to imitate besides being hardly substitutable (Teece et al., 1997; Peteraf, 1993; Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991). The translation of these organizational imperatives for a business is tailored to each particular sector of activities. Valuable, rare, non-imitable and non-substitutable competences in the industrial context are obviously different than in the service context. Even in only one sector, according to the type of product or service, the size of the company, or its environment (e.g. country, region, culture, social policies, regulations, current practices), the desired competences will vary.

In the food retailing context, offering products unused, basic customers' service, and a standard and easy to imitate shopping experience can't lead a supermarket to acquire a competitive advantage. In the attempt of developing a sustainable competitive advantage, supermarkets require, at first, to identify those competences that can be sources of competitiveness. If it may be easy to list potential firm-level organizational competences allowing a company to offer unique products and services; it is more complicated proceeding to a fine targeting for reducing the possible sources. For Zehir et al. (2006), organizational competences integrate the following components of competitiveness. (1) First, customers' expectations must be met around low cost. Firms need the financial capability to lowering the cost and offering a product or a service that translates to customer value and competitiveness. (2) Second, firms must develop and support product diversity and service quality, and (3) finally they must innovate in order to propose regularly a renewed offer.

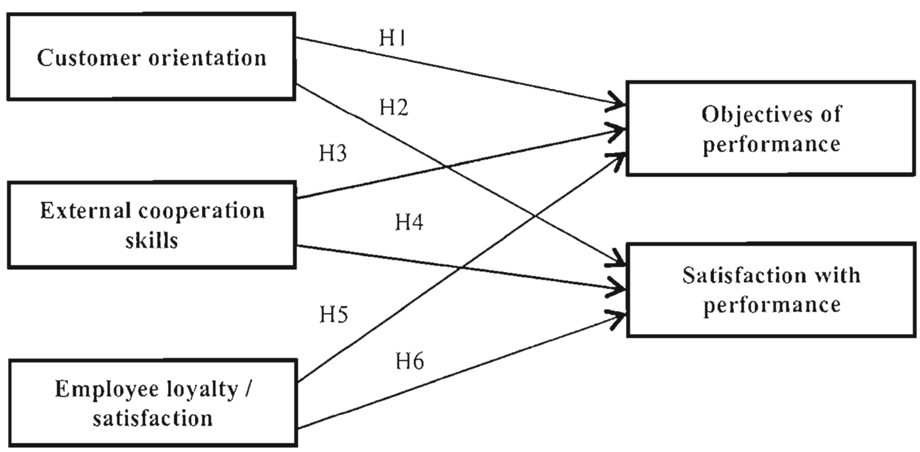
The Quebec food retailing market is characterized by an oligopolistic situation, highly concentrated, with few important competitors, and high entry barriers. In such a competitive environment, retailers invest, create, and develop competitive advantage utilizing unique set of strengths, resources and competences. According to some experts in the Quebec retailing context (Beauséjour, 2009), three organizational competences are considered as essential sources of competitiveness: (1) the customer orientation, (2) the external cooperation skills, and (3) the loyalty / satisfaction of employees toward the firm and the loyalty of the firm toward its employees. Voluntarily ignoring financial capability and besides the choice of strategy, this study focuses on these three specific organizational competences and their effects on business performance.

2.4. Hypotheses

In this section, we first present the following hypotheses in a conceptual model presented in the figure 2.4.1. and then we discuss the different variables used in the model and the suggested relations that we study in this research.

Figure 2.4.1.

Conceptual model



2.4.1. Performance

Performance measurement, in retailing such as in manufacturing, is not a unitary concepts and thus underlain several variables. Moreover, the nature of the performance measured can vary (financial performance or operational performance) and the type of measurement as well (quantitative indicators or perceptions). For the purpose of this research, we have chosen performance indicators largely inspired by Grewal and Slotegraaf (2007) mainly because their indicators were particularly appropriate for assessing food retailer performance.

Our aim was to focus on the store and merchandise management performance and then aggregating our data to get a broader picture of the banner. Since we did not have access to official figures that could have been provided by the stores or even by the corporate level of each one of the three grocery retailing chain, performance was measured based on the perception of store managers in relation to their reach of performance objectives and their satisfaction with performance.

2.4.2. Customer orientation

Product and service differentiation is a key source of competitive advantage (Porter, 1980) and the interface of the retailer with the customer is where the customer service competence relies (Rayport & Jaworski, 2004). With three major food retailers in Quebec, offering similar products, prices, and hours of operations, it becomes difficult for each one of them to strategically and systematically differentiate itself from its competitors and thus reach an above average performance. In this context, proposing an overall shopping experience that fosters customer service has became an important lever of performance (Grewal, et al., 2009; Grewal & Slotegraaf, 2007; Homburg, et al. 2002). Being service-oriented requires the retailer to focus on its relationships with its customers, providing them with quality service, required information, personnel availability, and pleasant communication and attitude. For reaching these objectives and transforming them into customer satisfaction, customer orientation must be translated into values and behavioural norms in order to establish a common commitment based on customer service (Pettijohn, Pettijohn & Taylor, 2007; Merlo, et al., 2006). Unfortunately, there is a lack of empirical research on customer orientation at the individual level even though the necessity of better understanding the high importance of customer-oriented selling concept in today's business world is widely acknowledged (Brown et al., 2002). However, some empirical studies explored this relationship between customer orientation and performance at different levels. Dunsen and Kilic (2010) revealed in their study that higher levels of customer orientation lead to higher levels of relationships development and individual performance. In their research, Stanforth and Lennon (1997: 115) argued "[...] as retailers strive to develop customer-oriented environments, the delivery of quality and value to the customer through customer service has been identified as a potential competitive advantage." In the same way, Zane (2000) indicated that enhanced levels of customer satisfaction provide the firm with a more loyal customer base and greater corporate profitability. More specifically in the domain of food retailing, Simon et al. (2009) found that employee attitudes positively influence customer satisfaction with service and thus affect sales performance.

Customer orientation focuses either on customer perceived value of the service, product offering valued by customers, or both. Since customer needs change rapidly, organizations must answer the situation with a rapid pace of innovation and a continued effort to be able to satisfy customers (Zehir et al., 2006). For conventional grocery stores operating under a traditional supermarket format, it represents an important challenge in order to provide customers with more than a mix of general merchandise items in complement to a full line of groceries, meat, and fresh products (Huddleston, et al., 2008); it means developing a discount line of products, offering unstandardized products such as bio food, or proposing prepared food ready for takeout. For hypermarkets, it is also about an integrated offer of services in addition to foodstuff such as pressing, library, banking and insurance, traveling agency, and so on. Therefore,

Hypothesis 1: The customer orientation has a positive and significant influence on supermarket reach of performance objectives.

Hypothesis 2: The customer orientation has a positive and significant influence on supermarket satisfaction with performance.

2.4.3. External cooperation skills

The classical relationship between the retailer an its suppliers suggests doing business in a we/they perspective, i.e. through traditional activities such as negotiation, hanging, pressure tactics, withholding of information, and playing off customers or suppliers against one another (Ashkenas, 1995). In a quality-seeking context, there must be a switch from relationship to partnership. However, for a retailer to build a collaborative partnership can be difficult. Accordingly, there must be a social investment by the retailer to lead him from a strictly transactional market relationship to a long-term partnership (Lindblom, et al., 2009). The creation and the sustainability of long-term partnerships between a retailer and a supplier underlie new cooperative managerial practices such as information sharing, and resources and competences exchanges for reaching a mutually benefited cooperation, which results in an economic interest (Ganesan, et al. 2009; Elg & Paavola, 2008; Morgan, et al. 2007). Hence, retailers must not only balance returns on assets, growth, and inventory turns but also need to develop the capability for collaborating with their supply chain partners to drive demand.

Previous researches have shown empirical evidences of benefits for both, retailer and supplier, when developing and maintaining cooperation. Pramatari and Miliotis (2008) analyzed and evaluated the influence of collaborative store replenishment practice facilitating information and knowledge sharing between retail store managers and suppliers' salesmen over an Internet-based system. Their results showed a positive impact on retailer performance since the platform led to a reduction of out-of-shelf situations by more than 50% and no significant variation of total observed inventory levels. The results of Li et al. (2004), in their research on the manufacturing sector, indicated that higher levels of supply chain management practice can lead to enhanced competitive advantage and improved organizational performance. Therefore,

Hypothesis 3: The external cooperation skills have a positive and significant influence on supermarket reach of performance objectives.

Hypothesis 4: The external cooperation skills have a positive and significant influence on supermarket satisfaction with performance

2.4.4. Employee loyalty / satisfaction

Workforce turnover in retailing represents a major issue for grocers because it involves high costs in terms of recruitment and training, but also indirect costs such as possible operations disruption, loss of knowledge, and even demoralization and additional work to be absorbed for employees who remain within the firm (Ton & Huckman, 2008; Foster, et al., 2008; Peterson, 2007). The nature of the job explains partly this reality. Retail provides a setting in which performance tends to depend on routines and repetitive tasks instead of innovation. This situation is even truer for frontline staffs, which is mainly composed of part-time employees, young, and often students not looking for a permanent job in this sector. In this context, retailers tend to provide their employees with a decent and pleasant work conditions and environment in order to limit the turnover as much as possible. There is an investment in terms of loyalty / employee satisfaction: the retailer enhances employees' job satisfaction, and the employees remain in the firm for a longer period of time (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Indeed, some studies in retailing suggest that perceived organizational support, employee satisfaction and personal achievement contribute to reduce turnover significantly (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoads et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2001). For Hurley and Estelami (2005), employee satisfaction influences employee loyalty levels and is reflected in the turnover indicators. Keiningham et al. (2005) have found that, depending the size of the store, there is a correlation between employee satisfaction and loyalty, and store profitability. The link between job satisfaction and customer satisfaction also needs to be investigated since it impacts directly on store performance. More satisfied employees tend to better serve customers (Brown & Lam, 2008) and also contribute to promote the banner (Foster, et al., 2008). Therefore,

Hypothesis 5: The loyalty / satisfaction in the relationship between the employee and the organization has a positive and significant influence on supermarket reach of performance objectives.

Hypothesis 6: The external cooperation skills have a positive and significant influence on supermarket satisfaction with performance.

Following the results of the interviews conducted by Beauséjour (2009) on which is based the choice of these three organizational competences, it is important to underline the fact that when the experts discussed about employee loyalty, they did not talk about employees defending the banner, they rather linked it directly to HR turnover and employees' intention to stay in the company. Consequently, they translated loyalty into HR policies or practices that enhance employee satisfaction and ultimately lead to a reduced turnover. Since the use of loyalty has naturally emerged for expressing the employee satisfaction idea, we have decided to use both terms jointly in our research in order to not denature the wording used by the experts while expressing at the same time the underlain meaning.

2.5. Method

2.5.1. Sample and data collection

As presented earlier, the hypotheses were tested through two distinct groups of respondents: (1) store managers / assistant store managers, and (2) department managers / assistant department managers, and head of cashiers / assistant head of cashiers. All the respondents work in one or another of the three largest supermarket banners in Quebec (Loblaws, Sobeys or Métro). A total of 143 respondents answered the questionnaire (72 store managers and 71 department managers / head of cashiers). It is important to take note that store managers respondents were not necessarily working in the same store than department managers respondents. Indeed, more than 135 stores were represented in this study by, at least, one of the two respondents types.

The questionnaire was based on an extensive literature review of well-established constructs used in studies on retailing industry. The survey was pre-tested with fifteen respondents from each group. After the pre-test, respondents were first able to respond directly to the questionnaire online in order to facilitate the data gathering. Unfortunately, the response rate hasn't been very high so it's been decided to also use hard copies deposited directly on the workplace. The added response rate has been relatively marginal. Globally, the online questionnaire allowed us to get 75% of total questionnaires and the hard copies, 25%.

In order to avoid receiving more than one questionnaire from a single respondent, two control modes have been adopted. First, a valid e-mail address was asked at the very beginning of the questionnaire. Second, specific characteristics concerning the grocery store where the respondents work were also asked (e.g. address, size, number of employees, etc.). Moreover, all the hard copies questionnaires were deposited in stores where no online questionnaires were received.

2.5.2. *Measures*

In order to avoid problems of common-factor variance, each group of respondents answered a questionnaire that was specific. Store managers and assistant store managers answered the following clusters of questions: (1) control, (2) strategy, and (3) performance. Department managers, assistant department managers, head of cashiers, and assistant head of cashiers answered two clusters of questions: (1) control, and (2) organizational competences – (a) customer orientation, (b) external cooperation skills, and (c) employee loyalty / satisfaction.

Ten points Likert-type scales were used to measuring organizational competences as independent variables. Respondents were asked to evaluate the degree of importance they grant to the different items in the context of their workplace (1 = not important at all to 10 = totally essential, with a middle anchor point of 5 = important).

Table 2.5.1.

Resources of scales

Group of respondents Department managers, assistant department managers, head of cashiers, and assistant head of cashiers		
Dimensions	**Authors**	**Number of items**
Control		**14**
Personal aspects		7
Organizational aspects		7
Organizational competences		**16**
Customer orientation	Merlo et al. (2006), Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar (2005), Peccei & Rosenthal (1997)	6
External cooperation skills		5
Employee loyalty / satisfaction		5
TOTAL		**30**

Table 2.5.1. (continued)

Group of respondents Store managers and assistant store managers		
Dimensions	**Authors**	**Number of items**
Control		**14**
Personal aspects		7
Organizational aspects		7
Performance		**9**
Reaching performance objectives	Grewal & Slotegraaf (2007)	5
Satisfaction with performance		4
TOTAL		**23**

Business performance scale consists of nine items that included company's growth and overall business performance factors. Ten points Likert-type scales were used to measuring performance as dependent variables. Respondents were asked to evaluate the performance of their store in terms of objectives reached over the past three years (1 = below average to 10 = beyond average, with a middle anchor point of 5 = average). Whereas they were asked to answer their degree of satisfaction toward their store performance again with ten points Likert-type scales evaluating their degree of agreement (1 = totally disagree to 10 = totally agree, with a middle anchor point of 5 = somewhat agree). The table 2.5.1 presents the studies that helped constructing our scales of measurement and the number of items used for measuring each dimension.

a. Factor analyses

The exploratory nature of this research and the small sample size led us to conduct exploratory factor analysis in order to define the global composite construct of organizational competences and verify that our scales were well suited to measuring this construct, we submitted the items related to organizational competences and performance to principle component analysis with varimax rotation. As expected, we obtained a three-factors solution for composing organizational competences, and two for performance. In order to estimate the reliability of our scales we used the

Cronbach alpha. After omitting items with low factor loading, 10 items left for explaining organizational competences in the Métro banner, and 9 remained for the joint group of respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys. Both banner samples retained 9 items to measure performance.[1] If Nunally (1978) argues that an alpha between 0.50 and 0.60 is acceptable in the case of measuring hypothetical constructs, Comrey (1973) tolerates a Cronbach alpha of 0.45 as the minimum acceptable. However, it is possible to argue that 0.65 could be a base value low enough that it is legitimate to construct hypotheses such as those put forward in this study. Below 0.65, the scale reliability is considered too low.

The results of factor analyses and the reliability test for both constructs, and each group of respondents, are presented in tables 2.5.2 and 2.5.3. Our results demonstrated that all of our scales were reliable and the factor loadings demonstrate that all the identified competences are unidimensional.

In the case of Métro, four items were taken into account for explaining the *customer orientation* organizational competence, and three were kept for *employee loyalty / satisfaction* and *external cooperation skills*. Cronbach alpha are high, particularly for *customer orientation* and *employee loyalty / satisfaction*, and demonstrate a very good internal consistency. Results from the respondents of Loblaws and Sobeys are different. The Cronbach alphas are totally acceptable, but the composition of the constructs is unalike, i.e. items for measuring each organizational competence were not always the same.

At Métro, *customer orientation* is the organizational competence that explains the most variance (33,07%), followed by *employee loyalty / satisfaction* (22,79%), and *external cooperation skills* (18,86%). Globally, these three organizational

---

[1] As recommended by Comrey (1973), we have rejected any statement with factor loadings below 0,45.

competences explain 74,72% of the variance. For Loblaws and Sobeys jointly, the same organizational competences explain 71,34% of the variance. However, the explained portion of the overall variance is shared more evenly between the three organizational competences studied - *customer orientation* (26,16%), *employee loyalty / satisfaction* (23%), and *external cooperation skills* (22,21%).

The situation is more similar in what regards performance. The two groups of respondents kept the same items for explaining performance. For Métro, *reaching performance objectives* explained 42,69% of the global variance and *satisfaction with performance*, 34,93% whereas for Loblaws and Sobeys, *reaching performance objectives* explained 34,55% of the global variance and *satisfaction with performance*, 34,29%.

With the aim of exposing the relations among organizational competences and business performance dimensions, we have conducted a correlations analysis. As shown in table 2.5.4, results from Métro show a slightly high correlation between customer orientation and employee loyalty / satisfaction but not with external cooperation skills. Since there were only three independent variables, it's been decided to keep all of them despite this score. So it is for reaching performance objectives, which do not appear to be correlated with external cooperation skills. However, satisfaction with performance is correlated with all three of the organizational competences. Contrarily to Métro, joint results from Loblaws and Sobeys demonstrate a high correlation between external cooperation skills and customer orientation as well as with both constructs of performance. On the other hand, employee loyalty / satisfaction are not correlated with any other dimensions but slightly with external cooperation skills.

Table 2.5.2.

Extraction of organizational competences variables

Factors	Items	Loadings		Cronbach *alpha*		% of total variance		Total variance	
		M[1]	LS[2]	M	LS	M	LS	M	LS
Customer orientation	Flexibility towards customers	,904	,783	,896	,783	33,070	26,161		
	Customer service	,875	,828						
	Customer satisfaction	,788	---						
	Products offer	,709	,809						
Employee loyalty / satisfaction	Benefits for employees	,810	,816	,803	,735	22,789	23,000	74,716	71,367
	Participation in goals identification and implementation	,800	---						
	Participation in decision-making	,740	,831						
	Work environment	---	,740						
External cooperation skills	Information from suppliers	,802	---	,697	,771	18,856	22,206		
	Cooperation with suppliers – best offer	,787	,798						
	Aware of the reputation	,665	---						
	Cooperation with supermarkets of the same banner	---	,811						
	Cooperation with suppliers – first offer	---	,723						

[1] Métro.
[2] Loblaws and Sobeys.

Table 2.5.3.

Extraction of performance variables

Factors	Items	Loadings		Cronbach *alpha*		% of total variance		Total variance	
		M[3]	LS[4]	M	LS	M	LS	M	LS
Objectives	Sales objectives	,907	,891	,925	,864	42,693	34,548	**77,619**	**68.838**
	Growth objectives	,904	,867						
	Market share objectives	,840	,742						
	Compared to competitors	,839	,639						
	Sales per square foot (past 3 years)	,797	,627						
Satisfaction	HR management	,927	,835	,895	,856	34,926	34,290		
	Average performance (past 3 years)	,883	,878						
	Store global management cost	,846	,771						
	Stock management	,744	,707						

[3] Métro.
[4] Loblaws and Sobeys.

Table 2.5.4.

Correlations coefficients, reliability and descriptive statistics

Metro	Alpha	Mean	S.D.	CUST	COOP	LOY	OBJ	SATIS
CUST	,896	8,10	1,23	1				
COOP	,697	7,87	1,07	,427**	1			
LOY	,803	7,74	0,83	,567**	,295	1		
OBJ	,925	7,61	1,21	,735**	,219	,693**	1	
SATIS	,895	7,58	1,00	,732**	,349*	,676**	,438**	1
Loblaws / Sobeys	**Alpha**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**CUST**	**COOP**	**LOY**	**OBJ**	**SATIS**
CUST	,783	7,73	0,92	1				
COOP	,771	7,88	1,16	,470**	1			
LOY	,735	7,32	0,76	,208	,345*	1		
OBJ	,864	7,50	0,85	,627**	,642**	,301	1	
SATIS	,856	7,80	0,77	,684**	,741**	,228	,567**	1

** $p < ,001$; * $p < ,005$

a. Regression analysis

To test our hypotheses, we employed linear regressions. Because department managers and heads of cashiers evaluated organizational competences and store managers, performance, we created a composite variable for each of the five constructs, based on the mean of all the items used for explaining each one of them. As shown in table 5.5, the six hypotheses have been calculated for both banner samples: (1) Métro (M), and (2) Loblaws and Sobeys (LS).

