

Organizational Structure: Study in a Rural Family Business Using the Three-Dimensional Development Model - MDT

Vinicius Pinheiro Sala¹, Edenis Cesar de Oliveira²

¹ Department of Agronomic Engineering, Federal University of Sao Carlos, Sao Paulo, Brazil

² Department of Management in Agroindustrial Systems, Federal University of Sao Carlos, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Abstract—Reconciling the strength of Brazilian agribusiness, globally recognized as the largest producer of commodities with the challenge of managing a family-run rural company is the challenge proposed in this study. Thus, this work aimed to diagnose the organizational structure of a rural family company, classifying it according to the Three-Dimensional Development Model - MDT, proposed by Gersik et al. (1997). The methodological set comprised the use of interviews with a semi-structured script, non-participant observation and documentary research, notably in the financial records. The numerical data were tabulated and systematized using an Excel® spreadsheet. Results showed an organizational structure classified as “Entrepreneurial Organization”. As for the classification in the Three-dimensional Development Model, the project is in the ‘Controlling Owner’ phase in the ‘Property’ axis; ‘Expansion / Formalization’ on the ‘Company’ axis. In the ‘Family’ axis, it presents a transition process from ‘Entering the Company’ to ‘Joint Work’.

Keywords— Organizational Structure, Family Business, Family Rural Company, Three-Dimensional Development Model, Case Study.

I. INTRODUCTION

Brazilian agribusiness consolidates itself each year as one of the main world producers of agricultural commodities. Thus, its great importance in the positive maintenance of the country's trade balance is notable, especially in the last years (2013 – 2015) when Brazil has gone through a serious economic crisis.

Agricultural production is characterized by being a high-risk activity, due to the fact that it is an “open-air industry”, subject to the most varied climatic conditions such as: droughts, rain in excess, hail, intense thermal amplitudes, among others.

In addition to these characteristics, the rural producer is also subject to oligopolies, an “evolved” form of monopoly (where a group of organizations owns a given product and / or service offer) and oligopsony (where there are few buyers and many sellers). In this scenario, the producer does not price the inputs, nor does he define the price of his products, as most industries do.

Within this context, the producer has some strategies to generate profit and increase his income. The first and most widespread is characterized by the adoption

of new technologies and new inputs that make production more efficient and increase productivity.

However, this first option has a little measurable characteristic: the significant increase in production costs. According to data from the National Supply Company [1], soybean production costs increased by 623% in the last 20 years, and corn by approximately 546% in the same period. Notwithstanding this, there is the challenge of reconciling all these demands with the management of a company that was originally family-owned, considering all the attributes and specificities that are characteristic of this type of company.

In order to better understand the peculiarities of a rural family business, it was sought to analyze a specific case, using the Family Business's Three-Dimensional Development Model as a “theoretical lens” [2].

Thus, the objective of this research was to diagnose the organizational structure of the rural family business, classifying it according to the Three-Dimensional Development Model of the Family Business [2].

A well-established organizational structure, based mainly on the principle of functionality, that is, a simple structure, but capable of responding to demands arising from the market environment. In the case of a rural family

business, in particular, it is configured in the initial and fundamental steps towards professionalization with the correct distribution of functions, compatible and proportionate level of authority and responsibility, establishment of the communication flow, among other relevant aspects.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

From the literature review, this topic will present the main references that will provide the basic theoretical framework to support the study now proposed.

2.1 Agribusiness

The term agribusiness appeared in the School of Business Administration at Harvard University, in a publication entitled *A Concept of Agribusiness* by John Davis and Ray Goldberg, in 1957. This publication suggested at the time the changes that were already noticeable in the way of producing, guided by through the technological revolution and the use of scientific advances aimed at agriculture [3].

In view of the more in-depth investigations, it is possible to note the changes, where the traditional primary sector, supported by the “Agriculture — Livestock - Extractivism” tripod, has become a “Diversified — Modern — Complex” activity called agribusiness [4].

The term is also used in Brazil to explain the existence of productive chains, which are composed of industrial, commercial and agrochemical activities, which in the end are included in a single term which facilitates the exposure of economic data [3].

These chains that make up agribusiness were defined by professors John Davis and Ray Goldberg, being “the set of all operations and transactions involved from the manufacture of agricultural inputs, the production operations in the agricultural units, to the processing and distribution and consumption of fresh or industrialized agricultural products”.

