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Elements, resources and capacities of agricultural production units: from a thoughtful analytical approach

Elementos, recursos y capacidades de las unidades de producción agrícola: desde un enfoque analítico reflexivo

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the elements, resources and capacities of agricultural production units. Based on the reflexive analytical approach of classical and current theoretical benchmarks. A Subjective interpretation is proposed as a central point to provide tools that contribute to the identification and configuration of elements of a system, resources with what works and organizational capabilities, leading to competitive advantages and interdependence relationships of companies. The findings show that agricultural production units will need to implement strategies to achieve levels of growth that help overcome gaps and problems of hunger and poverty in the world.

Keywords: elements, resources, capabilities, resource-based vision.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza los elementos, recursos y capacidades de las unidades de producción agrícola, partiendo del enfoque analítico reflexivo de referentes teóricos disciplinares clásicos y actuales. Se propone una interpretación subjetiva como punto central para brindar herramientas que contribuyan a la identificación y configuración de elementos de un sistema, recursos con los que funcionan y capacidades organizacionales, derivando en ventajas competitivas y relaciones de interdependencia de las empresas. Los hallazgos evidencian que las unidades de producción agrícola deberán implementar estrategias que permitan alcanzar niveles de crecimiento que coadyuven a superar brechas y problemas de hambre y pobreza en el mundo.

Palabras clave: elementos, recursos, capacidades, visión basada en recursos.

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural production units face challenges that make difficult to carry out their economic activities. Global warming and world population growth, estimated at 8.600 million by 2030 according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017), pressures on the sector for access to vital resources such as water and fertile land, while forcing the sector to meet the increased demand for food and raw materials for industry. The agricultural sector has become competitive, and making the most of the elements, natural and technological resources at their disposal is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of these units.

Food production has been growing since 1970 (the year from which measurement data are available), approaching to $ 2 billion by 2015 (Figure 1). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), this production is agglutinated in populated and extensive countries of the world such as China, India and the United States (FAO, 2019). For their part, developing country face population growth rates and, consequently, agricultural production must grow at an equal or greater rate in order to generate incomes that will enable them to overcome poverty and provide better living conditions. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), today enough food is produced to feed the entire world population, but nearly 900 million people suffer from chronic hunger (ECLAC, 2018, p. 19), 80% of them living in rural areas and dependent on agriculture (FAO, 2015).

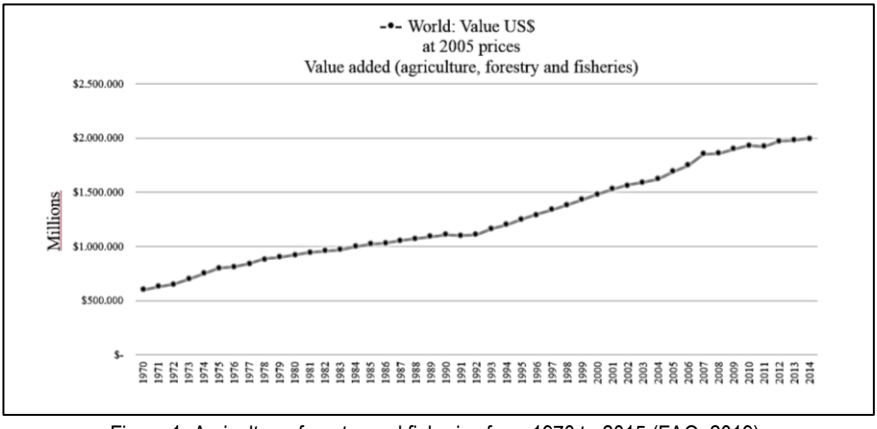

Figure 1. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries from 1970 to 2015 (FAO, 2019).

Latin America faces challenges in terms of reducing poverty and increasing food production, although it is not the poorest region in the world, if it is the most unequal (ECLAC, 2016, p. 16). Inequality exists worldwide and is a barrier for the region to reach its potential, being an impediment to access to essential elements to increase productivity, such as technology and infrastructure. At the rate of population growth estimated for the region, it is expected that by 2050 there will be nearly 800 million people from almost 650 million today (UN, 2017).