Globally, respondents from each of our two banner samples considered organizational competences as a whole having significant interactions on reaching performance objectives (M: F = 12,464; $p < ,001$ – LS: F = 8,069 ; $p < ,001$) or business satisfaction with performance (M: F = 14,055 ; $p < ,001$ – LS: F = 12,309 ; $p < ,001$). According to the respondents from Metro, organizational competences explain 48,9% of reaching performance objectives variance, and 51,9% of the business satisfaction with performance variance. Respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys granted little less importance to organizational competences for reaching performance objectives variance (44,7%), and 55,2% for explaining business satisfaction with performance variance.

Table 2.5.5.

Regression analysis

	Hypothesized relationships	β	*t*	R^2	Adj R^2	*F* statistic	Hypothesis
Métro							
H1a	Customer orientation ➔Reaching performance objectives	,479	3,254**				Supported
H2a	External cooperation skills ➔ Reaching performance objectives	-,149	-,964	,489	,450	12,464***	Not supported
H3a	Employee loyalty / satisfaction ➔ Reaching performance objectives	,562	2,563*				Supported
H4a	Customer orientation ➔Satisfaction with performance	,457	3,204**				Supported
H5a	External cooperation skills ➔Satisfaction with performance	,017	,141	,519	,483	14,055***	Not supported
H6a	Employee loyalty / satisfaction ➔Satisfaction with performance	,346	2,564**				Supported
Loblaws and Sobeys							
H1b	Customer orientation ➔ Reaching performance objectives	,436	2,831**				Supported
H2b	External cooperation skills ➔ Reaching performance objectives	,306	,551	,447	,391	8,069***	Not supported
H3b	Employee loyalty / satisfaction ➔ Reaching performance objectives	,080	,306				Not supported
H4b	Customer orientation ➔Satisfaction with performance	,462	3,335**	,552	,507	12,309***	Supported

Table 2.5.5. (continued)

H5b	External cooperation skills →Satisfaction with performance	,414	2,865**	Supported
H6b	Employee loyalty / satisfaction →Satisfaction with performance	-,029	-,225	Not supported

* $p < ,05$; ** $p < ,01$; *** $p < ,001$

When looking at each organizational competence individually, it is possible to demonstrate that customer orientation has a significant effect on business reaching performance objectives (M: $t = 3,254$; $p < ,01$ – LS: $t = 2,831$; $p < ,01$), and satisfaction with performance (M: $t = 3,204$; $p < ,01$ – LS: $t = 3,335$; $p < ,01$) in the case of Métro and Loblaws/Sobeys. Respondents from Métro also considered employee loyalty / satisfaction as an organizational competence having a significant impact on reaching performance objectives ($t = 2,563$; $p < ,05$) and satisfaction with performance ($t = 2,564$; $p < ,01$). However, if the respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys did not consider the influence of employee loyalty / satisfaction significant, they considered that external cooperation skills did have a significant impact on satisfaction with performance ($t = 2,865$; $p < ,01$), but not on reaching performance objectives.

2.6. Discussion

In a resource and competence-based view, firms possess limited resources and competences and out of this bundle, those considered as rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable can lead firms to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage, and ultimately, greater than others performance (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). In this inside-out perspective, organizational competences represent a major strategic asset influencing business performance.

In an attempt to measure the influence of some major organizational competences on business performance, we focused on the Quebec grocery retailing industry. This sector is characterized by an oligopolistic situation with three major banners sharing more than 75% of all the market shares.[1] Taking Métro as our reference case study, we have first determined how (1) customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction impact supermarket performance. We have also suggested a preliminary comparison between Métro and respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys jointly.

According to the results of each banner sample (i.e. (1) Métro and (2) Loblaws and Sobeys), organizational competences, when considered as one latent variable, significantly affect reaching performance objectives and satisfaction with performance. However, when taken separately, some disparities were identified between Métro and Loblaws/Sobeys.

Before identifying and discussing the differences of answers between the two banner samples, it is important to mention again the reasons why two different groups of respondents were chosen for this study. We have previously hypothesized that store managers were better positioned for evaluating business performance and getting a global view of the firm specifically in what regards numeric performance measures. Their great influence toward the store performance contributes to support this idea, and indeed the literature demonstrates that store manager work behaviour not only predict its individual performance, but also the success of the retail store (Arnold, et al., 2009; Koene et al., 2002; Lusch & Serpkenci, 1990). As managers with key leadership, their knowledge of important business issues, of strategy and objectives, should be transferred to the different business units, including departments, in order to leverage organizational competences that will contribute to the translation of these

[1] Table Agro-alimentaire de Chaudière-Appalaches, 2006.

issues, strategy and objectives into value-adding activities (Rulke et al., 2000). Whereas department managers and heads of cashiers had a narrower perception of business issues and strategy, but a more accurate one in what regards to their respective department operations, and consequently, on the required and desirable organizational competences.

Most of the previous researches on customer orientation tended to address the issue of customer orientation through the evaluation of customer satisfaction, trying to measure customer attitudes, perceptions or opinions (Williams and Naumann, 2011). In this research, our focus was put on front-line staff attitudes, perceptions and opinions for defining and measuring their own customer orientation. Results were then crossed with performance indicators assessed by store managers. They demonstrate that customer orientation influences significantly business performance. According to both samples, indicators used for measuring satisfaction with performance were the same (i.e. HR management, average performance over the past 3 years, store global management costs and stock management). Similarly, indicators used for measuring the reaching objectives for performance were also the same (i.e. Sales objectives, growth objectives, market share objectives, sales per square foot, and global performance in regards to competitors). Results suggest a relation according to which customer orientation, as evaluated by department managers and heads of cashiers, significantly impacts both grocery stores performance variables, as perceived by store managers. In other words, respondents from each sample think that customer orientation lead to greater sales payoffs, which confirms the current literature (Grewal, et al., 2009; Grewal & Slotegraaf, 2007; Gomez et al., 2003). For Métro respondents, customer orientation is translated through the flexibility toward customers, customer service, customer satisfaction and the products offer. The indicators retained by respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys were the same except that they do not integrate customer satisfaction for explaining customer orientation. Customer focus hence influences Quebec food retailing banners in their HR, supply chain and costs management and the reach of important performance objectives (Pugh, et al., 2002; Jeong & Hong, 2007; Reiner, 2005). As front-line managers, department managers and heads of cashiers have a direct and constant interface with clients and their assessment of impacts linked to customer service and product knowledge is important. Our results corroborate this idea that quality relationship between front-line staff and customers, based on customer service and satisfaction and products offer, positively effects store level performance (Pettijohn, et al. 2007; 2002; Wong & Sohal, 2002; Goff, et al., 1997).

According to our main sample, the loyalty / satisfaction of Métro employees have a significant effect on reaching performance objectives and satisfaction with performance. For assessing employee loyalty / satisfaction, respondents referred to benefits for employees and their participation to decision-making process as well as for the identification and implementation of their supermarket goals. On the other hand, respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys didn't consider significant the influence of employee loyalty / satisfaction on supermarket performance. In the case of Métro, the importance granted to employee loyalty / satisfaction supports the idea that some quality human resources management policies and practices help the firm to reach its performance objectives (Jones et al., 2009; Edgar & Geare, 2005; Guest, 2002; Huselid et al., 1997; Delaney & Huselid, 1996). Indeed, some researchers claim employee involvement has a positive impact on job satisfaction, commitment and loyalty (Blasi & Douglas, 2006; Scott-Ladd & Marshall, 2004; Guthrie, 2001; Cappelli & Neumark, 2001). In a more extended way, it has a positive impact on business performance in the context of retailing (Christen et al., 2006; Keiningham, et al., 2006; Gelade & Ivery, 2003).

Globally, the indicators used for composing the employee loyalty / satisfaction construct reflect more the concept of satisfaction than the one of loyalty since the notion of values underpinned by this concept has emerged so parsimonious in the interviews with experts on which this research is structured (Beauséjour, 2009). However, even if the indicators rather express the concept of *employee satisfaction* than the one of *loyalty*, we have kept both terms in our analyses in order to fully respect the wording used by the experts and the combined idea of satisfaction leading to loyalty. Nevertheless, the results obtained in our research didn't corroborate, in the case of the Loblaws/Sobeys, what the prevailing idea in the literature according to which employee satisfaction and loyalty represent key drivers of performance. However, our finding is not fully surprising. Silvestro (2002), in an empirical study of one of the UK's four large supermarket chains revealed similar results, i.e. an inverse correlation between employee satisfaction and loyalty, and profitability. In other words, the most profitable stores were those where employees were the least satisfied.

The effect of external cooperation skills on performance hasn't been significantly demonstrated by the Métro sample. Only respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys considered a positive impact on satisfaction with performance but not on reaching performance objectives. Out of the three organizational competences, external cooperation skills are the competence that explains the less variance and has the weakest relationship with performance. Interestingly, important different differences were found between both samples in the indicators used for measuring external cooperation skills. Respondents from Métro evaluated this organizational competence according to the information sharing between the grocer and its suppliers, the cooperation with suppliers for proposing customers a better products/service than the competitors, and their awareness of their own reputation. Respondents from Loblaws and Sobeys focused only on the cooperation aspect between the grocer and its suppliers (proposing a better products/service to customers than the competitors and being the first to offer a specific product) and between supermarkets of the same banner. Previous studies demonstrated that, in the food retailing sector, better cooperating with suppliers lead grocers to better manage their merchandise, and thus generate competitive advantage and cost savings (Ganesan, et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2007; Li et al., 2006). However, our results couldn't fully corroborate these researches.

Few explanations could be found for justifying the results obtained for external cooperation skills. The size of a grocery store is one of them. If departments in hypermarkets / superstores can be considered as 'stores in the store', with department managers fully assuming the management of their department, it is not the case for smaller sized supermarkets where decisions and external links are concentrated in the hands of the store manager. Hence, it can't be taken for granted that every internal grocery store supply chain enables orders for merchandise going directly from department to suppliers. In these cases, department managers and heads of cashiers are less involved in the external cooperation with suppliers, and this situation can partly justify the absence of perceived significant relationship between business performance and external cooperation skills. The integration of heads of cashiers in the same group of respondents with department managers may also have contributed to dilute department managers' perception of business performance – external cooperation skills relationship. Further researches involving a greater number of respondents for each one of these positions could possibly demonstrate a significant effect of external cooperation skills on business performance.

However, caution is required in considering our results because, despite their statistical significance, the measurement of the different constructs was based on very small samples. Nevertheless, empirical researches in the food retailing area focusing on organizational competences remain few and it's been necessary to use indicators found in researches focusing on other economic sectors for evaluations our different variables. In this context, the data gathered may not be as numerous as we would have liked to for studying the whole grocery retailing sector, the fact remains that in the case study context of Métro, with a preliminary comparison with the two other major banners, their validity is high.

Among the contingent factors that have also influences our results, the various supermarkets size may have had an impact. According to Silvestro (2002), in large grocery retail chains, store performance tends to correlate with store size: the larger is the store the greater is the profitability. Interestingly, the smaller is the store, greater is employee satisfaction and loyalty. Staff proximity with managers can explain this relation.

Possibilities for further researches are numerous. Some should focus on one specific organizational competence and go more in-depth in order to better understand the impact of each one of them on performance. Focusing on only one chain and enlarging the sample size would also be beneficial. It could give a better and broader picture of the chain situation and allow identifying more precisely the levers of actions for managers who would like to improve their store performance. Moreover, a study per business unit (store) could allow managers of the chain to identify and analyze the contingent factors that can explain differences between the stores.

Practically, our results, as those of Salvaggio et al. (2007) and Dietz (2005) should encourage practitioners to put more emphasis on service quality and customer orientation to reach a greater than average performance while increasing the purchase frequency. As it has also been shown in this study, Yee, Yeung & Edwin Cheng (2010) and Foster, Whysall & Harris (2008), employee loyalty toward the organization represents a fundamental basis for performance since their satisfaction is directly linked to their level of commitment. In the same vein, Reiner (2005) and Jeong & Hong (2007) argue for a more integrated relationship between suppliers and retailers. Our results support this idea even though the link between such a cooperation with performance is not as strong as it is for customer orientation and Employee loyalty / satisfaction.

2.7. Conclusion

In this exploratory empirical research, we have modeled three distinct organizational competences that have potential for explaining grocery store performance. It presents preliminary evidence of the impact of the studied organizational competences on Quebec food retailers' performance. In a resource and competence-based perspective, which suggests an inside-out approach, internal resources and competences can provide the firm with a competitive advantage and performance greater than its competitors. Our results suggest hat the RCBV is an appropriate framework for addressing shortcomings in retailing strategic management research, which has not addressed the issue of how organizational competences can contribute to performance for food retailers in an oligopolistic context such as the one prevailing in Quebec.

It empirically demonstrated positive and significant relations between customer orientation and performance for both banner samples, Métro and Loblaws/Sobeys. However, only respondents from Métro confirm the influence of employee loyalty / satisfaction on performance whereas external cooperation skills are positively related to performance for the Loblaws/Sobeys sample only. In this context, the evaluation of respondents' behaviours toward organizational competences in addition to the assessment of their perception could have given a more accurate perspective of the influence of the studied competences on performance.

Our research also contributes to the RCBV by demonstrating the possibility of measuring theoretical constructs across grocery stores. We have empirically shown the reliability and the validity of customer orientation, external cooperation, and employee loyalty / satisfaction as well as grocers reaching performance objectives and satisfaction with performance. Although our sample was small, this research gave an accurate and relevant overview of the influence of organizational competences on performance for the supermarket chain Métro and a comparable insight for Loblaws and Sobeys jointly.

CHAPITRE 3

THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF STRATEGY ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCES AND FIRM PERFORMANCE: A MODEL FOR THE FOOD RETAILING INDUSTRY

ABSRACT

It is generally assumed that the competences, once combined with strategy, lead businesses to above average performance. While most researches has studied this relationship through a contingency perspective, looking at strategy as a moderator of the relationship between competences and performance, this study rather considers strategy with a mediating role. Taking Quebec food retailing sector as field for this study, with a sample of 72 grocery stores managers and 71 department managers and heads of cashiers, our findings did not show any mediation. Interestingly, strategy did not appear as having a positive and significant effect on store performance whereas organizational competences did.

RÉSUMÉ

Il est généralement acquis que les compétences, une fois combinées à la stratégie, entrainent une performance de l'entreprise supérieure à la moyenne. Alors que plusieurs recherches ont étudié cette relation sous la perspective contingente, considérant la stratégie comme un modérateur de la relation entre les compétences et la performance, la présente étude s'intéresse plutôt à la stratégie sous l'angle de la médiation. En se penchant uniquement sur le secteur du commerce de détail en alimentation, avec un échantillon de 72 directeurs d'épiceries et de 71 gérants de rayon et chefs caissiers, nos résultats ne démontrent pas de médiation. Il est cependant intéressant de remarquer que la stratégie n'apparait pas comme ayant une influence positive et significative sur la performance des épiceries contrairement aux compétences organisationnelles.

Key words: organizational competences; customer orientation; external cooperation skills; loyalty; employee satisfaction; retailing; performance.

3.1. Introduction

Over the years, many researchers in strategic management have tried to explain why some organizations were more performing than others, what are the sources of organizational performance or what creates a performing organization (Pehrsson, 2000). Traditional answers to these strategic questionings suggest that firms need to seek opportunities and avoid threats, capitalize on their strengths and work on their weaknesses. In other words, there must be a strategic fit between the external environment and the internal resources. However, a greater emphasis has been put on the firm's strategic positioning in its environment. Porter's five forces (1980; 1985) and the school of industrial organization stems directly from this idea according to which firms must adopt a defensive or offensive strategy: finding a protected position or trying to alter the external forces in presence.

Several empirical studies have tried to establish a clear link between industrial structure and firm performance with inconsistent findings; some succeeding and some failing (Rumelt, 1991). Following these results, the focus of researchers has switched to internal resources rather than external environment as source of firm performance. In this context emerged the resource-based view (RBV) as one alternative way to conceive strategic management (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). Founded on the idea that firms are unique and composed of idiosyncratic sets of resources (Barney, 1991), the RBV focuses on firm's assets for determining how competitive advantage is achieved and how it might be sustained over time (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991; Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Wernerfelt, 1984).

Among firm's different internal assets, organizational competences and capabilities represent a major source of competitive advantage once interacting one with another. (Kaplan and Norton, 2004; Teece et al., 1997; Lado et al., 1992; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). However, some researchers argued for the integration of competitive strategy in the equation leading to sustainable competitive advantage. Accordingly, not aligning competitive strategy with organizational competences would be limitative since they are complementary and generate a synergetic effect for organizations (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Henderson & Cockburn, 1994; Barney & Zajac, 1994; Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984).

In the literature, the relationship between strategy and external factors and environment has led to numerous researches (Griffith, 2010; Tan & Tan, 2005; Chan et al., 1997; McDougall et al., 1994); the relationship between strategy and internal factors has been less well studied (Hughes & Morgan, 2008; Edelman et al., 2005; 2002; Brush & Chaganti, 1999; Chandler & Hanks, 1994; Mosakowski, 1993).

For this study, we studied the Quebec food retailing industry and more specifically one of the three major chains, Métro. We also wanted to propose a preliminary comparison with a joint sample of respondents from the two other banners, Loblaws and Sobeys. Following previous researches on organizational competences[1], the current focus is mainly on strategy and aimed to evaluate the vertical alignment (Kathuria et al., 2007) of specific organizational competences with strategy as prior to the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage. Our main assumption is that organizational competences should be aligned with business strategy in order to provide retailers with a sustainable competitive advantage and generate greater performance. Even though most empirical studies on vertical fit between internal factors and strategy addressed the issue through a moderating effect, we followed Edelman et al. (2005) methodology, preferring to investigate a fit as mediation that allowed us to get a broader picture of the relationship between organizational competences and performance with competitive strategy variable as mediator. We thus suggest the necessity of strategy in the organizational competences -

---

[1] See Chapitre 1 – Article 1, p. 61 and Chapitre 2 – Article 2, p. 86.

performance relation for the expected effects of organizational competences on performance occur.

3.2. Evaluating grocers performance

Over time, several scales have been developed and proposed for measuring performance, with a great variety of in terms of the nature of the performance indicators and the performance subject to measure. In this research, performance measurement has been based on Grewal and Slotegraaf (2007) work because of the quality and the adaptability of their indicators for the grocery retailing context.

First, we tend to evaluate the store global performance and then the merchandise management performance. Then, we proceeded to the aggregation of our data in order to get a broader picture of the banner Métro, and Loblaws / Sobeys. All measures were based on store managers' perceptions toward reaching performance objectives and satisfaction with performance since we did not have access to official figures from banners' corporate level.

3.3. Organizational competences for food retailers

Organizational competences have been an important research topic in the field of strategic management over the past twenty years. However few studies got interested in the roles of organizational competences and their impact on performance in the retailing context (Megicks, 2007; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001) and even less in the subsector of grocery retailing. Since it would have been impossible to study an exhaustive list of organizational competences, this research has been based on three of them, which were considered as particularly important for retailers, namely customer orientation, external cooperation skills, and employee loyalty / satisfaction (Beauséjour, 2009).

3.3.1. Customer orientation

One of the main objectives for food retailers remains the customer satisfaction. The related payoffs are important for grocers, for instance customer retention, repurchases, and promotion (Huddleston et al., 2008). In order to satisfy its customers, retailers tend to propose a high quality service, a consequent product offering, or both. There is not only one way for a retailer to adopt a customer orientation; it can be done through a service approach, through its product offering, or with a mix of these two perspectives. Being service-oriented for food retailers means flexible personnel and processes, providing customers with a pleasant shopping experience, providing them with the required information, and adopting practices and values that focus on customers (Merlo et al., 2006). A product orientation translates into a product offering valued by customers. For hypermarkets, it means having a wide range of products combining general merchandise and specialty products. For small formats, it rather means less variety but more specialities, or ensuring a basic offering (Huddleston et al., 2008). Innovating by proposing new products is also an important aspect of this approach. This approach also requires that personnel knows about the products required by the costumers in terms of quality, price, and availability.

3.3.2. External cooperation skills

The prominence of technology has notably increased the flow of information in all aspects of business. In retailing, as in manufacturing, it has led to vertical integration and intensive information sharing between players in the supply chain. The relationships between these players are tighter and more valued since the possession of information often results in a better market position; retailers can forecast the demand with sales data and manufacturers have an accurate understanding of the market and trends. Pooling the information improves not only the supply chain logistics, but also impact directly benefits for each player (Hsu et al., 2008). In this context, retailers see the establishment of collaborative and long-term partnerships as an investment (Lindblom et al., 2009). The sharing of information and the development of partnerships with suppliers allow grocers to offer unique products not distributed by competitors or to offer products before them. In a context where the retailers hold oligarchic power, the profit incurred by certain suppliers in an exclusive distribution remains important since its market penetration still represents about one third of the market.[2] However, exclusivity is not a widely accepted practice. The relationship is more based on the integration of resources, competences and systems that would allow a greater fluidity of operations.