Investigating the various concepts about the term “Agribusiness”, it is possible to note that it is a systemic vision that unites the segments that meet the demands of before, inside and outside the gate of the rural property [5] [6] [7].

Faced with this scenario, families who work within the gate, with their own business, need professionalization, from where the concept of rural companies emerges, which can be defined as a unit of production of agricultural crops, cattle breeding or forestry

crops for the purpose earning income [8].

Although the concept of a rural company is not unanimous among the authors, a basic conceptual review will be presented below in order to support this study.

2.2 Family Business

The literature presents several understandings of how to characterize a family business. A family business is considered to be one that has shareholding control in the hands of the family, where family ties define succession, relatives occupy strategic positions and lack of freedom to sell inherited “shares” [9].

It is understood that a company can only be considered family when it passes the first generation [10] [11] for those who are, it must be in the phase where the first and second generation work together. There is also the understanding that any organization that has the figure of the family concentrating power and management must be considered to be of a family character [12].

However, it is crucial to first define who the family is, in order to later characterize the company as family or not [13]. The number of couples that start and run companies is increasing, and that together with situations of consanguinity and marriage can be used to characterize family business [14].

Some characteristics are peculiar to this type of enterprise: i) the family has total or majority control; ii) the family influences management guidelines; iii) the company's values are related to the family's values; iv) the family decides on the succession process [15] [16].

Such characteristics mentioned can bring advantages and disadvantages when compared to other companies. The main advantages are: i) long-term vision, ii) family culture such as pride and commitment, iii) “training” the children from an early age, and iv) greater proximity to employees. Regarding the disadvantages, one can consider: i) informal structure, ii) tolerance of unqualified members, iii) lack of market attention and iv) lack of succession planning [17].

In Brazil, about 95% of family businesses exceed the first generation and, in agribusiness, it is no different, since 12% of companies in this sector are family members [18]. Within this vast field of family enterprises, it is very difficult to classify according to their size, since there is still no unanimously accepted concept in the world regarding size classification [19]. However, in Brazil, according to Complementary Law No. 123/06, companies can be classified according to their annual gross sales, as shown in Table 1.

Table. 1: Classification of companies according to annual gross sales

Classification	Annual Gross Revenue*
Micro Enterprise	Less than or equal to USD 87,000
Small Business	Greater than USD 87,000 and less than USD 1,160,000
Medium Company	Greater than USD 1,160,000 and less than or equal to USD 72,500,000
Big Company	Greater than USD 72,500,000

Source: [20].

*Amounts converted to the 2019 base year average value of the American currency (dollar = R\$4,14)

For the maintenance of family businesses in agribusiness, it is necessary that they adopt a solid and professional management model [21].

2.3 Organizational Structure

There are several conceptual models of organizational structures in the literature. The structure starts in a centralized way and as the company develops it creates departments to diversify the production of its products [22]. Organizations can be divided into mechanical structures, characterized by clarity in the definition of tasks, centralized decisions and a clear hierarchy of control; and organic, where decisions are

decentralized, a system divided according to knowledge and continuous adjustment of tasks according to knowledge [23].

Organizations can also be divided into linear or military: structure that has centralized power and well-defined routines; the functional structure: structure separated into departments and the focus is on specialization; and the staff-and-line structure: structure with centralized power, similar to the linear structure, but with the help of a division of labor advisory [24].

Among the existing models, we opted for the one presented in Table 2, since it best represents the structure of the company under study [25].

Table. 2: Mintzberg's organizational models

Organizational Model	Concept
Entrepreneurial Organization	Simple, non-formal organization, where the manager performs tasks with employees
Mechanical Organization	Organization from the industrial revolution, where employees become highly specialized, where work is highly standardized
Professional Organization	Organization where there is a greater division of work, more specialized employees
Diversified Organization	Organization where several divisions are created, due to the production of several products, so the control of activities is over each division
Innovative Organization	Organization that seeks to innovate its management, processes and products
Missionary Organization	Organization created and driven by ideology

Source: [25].

Each organizational model illustrated in Table 2 presents a different way of dividing labor, the way activities are carried out, the way the manager coordinates activities, and so on. There is design in decision-making within each organizational structure, ranging from an organization with centralized power in the manager, to fully decentralized structures, where each operational nucleus has freedom in decision-making [25].