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Colombia 12.8 million people remained in conditions of monetary poverty and 3.4 million suffered from hunger in 2016 (UNDP, 2018, p 14), with an accent on rural and dispersed areas of the country. The inhabitants of these parts of the country face increasing population, competition for food availability and price, natural phenomena, climate, armed conflict and economic slowdown. The foregoing describes an environment in which agriculture sector must organized elements that make up its system and make efficient use of the resources available for them, enhancing their capacities.

The situation of the agricultural sector in the Caribbean region of Colombia is particular, accounting for 22% of the population, but less than 15% of the national gross domestic product (GDP). The north of the country is plagued by problems such as falling international prices, revaluation of the exchange rate, violence and drought times (Banco de la República, 2017. pp 42-49.). As a result, arable land was used for cattle and livestock activities, consequently, the agricultural sector's share of regional GDP was halved, but with sustained growth in most departments.

Meanwhile, in the department of the Atlántico there is evidence of a decrease in agricultural production since the country's economic opening in the early 90s in the amount of cultivated land, going from 40,000 to 15,000 hectares in 2016 (Gobernación del Atlántico, 2016, p 63). According to the Agustín Codazzi Geographic Institute (IGAC, 2016), land use in the department is inappropriate, either due to underuse or overuse, and therefore its agricultural potential is not taken advantage of. Its agricultural production is mainly based on small and medium agricultural units that establish supply chains with various consumer and commercial enterprises, generating interdependence relations, depending on the period of the year, these suffer from water scarcity of water resources, which causes them to lag behind in their productivity.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the elements, resources and capacities of agricultural production units, making it possible to identify and organize them so that these generate sustainable competitive advantages. In order to do this, it is necessary to have clarity about the elements in which the units are composed, to find the resources within each company, to discriminate them according to their type and whether they generate capacities, allowing the establishment of strategic management charts that adapt to the dynamics and requirements of the global environment.

Each unit or company is unique because it has different elements, resources and capacities, so it is necessary that these be identified in order to propose a strategy that allows agricultural production units to obtain and conserve organizational capacities that give them sustainability over time (Ramos Martínez: 2007); Otherwise, they will remain behind competitors from other parts of the country. Similarly, it will allow adequate strategies for sustainability of agricultural production units in the Atlántico Department and the gaining of competitive advantages that allow an increase in their profitability and productivity. Therefore, the next question is formulated: How are the elements, resources and capacities of agricultural production units?

ELEMENTS, RESOURCES AND CAPACITIES: THEORETICAL REVIEW FROM THE ANALYTIC REFLECTIVE POINT OF VIEW

Within the open systems, elements, resources and capacities coexist, maintaining constant interaction with the environment where economic activities take place. There are different industry analysis tools, such as SWOT analysis, value chain analysis, benchmarking, determination of competitive strength and resource-based vision (RBV); which facilitate obtaining useful information on business performance, the use of resources in its production unit of goods and services and their interactions with the environment. The ways in which elements are configured to interact with the environment, the ability to streamline resources to increase them and achieve competitive advantage at higher levels than those of the rest of the competition, is crucial for organizations to survive and generate value in adverse environments. (Figure 2.)

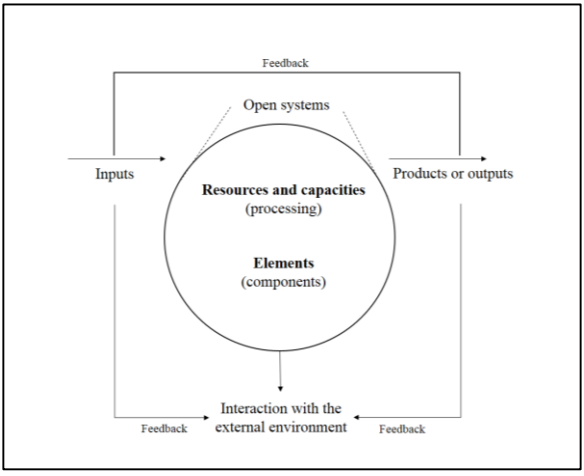

Figure 2. Operation Open Systems (Own preparation: 2019).