3.3.3. Employee loyalty / satisfaction

Efforts made by food retailers to ensure employees retention and loyalty are considerable since it implies significant investment for limiting personnel turnover. These costs are mainly related to recruitment and training (Foster et al., 2008; Peterson, 2007). Part-time jobs and low salaries contribute to accelerate the pace of turnover. This context leads to the establishment of a vicious cycle fuelled by uninterested front-line staff and low benefits for employees. On the contrary, personnel perception of a company concerned in retaining them is translated into loyalty toward the firm since it involves job satisfaction (Brown & Lam, 2008). It should be noted that employee loyalty not only has an impact on turnover, but equally on customer satisfaction; employee satisfaction has a direct impact on customer attitude toward the store (Foster et al., 2008). Personnel play a promotional agent role and tend to offer a better quality service.

---

[2] Three main firms companies (Loblaws, Sobeys and Metro) control more than 90% of the Quebec food retailing industry (Hubert, 2003).

3.4. Investigating strategies for retailers

Among earlier works in retailing, some authors suggested that certain strategy selections could influence performance and competitive positioning depending on the environment, the industry conditions and the entrepreneur's background (Brush & Chaganti, 1998; Helms et al., 1992; Wortzel, 1987). In order to identify and define these strategies, several typologies of strategic choice have been developed and used over the years as presented in table 3.4.1.

The previous table presents more similarities than differences. Globally, almost all the authors propose a certain number of generic strategies that can be applied to the retailing sector but also for other types of industry. However, what is particularly evident in this table is that all the suggested strategies are market-oriented. Indeed, none of these typologies tend to propose resource or competence-oriented strategies or even suggest strategy-supporting levers that would strengthen the implementation of the generic strategies.

Table 3.4.1.

Typologies of retailing strategies

Authors	Year	Strategy typologies applied to retailing	
Ansoff	1965	4 strategic choices	
		- Market penetration	- Market development
		- Product development	- Diversification
Miles & Snow	1978	4 strategic types	
		- Defender	- Analyzer
		- Prospector	- Reactor
Wissema et al.	1980	6 product/market combination strategies	
		- Explosion	- Slip
		- Expansion	- Consolidation
		- Continuous growth	- Contraction

Table 3.4.1. (continued)

Authors	Year	Strategy typologies applied to retailing
Hawes & Crittenden	1984	4 strategic groups for grocery retailing - Non-participants - Aggressive initiators - Conservative reactors - Submissive defenders.
Porter	1985	4 generic strategies - Cost leadership - Differentiation - Focus (cost or differentiation)
Wortzel	1987	4 strategies - Product differentiation - Price leadership - Service and personality differentiation
Walters & Knee	1989	Adapted Ansoff's matrix to retailing and proposed existing, related, and new customer base/market segments with existing, related, and new retailing product package.
Robinson & Clarke-Hill	1990	In turn, changed Knee & Walters's modified matrix of Ansoff and integrated related or domestic choices and new or international choices.
Duke	1991	Also created a matrix for retailing strategic choice with existing or new/modified outlet type, and existing or new/modified offer type.
Ellis & Kelley	1992	4 subscales - Product (variety in brands and sizes) - Amount of promotion - Promotion effectiveness - Customer service
Helms et al.	1992	3 strategies - Cost leadership - Differentiation - Combined approach
Conant et al.	1993	7 generic competitive advantages - Presentation and preparation - Production variety and depth - Low price - High-priced convenience - Inventory control and advertising - Targeted incentives - Traditional fashions and service
Chandler & Hanks	1994	3 implementation strategies - Quality/customer service - Innovation - Cost leadership
Mudambi & Mudambi	1995	3 strategy types - Internal strategies - Vertical strategies - Migrational strategies
Morschett et al.	2006	3 strategies from the perspective of consumers - Price level - Quality of performance - Scope of convenience

For this research, we have chosen the typology proposed by Porter (1985) for its simplicity and the relative antinomic nature of the strategies suggested. In the retailing context, these two characteristics have been judged as helpful for respondents to answer and position themselves on either strategies. We must also take for granted that the strategy adopted by supermarkets comes from the headquarters of the banners and defines the global positioning of the stores on the market, in regards of their competitors. Hence, the evaluation of strategies inspired by the RCBV wouldn't be relevant. According to Porter, strategy represents a coherent whole or a configuration of activities with the objective of developing a competitive advantage either based on low cost or differentiation (Spanos et al., 2004).

> *While no two retail businesses have identical strategies, certain similarities do exist. Primary in strategy selection is the ability of a particular strategy to provide the retail operation with a superior level of performance in the industry. Such competitive positioning commonly involves a singular approach emphasizing either cost leadership or differentiation (Helms et al., 1992: 3).*

A retailer may then decide to follow a cost leadership strategy by offering the lowest cost possible. This strategy underlies value chain activities performed at a lower cost than competitors, economies of scale, tight cost control and coordination of operations, reduced overhead and administrative expenses, limited investment in R&D and marketing activities and, volume sales techniques (Porter, 1985). A retailer choosing this strategy also means having a logistic center, managing employees in a most effective way, managing merchandise to reduce wastes as much as possible, and opting for FIFO methods (Le & Nhu, 2009). A firm adopting this strategy also systematically proposes low prices while remaining profitable. Offering products at low prices enable the firm to attract customers from competitors and then gain new market shares. Usually, large retailers can achieve cost leadership in an easiest way than small retailers because of their capacity to generate economies of scale and their bargaining power over suppliers, which enable them to obtain better purchase prices for their goods (Morschett et al., 2006). Impacts of cost leadership strategy on customers are important since selling price is an important attribute for customers in their choice of store. Price comparison being easy for customers to carry out, large retailers all tend to offer low prices. In the food retailing sector, hard discounters and some hypermarkets have mainly adopted cost leadership strategy (Ellis & Kelley, 1992). In the Quebec food retailing market, as in the rest of North America, the number of hypermarkets and superstores has increased over the past decade. This tendency makes it more difficult for smaller retailers to compete on prices and forces them to build their competitive advantage and structure their strategy on something more than only prices and thus try to differentiate otherwise.

As an alternative strategy, retailers may choose to differentiate from their competitors. Firms adopting a differentiation strategy tend to see themselves as unique regarding different aspects valued by customers and the industry. This strategy leads the firm to offer its customers products or services with high added value, possibly more innovative and more responsive to their needs (Porter, 1980). The firm addresses a broad target, with low volumes but high margins. The advantages of differentiation require manufacturers to divide markets in order to target specific segments, generating a price higher than average (Morschett et al., 2006). Differentiation can be translated through customer orientation. The quality of personnel and service, the establishment of policies and practices motivating for employees, the development of an organizational culture that considers customer service make retailers hard to copy by their competitors (Howe, 1990). This strategy can also be reached through product orientation. Retailer then proposes a product offer different from its competitors in terms of quality, choice, or promotion (McDowell Mudambi, 1994). For grocery retailers, it means offering providing customers with products (e.g. bio products, specific variety of non-food products, fine food, etc.) and services different from their competitors (e.g. prepared meals, greater customer service, ancillary services such as drug store, pressing or photography, etc.).

One issue that has raised considerable debate in the extant literature is the question of low cost and differentiation being mutually exclusive or not. Porter (1980. 1985) has generally urged against the simultaneous pursuit of both strategies on the ground that each of these involves a different set of resources and organizational arrangements. Others, however, have shown that cost leadership and differentiation may be compatible approaches to dealing with competitive forces (Miller & Friesen, 1986; Phillips et al., 1983), and postulated the pursuit of what has been termed 'hybrid', 'mixed', or 'combination' strategies. As explained by Miller & Friesen (1986), cost leadership and differentiation shouldn't be considered as mutually exclusive strategies. In its sense, they argued on Porter's proposition of a focus strategy and proposed a hybrid strategy combining both. When a company cannot afford to take the leadership nor by the cost or by differentiation, a niche strategy could be more appropriate. In this case, the firm concentrates its efforts and resources on a narrow and defined segment. The niche strategy is often employed by SMEs. With a focus on costs, a company aims to be the producer to lower prices on a niche or a particular segment. With a focused differentiation strategy, it creates a competitive advantage by differentiation on a particular niche. However, in the food retailing sector, the focus strategy is quite rare, whereas cost leadership and differentiation are more relevant (Koistinen & Järvinen, 2009).

Table 3.4.2.

Porter generic strategies

Target scope	**Advantage**	
	Low cost	***Product uniqueness***
Broad (industry wide)	Cost leadership strategy	Differentiation strategy
Narrow (market segment)	Focus strategy (low cost)	Focus strategy (differentiation)

Starting with these two generic strategies, several researchers have tested Porter's framework. If some have confirmed Porter's assumptions and argued that the use of only one strategy was profitable (Kumar et al., 1997; Dess & Davis, 1984; Hambrick, 1983), some others have been more critical (Morschett et al., 2006; Spanos & Lioukas, 2001; Mintzberg, 1996; Miller & Dees, 1993; Wortzel, 1987). Even if Porter's generic strategies model has been elevated to the level of quasi-paradigm (Campbell-Hunt, 2000), Morschett et al. (2006) underlie two main critics that can be addressed to this model: 1) Porter doesn't consider strategies combining several competitive advantages, and 2) the model is too simplistic when empirical studies demonstrate that differentiation advantages can be reached in different ways. Answering these critics, the table 3.3 clearly presents the characteristics associated to Porter's strategies in the context of retailing in such a way that both strategies include a large scope of characteristics that can define each one of them.

Table 3.4.3.

Porter's generic strategies applied to retailing

	Characteristics	Types of store
Cost leadership	- Economies of scale - Highly efficient supply chain operations often based on limited assortment - Tight cost focus i.e. customer operations, logistics, service and self-service equipment, product range, quantity and timing of buying - High negotiation power over suppliers for securing low procurement prices for purchased goods - Minimum investment in store design and ambiance - Reduced customer service - Reduction of waste and shrinkage	- Hypermarkets and large supermarkets - Superstores - Hard discounters
Differentiation	- Adapting certain store attributes more closely to specific needs of chosen customer segments: target market segment - Able to command above average prices for its outputs - Often fashionable stores - Specific promotion and choice of merchandise - Strategic promotion of customer service: quality of personnel and service	- Supermarkets - Specialty stores - Convenient stores

3.5. A mediation effect

The basic assumption of this study suggested that the force with which organizational competences can impact on performance could vary depending on the competitive strategy adopted by the retail business. While most of previous researches argued in favour of a moderating effect of strategies, the following framework rather proposed a fit as a mediating variable as suggested by Venkatraman (1989). Thus, it considers competitive strategy as a mediator in the relation between organizational competences and firm performance.

According to Kenny et al. (1998), we need to demonstrate three different relations in order to verify a mediator effect: (1) between the independent variable (organizational competences) and the dependent variable (firm performance), (2) between the independent variable (organizational competences) and the mediating variable (competitive strategy) and, (3) between the mediating variable (competitive strategy) and the dependent variable (firm performance). Afterwards, it is possible to evaluate the mediating effect of competitive strategy in the relation between the independent variable (organizational competences) and the dependent variable (firm performance). The strength of the mediation explains the predictive capacity of the independent variable (organizational competences), capacity, which differs with the absence of the mediator variable (Venkatraman, 1989; Baron & Kenny, 1986). In the present case, strategies constitute an alternative way by which organizational competence is linked to performance.

Among the numerous methods for testing mediation (MacKinnon et al, 2002), we have chosen the approach of Baron & Kenny (1986). According to their approach, testing the mediator effect of a variable m (competitive strategy), needs initially to examine the relation between the independent variable x (organizational competences) and the dependent variable y (firm performance). Afterwards, we have to determine at which degree this relation decreases when the mediator *m* is included in the equation. The figure 3.1 presents the relations between variables in a mediating effect.

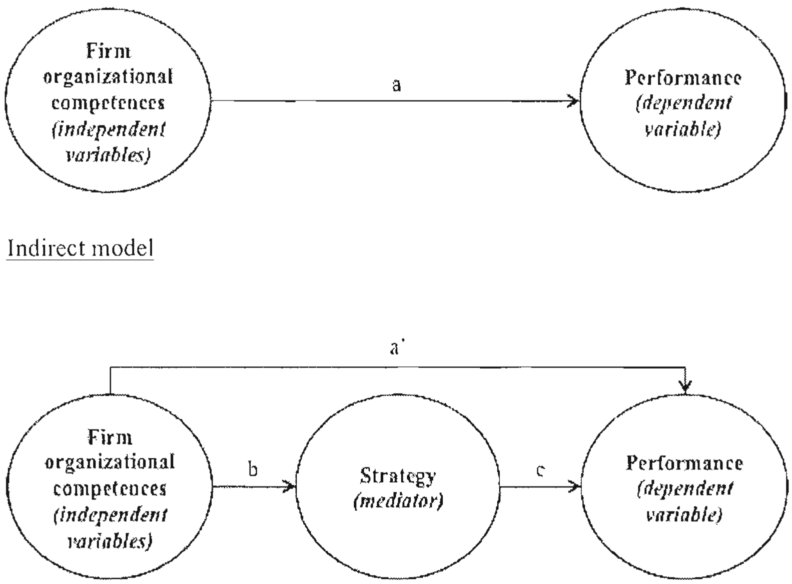
Figure 3.5.1.

The mediator effect of competitive strategy on the relation between organizational competences and firm's performance: an adaptation from Lam et al. (2004)

A) Models specifications

Direct model

Indirect model



B) Conditions

- The coefficient "**a**" must be significant in the direct model.
- The coefficients "**b**" and "**c**" must be significant in the indirect model.
- The coefficient "**a'**" must be inferior to coefficients "**b**" and "**c**" in the indirect model. A perfect mediation exists if "**a'**" is non significant in the indirect model.

However, the choice of mediation rather than moderation as intermediary effect in the relation between the organizational competences and the firm performance must meet certain conditions as exposed by Baron & Kenny (1986). First, variations of the independent variable (organizational competences) must significantly involve variations of the dependent variable (firm performance). Second, variations of the mediator (competitive strategy) must also significantly involve variations of the dependent variable (firm performance). Finally, when these first two relations are controlled, the effect of the independent variable (organizational competences) on the dependent variable (firm performance) is no longer significant. Hence, a decrease instead of the absence of relation significativity between the independent variable (organizational competences) and the dependent variable (firm performance) in spite of the presence of a mediator (competitive strategy) would indicate the existence of other mediators.

In order to test the mediating effect of competitive strategy, we have hypothesized that competitive strategy could explain the impact of organizational competences on business performance. Thus, we used the approach suggested by Lam et al. (2004) who adapted the test for mediation of Baron & Kenny (1986) to data analysis with structural equations. This approach is then to specify two models and to verify four conditions as exposed in the figure 3.3.1.

3.6. Methodology

3.6.1. Hypotheses

The global retailing sector counts for 6,4% of Quebec GDP[3] with more than one fifth of the market sales for the food retailing sector specifically.[4] Despite this economic

[3] Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2009.

importance, the sector remains little studied. Therefore, it was believed that grocery stores offered an excellent opportunity for assessing organizational competences and competitive strategy alignment. In this context, the implicit assumption for this study was the belief that the chosen competitive strategy was an integral part for explaining the influence of organizational competences on grocery retailers' business performance. For testing this assumption, we have applied the model of Baron and Kenny (1986) and assessed the various relations previously discussed and presented in the figure 3.3.1.

3.6.2. Sample and data collection

In order to proceed to the measurement of our hypotheses, we have focused on one of the major grocery retailing chain in Quebec, Métro. We have also gathered data from the other two main players in the Quebec food retailing market, Loblaws and Sobeys, and have compared the results obtained at Métro with the joint answers of Loblaws and Sobeys.

In order to avoid common-factor variance problem, we have selected two types of respondents that answered two distinct questionnaires. Out of the 143 grocery store employees, 72 were store managers and answered the questionnaire on strategy and performance. The other 71 were either department managers or heads of cashiers and answered the questionnaire on organizational competences. All of them were employed in one or the other of the three largest supermarket banners in Quebec. Following the questionnaire pretesting and revising, respondents had the possibility to answer a paper filed version at their workplace, or the online version.

---

[4] Statistics Canada, 2008.

3.6.3. Measures

Although we structured our questionnaire on existing scales of measurement (Grewal & Slotegraaf, 2007; Merlo et al., 2006; Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005; Spanos & Lioukas, 2001; Peccei & Rosenthal, 1997), we have adapted these scales to make them fit with the food retailing sector. To measure organizational competences, we used a ten points Likert-type scale based on importance granted and ranging from *not important at all* to *totally essential*. Competitive strategy was measured with the same 10 points Likert-type scale based on importance granted.

Finally, business performance was measured through a 10 points Likert-type scale based on (1) objectives reached over the past three years ranging from *below average* to *beyond average*, and (2) satisfaction toward their store performance also with a 10 points Likert-type scale evaluating their degree of agreement with specific assumptions and ranging from *totally disagree* to *totally agree*.

a. Factor analyses

Because of the exploratory nature of this research and the small size of our samples, we have conducted only exploratory factor analyses for determining the global composite constructs of organizational competences, strategy and performance.

To verify the validity of our scales for the measurement of our constructs, we have proceeded to principal component analysis with varimax rotation.

Table 3.6.1.

Resources of scales

Group of respondents Department managers, assistant department managers, head of cashiers, and assistant head of cashiers		
Dimensions	**Authors**	**Number of items**
Control		**14**
Personal aspects		7
Organizational aspects		7
Organizational competences		**16**
Customer orientation	Merlo et al. (2006), Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar (2005), Peccei & Rosenthal (1997)	6
External cooperation skills		5
Employee loyalty / satisfaction		5
TOTAL		**30**

Group of respondents Store managers and assistant store managers		
Dimensions	**Authors**	**Number of items**
Control		**14**
Personal aspects		7
Organizational aspects		7
Strategy		**11**
Cost Leadership	Spanos & Lioukas (2001)	5
Differentiation		6
Performance		**9**
Objectives	Grewal & Slotegraaf (2007)	5
Satisfaction		4
TOTAL		**34**

The results obtained show a three factors solution for organizational competence – (1) customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction – a two factors solution for strategy – (1) cost leadership and (2) differentiation – and another two factors solution for business performance – (1) reaching performance objectives and (2) satisfaction with performance –. All of our constructs showed good reliability indices. [5] Once low factor loading items eliminated, 10 (Métro) and 9 (Loblaws / Sobeys) items remained for explaining organizational competences. 7 (both samples) items left for measuring strategy and 9 (both samples) items for performance.[6]

According to our results, shown in tables 3.5.3., 3.5.4., and 3.5.5., customer orientation is the organizational competence that explains the most variance for Métro (33,07%) and Loblaws/Sobeys (26,16%). In the case of Métro, the second organizational competence explaining the most variance is employee loyalty / satisfaction (22,79%) followed by external cooperation skills (18,86%). Respondents from Loblaws/Sobeys almost considered external cooperation skills (22,21%) and then employee loyalty / satisfaction (23%) equally for explaining organizational competences variance.

In the case of strategy, differentiation appears to be the strategy explaining the most variance for Métro (38,05%) as well as for Loblaws/Sobeys (38,28%). Cost leadership is less important with 34,84% of variance explained for Métro and 28,7% for Loblaws/Sobeys.

---

[5] According to Nunally (1978), all constructs present a Cronbach alpha over 0.06.

[6] As recommended by Comrey (1973), we have rejected any statement with factor loadings below 0,45.

Table 3.6.2.

Extraction of organizational competences variables

Factors	Items	Loadings		Cronbach *alpha*		% of total variance		Total variance	
		M[1]	LS[2]	M	LS	M	LS	M	LS
Customer orientation	Flexibility towards customers	,904	,783	,896	,783	33,070	26,161		
	Customer service	,875	,828						
	Customer satisfaction	,788	---						
	Products offer	,709	,809						
Employee loyalty / satisfaction	Benefits for employees	,810	,816	,803	,735	22,789	23,000	**74,716**	**71,367**
	Participation in goals identification and implementation	,800	---						
	Participation in decision-making	,740	,831						
	Work environment	---	,740						
External cooperation skills	Information from suppliers	,802	---	,697	,771	18,856	22,206		
	Cooperation with suppliers – best offer	,787	,798						
	Aware of the reputation	,665	---						
	Cooperation with supermarkets of the same banner	---	,811						
	Cooperation with suppliers – first offer	---	,723						

[1] Métro.
[2] Loblaws and Sobeys.