Entrepreneurial Organization has the greatest centralization of power, both vertical and horizontal; thus, these companies are generally small, young, with few support managers or analysts; control is in the owner's hand. It has a lean structure, in general because it is young, since in its view, the aging of the company tends to make it bureaucratic.

In the Mechanical organization, work tends to be

highly specialized, adapting well to large-scale production, referring to the period of the Industrial Revolution. In this structure there is a greater number of managers to control the work of the highly specialized operational nucleus, creating a decentralized environment horizontally, but highly centralized vertically [25].

The Professional Organization, unlike the Mechanical Organization, has greater pressure on the specialization of the professionals who work there. These specialized professionals have greater power over the decision on operational and decision-making flows, generating high horizontal decentralization, maintaining vertical centralization. Therefore, it is possible for the operational units to grow according to the capacity of the first line managers, since the structure allows their autonomy [25].

The Diversified Organization is one that has divisions, that is, it produces or provides more than one service, therefore, it has a very diversified portfolio, with a central control office. They are generally characteristics of large and mature companies where each division has autonomy, having its own organizational structure with a limited form of decentralization from top to bottom of power [25].

Contrary to all previous forms, the Innovative Organization has a fully decentralized structure, both vertical and horizontal; its organization is based on projects, bringing together the most varied profiles of professionals in the quest to achieve a new product. This type of organization is found in dynamic and complex environments, highly demanding in innovation, which

creates the need for a cooperative environment [25].

Finally, the Missionary Organization, which differently from the previous ones, has its configuration based on an ideology that contributes to encourage members to participate in it. It does not present a firm division of tasks or a strong centralization of power, keeping “missionaries” together through common norms, values and beliefs [25].

2.4 Three-dimensional Development Model

In general, family businesses are managed by the owner (s) themselves, which reinforces the need to separate the interests of the company and the family [26]. The work environment reflects the existence of conflicts, disputes and harmony in the home [27]. In view of this complex relationship and involvement that exists between family and company, it is of utmost importance that there is the elaboration of criteria and guidelines that assist in the posture and decision-making by the manager in order to manage the company's activities and resolve conflicts that may result in a shorter enterprise longevity [26].

Thus, the act of managing is to develop the family to be able to manage the business as well as to establish and consolidate the business for which the company was created. Gersick et al. [2] present the Three-Dimensional Development Model of the Family Business as shown in Figure 1.

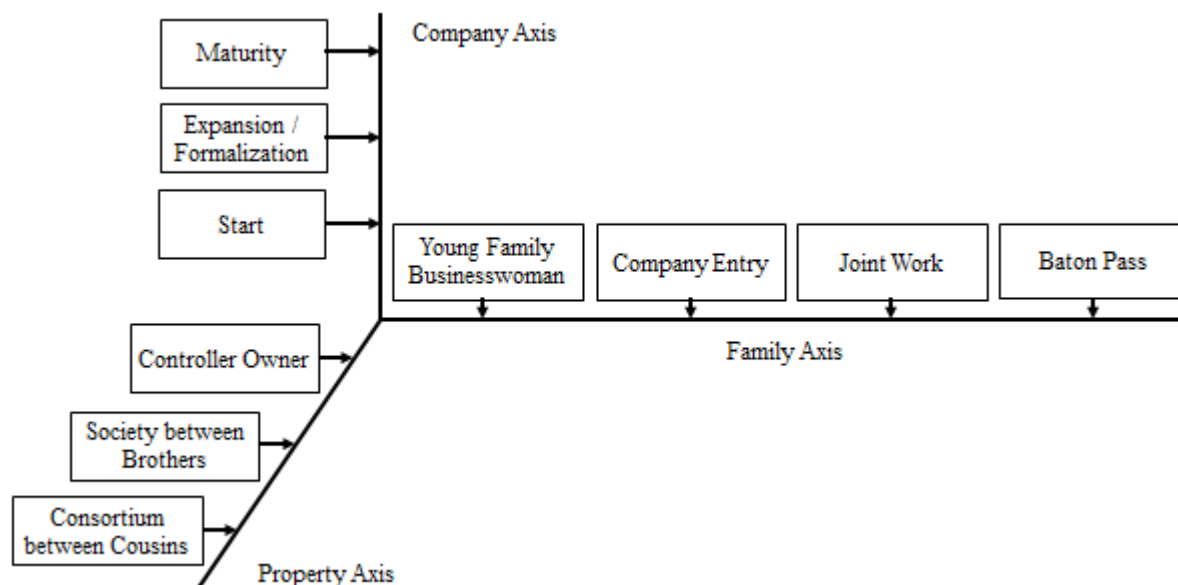


Fig.1: Three-dimensional Family Business Development Model

Source: [2]