From a holistic point of view, where the components that make up a system form part of a larger functional unit (Smuts: 1926), it can be said that the concepts of elements, resources and capacities keep relationship within strategic management. This view finds correspondence with the postulates found in the theory of systems (TS) (Johnson, Kast and Rosenzweig: 1968), which comes from the general theory of systems (GTS) originated from the works of the German biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1950), for integration between natural and social sciences, studying non-physical fields of knowledge. The above, derives in a systems theory that considers them as a set of linked components: elements, units and relations.

The elements, as essential components of systems, adopt unique forms to interact with each other and with others, to achieve specific goals and purposes of the organization. In turn, each element constitutes a subsystem that integrates major systems and supra-systems (Optner: 1960). These interactions generate properties and characteristics for each integral system, making possible the articulation of the whole, under purposes or objectives, in a global or total way.

Regarding the element attributes as major system integrators, they have two basic characteristics: (1) purpose or objective and (2) globality or totality (Chiavenato: 2017). The first, determine an agreement that always has a purpose or objective to achieve (Schein: 1982), that is, only elements are associated to achieve certain goals for the organization, the latter refer to the organic property of the systems (Spencer: 1904), where an action generated in one element affects the others (Lawrence and Lorsch: 1973), affecting the entire system, generates a joint response to said stimulus.

On the other hand, resources and capacities are fundamental source that lead companies to obtain competitive advantages (Barney: 1991; Conner: 1991), these represent differentiating assets of an organization and are determinant to define its competitive capacity and its ability to succeed in the market (Wernelfelt: 1984). The RBV is a deeper strategic analysis of identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), because it allows to know how to obtain a competitive advantage and raises awareness on urgent and important business issues, but its limitation lies in the inability to provide steps and actions necessary to achieve strategic changes (Dess, Lumpkin and Eisner: 2011; Annia, Villalobos, Ramírez, Romero y Ramos: 2018) as provided by the value chain.

RBV allows companies to achieve sustainable results that are superior to those of the rest of the industry through the exploitation of valuable, rare and inimitable resources (Dhanaraj and Beamish: 2003; Makadok: 2001). It consists of an analysis of internal and external phenomena of the company. These resources can be

tangible (financial, material, technology, organizations), intangibles (human resources, innovation and creativity, reputation) and organizational capabilities (Figure 3) (Hall: 1992, 2009).

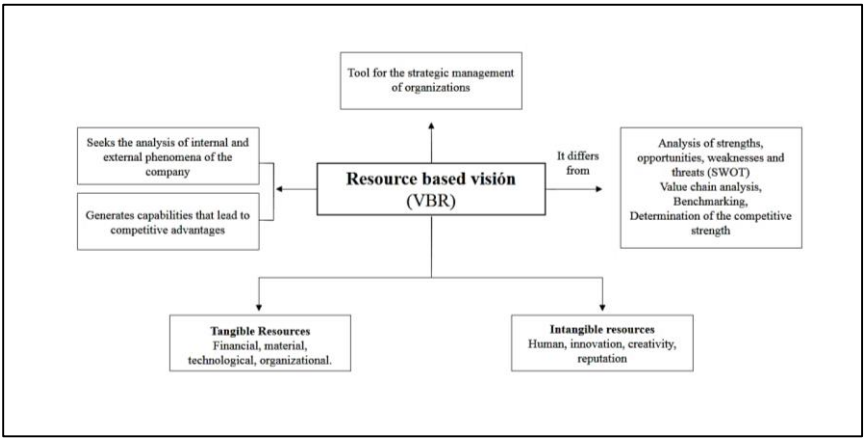

Figure 3. Resources-based vision (Own development: 2019).

In the agricultural sector, tangible resources are often scare to meet growing demand. In an estimate of the United Nations (UNDP 2018) the world population in 2050 will be 9.800 million people, who will compete for access to water and food. Gradually, access and possession of potable water for cultivation and arable land will pressure on food producers. By their nature, intangible resources are complex to identify and maintain in this type of business, since human and intellectual capital possess particular temporal and qualitative characteristics, compared with other economic activities (Bazylevych,Kupalova, Bulhairova, Satyr and Goncharenko:2016), at the same time, by the complexities of establishing a supply chain, brand reputation and relationships, are crucial strategic assets to maintain and renew.