Table 3.6.3.

Extraction of strategy variables

Factors	Items	Loadings		Cronbach *alpha*		% of total variance		Total variance	
		M[3]	LS[4]	M	LS	M	LS	M	LS
Differentiation	Unique products / services	,913	---	,815	,826	38,052	38,276		
	Innovation investment	,848	,859						
	Quality of products / services	,790	---						
	Products range & growth	,672	,746						
	Competitor follower	---	,866						
	Innovating product offer	---	,786						
								72,890	**66,972**
Cost Leadership	Low price-based strategy	,910	---	,829	,731	34,838	28,696		
	Low HR management cost	,881	---						
	Internal promotion	,787	,751						
	Low stock management cost	---	,864						
	Lowest price	---	,797						

[3] Métro.
[4] Loblaws and Sobeys.

Table 3.6.4.

Extraction of performance variables

Factors	Items	Loadings		Cronbach *alpha*		% of total variance		Total variance	
		M[5]	LS[6]	M	LS	M	LS	M	LS
Objectives	Sales objectives	,907	,891	,925	,864	42,693	34,548	77,619	68.838
	Growth objectives	,904	,867						
	Market share objectives	,840	,742						
	Compared to competitors	,839	,639						
	Sales per square foot (past 3 years)	,797	,627						
Satisfaction	HR management	,927	,835	,895	,856	34,926	34,290		
	Average performance (past 3 years)	,883	,878						
	Store global management cost	,846	,771						
	Stock management	,744	,707						

[5] Métro.
[6] Loblaws and Sobeys.

Finally, our results demonstrate a similar situation in what regards performance since the two groups of respondents kept the same items for explaining both variables of performance. Reaching performance objectives explained 42,96% of the global variance for Métro and 34,55% for Loblaws/Sobeys whereas satisfaction with performance explained 34,93% for Métro and 34,55% for Loblaws/Sobeys.

In order to show the relations between the different factors, we have conducted a correlations analysis. As shown in table 3.6.5., for the Métro sample, customer orientation is highly correlated with the two other organizational competences. However, external cooperation skills and employee loyalty / satisfaction are not correlated significantly together. Performance factors are also positively correlated together. However, there is no significant correlation between the two strategies. All three organizational competences are correlated with reaching performance objectives. However, only customer orientation and employee loyalty / satisfaction are correlated with satisfaction with performance. The only organizational competence correlated with strategy is customer orientation with differentiation. Finally, only the differentiation strategy is positively correlated with reaching performance objectives, but not with satisfaction with performance.

According to the Loblaws / Sobeys sample, external cooperation skills are positively and significantly correlated with the two other organizational competences but customer orientation and employee loyalty / satisfaction are not correlated together. As for Métro, performance factors are highly correlated together. However, ther is no correlation between strategy factors. Finally, only the strategy of differentiation is positively and significantly correlated with reaching performance objectives of but not with satisfaction with performance.

a. Regression analyses

Given our hypotheses, we used hierarchal regressions in order to compare the overall effect of blocks of variables. This is the preferential type of analysis to verify a mediator effect (Kenny, Kashy and Bolger, 1998; Schappe, 1998). Each step described in the section 4 will be included in this section for testing our research hypotheses.

Results of the first regression analysis are presented in table 3.6.6. In the case of our main sample, Métro, they indicate that, globally, organizational competences are positively linked to reaching performance objectives and satisfaction with performance, and explain 64% and 60,3% of variance. Individually considered, only customer orientation and employee loyalty / satisfaction are significantly related to our factors of performance. According to the respondents from Loblaws / Sobeys organizational competences are also positively linked to reaching performance objectives and satisfaction with performance, and explain 52,9% and 65,8% of variance. However, they do not consider employee loyalty / satisfaction as significantly related to factors of performance, but recognize a significant relation with customer orientation and external cooperation skills.

The second step is to demonstrate a relationship between organizational competences and strategy. According to our results in table 3.6.6., there is no positive link when organizational competences are taken globally but there is a significant relationship between customer orientation and the differentiation strategy only for the Métro sample.

Table 3.6.5.

Correlation coefficients, reliability and descriptive statistics

Métro	Alpha	Mean	S.D.	CUST	COOP	LOY	COST	DIF	OBJ	SATIS
CUST	,896	8,10	1,23	1						
COOP	,697	7,87	1,07	,427**	1					
LOY	,803	7,74	0,83	,567**	,295	1				
COST	,829	5,58	2,03	-,097	-.191	,188	1			
DIF	,815	8,69	1,26	,336*	-,001	,130	,062	1		
OBJ	,925	7,61	1,21	,735**	,219	,693**	,155	,376*	1	
SATIS	,895	7,58	1,00	,732**	,349*	,676**	-,037	,269	,438**	1
Loblaws / Sobeys	**Alpha**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**CUST**	**COOP**	**LOY**	**COST**	**DIF**	**OBJ**	**SATIS**
CUST	,783	7,73	0,92	1						
COOP	,771	7,88	1,16	,470**	1					
LOY	,735	7,32	0,76	,208	,345*	1				
COST	,731	7,15	1,14	,067	,204	,199	1			
DIF	,826	7,16	0,94	,075	,154	,164	-,013	1		
OBJ	,864	7,50	0,85	,627**	,642**	,301	,171	,427*	1	
SATIS	,856	7,80	0,77	,684**	,741**	,228	,255	,231	,567**	1

* $p < ,005$; ** $p < ,001$

Table 3.6.6.

Regression analyses – Steps 1 & 2

Factors	Variables	Step 1				Step 2			
		Reaching performance objectives		Satisfaction with performance		Cost leadership		Differentiation	
		β	*t*	β	*t*	β	*t*	β	*t*
Métro									
Organizational competences	Customer orientation	,560	4,351***	,506	3,750***	-,221	-1,062	,451	2,176*
	External cooperation skills	-,143	-1,290	,019	,165	-,208	-1,154	-,171	-,959
	Employee loyalty / satisfaction	,417	3,427**	,383	3,001**	,375	1,901	-,075	-,382
Adjusted R^2		**,640**		**,603**		**0,53**		**0,64**	
F statistic		**22,287*** **		**19,252*** **		**1,673**		**1,818**	
Loblaws / Sobeys									
Organizational competences	Customer orientation	,399	2,423*	,395	2,817**	-,056	-,240	-,005	-,022
	External cooperation skills	,384	2,208*	,529	3,566***	,185	,751	,112	,451
	Employee loyalty / satisfaction	,105	,716	-,018	-,141	,142	,685	,126	,598
Adjusted R^2		**,529**		**,658**		**,062**		**,037**	
F statistic		**9,348*** **		**16,043*** **		**,551**		**,324**	

* $p < ,05$; ** $p < ,01$; *** $p < ,001$

Table 3.6.7.

Regression analyses – Steps 3 & 4

Factors	Variables	Step 3				Step 4			
		Reaching performance objectives		Satisfaction with performance		Reaching performance objectives		Satisfaction with performance	
		β	*t*	β	*t*	β	*t*	β	*t*
Métro									
Strategy	Cost leadership	,132	,912	-,054	-,352	,018	,191	0,61	,524
	Differentiation	,367	2,529*	,212	1,789	,309	3,164**	,088	,752
Organizational competences	Customer orientation					,425	3,373**	,480	3,191
	External cooperation skills					-,086	-,848	,047	,385
	Employee loyalty / satisfaction					,434	3,765***	,367	2,669
Adjusted R^2		**,159**		**,075**		**,083**		**,011**	
F statistic		**3,771***		**1,629**		**5,240***		**,482**	
Loblaws / Sobeys									
Strategy	Cost leadership	,176	1,014	,258	1,400	,069	,537	,141	1,176
	Differentiation	,429	2,468*	,234	1,270	,337	2,641*	,136	1,151
Organizational competences	Customer orientation					,405	2,694*	,404	2,906
	External cooperation skills					,334	2,070*	,488	3,271
	Employee loyalty / satisfaction					,053	,389	-,055	-,434
Adjusted R^2		**,214**		**,120**		**,111**		**,034**	
F statistic		**3,530***		**1,765**		**3,557***		**1,273**	

* $p < ,05$; ** $p < ,01$; *** $p < ,001$

The third regression step aims to determine the influence of strategy on business performance. As shown in table 3.6.7., the variance of reaching performance objectives explained by strategy is 15,9% for Métro whereas it is 21,4% for Loblaws / Sobeys. When strategies are individually considered, results are the same for Métro and Loblaws / Sobeys. Differentiation clearly appears to be the only strategy that influences reaching performance objectives but not the satisfaction with performance. Cost leadership strategy is not positively linked to any performance factor.

The last regression analysis explains, for Métro and Loblaws / Sobeys, 8,3% and 11,1% of the performance objectives reaching but not satisfaction with performance. These results allow us confirm the presence of a partial mediating effect of differentiation strategy in the relationship between organizational competences and reaching performance objectives because customer orientation and employee loyalty / satisfaction (Métro) and customer orientation external cooperation skills (Loblaws / Sobeys) are still significantly related to reaching performance objectives despite the presence of the mediator.

On the basis of our results, we can conclude, for the Métro sample, that: (1) customer orientation has a direct and indirect effect on reaching performance objectives, (2) customer orientation has a direct effect on satisfaction with performance, (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction has a direct and indirect effect on reaching performance objectives, (4) employee loyalty / satisfaction has a direct effect on satisfaction with performance, (5) customer orientation has a direct effect on the strategy of differentiation, (6) differentiation has a direct effect on reaching performance objectives, (7) differentiation partially mediates the relationship between customer orientation and reaching performance objectives, and (8) differentiation partially mediates the relationship between employee loyalty / satisfaction and reaching performance objectives.

The results, in the case of Loblaws / Sobeys, lead us to conclude that: (1) customer orientation has a direct and indirect effect on reaching performance objectives, (2) customer orientation has a direct effect on satisfaction with performance, (3) external cooperation skills have a direct effect on reaching performance objectives, (4) external cooperation skills have a direct effect on satisfaction with performance, (5) the differentiation strategy partially mediates the relationship between customer orientation and reaching performance objectives, and (8) differentiation partially mediates the relationship between external cooperation skills and reaching performance objectives.

3.7. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of organizational competences and strategy as these influence retailer performance. We first tested the direct effect of organizational competences on business performance, then the direct effect of strategy on business performance, and finally the mediated effect of organizational competences on business performance, with strategy as a mediator. The results of our analyses led us to conclude to two main assertions that are discussed below.

3.7.1. Differentiation as the strategic option to gain a competitive advantage

It would be erroneous to not consider cost leadership as a competitive strategy adopted by food retailers even if the results obtained tend to pretend so. Actually, the relative homogeneity of the three main banners in the Quebec food retailing sector tend to force them to gain a competitive advantage through resources and competences, or any ways that would contribute to differentiate from their competitors. Even if this strategy has made the success of hypermarkets and supermarkets and helped them gaining competitive advantage over smaller stores

(Koistinen & Jarvinen, 2009), competing and structuring a strategy on a cost saving basis (inventory methods, transport, purchasing practices, technological advances, efficient use of floor space, etc.) and low prices is not sufficient to develop and sustain a competitive advantage when competing with similar stores (Helms et al., 1992). This supposes an underlain bias by the questionnaire; questions on cost leadership were related to competitors, and respondents considered only comparable competitors, contributing to enhance the differentiation strategy orientation.

Contrarily to Porter's considerations, which weren't in favour of mixed strategies between cost leadership and differentiation, we support the idea of hybrid or combined strategies. Since large retailers usually achieve economies of scale resulting from a cost leadership strategy more easily and often (Ellis & Kelley, 1992), we can assume that supermarkets and hypermarkets, such as those whose representatives have responded to our questionnaire[1], have combined efforts not only to reduce their costs, but also to increase their sales in order to remain competitive. To compete with equally cost-efficient organizations is difficult and lead stores to win a competitive advantage on something else than cost only (Koistinen & Jarvinen, 2009).

3.7.2. Co-aligning organizational competences and strategy

Most studies in the literature got interested in the moderating effects of strategy and external factors. Fewer focused on the relationship between strategy and internal factors, moreover under the angle of mediation (Edelman et al., 2005). Traditional industries have also been well more studied than other economic fields such as retailing.

---

[1] The average grocery store surface for this study was between 1500 and 2000 m^2.

Our study supports the contingency perspective according to which internal co-alignment between resources and strategies lead to greater performance, but in a very limited way. Effectively, for both samples, the direct effect of organizational competences on business performance was significant. The direct effect of differentiation on reaching performance objectives was also significant, in the case of Métro only. Finally, the relationship between organizational competences and business performance once mediated by differentiation also significantly computed. These results explained a partial mediation meaning that alone, organizational competences or differentiation, explain only partially food retailers reaching performance objectives. However, their co-alignment provided a very small but still significant additional performance.

Whereas some previous researches have been able to demonstrate a positive and significant impact of vertical alignment on performance (Hughes & Morgan, 2008; Edelman et al., 2005; O'Regan & Ghobadian, 2004; Zajac et al., 2000; Chandler & Hanks; 1994), our findings couldn't demonstrate a strong and highly significant impact of fit between the studied organizational competences, differentiation, and more broadly competitive strategy, on business performance.

The choice of food retailing as our field of study can explain partly our results. Contrarily to some other traditional industries or retailing subsectors, the food retailing context is not a fragmented sector. It is strongly competitive and the few major players propose a similar business offer. The possible different strategic choices are limited, and the impact on performance seems restricted. For both studied samples, the mediating effect is very weak and in the case of Loblaws / Sobeys, the direct effect of strategy on performance factors is non-significant.

In a resource and competence-based perspective, it is quite clear that the weak link between the corporate strategy and the internal assets tend to demonstrate either that supermarkets' management and corporate level is not much concerned about front-line staff, and front-line staff is not fully concerned about corporate strategy. This situation might appear paradoxical because staff turnover is a major issue for food retailers. In that sense, not structuring or optimizing its strategy on the basis on its organization's resources and competences, not providing the necessary leadership, or not developing policies and practices that would lead to HR mobilization may cause high turnover. Interestingly, as it is shown by our results, strategy seems parachuted by the corporate level without being translated for and by each supermarket's staff. This situation can be unfortunate. Moreover in a context where in both, Métro and Loblaws / Sobeys, the best performance indicator seems to be the staff customer orientation.

Consequently, as presented in our results, the development and sustainability of unique organizational competences have an important influence on grocers. This supports Eisenhardt & Martin (2000) conclusion, which suggested that competitive advantages lie more in the company's capacity to use its competences more rapidly and skilfully than the market, than it whatever else.

3.8. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the mediating influence of competitive strategy in the relationship between organizational competences and business performance. To achieve this research, we have conducted a survey for food retailers on the Quebec market. The studied supermarkets operate in a highly competitive sector and have little opportunity to defend against imitation. They capitalize on their internal resources and competences, but do not rely on corporate strategy in order to reach performance greater than competitors.

The assumption we made about the necessary co-alignment of organizational competences and competitive strategy has been very partially proved only. Even if the fit has been validated, the mediation was weak and partial. Our results led us to the following conclusions: (1) for Métro, as well as for Loblaws / Sobeys, cost leadership strategy is not considered as a fruitful strategy even though it seems inherent for food retailers, (2) differentiation is the main strategy but it's influence on performance is very relative influence, and (3) the creation and the support of organizational competences have more positive impact on food retailers performance than the strategy choice, regardless of the banner. However, their fit leads to a small but positive effect on performance.

Avenues for further researches are numerous. It would be interesting to explore a complementary model studying other organizational competences and/or empirically test a similar model with a different strategy typology than the one or Porter (1980). This study, as most of the studies in strategic management, focused on vertical alignment to explain business performance. Investigating more the influence of horizontal alignment on performance would be an interesting path to follow (Rhee & Mehra, 2006; Youndt et al., 1996).

With respect to our data, our methodology, and the exploratory nature of our research, the samples size were small and any further research should ideally be supported and motivated by the studied corporations in order to ensure greater results accuracy and validity and being able to generalize the results to a whole grocery chain.

Limitations notwithstanding, our study contributed to better understand interactions through mediation between organizational competences and competitive strategy, and the impact on business performance. Even if the resource and competence-based view has resulted in several researches, there is still a lack of studies investigating the link between resources, competences and strategy (Barney, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The combined contributions of the three articles that compose this thesis not only provide meaningful and practical insights into how organizational competences influence business performance in the food retailing context, they also plough new ground for the validation and fine-tuning of the relationship between organizational competences and strategy. This section is focused on the contributions that the three articles bring to our current understanding of the resource and competence-based theory, but more specifically on how organizational competences represent major internal assets and sources of sustainable competitive advantage according to resource and competence-based theory.

4.1. Organizational competences and business performance through the resource and competence-based perspective

When it comes time to discuss about competences, most studies tend to focus on human resources, and were conducted for evaluating individual or collective skills, abilities and/or capabilities while keeping the individual as the unit of measurement. In strategic management, the organization is the main unit of analysis. Until the development of the resource and competence-based view (RCBV), organizations were studied according to an outside-in approach. In other words, an organization's competitive advantage was related to its positioning in the external environment in regards of the threats and opportunities, as well as its strengths and weaknesses (Porter, 1985). With the RCBV, the focus has switched to organization's internal environment and the suggested assumption that competitive advantage was based on internal assets, which includes organizational competences and capabilities (Teece et al., 1997; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Although there is still no consensus in the literature whether industrial organization theory and market competition, or RCBV and internal assets, are more effective for shaping and explaining business performance (Henderson & Mitchell, 1997), this thesis has been structured in the perspective of the RCBV, positioning the concept of competence at the organizational level for studying its effect on business performance.

While pursuing an exploratory logic, all three articles have a distinct but complementary contribution to this thesis. Article 1 offers insights into the repertoire of organizational competences that experts in retailing consider as the most important for retailers. The qualitative analysis also constitutes the main basis of the two subsequent empirical articles. Article 2 considers to what extent three mostly relevant organizational competences – (1) customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction – influence the business performance of food retailers. Finally, the article 3 integrates strategy as a mediator in the relationship between organizational competences and business performance, and tends to evaluate the influence of organizational competences and strategy co-alignment on food retailers performance.

As generally predicted by the RCBV, and as of others have illustrated (Grewal & Slotegraaf, 2007; Zehir et al., 2006; Edelman et al., 2005; Brush & Chaganti, 1998), ongoing concern over the development and the sustainability of organizational competences as sources of competitive advantage was pervasive for all retailers investigated in the context of the present study. More interestingly, the three organizational competences selected by the experts in the qualitative part of this research, all involve human interactions: (1) retailer relationship with customers through customer orientation, (2) retailer relationship with suppliers through external cooperation skills, and (3) managers relationship with employees through employee loyalty / satisfaction. According to the RCBV, the results of our study partly unravel the centrality of human resources-focused type of organizational competences. Indeed, in the context of food retailing, this type of organizational competences not only meets the requirements of value, rarity, non-substitutability, and non-imitability, but they also refer to the notion of social complexity, inherent to human interactions, which makes them more hardly imitable for competitors (Barney, 1991; Fiol, 1991).

4.1.1. Identifying organizational competences as source of business performance

The first article entitled "Building on Organizational Resources and Competences to Reach Performance: The Case of the Retailing Industry" is part of the deductive approach of this thesis by suggesting primarily a series of organizational competences (Thompson & Richardson, 1996; Lado & Wilson, 1994) to experts in retailing. It is based on the idea that organizations, as individuals, possess competences. Even though some are embodied through individuals, these competences remain in the organization even if individuals come and go. The core assumption of this article suggested that retailers could build a competitive advantage, based on specific organizational competences, in order to reach business performance. Through an exploratory perspective, four experts in retailing were asked to determine which organizational competences could positively and mostly influence the performance of their company.

In-depth interviews with these experts revealed their unanimous opinion regarding the identification of three organizational competences identified as having the greatest potential for providing retailers with a competitive advantage: (1) customer orientation, (2) external cooperation skills, and (3) employee loyalty / satisfaction. From the perspective of the resource and competence-based theory, the present findings are not surprising, as several previous researches have proved the influence of one or the other of these three organizational competences on business performance (Ganesan, et al. 2009; Huddleston et al., 2008; Paulraj et al., 2008; Brown & Lam, 2008; Merlo et al., 2006; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001). However, the choice of these three specific organizational competences as the most influent on retailers' performance among a list of fifteen is of great interest. These findings represent a pragmatic contribution for retailers wishing to invest in the development of their resources and competences in order to enhance their performance. According to the experts, proposing a better than average customer service and/or product offer, building and sustaining strong partnerships with suppliers, and contributing to employee satisfaction in order to reduce as much as possible personnel turnover represent worthwhile investments for retailers, more than any other area.