In the model presented, there are three axes: Company Axis, Property Axis and Family Axis. In the Company Axis, the initial stage represents the start of the company, when it is still informally organized and the owners are performing various functions. In the Formalization / Expansion stage, the company has formalized management and an organized structure that supports the company's expansion. In the Maturity stage, it is when the company is consolidated in the market, with organized functional routines, efficient production techniques and good experience in the inserted market.

In the Axis of Property, the Controlling Owner stage is characterized by control concentrated on the owner or owner couple. In the Partnership Between Brothers stage, the company has the control of two or more brothers. At the Cousins Consortium stage, the company has a shareholder structure in which there are several cousins and a mix of employee and non-employee partners.

Finally, in the Family Development Axis, the Young Family Entrepreneur internship is characterized by the first generation, where the founders are under 40 years old and children under 18 years old. In the Entering the Company stage, the founders are between 35 and 55 years old and their children (from the age of adolescence to 30 years old) begin to have contact with business. The Joint Work stage is characterized with founders aged between 50 and 65 years and children aged between 20 and 45 years. In the Baton Pass stage, the founders are 60 years old or more, which in general characterizes the disconnection of the older leadership in relation to the company and the transfer of leadership.

Initially the company is managed informally, however over time and the arrival of new members, it is

necessary to seek professionalization of the enterprise so that it can prepare successors. This professionalization consists of the separation of family interests from the interests of the company [28].

This same logic can be followed for the management of the company with a focus on agriculture, however, it is necessary to make some reservations in view of the peculiarities that agricultural production has.

Good management involves the ability to manage controllable factors (acquisition of inputs, execution of tasks and labor). However, for agribusiness, uncontrollable factors are also used, such as the most emblematic example, climatic variations, in such a way that activities do not have a regularity [29].

Thus, the rural manager must act in a complex scenario, where his functions are to plan, control, evaluate results and motivate his workforce [29].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Farm Santa Isabel is a development that is in the third generation of a family of rural producers, over more or less 100 years. Several crops have already been cultivated, however, in the last 30 years there has been a specialization in the cultivation of Soy, Corn, Beans, Wheat, Oats, in an area of 530 hectares — and more recently confining about 360 cattle per year — allowed the venture to become expand.

The company is in the legal form of “Individual Entrepreneur”, in which the individual represents the company's assets. Located in the municipality of Itararé — SP, Morro Vermelho neighborhood.

Table 3 shows the actors involved in the management of the project.

Table. 3: Age and function of the actors of the enterprise

Actors	Age	Occupation
Father	50	Administration, Service Management and Legal Representative
Mother	47	Administrative services
Son 1	22	Field services (Agricultural)
Son 2	20	Field services (Livestock)

The property is divided into 22 plots, which together add up to 530 hectares. One of the plots serves as the headquarters of the enterprise, with two warehouses for guarding machinery and supplies, a workshop and a house that doubles as an office, the other plots of activity of the

enterprise are within a radius of 8.5 km from the headquarters, and they currently have 4 permanent employees (3 for agricultural activities and 1 for livestock activities).

4.1 Organizational Structure of the Enterprise

After the observations and survey of the information, it was possible to notice that the enterprise has a structure of centralization of the decision-making power in the figure of the Father — controller — that concentrates the decisions of the activities within itself, although there is a small division of tasks between the children and the children and mother.

This small division of tasks can be an indication that the enterprise is moving towards a transition, in which the children begin to assume more responsibility and power within the company, although this does not mean

that there will be a change in the company's culture. The other actors involved in the project believe that a certain level of resistance on the part of the controller to such changes is natural, since this characteristic can already be observed in the project!

Figure 2 illustrates the current organizational structure of the enterprise.