Organizational capacities refer to solid skills employed by the company to transform its inputs into quality products and services for the market (Ramirez Chacón and El Kadi: 2018; Villalobos and Ramírez: 2018), their sufficiency allows combining tangible and intangible resources, using both administrative and operational processes of the company for the consolidation of goals (Agarwal and Selen, 2015, Ramírez Chacón and Valencia: 2018). These are based on knowledge, reside in human and intellectual capital, and in organizational processes or systems, incorporating strategic insight, tailored to the needs of the environment (Amit and Schoemaker: 1993; Ramírez, Villalobos and Herrera: 2018; Villalobos Ramírez and Díaz-Cid: 2019); sustaining the capacity to develop innovative products, an incomparable customer service, to attract, motivate and retain its human capital.

Elements and resources alone do not lead to competitive advantages, since the use of these there are diverse schemes of coordination among human resources, fixed assets and organizational resources that are difficult to imitate by competitors (Indacochea: 2016). Capacities, which are fundamental to originating products and services, reside in the way in which resources and elements coordinate and complement each other. Organizational capacity, processes and control systems and hiring are skills that a company has to carry out specific tasks.

Because of their complexity, the capacities are difficult to categorize and locate resources, however, there are two useful approaches that achieve a systematic process of finding them within the organization. The first part of the observation is to draw up a complete list of company resources (Thompson, Strickland, Janes, Sutton, Peteraf and Gamble: 2018), since capabilities use these and the way they are exercised, while at the same time shedding light on the types of capabilities that the company may have generated and accumulated.

The second method examines capabilities from a functional perspective, considering that there are very specific tasks that demand a set of resources and comprise a unit or element of the organization (Thompson, et al: 2018 the). The problem with this method is that there are processes that, due to their importance, are carried out transversally by the company and it is not possible to mark a border within the system, since they cover many elements and resources, such as product innovation with a short life cycle, where the effort of business units is required: design, engineering, manufacturing and marketing.

Determining whether an organization's resources and capabilities are strong enough to allow for a sustainable competitive advantage is a process where it must be taken into account that resources are different for each organization, while being immobile. The first refers to the fact that each organization proposes different strategies because resources differ from one organization to another; in the same sense, resources are immobile, since they do not change from one company to another (Barney: 1991; Lay, Ramírez and Villalobos: 2019).

Resources determine how the organization's system interacts with the external environment in which it carries out its economic activities, and to determine strategic relevance and competitive power requires more than simply identifying these in the organization. Therefore, a sustainable advantage will consist in analyzing which resources and capacities of the company represent a value for the competition. Resources and capacities must maintain their value in order to preserve their dynamics. These must be continuously refined and updated, sometimes augmented with all kinds of skills, as rival organizations strive to refine and recalibrate their capabilities, as long as the needs and expectations of consumers change (Leonard-Barton: 1992), organizational capabilities are lost if they do not evolve.

As fundamental parts of systems, elements, resources and capacities are related so that some do not exist without the other. These three concepts are similar in that they are organizational systems integrators, that is, they make possible cohesion and coordination within the company; together they generate other characteristics different from those they would generate if they were disaggregated or separated. They are also characterized by being unique and distinctive for each organization, from which derive their competitive advantages.

Likewise, they differ in the elements that exist in the organization because there are goals and objectives that link them to it. Resources are input elements (feedstocks), which by themselves do not generate a competitive advantage, while to the same time, they are processors of the input elements and feedstock that enter the system. Finally, the capabilities are key factors derived from resources that allow companies to gain competitive advantages, skills and abilities that will differentiate them from their rivals. To do so, they must retain these advantages by evolving their organizational capabilities (Table 1).

Table 1. Similarities and differences between elements, resources and capabilities

Organizational Components	Similarities	Differences
Elements.	Components that integrate organizational systems.	They have purposes that relate them to the organization.
Resources.	Each one has properties and characteristics, that would be integrated to have other attributes. Unique to each organization. Their combination generates competitive advantages.	They process the input elements to the system.
Capacities.		Keys to obtain skills and abilities. They must evolve to develop competitive advantages.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2019).

When approaching the elements, resources and capacities, from the analytical-reflective theoretical review, the combination of variables provides a broad vision about the functioning of the organization's system that leads to go beyond an analysis. Agricultural units must establish which are the elements that compose the structure of their system in order to know the frontiers of their organization, allowing them to know the inputs they receive from the environment and how they are transformed into products and/or services.