This article also has a methodological contribution. In addition to the choice of retailing as an original field for studying organizational competences, the use of mind mapping for interpreting and analyzing expert interviews content allowed us both, to identify main and secondary organizational competences and to link them together. In a broader way, it also helped defining the role of organizational competences for retailing organizations and figured out how these competences interact one with another in order to lead the retailer being more efficient.

As the starting point of the thesis, it contributed to organizational competences identification and is antecedent to the empirical measurement of their impact on grocery retailers' business performance. Since competitive strategy has also been pointed out for influencing performance, and ideally being co-aligned with organizational competences, it's been measured as a mediator in the third article.

4.1.2. Measuring the influence of organizational competences on Quebec food retailers' business performance

If retailing appeared to be a relevant field of study for conducting this research, it remained too large and too heterogenic for the empirical phase. That's why we decided to focus on a more restricted retailing domain for this second article entitled: "Organizational Competences as a Performance Lever for Food Retailers: An Empirical Study". The choice of the food, or grocery, retailing was based on several reasons. First, it answered the issue of heterogeneity. Second, and as we mentioned earlier, organizational competences are often embedded through human resources. Front-line managers (department managers and heads of cashiers) are particularly well aware for evaluating such competences and their effects whereas store managers have a greater perspective on business performance. The decision of choosing these two groups of respondents allowed us to avoid common-factor variance problems and to effectively gather relevant data regarding the influence of organizational competences on performance. More than opting for two distinct groups of respondents, we also focused on one of the three major food retailing chains, Métro, as our main study sample and proposed a preliminary comparison of our results with those of Loblaws and Sobeys jointly.

Methodologically, this article addressed the issue of the measurement of unobservables in the context of the RCBV following the method suggested by Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar (2005). We have been able to measure the previously identified organizational competences through proxy variables and determine the relative influence of each one of these competences on grocery stores performance. Doing so, we proposed scales of measurement for each competence, which represents a methodological contribution *per se*. Finally, this second article presented a statistical evaluation of three organizational competences according to the banner Métro and Loblaws / Sobeys jointly. This operation was an opportunity to compare different chains and gave us an interesting insight of the differences and similarities toward their respective perceptions of the impact of organizational competences on business performance.

The results showed interesting figures. According to both banner samples customer orientation is the organizational competence explaining the most business performance variance. This refers to the ways grocery retailers put customers at the heart of the business concerns, satisfying them with an interesting product offer, but most importantly with a high quality service.

Whereas respondents from Métro granted more importance to employee loyalty / satisfaction, those of Loblaws / Sobeys rather considered the influence of external cooperation skills. Employee loyalty / satisfaction toward the firm refers to the actions taken by the grocer for optimizing its personnel intention to stay and thus tend to reduce turnover. To do so, a food retailer provides its personnel with a good workplace environment and benefits valued by employees. Employee participation and involvement in the decision-making processes as well as in the identification and implementation of objectives also contribute to business performance. External cooperation skills are a competence focused on the relationship between the retailer and the supplier, and the means by which grocers could improve their performance through information sharing, collaboration, partnership, or resource and competence exchange. According to our samples and our results, and in regards of the RCBV, we could possibly assert that Métro is more turned on to valuing its internal resources and competences than Loblaws / Sobeys since employee loyalty / satisfaction represent an organizational competence fully oriented on the organization itself whereas external cooperation skills is based more on the quality of the relationship and the willingness of suppliers.

4.1.3. Assessing the mediating effect of strategy

In the third article, "The Mediator Effect of Strategy on Organizational Competences and Firm Performance: A Model for the Food Retailing Industry", the competitive strategy variable has been added to our framework. As a whole, the conceptual model suggested represents an interesting contribution in terms of methodology since its structure and the scales of measurement have been correctly validated and could thus be replicated.

According to the RCBV, strategy is conceived not as an adaptation to the external environment, but as an enhancement of resources, competences and expertise accumulated within the company. It is a shift from a strategic adaptive logic to a proactive approach where the company will draw itself the conditions, resources, and competences of its own development. In its sense, the necessity of developing the strategy in accordance with the competences of the organization was mentioned by the experts. The literature also supports this idea (Mullaly & Thomas, 2009; Rivard et al., 2006; Edelman et al., 2005; Slater et al., 2006; Zajac et al., 2000; Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984) and proved the relevance of testing the relationship between organizational competences and strategy. Basically, two possibilities were considered: (1) the *fit* as mediation, and (2) the *fit* as moderation. If most of the previous studies measuring the intermediary effect of strategy in a relationship between internal assets and performance opted for moderation, we followed the suggestion of Edelman et al (2005) who preferred evaluating the mediating effect of strategy since they considered this fit more accurate and relevant in the retailing context. Our findings were mixed. Although the mediating effect was observed and proved statistically significant, the co-alignment effect was marginal. Indeed, we obtained a partial mediation and most of the measured effect on performance was derived from the direct influence of organizational competences.

Even though our results tended to demonstrate the importance for grocery retailers to differentiate themselves from their competitors, we consider this conclusion as paradoxical. Indeed, there are no unlimited possibilities for grocers to conduct a differentiation strategy and thus, the degree of differentiation is not infinite. In other words, while following a differentiation strategy, grocers propose similar services and product offer, and comparable shopping experience. In a resource and competence-based perspective, a food retailer then couldn't base its competitive advantage on its strategy because, somehow, it would be too easy to imitate by competitors. As our results demonstrated, the idiosyncratic nature of organizational competences represents a stronger lever of performance than strategy. Moreover, a standardized product offer and equivalent price and cost policies applied by the different banners also lead to this conclusion.

However, this article main result rather concerns the weak link found between organizational competences and strategy, and between strategy and business performance. Indeed, despite the significant but partial mediating role of differentiation strategy, the relative weakness of the relationship tend to demonstrate an equally weak importance of corporate strategy on food retailers food performance. We can assume that a better co-alignment between strategy and organizational competences would maybe lead to a greater effect on business performance.

4.2. Future researches

This study made a number of noteworthy contributions previously illustrated. However, future researches on the subject could either proceed in a more accurate way or push the investigation further. The following are relevant suggestions that would contribute to the improvement of this research in terms of methodological structure or investigate complementary avenues.

4.2.1. Methodological improvements

The first suggestion would be to increase the sample size. Ideally, further researches should benefit from the corporate support through a formal sponsoring from the chain. The possibilities to generalize findings to the whole chain with a larger sample would then be greater. It would also be relevant to integrate other types of grocery stores. This study was focused on supermarkets of the Quebec food retailing sector. However, it would be interesting to investigate smaller stores as well as department stores with an important food department or warehouse stores (e.g. Wall-Mart, Costco). Taking into account those other store types would give a broader and more complete view of the sector.

In all respect to the quality of the present study, it remains static and presents a perspective of a reality that is dynamic by nature. A longitudinal study would allow us to better understand the evolution of the respondents' perception toward organizational competences, strategy, and business performance in time. According to the RCBV it could also be possible to identify the variations in terms of strategic assets and competitive advantage. A better assessment of this evolution could help businesses to invest more accurately their organizational competences and build a more effective strategy on the basis of these competences.

4.2.2. Complementary investigation avenues

The following investigation avenues represent as many complementary ways to extend the current study or to focus on specific aspects of it.

a. Combining internal and external factors

A future study could examine the role of some external factors in combination with the studied organizational competences to evaluate the joint impact on business performance. Such a study would be part of a combined approach incorporating both, the IO and RCBV perspectives and would tend to demonstrate that both perspectives are not mutually exclusive (Furrer, et al., 2008; Fleury & Fleury, 2005).

b. Analyzing hybrid strategies

For the current study, the focus has been put on the two generic strategies suggested by Porter (1985), cost leadership and differentiation. As proposed by other authors (Morschett et al., 2006; Dess et al., 1995; Helms et al., 1992), some hybrid strategies are possible depending on the industry, the type of organization, its culture, or the context. In a dynamic environment, strategy should evolve and can consequently lead to mixed strategies. The specific case of the studied grocery stores clearly demonstrate that such an hybrid strategy, underlying elements of cost leadership and differentiation, could probably have been considered as the most relevant strategy by the respondents.

c. Focalizing on one organizational competence / Expending to other organizational competences

Our study got interested into three distinct organizational competences – 1) the customer orientation, 2) the external cooperation skills, and 3) the employee loyalty / satisfaction. As a future study, a research that would focus on only one of these organizational competences could also be relevant even though some previous studies have already investigate these one to one relationship with performance. An in-depth analysis, still concentrated on the food retailing industry, could explain a more important part of the influence of one of the organizational competences on business performance. Complementarily, the choice of other organizational competences as independent variables could equally be considered as totally relevant. We could consider HR selection, ethics, leadership, communication or failure and crisis avoidance, for instance, as important sources of competitive advantage and thus, as having an impact of a grocery store performance.

d. Investigating another retailing context

Finally, it would be of great interest to replicate our study in a different retailing context. Retailing is a large field of study, and the food retailing reality is very specific. We argue that other contexts such as department stores, banking, restaurants, or any other could also be informative for the retailers.

4.3. Closing

It has become a truism of the resource and competence-based view that internal assets are potential sources of competitive advantage. The literature has also provided numerous scientific articles criticizing this strategic approach and arguing about the tautological aspect of resource and competence operationalization (Priem & Butler, 2001a; Priem & Butler, 2001b; Williamson, 1999). Nevertheless, the RCBV still remains one of the two main strategic approaches and gives a coherent theoretical framework for analyzing, from the inside of the firm, the basis of a firm success.

Our study adds to the literature on organization, and more precisely on the food retailing sector. It suggests that firm's willingness to undertake a proactive identification and development of organizational competences, and to co-align them with a coherent strategy, will perform in a greater way than their competitors. This dissertation doesn't represent an end, but an additional step on the road of knowledge.

ANNEXES

Annexe A Guide d'entrevue

Montréal, le _____________ 2008

Madame, Monsieur,

Dans le cadre de ma thèse de doctorat en administration des affaires à l'École des Sciences de la Gestion de l'UQAM, je désire rencontrer des experts dans le commerce de détail pour une interview confidentielle portant sur les compétences organisationnelles et leur influence sur la performance des entreprises dans le commerce de détail.
Cette interview, d'une durée variant entre une heure et une heure et demie, pourra se tenir à l'endroit que vous désirez et à l'heure qui vous conviendra. Vous trouverez ci-joint :

1. le guide d'entrevue lequel liste les différents enjeux dont j'aimerais discuter avec vous ;
2. l'ensemble des questions qui vous seront posées ;
3. un formulaire de consentement.

Je puis vous assurer du sérieux de cette démarche et vous indiquer, par ailleurs, qu'à titre de chercheur, je suis soumis aux règles et procédures relatives à l'éthique en recherche tel qu'émises par l'UQAM.
Je vous remercie de votre collaboration éventuelle à cette étude.
Cordialement,

Vincent BEAUSÉJOUR
MBA, doctorant
ESG – UQAM

GUIDE D'ENTREVUE

Bonjour.

Permettez-moi d'abord de vous remercier pour m'avoir alloué ce moment malgré un horaire que je suppose déjà très chargé.

Comme vous le savez, dans le cadre de mes études doctorales, je m'intéresse à la stratégie dans le domaine du commerce de détail. De façon plus spécifique, ma thèse porte sur l'influence des compétences organisationnelles sur la performance des entreprises dans le commerce de détail. Il m'est donc apparu essentiel de consulter l'opinion d'experts dans le domaine afin de mener à bien ce projet de recherche que je désire à la fois pratique et appliqué.

Cette entrevue durera entre une heure et une heure trente. Les sujets discutés sont les suivants :

a) Votre expérience à titre d'expert
b) La stratégie d'entreprise
c) La culture organisationnelle
d) Le leadership

THÈME 1 : Votre expérience à titre d'expert

Avant d'entrer dans le vif du sujet, j'aimerais que vous présentiez votre parcours professionnel et ce qui vous a amené à œuvrer dans le commerce de détail et ultimement à occuper le poste que vous occupez présentement.

THÈME 2 : La stratégie

Il est acquis que la stratégie, au même titre que les opérations, soit essentielle au développement d'une entreprise. Les questions suivantes seront donc liées aux compétences organisationnelles différents aspects relatifs à la stratégie d'entreprise.

Orientation consommateur / produit

1. À partir d'exemples concrets, pouvez-vous nous décrire comment vous prenez en compte vos consommateurs et/ou vos produits dans votre développement stratégique?

Veille stratégique

2. Par quels moyens assurez-vous une veille stratégique des changements dans votre environnement d'affaires et de leurs implications pour l'entreprise?

Mission et objectifs

3. Est-il important que vos employés connaissent et comprennent la mission et les objectifs de l'entreprise?

Mise en œuvre de la stratégie

4. À partir d'exemples concrets, comment décririez-vous le processus de mise en œuvre de la stratégie dans votre organisation?

5. Quelle est la contribution des employés dans le développement de la stratégie d'entreprise?

R&D

6. Quelle importance votre entreprise accorde-t-elle à la recherche et au développement? Dans quels champs se font les investissements en cette matière?

Processus d'apprentissage

7. Quel pourcentage de la masse salariale votre entreprise investit-elle dans la formation de ses employés?

8. Quels types de formation sont privilégiés?

THÈME 3 : La culture organisationnelle

La culture organisationnelle réfère à l'environnement de travail, aux interactions entre les membres de l'organisation et aux valeurs et croyances qui sont véhiculées dans l'entreprise.

Communication

9. Quels sont les mécanismes internes qui favorisent les interactions et la communication entre les employés? Entre les employés et les gestionnaires?

Loyauté

10. Comment décririez-vous la loyauté des employés envers l'organisation? Quelle importance y accordez-vous?

11. Est-ce important que l'entreprise soit loyale envers ses employés? Pourquoi?

Qualité et service aux consommateurs

12. Comment vous assurez-vous de la qualité et d'un bon service au consommateur?

Réputation

13. En quoi la réputation de votre entreprise représente-t-elle un actif stratégique important?

Éthique et responsabilité sociale

14. L'éthique et la responsabilité sociale sont-ils des enjeux stratégiques pour votre entreprise? Comment cela s'applique-t-il concrètement dans votre entreprise?

Coopération externe

15. À l'aide d'exemples concret, indiquez comment vos relations avec vos fournisseurs vous aident à identifier et à acquérir de nouvelles ressources ou compétences?

Tolérance aux crises et à l'échec

16. Existe-t-il des processus internes qui vous permettent de faire face aux crises que peut vivre votre entreprise? Qui vous permettent de les éviter?

17. Quelles seront les compétences recherchées chez les gestionnaires dans le futur? Votre organisation a-t-elle un plan pour les acquérir?

THÈME 4 : Leadership

Le leadership des gestionnaires au sein d'une entreprise témoigne souvent du dynamisme de l'entreprise.

18. Quel style de leadership est recherché par votre entreprise?

19. Que considérez-vous comme les compétences les plus importantes pour votre organisation?

Annexe B Questionnaire – Directeur de magasin

Bonjour,

L'importance du commerce de détail dans nos économies modernes ne fait aucun doute. Pourtant, trop peu d'études on été réalisées dans ce domaine de manière à aider les acteurs de ce secteur à être plus performants.

Directeur(trice) / Assistant(e)-directeur(trice) de magasin

INFORMATIONS

Cette enquête s'adresse aux directeurs(trices) et assistant(e)s-directeurs(trices) de magasins en alimentation du Québec et porte sur leur perception à l'égard des compétences de l'organisation, de la stratégie et de la performance de leur magasin.

Cette enquête est d'une durée approximative de 15 minutes.

Merci de votre participation.

---

1) Consentement du répondant

J'accepte de participer à cette enquête sur les détaillants en alimentation. À cette fin des données seront recueillies mais resteront confidentielles et à l'usage strict de cette enquête. Il est entendu que je pourrai, à tout moment, interrompre ma participation à cette enquête.

☐ Oui ☐ Non

---

2) Bannière du magasin

☐ Loblaws (Loblaws, Provigo, Maxi, Maxi & Cie, Axep, Intermarché)
☐ Sobeys (IGA, IGA extra, Marché Bonichoix, Les Marchés Traditions)
☐ Metro (Metro, Metro Plus, Super C, Marché Richelieu, Les 5 Saisons)
☐ Autre, merci de préciser : ____________________

3) Autonomie

☐ Affilié ☐ Corporatif

4) Genre

☐ Homme ☐ Femme

5) Âge

☐ - de 20 ans
☐ 20-30 ans
☐ 31-40 ans
☐ 41-50 ans
☐ 51-60 ans
☐ + de 60 ans

6) Depuis combien d'années occupez-vous ce poste?

☐ - de 5 ans
☐ 5-10 ans
☐ 11-15 ans
☐ 16-20 ans
☐ + de 20 ans

7) Depuis combien d'années travaillez-vous pour cette bannière?

☐ - de 5 ans
☐ 5-10 ans
☐ 11-15 ans
☐ 16-20 ans
☐ + de 20 ans

8) Quel est votre dernier diplôme obtenu?

☐ Études secondaires non complétées
☐ Diplôme d'études secondaires
☐ Diplôme d'études professionnelles
☐ Diplôme d'études collégiales
☐ Baccalauréat
☐ Maîtrise
☐ Doctorat

9) Quel était votre domaine d'études?

☐ Parcours généraliste
☐ Spécialisation à préciser : ______________________________

10) Environ combien d'employés à temps plein travaillent dans votre rayon?

____

11) Environ combien d'employés à temps partiel travaillent dans votre rayon?

---

12) Quelle est la moyenne d'âge de l'ensemble des employés travaillant dans votre rayon?

---

13) Environ combien d'employés avez-vous sous votre supervision directe?

---

14) Quelle est la superficie du magasin dans lequel vous travaillez?

☐ - de 1000 m2 (10 765 pi2)
☐ 1000 m2 - 2000 m2 (10 765 pi2 - 21 530 pi2)
☐ 2001 m2 - 3000 m2 (21 531 pi2 - 32 290 pi2)
☐ 3001 m2 - 4000 m2 (32 291 pi2 - 43 055 pi2)
☐ 4001 m2 - 5000 m2 (43 056 pi2 - 53 820 pi2)
☐ + de 5000 m2 (53 821 pi2)

INFORMATIONS - *STRATÉGIE*

Indiquez le degré d'importance que vous accordez dans le cadre de votre travail aux éléments suivants.

(1: pas du tout important ... 5: important ... 10: totalement essentiel)

15) Notre magasin doit offrir des produits (ex: produits bio) et/ou services (ex: caisses libre-service) innovants.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

16) Notre magasin mise sur la variété de produits et/ou services offerts pour atteindre ses objectifs de croissance.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

17) Notre magasin doit offrir des produits et/ou services uniques par rapport à nos compétiteurs.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

18) Notre magasin a une forte tendance à suivre les compétiteurs dans l'adoption de produits et/ou services innovants.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

19) Les dépenses de notre magasin en matière d'innovation de produits et/ou services ne doivent pas représenter un pourcentage (%) élevé de nos ventes.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

20) Notre magasin doit se démarquer de ses compétiteurs par la qualité des produits et/ou services offerts.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

21) Notre stratégie doit d'abord être basée sur les bas prix.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

22) Notre magasin doit minimiser ses coûts en matière de promotion interne.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

23) Notre magasin recherche toujours à minimiser ses coûts quant à l'embauche de personnel.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

24) Notre magasin recherche toujours à minimiser ses coûts quant à la gestion de sa marchandise.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

25) Notre magasin doit offrir ses produits et/ou services à un prix plus bas que ses compétiteurs.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

INFORMATIONS - *PERFORMANCE*

Indiquez le degré d'importance que vous accordez dans le cadre de votre travail aux éléments suivants.
(1: pas du tout important ... 5: important ... 10: totalement essentiel)

26) En regard de nos principaux compétiteurs, notre performance globale a été ...

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

27) En regard des objectifs de croissance, notre performance globale a été ...

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

28) En regard des objectifs de ventes, notre performance globale a été ...

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

29) En regard des objectifs de parts de marché, notre performance a été ...

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

30) Nous sommes satisfaits de la gestion des employés dans notre magasin.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

31) Nous sommes satisfaits de la gestion de la marchandise dans notre magasin.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

32) Nous sommes satisfaits des coûts associés à la gestion globale de notre magasin.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

33) En moyenne, la performance de notre magasin a été supérieure à nos objectifs au cours des 3 dernières années.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

34) En moyenne les ventes par mètre carré / pied carré de notre magasin ont augmenté au cours des 3 dernières années.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

INFORMATIONS

Pour les énoncés suivants, indiquez le pourcentage (%) correspondant.