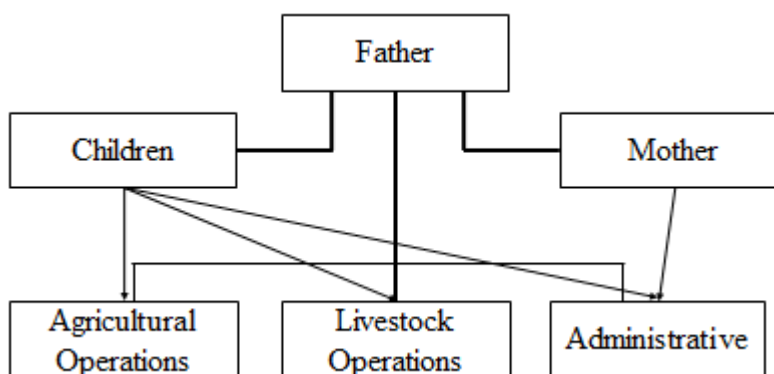


Fig.2 - Organizational Structure of the Enterprise

This model represents a transition from the Entrepreneurial Organization model to the Professional Organization model corroborated by studies previously presented [25]. The Entrepreneurial Organization has a simple structure, with few managers in line, which keeps the main decision at the top and then allows the organization to be flexible, lean and has the expertise of its owner.

In general, these organizations are young and small — which is similar in parts to the history of the enterprise, which although it is a family that has been in the agricultural business for several years, only recently is in the process of formalization — even though it has a simple structure, in the author's view, these organizations can grow, as long as their leader is strong [25].

The Professional Organization, on the other hand, presents a more bureaucratic structure, where the pressure for professionalization increases, there are specialized professionals — in the case of the family where the children are attending higher education — who share the power of many strategic and operational decisions, having some autonomy to create a standardization activities. This format allows the growth of operational units without the need for many managers, complexity and automation.

Low complexity generates less bureaucracy in company processes, a fact corroborated by other studies [34], considering that the excess of bureaucracy in contemporary organizations considerably reduces the speed in decision-making.

The organization chart in Figure 2 illustrates a decentralized structure design horizontally and a vertical centralization [25], that is, the children and mother have a certain power of decision, with freedom of action. Nevertheless, the final decision is always the father's responsibility. This characteristic can be associated with the culture that the company has, which, for several generations, has always had its command in the father figure.

4.2 Classification According to Three-Dimensional Model

With regard to the Property Axis, the project has consolidated control in the parent (Controlling Owner), as previously discussed, creating a less bureaucratic structure where its growth is based on the controller's expertise. However, as the business evolves in the other axes, especially in the Axis of the Company, with ascendancy towards organizational maturity, this centralization starts to

generate several challenges.

He observes in the enterprise that the father has accumulated functions in the company, having all strategic, operational and administrative decisions under his responsibility. Inevitably, this has led to a loss of efficiency in business operations. In line with this scenario, it is suggested that, in order to improve business management, the division of tasks and, consequently, power among family members should be promoted, creating an environment of greater commitment [15].

Thus, it is to be expected that, following the natural course of the corporate life cycle, advancing to the maturation phase, the controller will experience new challenges that, inevitably, will require the latter, the need to expand and intensify the delegation process. However, the act of delegating is still seen with some resistance from the controller, being carried out partially in specific situations, something common to happen in family businesses [35].

There is an urgent need to implement an organizational structure that understands the transition that the enterprise is experiencing in the Family Hub, moving from Entering the Company to Working Together. This scenario is reinforced by what has already been discussed, in which the children and mother have a certain autonomy and participation in the business strategy, although it is not

yet an effective and joint work, considering that the children are in higher education, and they cannot dedicate themselves full time to the business.

At this stage, the great challenge of the enterprise is to reconcile the professional aspirations of the children, with the company's ability to be profitable and generate sufficient resources to meet those aspirations, this being one of the great challenges in the Family Hub, which can be observed in several case studies on family businesses at this stage [36] [37].

The enterprise has expanded over time, however, has not yet been formalized and, consequently, has not become professionalized to the point of facing the dilemmas mentioned above. This professionalization can assist in facing the inherent challenges of working together, especially in the process of decentralizing the decision-making power of the father figure, paving the way for an expansion in the company's fields of activity.

Figure 3 graphically represents the analysis undertaken in accordance with the theoretical model of Gersick et al. [2], specifically for the family rural company, object of this study.