After recognizing the elements that make up the system of each agricultural unit, it is necessary to know what resources they possess in order to compete in the market. Of these resources, the tangible ones will be evident to identify within the organization, as fertile and arable land, the conservation and utilization of water sources; others will have to be found from the observation as the structure of the organization, knowledge of techniques and technology that only exist in such agricultural units.

The way in which tangible and intangible resources are combined will be the generators of key capabilities for obtaining competitive advantages in agricultural production units. The different ways of growing, caring for and harvesting food are competitive advantages that competitors will strive to imitate. It is necessary to create an enabling environment to make sound decisions about resource management and management capabilities, in order to take advantage of market opportunities.

Organizational resources are obtained through the market (inputs) and experience, constituting a learning experience for the company. Only by combining their own resources and capacities with other companies to generate synergies that provide better conditions for the sector, value and wealth are created, which will benefit industry and society immersed in the industry's supply chain (external environment). Correct articulation with the public sector, will be crucial to achieving these advantages quickly and efficiently.

The above describes threats to which agricultural production units are exposed in this region of Colombia, although it has fertile and cultivable land at its disposal, the water resource is essential for its operation, but scarce to acquire. Food producers suffer prolonged periods of drought and because of their location, they do not always have water bodies to draw upon to supply themselves during these periods of time. Achieving synergies with other producers who have access to water, establishing links and complementarity relationships between them will be crucial for their sustainability. Regional and local governments should support these efforts, even assist in designing and implementing irrigation systems that mitigates access to this resource.

PRACTICES THE ELEMENTS, RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES FOR THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION UNITS

Several studies on the practices of the elements, resources and capacities in agricultural units worldwide have applied formulas differently in each case. They say that agricultural production units are essential for society as they generate essential goods for human beings. The problems that originated these studies have been environmental, economic, commercial and labor issues, requiring the link between the private and public sector, and the sum of other actors.

The study of Trukhachev, Sklyarov and Sklyarova (2016), recounts the situation presented in Stávropol (southern Russia), identifying elements that make up agricultural production units, allowing growth above the average of the country, valuable resources were recognized as abundant and fertile land and water (tangible resources), a supply of human resources superior to the rest of the Russian Federation, organizational capacities, focusing on the generation of competitive advantages such as agricultural experience and accumulated production potential, own infrastructure (transport , education, scientific research), the existence of a cluster consisting of companies in the food production and processing sector.

However, this region faces a problem such as the increase in commodity prices, stagnation in the recovery of usable land for agriculture, weak agricultural market worldwide, causing degradation of competitive advantage. The situation has begun to reverse, with improvements in the quality of financial management and

transparency in the management of agricultural organizations, demanding the support of local and regional governments, leading policies that tend to efficient use of soils, counseling small food producers to stop the detriment of their operational capacity, provide financial stability and avoid negative effects derived from fluctuations in the exchange rate.

Kaup (2015), refers to Brazil's potential to lead the production of biofuels from sugarcane, the product of a complex system that describes elements and resources that generate capacities and, consequently, competitive advantages to innovate in products and services. However, these advantages would be imitated in other regions of the world with similar climatic, topographical and biological conditions, deteriorating their dominant position in the industry.

The research by Davies, Baines and Batt (2013), based on cases of Asia, Africa and South America to analyze the development of the value chain through public-private partnerships, plus the incorporation of the education sector, seeking to integrate the capabilities of all three. Universities would act as intermediaries that facilitate the establishments of links between governments, entrepreneurs and the community, while at the same time contributing to the construction of techniques, technologies and knowledge with those who develop them, in order to enrich the industry.

FINDINGS OF ELEMENTS, RESOURCES AND CAPACITIES: COMPONENTS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION UNITS

Results of strategic management studies were different due to the variety of tools and methods used. These expose the internal and external situation of the agricultural production units, analyze the way in which they interact with the external environment and find weaknesses that involve risks as the maintenance of accumulated capabilities and competitive advantages acquired for their sustainability.