35) Par rapport à l'année dernière, la fréquence d'absence de tous les employés du magasin ...

☐ a diminué de 0 à 10%
☐ a diminué de 11 à 20%
☐ a diminué de 21 à 30%
☐ a diminué de plus de 30%
☐ n'a pas changé
☐ a augmenté de 0 à 10%
☐ a augmenté de 11 à 20%
☐ a augmenté de 21 à 30%
☐ a augmenté de plus de 30%

36) Par rapport à l'année dernière, le nombre de départs volontaires de notre magasin ...

☐ a diminué de 0 à 10%
☐ a diminué de 11 à 20%
☐ a diminué de 21 à 30%
☐ a diminué de plus de 30%
☐ n'a pas changé
☐ a augmenté de 0 à 10%
☐ a augmenté de 11 à 20%
☐ a augmenté de 21 à 30%
☐ a augmenté de plus de 30%

37) Je désire recevoir les résultats de cette étude.

☐ Non
☐ Oui, me les faire parvenir à cette adresse courriel : ______________________

MERCI POUR VOTRE PRÉCIEUSE COLLABORATION

Annexe C: Questionnaire – Gérant de rayon / Chef caissier(ère)

Bonjour,

L'importance du commerce de détail dans nos économies modernes ne fait aucun doute. Pourtant, trop peu d'études on été réalisées dans ce domaine de manière à aider les acteurs de ce secteur à être plus performants.

Gérant(e)s de rayon / Chef caissier(ère) / Assistant(e)

INFORMATIONS

Cette enquête s'adresse aux gérant(e)s de rayon, assistant(e)s-gérant(e)s de rayon, chefs caissier(ère)s et assistant(e)s-chefs caissier(ère)s de détaillants en alimentation du Québec et porte sur leur perception à l'égard des compétences de l'organisation.

Cette enquête est d'une durée approximative de 15 minutes.

Merci de votre participation.

1) Consentement du répondant

J'accepte de participer à cette enquête sur les détaillants en alimentation. À cette fin des données seront recueillies mais resteront confidentielles et à l'usage strict de cette enquête. Il est entendu que je pourrai, à tout moment, interrompre ma participation à cette enquête.

☐ Oui ☐ Non

2) Poste

☐ Gérant(e) de rayon ☐ Chef caissier(ère)

3) Bannière du magasin

☐ Loblaws (Loblaws, Provigo, Maxi, Maxi & Cie, Axep, Intermarché)
☐ Sobeys (IGA, IGA extra, Marché Bonichoix, Les Marchés Traditions)
☐ Metro (Metro, Metro Plus, Super C, Marché Richelieu, Les 5 Saisons)
☐ Indépendant
☐ Autre, merci de préciser : ______________________________

4) Autonomie

☐ Affilié ☐ Corporatif

5) Genre

☐ Homme ☐ Femme

6) Âge

☐ - de 20 ans ☐ 41-50 ans
☐ 20-30 ans ☐ 51-60 ans
☐ 31-40 ans ☐ + de 60 ans

7) Depuis combien d'années occupez-vous ce poste?

☐ - de 5 ans ☐ 16-20 ans
☐ 5-10 ans ☐ + de 20 ans
☐ 11-15 ans

8) Depuis combien d'années travaillez-vous pour cette bannière?

☐ - de 5 ans ☐ 16-20 ans
☐ 5-10 ans ☐ + de 20 ans
☐ 11-15 ans

9) Quel est votre dernier diplôme obtenu?

☐ Études secondaires non complétées
☐ Diplôme d'études secondaires
☐ Diplôme d'études professionnelles
☐ Diplôme d'études collégiales
☐ Baccalauréat
☐ Maîtrise
☐ Doctorat

10) Quel était votre domaine d'études?

☐ Parcours généraliste
☐ Spécialisation à préciser : ____________________

11) Environ combien d'employés à temps plein travaillent dans votre rayon?

____

12) Environ combien d'employés à temps partiel travaillent dans votre rayon?

____

13) Quelle est la moyenne d'âge de l'ensemble des employés travaillant dans votre rayon?

____

14) Environ combien d'employés avez-vous sous votre supervision directe?

____

15) Quelle est la superficie du magasin dans lequel vous travaillez?

☐ - de 1000 m2 (10 765 pi2)
☐ 1000 m2 - 2000 m2 (10 765 pi2 - 21 530 pi2)
☐ 2001 m2 - 3000 m2 (21 531 pi2 - 32 290 pi2)
☐ 3001 m2 - 4000 m2 (32 291 pi2 - 43 055 pi2)
☐ 4001 m2 - 5000 m2 (43 056 pi2 - 53 820 pi2)
☐ + de 5000 m2 (53 821 pi2)

INFORMATIONS – *COMPÉTENCES ORGANISATIONNELLES*

Indiquez le degré d'importance que vous accordez dans le cadre de votre travail aux éléments suivants.

(1: pas du tout important ... 5: important ... 10: totalement essentiel)

16) Proposer souvent aux clients de nouveaux produits.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

17) S'assurer d'avoir les produits demandés par les clients malgré le risque de surplus.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

18) Mettre la satisfaction du client comme priorité numéro un dans notre travail.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

19) Fidéliser nos clients par notre service à la clientèle avant tout.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

20) Démontrer beaucoup de flexibilité pour aider la clientèle.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

21) S'assurer que tous les employés de mon rayon connaissent les produits que les clients désirent.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

22) Déterminer l'ordre d'importance des éléments suivants (1 = l'élément le plus important de la liste ... 5 = l'élément le moins important de la liste)

Satisfaire les besoins des clients ______
Maximiser les profits bruts ______
Offrir un service à la clientele de haute qualité ______
Offrir de nouveaux produits ______
Éviter les surplus ______

23) Obtenir de nos fournisseurs des informations sur les produits et/ou services que nous devrions offrir.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

24) Coopérer avec nos fournisseurs pour pouvoir offrir des produits et/ou services meilleurs que nos compétiteurs.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

25) Coopérer avec nos fournisseurs pour pouvoir offrir des produits et/ou services avant nos compétiteurs.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

26) Être conscient de la réputation de notre magasin sur le marché.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

27) Collaborer avec d'autres détaillants en alimentation de la même bannière pour s'améliorer.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

28) Avoir un excellent climat de travail dans notre magasin.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

29) Les avantages qu'offre l'entreprise aux employés du magasin.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

30) La flexibilité des employés à l'égard du temps supplémentaire.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

31) La participation des employés aux prises de décision dans le magasin.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

32) La participation des employés dans l'identification des objectifs du magasin et des façons de les atteindre.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

INFORMATIONS

Pour les énoncés suivants, indiquez le pourcentage (%) correspondant.

33) Par rapport à l'année dernière, la fréquence d'absence de tous les employés du magasin ...

☐ a diminué de 0 à 10%
☐ a diminué de 11 à 20%
☐ a diminué de 21 à 30%
☐ a diminué de plus de 30%
☐ n'a pas changé
☐ a augmenté de 0 à 10%
☐ a augmenté de 11 à 20%
☐ a augmenté de 21 à 30%
☐ a augmenté de plus de 30%

34) Par rapport à l'année dernière, le nombre de départs volontaires de notre magasin ...

☐ a diminué de 0 à 10%
☐ a diminué de 11 à 20%
☐ a diminué de 21 à 30%
☐ a diminué de plus de 30%
☐ n'a pas changé
☐ a augmenté de 0 à 10%
☐ a augmenté de 11 à 20%
☐ a augmenté de 21 à 30%
☐ a augmenté de plus de 30%

35) Je désire recevoir les résultats de cette étude.

☐ Non
☐ Oui, me les faire parvenir à cette adresse courriel : ______________________

MERCI POUR VOTRE PRÉCIEUSE COLLABORATION

Annexe D: Lettre de présentation

Madame, Monsieur,

L'importance du commerce de détail dans nos économies modernes ne fait aucun doute. Pourtant, trop peu d'études ont été réalisées dans ce domaine de manière à aider les acteurs de ce secteur à être plus performants. C'est pourquoi nous avons décidé de faire une étude visant à définir et valoriser les compétences nécessaires à la réussite des détaillants en alimentation du Québec.

Nous vous invitons donc personnellement, ainsi que tous les autres directeur(trice)s, assistant(e)s-directeur(trice)s de magasin de même que les gérant(e)s de rayon, assistant(e)s-gérant(e)s de rayon, chef caissier(ère)s et assistant(e)s-chefs caissier(ère)s, à répondre à un questionnaire en ligne ne nécessitant que 15 minutes de votre temps.

Pour ce faire, visiter notre site web à l'adresse suivante : www.alimentation-quebec.webs.com

Il est important de noter que vos réponses et toutes les données obtenues lors de cette enquête sont confidentielles et que cette enquête répond en tout point aux impératifs d'éthique à la recherche stipulés par l'ESG de l'UQAM. Aucune information spécifique à une bannière ne sera transmise à une autre. Cependant, si jamais la demande était faite, nous pourrions indiquer sous toute confidentialité les résultats consolidés d'une bannière aux responsables de cette bannière. De plus, les participant(e)s ont la possibilité de recevoir l'analyse globale des réponses sous forme de synthèse exécutive en indiquant leur intérêt en fin de questionnaire.

Merci sincèrement pour votre opinion car cette étude ne pourrait être réalisée sans votre support et celui de vos collègues.

Vincent BEAUSEJOUR
MBA, doctorant
ESG – UQAM

Annexe E Site web

ENQUETE SUR LES DÉTAILLANTS EN ALIMENTATION
DU QUEBEC

BONJOUR,

L'importance du commerce de détail dans nos économies modernes ne fait aucun doute. Pourtant, trop peu d'études on été réalisées dans ce domaine de manière à aider les acteurs de ce secteur à être plus performants.

De manière spécifique, cette étude porte sur les capacités, la stratégie et la performance des détaillants en alimentation du Québec et s'adresse à deux groupes de répondants:

- Les directeur(trice)s / assistant(e)s-directeur(trice)s de magasin

- Les gérant(e)s de rayon / assistant(e)s-gérant(e)s de rayon / chefs caissier(ère)s / assistant(e)s-chefs caissier(ère)s

----

Directeur(trice)s, Gérant(e)s, Assistant(e)s, Chefs caissier(ère)s,

Notre objectif est d'identifier certains facteurs de succès des magasins en alimentation et ainsi déterminer des pistes d'action permettant d'améliorer leur rendement.

Votre participation à cette étude est importante pour nous et nous croyons que les résultats que nous obtiendrons le seront également pour vous.

Nous nous engageons d'ailleurs à communiquer nos résultats à tous les répondants qui en émettront le désir en cochant la case appropriée à la fin du questionnaire.

Si vous êtes intéressés à participer à cette enquête, cliquez sur le lien ci-dessous qui correspond à votre poste.

Le temps de réponse à ce questionnaire est d'environ 15 minutes.

1) Les directeur(trice)s / assistant(e)s-directeur(trice)s

https://www.questback.com/universitelyon3setic/directeur/
(https://www.questback.com/universitelyon3setic/directeur/)
(https://www.questback.com/universitelyon3setic/directeur/)

2) Les gérant(e)s de rayon / assistant(e)s-gérant(e)s de rayon / chef caissier(ère)s / assistant(e)s-chefs caissier(ère)s

https://www.questback.com/universitelyon3setic/rayoncaisse
(https://www.questback.com/universitelyon3setic/rayoncaisse)/

La participation à cette enquête est faite de façon anonyme et les données recueillies resteront confidentielles et à l'usage unique de cette étude.

NOUS TENONS À VOUS REMERCIER DE VOTRE PRÉCIEUSE COLLABORATION

http://www.alimentation-quebec.webs.com/

Bibliographie

Ailawadi, K.L., Beauchamp, J.P., Donthu, N., Gauri, D.K. & Shankar, V. (2009). "Communication and Promotion Decisions in Retailing: A Review and Directions for Future Research". *Journal of Retailing*. 85(1): 42-55.

Amit, R. & Schoemaker, P.J.H. (1993). "Strategic Assets and Organizational Rent", *Strategic Management Journal*, 14(1): 33-46.

Andersen, O. & Suat Kheam, L. (1998). "Resource-based Theory and International Growth Strategies: An Exploratory Study". *International Business Review*. 7: 163-184.

Andrews, K.R. (1971). *The Concept of Corporate Strategy*. Homewood, Irwin.

Ansoff, I.H. & McDonnell, E.J. (1988). *The New Corporate Strategy*. NY, Wiley: New York.

Ansoff, H.I. (1965). *Corporate Strategy: An Analytical Approach to Business Policy for Growth and Expansion*. New York, McGraw-Hill.

Arnold, T.J., Palmatier, R.W., Grewal, D. & Sharma, A. (2009). "Understanding Retail Managers' in the Sales of Products and Services". *Journal of Retailing*. 85(2): 129-144.

Arrègle, J.-L. & Quélin, B. (2000). "L'approche *Resource-Based View* à la croisée des chemins". In B. Quélin & J.-L. Arrègle. (2000). *Le management stratégique des compétences*. Ellipses Éditions Marketing, Paris, 19-53.

Ashkenas, R. (1995). "Capability: Strategic Tool for a Competitive Edge". *Journal of Business Strategy*. 16(6): 13-15.

Avolio, B.J., Walumbwa, F.O. & Weber, T.J. (2009). "Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions". *Annual Review of Psychology*. 60(1): 421-449.

Avolio, J.B. & Bass, B.M. (1995). "Individual Consideration Viewed at Multiple Levels of Analysis – A Multilevel Framework for Examining the Diffusion of Transformational Leadership". *Leadership Quarterly*. 6(2): 199-218.

Barney, J.B., (2001). "Is the Resource-Based Theory a Useful Perspective for Strategic Management Research? Yes". *Academy of Management Review*. 26(1): 41-56.

Barney, J.B. (1995). "Looking Inside for Competitive Advantage". *Academy of Management Executive*. 9(4): 49-61.

Barney, J.B. (1991). "Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage". *Journal of Management*, 17(1): 99-120.

Barney, J.B. (1986). "Strategic Factor Markets: Expectations, Luck, and Business Strategy". *Management Science*. 32(10): 1231-1241.

Barney, J.B. & Arikan, A.M. (2001). "The Resource-based View: Origins and Implications". *The Blackwell Handbook of Strategic Management*. 124-188.

Barney, J.B. & Zajac, E. (1994). "Competitive Organizational Behavior: Toward and Organizationally Based Theory of Competitive Advantage". *Strategic Management Journal*.15: 5-11.

Baron, R.M. & Kenny, D.A. (1986). "The Moderator-Mediator Variable Distinction in Social Psychological Research: Conceptual, Strategic and, Statistical Considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 51(6): 1173-1182.

Beauséjour, V.D. (2009). "Les compétences organisationnelles comme avantage compétitif: le cas de l'industrie du commerce de détail au Québec". Association Internationale de Management Stratégique. Conference proceedings. Grenoble, France. June 2009.

Becker, B. & Gerhart, B. (1996). "The Impact of Human Resource Management on Organizational Performance: Progress and Prospects", *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(4): 779-801.

Beehr, T.A., Drexler, J.A. & Faulkner, S. (1997). "Working in Small Family Businesses: Empirical Comparisons to Non-Family Businesses". *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. 18(3): 297-312.

Bergenhenegouwen, G.J., Ten Horn, H.F.K. & Mooijman, E.A.M. (1996). "Competency Development - A Challenge for HRM Professionals: Core Competencies of Organizations as Guidelines for the Development of Employees", *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 20(9): 29-35.

Black, J.A. & Boal, K.B. (1994). "Strategic Resources: Traits, Configurations and Paths to Sustainable Competitive Advantage", *Strategic Management Journal*, 15: 131-148.

Blasi, J.R. & Douglas, L.K. (2006). "U.S. High Performance Work Practice's at Century's End". *Industrial Relations*. 45(4): 547-578.

Bogner, W.C., & Thomas, H. (1994). "Core Competency and Competitive Advantage: A Model and Illustrative Evidence From the Pharmaceutical Industry". In G. Hamel and A. Heene. (1994), *Competency-based competition*. Chichester, UK, The Strategic Management Series, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 111–144.

Bontis, N. (2001). " Assessing Knowledge Assets: A Review of the Models Used to Measure Intellectual Capital". *International Journal of Management Reviews*. 3(1): 41-60.

Booth, S. & Hamer, K. (2006). "Labour Turnover in the Retail Industry. Predicting the Role of Individual, Organizational and Environmental Factors". *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*. 35(4): 289-307.

Bowman, C & Collier, N. (2006). "A Contingency Approach to Ressource-Creation Process". *International Journal of Management Reviews*. 8(4): 191-211.

Boyatzis, R.E. (1982). *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance*. John Wiley & Sons, New York.

Broadbridge, A. (2002). "Rationalising Retail Employment: A View from the Outside Looking in". *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*. 30(11): 536-543.

Brown, S.P. & Lam, S.K. (2008). "A Meta-Analysis of Relationships Linking Employee Satisfaction to Customer Responses". *Journal of Retailing*. 84(3): 243-255.

Brown, T.J., Mowen, J.C., Donavan, D.T. & Licata, J.W. (2002). "The Customer Orientation of Service Workers: Personality Traits Effects on Self and Supervisor Performance Ratings". *Journal of Marketing*. 39(1): 110-119.

Brush, C.G. & Chaganti, R. (1998). "Business Without Glamour? An Analysis of Resources on Performance by Size and Age in Small Service and Retail Firms". *Journal of Business Venturing*. 14: 233-257.

Camisón, C. (2004). "On How to Measure Managerial and Organizational Capabilities". *Management Resarch*. 23(1): 27-48.

Campbell, A. & Sommers Luchs, K. (1997). "Understanding Competencies". In A. Campbell & K. Sommers Luchs. (1997), *Core Competency-based Strategy*. International Thompson Business Press, Smart Strategies, London. 5-12.

Campbell-Hunt, C. (2000). "What Have We Learned About Generic Competitive Strategy? A Meta-Analysis". *Strategic Management Journal*. 21: 127-154.

Cappelli, P. & Neuwark, D. (2001). "Do 'High-Performance' Work Practices Improve Establishment-Level Outcomes". *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*. 54(4): 737-775.

Chan, Y.E., Huff, S.L., Barklay, D.W. & Copeland, D.G. (1997). "Business Strategic Orientation, Information System Strategic Orientation and Strategic Alignment". *Information Systems Research*. 8(2): 125-150.

Chandler, G. & Hanks, S.H. (1994). "Market Attractiveness, Resource-based Capabilities; venture Performance: An Extended Model". *Journal of Business Venturing*. 8(5): 391-408.

Chatterjee, S. & Wernerfelt, B. (1991). "The Link Between Resources and Type of Diversification: Theory and Evidence". *Strategic Management Journal*. 12: 33-48.

Chorn, N.H. (1991). "The 'Alignment' Theory: Creating Strategic Fit". *Management Decision*. 29(1): 20-24.

Christen, M., Iyer, G., Soberman D. (2006). "Job Satisfaction, Job Performance, and Effort: A Reexamination Using Agency Theory". *Journal of Marketing*. 70(1): 137-150.

Collis, D.J. & Montgomery, C.A. (1995). "Competing on Resources: Strategy for the 1990s". *Harvard Business Review*, 73(4): 118-128.

Collis, D.J. (1994). "Research Note: How Valuable Are Organizational Capabilities?". *Strategic Management Journal*, Special Issue: Competitive Organizational Behavior. 15: 143-152.

Combs, J.G & Ketchen, D.J. (1999). "Explaining Interfirm Cooperation and Performance: Toward a Reconciliation of Predictions from the Resource-based View and Organizational Economics" *Strategic Management Journal*. 20(9): 867-888.

Comrey, A.L. (1973). *A First Course in Factor Analysis*. Academic Press, New York, NY.

Conant, J.S., Smart, D.T. & Solano-Mendez, R. (1993). "Generic Retailing Types, Distinctive Marketing Competencies and Competitive Advantage". *Journal of Retailing*. 69(3): 254-279.

Conant, J.S., Mokwa, M.P. & Varadarajan, P.R. (1990). "Strategic Types, Distinctive Marketing Competencies and Organizational Performance: A Multiple Measures-Based Study". *Strategic Management Journal*. 11(5):365-383.

Cool, K. & Schendel, D.E. (1988). "Performance Differences among Strategic Group Members". *Strategic Management Journal*. 9: 207-23.