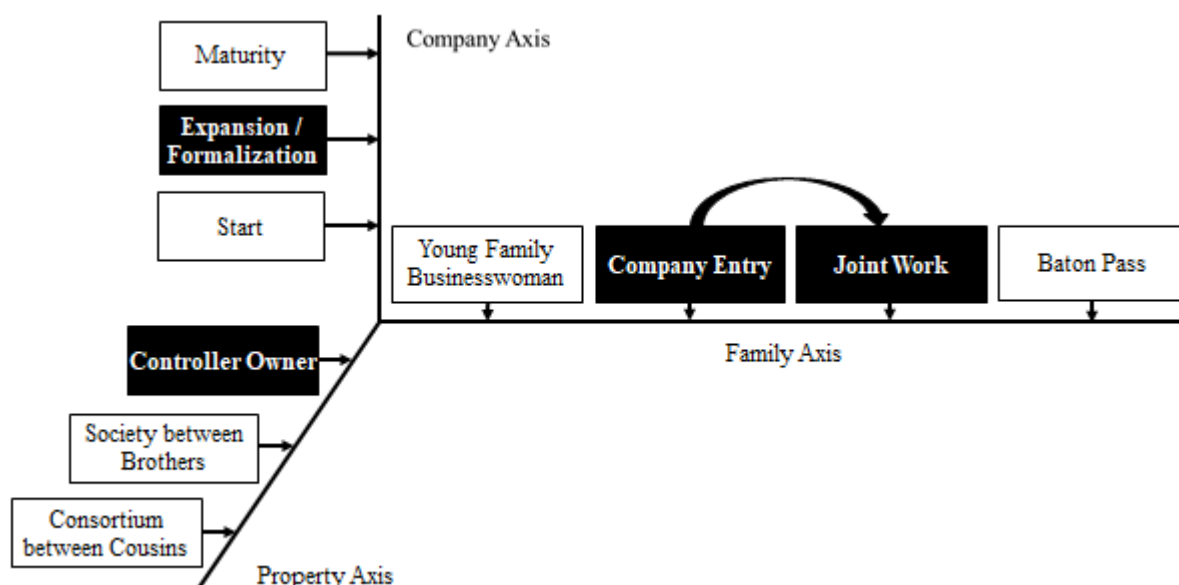


Fig.3: Three-Dimensional classification of the studied enterprise.

It is known that in order to be lasting and consistent, professionalization must be an inside-out process, actively involving all family members interested in the business. Professionalizing does not necessarily mean taking control off the family management and handing it over to hired professionals, but, above all, that the established organizational structure clearly understands the establishment of the roles to be performed, as well as the limitations of the levels of authority and responsibility for each position [12].

IV. CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the enterprise's organizational structure from the perspective of the Three-Dimensional Development Model proposed by Gersick et al. [2], it was possible to obtain a better understanding of the culture of the enterprise, such as the flow of information, decision-making and power relations.

The company, which has been conducted for generations, has not yet reached the level of consolidation in its organizational structure, limiting itself only to the transmission of control between the generations, based primarily on the intuition of the controller, represented by the figure of the father, who, in turn, promotes specific delegations to the children, maintaining a high and ineffective level of centralization.

Despite this, this informal and centralized structure ends up limiting growth, as it requires a lot of work from the controller, being restricted to his experience and expertise. Another limiting factor refers to the low capacity to measure data, which, when performed, is done with high inaccuracy. Consequently, it is impossible to create management indicators for effective decision-making (profitability, return on invested capital, annual growth, etc.).

Thus, when the company was classified according to the Family Business Three-Dimensional Development Model proposed by Gersick et al. [2], it was noticed that the company's expansion capacity is limited to some factors such as, i) Lack of formalization; ii) Absence of structure at hierarchical levels, division of positions and functions to decentralize decisions and allow greater efficiency, flow of communication; iii) Low incentive to create an environment in which all members are able to work together and the company can meet all of their professionals and financial interests.

The main actions should be focused on creating an exclusive organizational structure for the business,

clearly defining the role of each family member, hierarchical levels, the correct distribution of functions / tasks, the communication flow, among other relevant aspects. This structure will surely become an “embryo” for the professionalization of management, with necessary and sufficient conditions for the development of the business, making it even more efficient and competitive, especially in preparation for the coming demands.

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