The findings show signs of recovery of the agricultural sector Stávropol after the crisis suffered since the period of reforms and Russian economic opening of the 90s. This was achieved by implementing methods that identified elements that make up agricultural production systems, the resources available to them to operate and the accumulated capabilities to recover and strengthen competitive advantages in the region. The agroindustry complex of the region is composed of companies that develop food industry supply chain processes. At the same time, the resource potential found describes facilities and human resources that allow potential in horticulture, viticulture, poultry, beef and sheep farming, pig farming and beekeeping, accumulating organizational capacities and competitive advantages such as availability of arable land, provision of human resources and the formulation of an agroindustry cluster.

In the system of production of biofuels made from sugar cane in Brazil, there were organizational elements, tangible and intangible resources that allow having a dominant position in the industry, such as climate and soil favorable for the cultivation of this plant and the potential to innovate in products and processes. A supply chain spanning companies that cover the stages of production and distribution processes was recognized.

The integration of different actors in the production and innovation processes of agricultural production units in Asia, África and South América, has influenced the generation of new competitive advantages as a result of the integration of elements, resources and capacities. Linking universities and research and innovation centers would help to achieve interactions between companies, governments and the community, taking advantage of the elements, resources and capacities they possess. This establishes a new level of cooperation, where relationships that will be beneficial to industry, the economy of those regions and consumers of the goods produced by those companies.

REFLECTIONS ON ELEMENTS, RESOURCES AND CAPACITIES IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION UNITS

Strategic management tools offer different points of view of the reality of organizations that varies, depending on the interpretation given by management to them. Agricultural production units should use these methods to have a broad overview of the internal and external situation of the company, so that they can continue to grow through the generation of competitive advantages and innovative organizational capabilities. The arrangement of the elements that make up the system will allow the organization's tangible and intangible resources to be used in an optimal way, generating new capacities to obtain a better position in the markets in which they intend to position themselves.

The role assumed by the different actors, inside and outside the industry, will be crucial if food production is to maintain growth levels that will enable hunger and poverty to be overcome worldwide. Link to governments and other institutions in the role of guiding agricultural production units so that they obtain better conditions in the market and manage to revert the problems derived from poor agricultural practices and/or in the use of the land, being decisive for these to be positioned in national and international markets, while acquiring the raw materials that allow them to reach and maintain quality levels in their products and profitability to make them competitive.

Likewise, involving universities and research and innovation centers will be decisive to generate new competitive advantages through the configuration of elements of organizational systems of agricultural production units, the efficient use of organizational resources and the acquisition of new skills. Higher education institutions have the capacity to involve different actors and stakeholders, focusing on obtaining and implementing better techniques and technologies in the production and distribution processes of the goods produced by agribusinesses. The gearing of these components in production systems is essential for agribusinesses to generate conditions that allow them to have a value generation chain and its articulation to the supply chain.

Interdependency relationships described above will result in the development of new competitive advantages and organizational and functional capabilities, so that the supply chain in which is integrated grows and increases its profitability in a harmonious way, reaching international markets in which they can export the goods produced and acquire raw materials at competitive prices. Cooperation is crucial for agribusinesses to be competitive in the markets in which they compete and to generate progress in society.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the analytical reflective approach of the research, it can be extracted that: (1) the elements, resources and capacities, are few variables studied within the organizations, regardless of their nature, evidencing the inadequate use of the terms of classic disciplinary references such as current, praxis and systematization of these in the agricultural production units, socially impacting the strategic management of the companies, disadvantaged by the sustainable conditions (environmental, social and economic) that developing countries go through. To this end, it is imperative the identification, planning and rethinking of the articulation of these variables, so that they generate lasting competitive advantages over time to suit the dynamics and requirements of the global environment.

(2) Data reported in practice and research findings placed clear that the elements have purposes that relate to the organization, while resources process the input elements into to the system, and the capabilities are key to obtaining skills and abilities of human talent, which must evolve to develop competitive advantages, these being related to each other.

(3) The reference literature confirms the priority of creating an enabling environment to take relevant decisions on the management of elements, resources and managerial capacities, taking advantage of market

opportunities, achieving synergies with business networks, clusters and stakeholders. Establishing links and complementary relationships between them will be crucial for their sustainability, regional and local governments should support these efforts, even assist in designing and implementing integrated systems articulating the strategic management of human talent, associated with value chains with a resource-based vision, to ensure adaptation to global abrupt changes.

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