Covin, J.G. & Selvin, D.P. (1989). "Strategic Management of Small Firms in Hostile and Benign Environments". *Strategic Management Journal*. 10: 75-87.

Dearnley, C. (2005). "A Reflection on the Use of Semi-structured Interviews". *Nurse Researcher*. 13(1): 19-28.

Delaney, J.T. & Huselid, M.A. (1996). "The Impact of Human Resource Management Practices on Perceptions of Organizational Performance". *Academy of Management Journal*. 39(4): 949-969.

Dennis, C., Fenech, T. & Merrilees, B. (2005). "Sale the 7 Cs: Teaching/Training Aid for the (e)Retail-Mix". *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. 33(3): 179-193.

Dess, G.G., Gupta, A, Hennart, J. & Hill, C.W.L. (1995). "Conducting and Integrating Strategy Research at the International, Corporate, and Business Levels". *Journal of Management*. 21(3): 357-393.

Dess, G.G. & Davis, P.S. (1984). "Porter's (1980) Generic Strategies as Determinants of Strategic Group Membership and Organizational Performance". *Academy of Management Journal*. 27(3): 467-488.

Diefenbach, T. (2009). "Are Case Studies More Than Sophisticated Storytelling?: Methodological Problems of Qualitative Empirical Research Mainly Based on Semi-structured Interviews". *Quality and Quantity*. 43(6): 875-894.

Dierickx, I. & K. Cool (1989). "Asset Stock Accumulation and Sustainability of Competitive Advantage". *Management Science*. 35: 1504–1511.

Dietz, J. (2005). "Collaborative Customer Relationship Management: Taking CRM to the Next Level". *Journal of Consumer Marketing*. 22(2): 106-107.

Doz, Y. (1997)."Managing Core Competency for Corporate Renewal: Towards a Managerial Theory of Core Competencies". In A. Campbell and K. Sommers Luchs. (1997), *Core Competency-based Strategy*. International Thompson Business Press, Smart Strategies, London. 53-75.

Dröge, C., Vickery, S. & Markland, R.E. (1994). "Sources and Outcomes of Competitive Advantage: An Exploratory Study in the Furniture Industry". *Decision Sciences*. 25(5/6): 669-689.

Duke, R. (1991). "Post-Saturation Competition in UK Grocery Retailing". *Journal of Marketing Management*. 7: 63-75.

Dunsen, T. & Kilic, C. (2010). "Organizational Culture and Employee Performance: An Investigation of the Mediating Effect of Customer Orientation". Annual Meeting of the Association of Collegiate Marketing Educators. Conference proceedings. Dallas, USA. March 2010.

Durand, T. (2006). "L'alchimie de la competence". *Revue française de gestion*. 1(160): 261-292.

Dusheck, S. (2004). "Inter-Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage". *Management Revue*. 15(1): 53-73.

Dutta, S., Narasimhan, O. & Rajiv, S. (2005). "Conceptualizing and Measuring Capabilities: Methodology and Empirical Application". *Strategic Management Journal*. 26: 277-285.

Dyer, J. & Singh, H. (1998). "The Relational View: Cooperative Strategy and Sources of Interorganizational Competitive Advantage. *Academy of Management Review*. 23(4): 660-679.

Edelman, L.F., Brush, C.G. & Manolova, T.S. (2005). "Co-alignment in the Resource-Performance Relationship: Strategy as a Mediator". *Journal of Business Venturing*. 20: 359-383.

Edelman, L.F., Brush, C. G. & Manolova, T. (2002). "The Impact of Human and Organizational Resources on Small Firm Strategy". *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*. 9(3): 236-244.

Edgar, F. & Geare, A. (2005). "HRM Practices and Employee Attitudes: Different Measures – Different Results". *Personnel Review*. 34(5): 534-549.

Eisenberger, R., Stinglhamber, F., Vandenberghe, C., Sucharski, I. & Rhoades, L. (2002). "Perceived Supervisor Support: Contributions to Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Retention". *Journal of Applied Psychology.* 87(3): 565-73.

Eisenberger, R., Armeli, S., Rexwinkel, B., Lynch, P.D. & Rhoades, L. (2001). "Reciprocation of Perceived Organizational Support". *Journal of Applied Psychology.* 86(1): 42-51.

Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S. & Sowa, D. (1986). "Perceived Organizational Support", *Journal of Applied Psychology.* 71: 500-507.

Eisenhardt, K.M. & Martin, J.A. (2000). "Dynamic Capabilities: What Are They?". *Strategic Management Journal.* 21: 1105-1121.

Elg, U. & Paavola, H. (2008). "Market Orientation of Retail Brands in the Grocery Chain: The Role of Supplier Relationship. *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research.* 18(2): 221-233.

Ellis, B. & Kelley, S. (1992). "Competitive Advantage in Retailing". *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research.* 2(2): 381-396.

Escrig-Tena, A.B. & Bou-Llusar, J.C. (2005). "A Model for Evaluating Organizational Competencies: An Application in the Context of a Quality Management Initiative", *Decision Sciences*, 36(2): 221-257.

Fiol, C.M. (1991). "Managing Culture as a Competitive Resource: An Identity-Based View of Sustainable Competitive Advantage". *Journal of Management.* 17(1): 191–211.

Fleury, M.T.L. & Fleury, A.C.C. (2005). "In Search of Competence: Aligning Strategy and Competences in the Telecommunications Industry". *International Journal of Human Resource Management.* 16(9): 1640-1655.

Foss, H.J. & Knudsen, T. (2003). "The Resource-Based Tangle: Towards a Sustainable Explanation of Competitive Advantage". *Managerial and Decision Economics.* 24: 291-307.

Foster, C., Whysall, P. & Harris, L. (2008). " Employee Loyalty: An Exploration of Staff Commitment Levels Towards Retailing, the Retailer and the Store". *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research.* 18(4): 423-435.

Franke, U.J. (2002). "The Competence-based View on the Management of Virtual Web Organizations". In: *Modern Organizations in Virtual Communities.* Kisielnicki, J. IRM Press Hershey. 19-48.

Freiling, J. (2004). "A Competence-based Theory of the Firm". *Management Revue*. 15(1): 27-52.

Furrer, O., Sudharshan, D., Thomas, H. & Alexandre, M.T. (2008). "Resource Configurations, Generic Strategies, and Firm Performance. Exploring the Parallels between Resource-based and Competitive Strategy Theories in a New industry". *Journal of Strategy and Management*. 1(1): 15-40.

Galbreath, J. (2005). "Which Resources Matter the Most to Firm Success? An Exploratory Study of Resource-Based Theory". *Technovation*. 25: 979-987.

Ganesan, S., Morris, G., Jap, S., Palmatier, R.W. & Weitz, B. (2009). " Supply Chain Management and Retailer Performance: Emerging Trends, Issues, and Implications for Research and Practice". *Journal of Retailing*. 85(1): 84-94.

Garavan, T.N. & McGuire, D. (2001). "Competencies and Workplace Learning: Some Reflections on the Rhetoric and the Reality", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 13(4): 144-163.

Gelade, G.A., & Ivery, M. (2003). "The Impact of Human Resource Management and Work Climate on Organizational Performance". *Personnel Psychology*. 56: 383-404.

Godfrey, P.C. and Hill, C.W.L., (1995). "The Problem of Unobservables in Strategic Management Research. *Strategic Management* Journal. 16(7): 519-533.

Goff, B.G., Boles, J.S., Bellenger, D.N. & Stojack, C. (1997). "The Influence of Salesperson Selling Behaviors on Customer Satisfaction with Products". *Journal of Retailing*. 73(2): 171-183.

Gomez, M.I., McLaughlin, E.W. & Wittink, D.R. (2003). "Do Changes in Customer Satisfaction Lead to Changes in Sales Performance in Food Retailing?" Yale SOM Working Paper No. MS-14.

Good, L., Sisler, G. & Gentry, J. (1988). "Antecedents of Turnover Intentions among Retail Management Personnel". *Journal of Retailing*. 64(3): 295-314.

Grant, R. (1991). "The Resource-based Theory of Competitive Advantage: Implications for Strategy Formulation". *California Management Review*. 33(3): 114-135.

Grewal, D., Keishnan, R. & Lindsey-Mullikin, J. (2008). "Building Store Loyalty Through Service Strategies". *Journal of Relationship Marketing*. 7(4): 341-358.

Grewal, R. & Slotegraaf, R.J. (2007). "Embeddedness of Organizational Capabilities". *Decision Sciences*. 38(3): 451-488.

Griffith, D.A. (2010). "Understanding Multi-level Institutional Convergence Effects on International Market Segments and Global Marketing Strategy". *Journal of World Business*. 45(1): 59-67.

Guest, D.E. (2002). "Human Resource Management, Corporate Performance & Employee Wellbeing: Building the Worker into HRM". *Journal of Industrial Relations*. 44(3): 335-358.

Guthrie, J.P. (2001). "High-Involvment Work Practices, Turnover, & Productivity: Evidence from New Zealand". *Academy of Management Journal*. 44: 180-190.

Hafeez, K., Zhang, Y. & Malak, N. (2002). "Core Competence for Sustainable Competitive Advantage: A Structured Methodology for Identifying Core Competence". *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*. 49(1): 35.

Hall, R. (1992). "The Strategic Analysis of Intangible Resources". *Strategic Management Journal*. 13(2): 135-144.

Halldórsson, Á. & Skjøtt-Larsen, T. (2004). "Developing Logistics Competencies Through Third Party Logistics Relationships". *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*. 24(2): 192-206.

Hambrick, D.C. (1983a). "Some Tests of the Effectiveness and Functional Attributes of Miles and Snow's Strategic Types". *Academy of Management Journal*. 26(1): 5-26.

Hambrick, D.C. (1983b). "High Profit Strategies in Mature Capital Goods Industries: A Contingency Approach". *Academy of Management Journal*. 26(4): 687-707.

Hamel, G. (1994). "The Concept of Core Competence". In Hamel, G. and A. Heene (1994). *Competence-based Competition*. John Wiley and Sons, Chichester. 150-169.

Hamel, G. & Prahalad, C.K. (1994), *Competing for the Future*. Harvard Business Scholl Press.

Hamel, G. & Prahalad, C.K. (1993). "Strategy as Stretch and Leverage". *Harvard Business Review*. 71(2): 75-84.

Hamilton III, R.D., Eskin, D. & Michaels, M.P. (1998). "Assessing Competitors: The Gap between Strategic Intent and Core Capability". *Long Range Planning*. 31(3): 406-417.

Harris, L.C. & Ogbonna, E. (2001). "Competitive Advantage in the UK Food Retailing Sector: Past, Present and Future". *Retailing and Consumer Services*. 8: 157-173.

Hawes, J.M. & Crittenden, W.F. (1984). "A Taxonomy of Competitive Retailing Strategies". *Strategic Management Journal*. 5: 275-287.

Helfat, C.E. & Peteraf, M.A. (2003). "The Dynamic Resource-based View Capability Lifecycles". *Strategic Management Journal*. 24(10): 997-1010.

Helms, M.M., Haynes, P.J. & Cappel, S.D. (1992). "Competitive Strategies and Business Performance Within Retailing Industry". *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. 20(5): 3-15.

Hendeghem, A. & Vendermeulen, F. (2000). "Competency Management in the Flemish and Dutch Civil Service", *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 13(4): 342-353.

Henderson, R. & Mitchell, W. (1997). "The Interactions of Organizational and Competitive Influences on Strategy and Performance". *Strategic Management Journal*. 18(1): 5-14.

Henderson, R. & Cockburn, I. (1994). "Measuring Competence: Exploring Firm Effects in Pharmaceutical Research". *Strategic Management Journal*. 15: 63-84.

Hendrie, J. (2004). "A Review of a Multiple Retailer's Labour Turnover". *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*. 32(9): 434-441.

Hitt, M.A., Bierman, L., Shimizu, K. & Kochhar, R. (2001). "Direct and Moderating Effects of Human Capital on Strategy and Performance in Professional Service Firms: A Resource-based Perspective". *Academy of Management Journal*. 44(1): 13-28.

Hitt, M.A. & Ireland, D. (1986). "Relationships among Corporate Level Distinctive Competencies, Diversification Strategy, Corporate Strategy and Performance". *Journal of Management Studies*. 23: 401-416.

Hofer C.W. & Schendel, D. (1978). *Strategy Formulation: Analytical Concepts*. St-Paul, MN.

Homburg, C., Hoyer, W.D. & Fassnacht, M. (2002). "Service Orientation of a Retailer's Business Strategy: Dimensions, Antecedents, and Performance Outcomes". *Journal of Marketing*. 66(October 2002): 86-101.

Howe, W.S. (1990). "UK Retail Vertical power Market Competition and Consumer Welfare". *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. 18(2): 16-25.

Hubert, J.-J. (2003). "Le CTAC en congrès – Les fabricants affichent leurs couleurs". *L'Alimentation*. vol. 43.

Huddelston, P., Whipple, J., Mattick, R.N. & Jung Lee, S. (2008). "Customer Satisfaction in Food Retailing: Comparing Specialty and Conventional Grocery Stores". *International Journal of Retail and Distribution management*. 37(1): 63-80.

Hughes, P. & Morgan, R.E. (2008). "Fitting Strategic Resources with Product-Market Strategy: Performance Implications". *Journal of Business Research*. 61: 323-331.

Hunt, S.D. (1997). "Competing Through Relationships: Grounding Relationship Marketing in Resource-Advantage Theory". *Journal of Marketing Management*. 13(5): 431-445.

Hurley, R.F & Estelami, H. (2005). "An Exploratory Study of Employee Turnover Indicators as Predictors of Customer Satisfaction". *Journal of Services Marketing*. 21(3): 186-199.

Huselid, M.A., Jackson, S.E. & Shuler, R.S. (1997). "Technical and Strategic Human Resource Management Effectiveness Determinants of Firm Performance". *Academy of Management Journal*. 40(1): 171-188.

Hsu, C-C., Kannan, V.R., Tan, K-C. & Leong, G.K. (2008). "Information Sharing, Buyer-Supplier Relationships, and Firm Performance". *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*. 38(4): 296-310.

Jeong, J.S., & Hong, P. (2007). "Customer Orientation and Performance Outcomes in Supply Chain Management". *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*. 20(5): 578-594.

Jones, D.C., Kalmi, P. & Kauhansen, A. (2009). "How Does Employee Involvement Stack Up& The Effects of Human Resource Management Policies on Performance in a Retail Firm". *Industrial Relations*. 49(1): 1-21.

Joseph, E.E. & Winston, B.E. (2005). " A Correlation of Servant Leadership, Leader Trust, and Organizational Trust". *Leadership Organizational Development Journal.* 26(1): 6-22.

Jubb, R. & Robotham, D. (1997). "Competencies in Management Development: Challenging the Myths", *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 21(4-5): 171-177.

Jurie, J.D. (2000). "Building Capacity: Organizational Competency and Critical Theory", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 13(3): 264-274.

Jüttner, U. & Wehrli, H.P. (1994). "Competitive Advantage: Merging Marketing and the Competence-based Perspective", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 9(4): 42-53.

Kaplan, R.S. & Norton, D.P. (2004). "Measuring the Strategic Readiness of Intangible Assets", *Harvard Business Review*, 82(2): 52-63.

Kathuria, R., Joshi, M.P. & Porth, S.J. (2007). "Organizational Alignment and Performance: Past, Present and Future". *Management Decision.* 45(3): 503-517.

Kean, R., Gaskill, L., Leistritz, L., Jasper, C., Bastow-Shoop, H., Jolly, L. & Sternquist, B. (1998). "Effects of Community Characteristics, Business Environment, and Competitive Strategies on Rural Retail Business Performance". *Journal of Small Business Management.* 36(2): 45-57.

Keiningham, T.L., Aksoy, L., Daly, R.M., Perrier, K. & Solom, A. (2006). "Reexamining the Link Between Employee Satisfaction and Store Performance in a Retail Environment". *International Journal of Service Industry Management.* 17(1): 51-57.

Kenny, D.A., Kashy, D.A. & Bolger, D. (1998). "Data Analysis in Social Psychology". In Gilbert, T.D., Fiske, S.T. & Lindzey, G. (1998). *The Handbook of Social Psychology.* 4th ed. New York : McGraw-Hill, 233–265.

Koene, B.A.S., Vogelaar, A.L.W. & Soeters, J.L. (2002). "Leadership Effects on Organizational Climate and Financial Performance: Local Leadership Effect in Chain Organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly.* 13: 193–215.

Koistinen, K. & Jarvinen, R. (2009). "Consumer Observations on Channel Choices – Competitive Strategies in Finnish Grocery Retailing". *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services.* 16(4): 260-270.

Kraaijenbrink, J, Spender, J.C. & Groen, A.J. (2010). "The Resource-based View: A Review and Assessment of its Critiques". *Journal of Management*. 36(1): 349-372.

Kristandl, G. & Bontis, N. (2007). "Constructing a Definition for Intangibles using the Resource-based View of the Firm". *Management Decision*. 45(9): 1510-1524.

Kuivalainen, O. & Taalikka, S. (2004). "Capabilities of the Firm and their Effects on Performance – Production of Information and Communication Technology Services as an Example". In G. Fandel, U. Backes-Gellener, M. Shlutter & J.E. Staufenbiel. (2004). *Modern Concepts of the Theory of the Firm: Managing Enterprises of the New Economy*. Berlin, Springer, 647.

Kumar, K., Subramanian, R., & Yauger, C. (1997). "Pure Versus Hybrid: Performance Implications of Porter's Generic Strategies". *Health Care Management Review*. 22(4): 47-60.

Lado, A.A. & Wilson, M.C. (1994). "Human Resource Systems and Sustained Competitive Advantage: A Competency-based Perspective", *Academy of Management Review*, 19(4): 699-727.

Lado, A.A., Boyd, N.G. & Wright, P. (1992). "A Competency-based Model of Sustainable Competitive Advantage: Toward a Conceptual Integration". *Journal of Management*. 18: 429-456.

Lam, S.Y., Shankar, V. & Murthy, K.E.B. (2004) "Customer Value, Satisfaction, Loyalty, and Switching Costs: An Illustration from a Business-to-Business Service Context". *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. 32(3): 293-311.

Le, N.H. & Nhu, D. (2009). "Food Retail Competitive Strategy in Recession Economy: A Case of Successful Foreign Discount Stores in Finland". *International Journal of Business and Management*. 4(6): 44-50.

Lewis, P. & Thomas, H. (1990). "The Linkage Between Strategy, Strategic Groups, and Performance in the UK Grocery Industry. *Strategic Management Journal*. 11(5): 385-397.

Li, S., Ragu-Nathan, B., Ragu-Nathan, T.S. & Subba Rao, S. (2004). "The Impact of Supply Chain Management on Competitive Advantage and Organizational Performance". *International Journal of Management Science*. 34(2006): 107-124.

Liao, H & Chuang, A.C. (2007). "Transforming Service Employees and Climate: A Multilevel, Multisource Examination of transformational Leadership in Building Long-term Service Relationships". *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 92(4): 1006-1019.

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. New York. Sage.

Lindblom, A., Olkkonen, R, Ollila, P. & Hyvönen, S. (2009). "Suppliers' Roles in Category Management: A Study of Supplier-Retailer Relationships in Finland and Sweden". *Industrial Marketing Management*. 33(8): 1006-1013.

Lindsay, P.R. & Stuart, R. (1997). "Reconstruing Competency", *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 21(9): 326-332.

Lippman, S.A. & Rumelt, R.P. (1982). "Uncertain Imitability: An Analysis of Interfirm Differences in Efficiency Under Competition", *Bell Journal of Economics*, 13(2): 418-438.

Lusch, R.F. & Serpkenci, R.R. (1990). "Personal Differences, Job Tension, Job Outcomes, and Store Performance: A Study of Retail Store Managers". *Journal of Marketing*. 54(1): 85-101.

MacKinnon, D.P., Lockwood, C.M., Hoffman, J.M., West, S.G. & Sheets, V. (2002). "A Comparison of Methods to Test Mediation and Other Intervening Variable Effects". *Psychological Methods*. 7: 83-104.

Mahoney, J.T. & Pandian, J.R. (1992). "The Resource-based View Within the Conversation of Strategic Management". *Strategic Management Journal*. 13: 363-380.

Mata, F.J., Fuerst, W.L. & Barney, J.B. (1995). "Information Technology and Sustained Competitive Advantage: A Resource-based Analysis". *MIS Quarterly*. 19(4): 487-505.

McClelland, D.C. (1973). "Testing for Competence Rather than Intelligence". *American Psychologist*. 28: 1-4.

