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ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT INNOVATION: HOW DO COMPANIES DECIDE?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work is to discuss the issue of how companies aiming to increase their innovative capacity should decide about their organizational structure. To accomplish this goal, a bibliographic review about the theme was carried out, as well as an exploratory research, conducted by case study in a Brazilian petrochemical company that had recently re-organised its structure regarding innovative activities. The results suggest that the studied company decided upon its organisational structure without considering the whole process of innovation, focusing efforts only on the Research and Development area. Its organizational structure is still based on traditional forms, with centralized decisions and well demarcated functions. A more "adhocratic" structure, considering innovation as an integrated process would foster the company innovative capacity in the future.

Keywords: Organizational Structure; Innovative Capacity; Innovation; Petrochemical industry.

1. INTRODUÇÃO

This paper attempts to discuss how companies seeking to increase their innovative capacity should make decisions regarding innovation-related structures. In order to do so, the relevant literature was reviewed and an exploratory study of a Brazilian petrochemicals company that recently reorganized its research and development structure, seeking to increase their competitiveness in product innovation was conducted.

Innovation, whether related to products, process, organizational methods, or marketing, is a complex, multidisciplinary activity that involves several areas of a single firm (such as Marketing, R&D, Manufacturing, Financial, etc.), its clients, and its suppliers. In order for this system to function effectively, effective coordination of the different activities it entails is required.

Traditional organizational configurations, which have Taylor, Fayol, and Weber as their main scholars, are based on the principles of division of labor, the need for supervision and a single center of authority and control. Such organizations would be static, as they should be efficient and effective in any situation (Takahashi & Takahashi, 2006).

However, in more turbulent, complex, and uncertain environments, such as innovative ones, static organizational frameworks with rigid division and specialization of labor cannot provide the flexibility and agility needed to maintain innovative competitiveness. Organization and communication structures that encourage and make use of experience-based learning, knowledge sharing, and interaction – such as project teams, problem solving groups, and task rotation – can contribute positively to the performance of innovative activities (Jensen *et al.,* 2007, Gloet & Terziovski, 2004).

Although the literature offers several examples of organizational configurations that prioritize the flexibility and agility required for innovative activity (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Worley & Lawler III, 2006; Minztberg, 1995), many companies adopt decision-making and coordination structures and methods based on classical theory, and eventually have trouble managing innovation efficiently and effectively, even though it is a vital strategic goal.

In seeking a path to effective and efficient innovation management, many companies design new structures and organization methods based on the assumption that their problems are similar and that solutions found in the literature are applicable, without adequately pinpointing the actual location of the innovation bottleneck. Hansen and Birkinshaw (2007) propose a framework – the "innovation value chain" – through which they conduct an integrated analysis of the innovative process, from inception of the concept to the diffusion of innovation across other areas of the firm, and propose that,