McDougall, P., Covin, J., Robinson, R. & Herron, L. (1994). "The Effects of Industry Growth and Strategic Breadth on New Venture Performance and Strategy Content". *Strategic Management Journal*. 15(7): 537-554.

McDowell Mudambi, S. (1994). "A Topology of Strategic Choice in Retailing". *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. 22(4): 32-40.

McGee, J.E. & Peterson, M. (2000). "Towards the Development of Measures of Distinctive Competencies among Small Independent Retailers". *Journal of Small Business Management*. 38(2): 19-33.

McGrath, R.G., MacMillan, I.C. & Venkatraman, S. (1995). "Defining and Developing Competence: A Strategic Process Paradigm". *Strategic Management Journal*, 16(4): 251-275.

Megicks, P. (2007). "Levels of Strategy and Performance in UK Small Retail Businesses". *Management Decision*. 45(3): 484-502.

Merlo, O., Bell, S.J., Menguç, B. & Whitwell, G.J. (2006). "Social Capital, Customer Service Orientation and Creativity on Retail Stores". *Journal of Business Research*. 59: 1214-1221.

Meyer, J.P. & Allen, N. (1991). "A Three-component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment". *Human Resource Management Review*. 1: 61–89.

Miles, R.E. & Snow, C.C. (1984). " Fit, Failure and the Hall of Fame". *California Management Journal*. 7: 242-252.

Miles, R.E. & Snow, C.C. (1978). *Organizational Strategy, Structure, and Process*. New York, McGraw Hill.

Miller, A. & Dess, G.G. (1993). "Assessing Porter's (1980) Models in Terms of its Generalizability, Accuracy, and Simplicity". *Journal of Management Studies*. 30: 553-584.

Miller, D. & Friesen, P.H. (1986). "Porter's (1980) Generic Strategies and Performance: An Empirical Examination with American Data. Part II: Performance Implications". *Organization Studies*. 7: 255-261.

Mills, J., Platts, K., Bourne, M. & Richards, H. (2002). *Strategy and Performance. Competing Through Competences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mintzberg, H. (1996). "Generic Business Strategies". In H. Mitzberg and J. Quinn. (1996). *The Strategy Process*. Upper Saddle River, Prentice Hall. 83-92.

Moore, M. (2005). "Towards a Confirmatory Analysis of Retail Strategy Types: An Empirical Test of Miles and Snow". *Journal of Business Research*. 58: 696-704.

Moore, M. (2002). "Retail Performance in Retail U.S. Apparel Supply Chains: Operational Efficiency, Marketing Effectiveness, and Innovation". *Journal of Textile and Apparel, Technology and Management*. 2(3): 1-9.

Moran, P. & Goshal, S. (1999). "Markets, Firms, and the Process of Economic Development". *Academy of Management Review*. 24(3): 390-412.

Morgan, N.A., Kaleka, A. & Gooner, R.A. (2007). "Focal Supplier Opportunism in Supermarket Retailer Category Management". *Journal of Operations Management*. 25: 512-527.

Morschett, D., Swoboda, B., & Schramn-Klein, H. (2006). "Competitive Strategies in Retailing – An Investigation of the Applicability of Porter's Framework for Food Retailers". *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. 13: 275-287.

Mosakowski, E. (1993). "A Resource-based Perspective on the Dynamic Strategy Performance Relationship: An Empirical Examination of the Focus and Differentiation Strategies in Entrepreneurial Firms". *Journal of Management*. 19(4): 819-839.

Mudambi, R. & Mudambi, S.M. (1995). "From Transaction Cost Economics to Relationship Marketing: A Model of Buyer-Supplier Relations". *International Business Review*. 4(4): 419-433.

Mullaly, M. & Thomas, J.L. (2009). "Exploring the Dynamics of Value and Fit: Insights From Project Management". *Project Management Journal,* 40(1): 124-135.

Murray, P. & Donegan, K. (2003). "Empirical Linkages Between Firm Competencies and Organizational Learning". *The Learning Organization*. 10(1): 51-62.

Nanda, A. (1996). "Resources, Capabilities and Competencies". In Moingeon, B. and Edmonson, A. (1996). *Organizational Learning and Competitive Advantage*. Sage. 93-120.

Nelson, R. (1991). "Why Do Firms Differ and how Does it Matter?". *Strategic Management Journal*, 12: 61-74.

Nelson, R. and Winter, S. (1982). *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.

Nordhaug, O. (1996). "Collective Competencies in Organizations". In Falkenberg, J.S., Haugland, S. eds., *Rethinking the Boundaries of Strategy*. Copenhagen Business School Press, Working Paper, 33.

Nordhaug, O. & Gronhaug, K. (1994). "Competencies as Resources in Firms", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 5(1): 89-103.

Nunally, J.C. (1978). *Psychometric Theory.* 2nd ed, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

O'Regan, N. & Ghobadian, A. (2004). "The Importance of Capabilities for Strategic Direction and Performance". *Management Decision.* 42(2): 292-313.

Panigyrakis, G.G. and Theodoridis, P.K. (2007). "Market Orientation and Performance: An Empirical Investigation in the Retail Industry in Greece". *Journal of Retailing and Consumers Services.* 14(2): 137-149.

Paulraj, A., Lado, A.A. & Chen, I.J. (2008). "Inter-organizational Communication as a Relational Competency: Antecedents and Performance Outcomes in Collaborative Buyer-Supplier Relationships". *Journal of Operations Management.* 26: 45-64.

Peccei, R. & Rosenthal, P. (1997). "The Antecedents of Employee Commitment to Customer Service: Evidence From a UK Service Context". *International Journal of Human Resource Management.* 8(1): 66-86.

Pehrsson, A. (2000). "Strategy Competence: A Successful Approach to International Market Entry". *Management Decision.* 42(6): 758-768.

Penrose, E. (1959). *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm.* Wiley, New York.

Peteraf, M.A. (1993). "The Cornerstones of Competitive Advantage: A Resource-Based View", *Strategic Management Journal*, 14: 179-191.

Peterson, S.L. (2007). "Managerial Turnover in US Retail Organizations". *Journal of Management Development.* 25(8): 770-789.

Pettijohn, C.E., Pettijohn, L.S., & Taylor, A.J. (2007). "Does Salesperson Perception of the Importance of Sales Skills Improve Sales Performance, Customer Orientation, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment, and Reduce Turnover?". *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management.* 27(1): 75-88.

Pettijohn, C.E., Pettijohn, L.S., & Taylor, A.J. (2002). "The Influence of Salesperson Skill, Motivation, and Training on the Practice of Customer-oriented Selling". *Psychology and Marketing.* 19(9): 743-757.

Phillips, L.W., Chang, D.R. & Buzzell, R.D. (1983). "Product Quality, Cost Position and Performance: A Test of Some Key Hypotheses". *Journal of Marketing.* 47(Spring): 26-43.

Porter, M.E. (1985). *Competitive Advantage*. New York, Free Press.

Porter, M.E. (1980). *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*. New York, Free Press.

Prahalad, C.K. and Hamel, G. (1990). "The Core Competencies of the Corporation", *Harvard Business Review*, 68(3): 79-93.

Pramatari, K. & Miliotis, P. (2008). "The Impact of Collaborative Store Ordering on Shelf Availability". *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*". 13(1): 49-61.

Prévot, F. (2005). "Ressources et compétences: Proposition d'une synthèse des définitions". *Working Paper*, Euromed Marseilles, No. 42-2005.

Priem, R.L. & Butler, J.E. (2001a). "Is the Resource-Based "View" a Useful Perspective for Strategic Management Research?". *Academy of Management Review*. 26(1): 22-40.

Priem, R.L., & Butler, J.E. (2001b). "Tautology in the Resource-Based View and the Implications of Externally Determined Resource Value, Further Comments". *Academy of Management Review*. 26:57–66.

Pugh, S.D., Dietz, J., Wiley, J.W., & Brooks, S.M. (2002). "Driving Service Effectiveness Through Employee-Customer Linkages". *Academy of Management Executive*. 16(4): 73-84.

Rayport, J.F. & Jaworski, B.J. (2004). "Best Face Forward". *Harvard Business Review*. December. 82: 47-58.

Reiner, G. (2005). "Customer-oriented Improvement and Evaluation of Supply Chain Processes Supported by Simulation Models". *International Journal of Production Economics*. 96(3): 381-395.

Reed, R. & DeFillippi, R.J. (1990). "Causal Ambiguity, Barriers to Imitation, and Sustainable Competitive Advantage", *Academy of Management Review*, 15(1): 88-102.

Rhee, M. & Mhera, S. (2006). "Aligning Operations, Marketing, and Competitive Strategies to Enhance Performance: An Empirical Test in the Retail Banking Industry", *Omega*, 34(5) : 505-15.

Rhoades, L., Eisenberger, R. & Armeli, S. (2001). "Affective Commitment to the Organization: The Contribution of Perceived Organizational Support". *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 86(5): 825-36.

Rhoads, G., Swinyard, W., Guerts, M. & Price, W. (2002). "Retailing as a Career: A Comparative Study of Marketers". *Journal of Retailing*. 78(1): 71-6.

Rivard, S., Raymond, L. & Verreault, D. (2006). "Resource-based View and Competitive Strategy: An Integrated Model of the Contribution of Information Technology to Firm Performance. *Strategic Information Systems*. 15: 29-50.

Robinson, T.M. & Clarke-Hill, C.M. (1990). "Directional Growth by European Retailers". *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. 18(5): 3-14.

Rouby, E. & Thomas, C. (2004). "La codification des compétences organisationnelles. L'épreuve des faits". *Revue française de gestion*. 2(149): 51-68.

Rowe, W.G. & Barnes, J.G. (1998). "Relationship Marketing and Sustained Competitive Advantage". *Journal of Market Focused Management*. 2(3): 281-297.

Rulke, D.L., Zaheer, S. & Anderson, M.H. (2000). "Sources of Managers' Knowledge of Organizational Capabilities". *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 82(1): 134-149.

Rumelt, R.P. (1991). "How Much Does Industry Matters?". *Strategic Management Journal*. 12(3): 167-186.

Russo, M.V. & Fouts, P.A. (1997). "A Resource-based Perspective on Corporate Environmental Performance and Profitability". *Academy of Management Journal*. 40(3): 534-559.

Ryals, L. (2002). "Are You Customers Worth More Than Money?". *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. 9(5): 241-251.

Salvaggio, A.N., Schneider, B., Nishii, L.H., Mayer D.M., Ramesh, A., and Lyon, J.S. (2007). "Manager Personality, Manager Service Quality Orientation, and Service Climate: Test of a Model". *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 92(6): 1741-1750.

Sanchez, R. (2004). "Understanding Competence-based Management. Identifying and Managing Five Modes of Competence". *Journal of Business Research*. 57: 518-532.

Sanchez, R. (2000). "Une comparaison des approches de la resource, des capacités dynamiques et de la competence: Une contribution à la théorie du management stratégique". In B. Quélin & J.-L. Arrègle. (2000). *Le management stratégique des compétences*. Ellipses Éditions Marketing, Paris, 55-81.

Sanchez, R. & Heene, A. (1997). "Competence-based Strategic Management. In Heene A. and R. Sanchez. *Competence-based Strategic Management*. Chichester, Wiley. 3-42.

Sanchez, R., Heene, A. & Thomas, H. (1996). "Towards the Theory and Practice of Competency-based Competition". In R. Sanchez, A. Heene & H. Thomas. (1996). *Dynamics of Competency-based Competition: Theory and Practice in the New Strategic Management*. Oxford, UK, Pergamon. 1-35.

Schmiedinger, B., Valentin, K. & Stephan, E. (2005). "Competency Based Business Development – Organizational Competencies as Basis for Successful Companies". *Journal of Universal Knowledge Management*. 0(1): 13-20.

Scott-Ladd, B. & Marshall, V. (2004). "Participation in Decision Making: A Matter of Context". *The Leadership and Organization Development Journal*. 25(8): 616-662.
Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in Administration. A Sociological Interpretation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sharma, S., Aragon-Correa, J.A. & Rueda-Manzanares, A. (2007). "The Contingent Influence of Organizational Capabilities on Proactive Environmental Strategy in the Service Sector: An Analysis of North American and European Ski Resorts". *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*. 24(4): 268-283.

Sharma, S. & Vredenburg, H. (1998). "Proactive Corporate Environmental Strategy and the development of Competitively Valuable Organizational Capabilities". *Strategic Management Journal*. 19(8): 729-753.

Silvestro, R. (2002). "Dispelling Modern Myth. Employee Satisfaction and Loyalty Drive Service Profitability". *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*. 22(1): 30-49.

Simon, D.H., Gomez, M.I., McLaughlin, E.W. & Wittink, D.R. (2009). "Employee Attitudes, Customer Satisfaction, and Sales performance: Assessing the Linkages in US Grocery Stores". *Managerial and Decision Economics*. 30(1): 27-41.

Skinner, S.J., Gassenheimer, J.B. & Kelley, S.W. (1992). "Cooperation in Supplier-Dealer Relations". *Journal of Retailing*. 68(2): 174-192.

Slater, S.F., Olson, E.M. & Hult, T.M. (2006). "The Moderating Influence of Strategic Orientation on Strategy Formation Capability – Performance Relationship". *Strategic Management Journal*. 27: 1221-1231.

Smart, D.T. & Conant, J.S. (1994). "Entrepreneurial Orientation, Distinctive Marketing Competencies and Organizational Performance". *Journal of Applied Business Research*. 10(3): 28-39.

Snow, C.C. & Hrebiniak, L.G. (1980). "Strategy, Distinctive Competency, and Performance". *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 25:317-336.

Spanos, Y.E., Zaralis, G., & Lioukas, S. (2004). "Strategy and Industry Effects on Profitability: Evidence from Greece". *Strategic Management Journal*. 25: 139-165.

Spanos, Y.E. & Lioukas, S. (2001). "An Examination Into Causal Logic of Rent Generation: Contrasting Porter's Competitive Strategy Framework and the Resource-based Perspective". *Strategic Management Journal*. 22: 907-934.

Spanos, Y.E., Zaralis, G. & Lioukas, S. (2000). "Strategy and Industry Effects on Profitability: Evidence from Greece". *Strategic Management Journal*. 25: 139-165.

Stanforth, N. & Lennon, S.J. (1997). "The Effects of Customer Expectations and Store Policies on Retail Salesperson Service, Satisfaction and Patronage". *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*. 15(2): 115-124.

Tampoe, M. (1994). "Exploiting the Core Competences of Your Organization", *Long Range Planning*, 27(4): 66-77.

Tan, J. & Tan, D. (2005). "Environment – Strategy Co-evolution and Co-alignment: A Staged Model of Chinese SOEs under Transition". *Strategic Management Journal*. 26: 141-157.

Taylor Coates, T. & McDermott, C.M. (2002). "An Exploratory Analysis of New Competencies: A Resource-based View Perspective". *Journal of Operations Management*. 20: 435-450.

Teece, D.J. (2007). "Explicating Dynamic Capabilities: The Nature and Microfoundations of (Sustainable) Enterprise Performance". *Strategic Management Journal*. 28(13): 1319-1350.

Teece, D.J., Pisano, G. & Shuen, A. (1997). "Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Management". *Strategic Management Journal*. 18(7): 509-533.

Thompson, J. & Richardson, B. (1996). "Strategic and Competitive Success: Towards a Model of a Comprehensively Competent Organization". *Management Decision*. 34(2): 5-19.

Ton, Z. & Huckman, R.S. (2008). "Managing the Impact of Employee Turnover on Performance: The Role of the Process Conformance". *Organization Science*. 19(1): 56-68.

Tremblay, M. & Simard, G. (2005). "La mobilisation du personnel: l'art d'établir un climat d'échanges favorables base sur la réciprocité". *Gestion*. 30: 60-68.

Tremblay, M. & Wils, T. (2005). "La mobilisation des ressources humaines: une stratégie de rassemblement des energies de chacun pour le bien de tous". *Gestion*. 30: 37-49.

Tripsas, M. (1997). "Unraveling the Process of Creative Destruction: Complementary Assets and Incumbent Survival in the Typesetter Industry". *Strategic Management Journal*. 18: 119-142.

Truijens, O. (2003). "A Critical Review of Resource-based View of the Firm". *Primavera Working Paper Series*. University of Amsterdam. 2003-16.

Ulrich, D. & Smallwood, N. (2004). "Capitalizing on Competences". *Harvard Business Review*. 82(6): 119-127.

Vasquez, R., Rodriguez-Del Bosque, I.A., Diaz, A.M. & Ruiz, A.V. (2001). "Service Quality in Supermarket Retailing: Identifying Critical Service Experiences". *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. 8: 1-14.

Veliath, R. & Shortell, S.M. (1993). "Strategic Orientation, Strategic Planning System Characteristics and Performance. *Journal of Management Studies*. 30(2): 359-381.

Venkatraman, N. (1989). "The Concept of Fit in Strategy Research: Toward Verbal and Statistical Correspondance". *Academy of Management Review*. 14(3): 423-444.

Venkatraman, N. & Camillus, J.C. (1984). "Exploring the Concept of 'Fit' in Strategic Management". *Academy of Management Review*. 9(3): 512-525.

Verdin, P.J. & Williamson, P.J. (1994). "Core Competencies, Competitive Advantage and Market Analysis: Forging the Links". In G. Hamel & A. Heene. (1994). *Competency-based Competition*. Chichester, UK, The Strategic Management Series, John Wiley & Sons. 77-110.

Von Krogh, G. & Roos, J. (1995). "A Perspective on Knowledge, Competency and Strategy", *Personnel Review*, 24(3): 56-76.

Wade, M. & Hulland, J. (2004). "The Resource-based View and Information Systems Research: Review, Extensions and Suggestions for Future Research". *MIS Quarterly*, 28(1): 107-142.

Wallace, D.W., Giese, J.L. & Johnson, J.L. (2004). "Customer Retailer Loyalty in the Context of Multiple Channel Strategies". *Journal of Retailing*. 80(4): 249-263.

Walters, D. & Knee, D. (1989). "Competitive Strategies in Retailing". *Long Range Planning*. 22(6): 74-84.

Wernerfelt, B. (1984). "A Resource-based View of the Firm". *Strategic Management Journal*. 5(2): 171-180.

Wilcox King, A. Fowler, S.W. & Zeithaml, C.P. (2001). "Managing Organizational Competencies for Competitive Advantage: The Middle-Management Edge". *Academy of Management Executive*. 15(2): 95-106.

Williams, P. and Naumann, E. (2011). "Customer Satisfaction and Business Performance: A Firm-level Analysis". *Journal of Services Marketing*. 25(1): 20-32.

Williamson, O. (1999). "Strategy Research: Governance and Competence Perspective". *Strategic Management Journal*. 20(12): 1087-1108.

Wissema, J.G., Van Der Pol, H.W. & Messer, H.M. (1980). "Strategic Management Archetypes". *Strategic Management Journal*. 1: 37-47.

Wong, A. & Sohal, A. (2002). "An Examination of the Relationship between trust, Commitment and Relationship Quality". *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*. 30(1): 34-50.

Wortzel, L. (1987). "Retailing Strategies for Today's Mature Marletplace". *Journal of Business Strategy*. 8: 45-56.

Yee, R.W.Y., Yeung, A.C.L., and Edwin Cheng, T.C. (2010). "An Empirical Study of Employee Loyalty, Service Quality and Firm Performance in the Service Industry". *International Journal of Production Economics*. 124(1): 109-120.

Yeoh, P.L. & Roth, K. (1999). "An Empirical Analysis of Sustained Advantage in the U.S. Pharmaceutical Industry: Impact of Firm Resources and Capabilities". *Strategic Management Journal*. 20(7): 637-653.

Yoshikawa, H., Kalil, A., Weisner, T.S., & Way, N. (2008). "Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Research in Developmental Science: Uses and Methodological Choices". *Developmental Psychology*. 4(2): 344-352.

Youndt, M.A., Snell, S.A., Dean, J.W. & Lepak, D.P. (1996). "Human Resource Management, Manufacturing Strategy and Firm Performance". *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(4): 836-866.

Zajac, E., Kraatz, M. & Bresser, R. (2000). "Modeling the Dynamics of Strategic Fit: A Normative Approach to Strategic Change". *Strategic Management Journal*. 21(4): 429-453.

Zane, C.J. (2000). " Creating Lifetime Customers". *Arthur Andersen Retailing Issues Letter*. 12 (September): 1-5.

Zehir, C., Zafer Acar, A. & Tanriverdi, H. (2006). "Identifying Organizational Capabilities As Predictors of Growth and Business Performance". *The Business Review*. 5(2): 109-116.