



# Competitive resources in international entrepreneurship: a qualitative analysis of export enterprises

**Recursos competitivos no empreendedorismo internacional: uma análise qualitativa em empresas exportadoras**

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**Abstract:** The theoretical perspective of the resource based view has contributed to the understanding of strategic management and entrepreneurs actions. Given its significant relevance, this article aims to identify the competitive resources developed by international entrepreneurs of exporting companies. A multiple case study was carried out with four companies located in the Brazilian Northeastern semi-arid region. We carried out 31 interviews and analyzed them along with documents and bibliographic material. Content analysis was supported by the ATLAS.ti software. The resources knowledge, team, liquidity, brand, production, quality and relationships stand out in the results. Therefore, the tangible and intangible nature of resources is evidenced and reveals the importance of the development of resources for internationalization by international entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** Resource based view; Internationalization; Adaptive theory.

**Resumo:** A perspectiva teórica da visão baseada em recursos vem contribuindo para a compreensão da administração estratégica e das ações de empreendedores. Diante da sua significativa relevância, este artigo tem por objetivo identificar os recursos competitivos desenvolvidos por empreendedores internacionais de empresas exportadoras. Um estudo de múltiplos casos foi realizado com quatro empresas localizadas no semiárido do Nordeste brasileiro, assim, 31 entrevistas foram realizadas e analisadas em conjunto com documentos e material bibliográfico. A análise de conteúdo foi apoiada pelo software ATLAS.ti. Os recursos conhecimento, equipe, liquidez, marca, produção, qualidade e relacionamentos são os que se destacam nos resultados. Portanto, a natureza tangível e intangível dos recursos é evidenciada e revela a importância do desenvolvimento de recursos por parte dos empreendedores internacionais para a internacionalização.

**Palavras-chave:** Visão baseada em recursos; Internacionalização; Teoria adaptativa.

## 1 Introduction

Contemporary companies are facing challenges that demand a strategic orientation from their leaders. This trend contributes to the understanding of both the organizational idiosyncrasies, and the internal environment forces needed to achieve greater performance than local and international competitors.

Competitive resources support internationalization (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994) by adding competitive advantage. The resources not only have to be heterogeneous and immobile, but they also have to be valuable, rare, inimitable and irreplaceable (elements from the VRII model; Barney, 1991).

Further, the company has to be organized in a way as to be able to explore them, constituting thus the VRIO model (Barney, 2002). In that sense, the financial, physical, human and organizational assets are resource categories. As for capabilities, they are viewed as internal attributes of the company that enable the coordination and exploitation of resources, while skills favor the implementation of strategies (Barney, 2002).

For the international entrepreneur (IE), the development of competitive resources becomes essential to conquer the global market and to be

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distinct from rivals. The development of competitive resources (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994) is present in EI (Zahra & George, 2002).

Some IE resources such as, the brand, facilities and knowledge, can be developed along the trajectory of the company by the entrepreneur himself (Ribeiro & Pimentel, 2009). The challenge is to identify sources and maximize resources for after acquiring them, it is possible to raise the competitive business standard of a company (Calicchio & Marcondes, 2016; Popadiuk & Ricciardi, 2011).

More recent studies, such as McDougall-Covin et al. (2014); Peiris et al. (2012); Schweizer (2013); Shirokova & McDougall-Covin (2013); and Sigfusson & Harris (2012) indicate the need to explore the international entrepreneurship theme. In emerging countries, the studies on that theme are embryonic and have high potential to contribute to the advancement of this scientific field.

When considering those factors discussed in the literature, this article aims to reveal the resources that bring competitive advantage for companies that export their products to international markets. Foreign buyers are characterized by high demand for product quality, for services provided with punctuality, and by requiring the exact quantity purchased upon delivery. The development of tangible and intangible assets proves to be an essential skill in this type of business, demanding attention and skills from its leaders.

In that context, this study seeks to identify the competitive resources developed by international entrepreneurs of exporting companies. Therefore, this study's development is justified for it intends to contribute to the academic panorama by generating knowledge about the role of competitive resources in international entrepreneurship.

To achieve that goal, the qualitative approach was adopted for the analysis of four companies located in the northeastern, semi-arid region that exports fruit to international markets. The information was obtained through interviews with leaders and advisors, as well as from the documents and bibliographic material examined with the support of the ATLAS.ti software.

The theoretical framework is presented in the next section and is followed by the detailed explanation of the methodological procedures. Lastly, the results are revealed and the paper is concluded with closing remarks.

## 2 Theoretical background

The existence of certain resources provides a unique outlook on opportunities as well as risks. Managers not only need to have adequate resources to face competitors, but need to use them differently, as if the strategy itself was a theory (Barney, 2002).

The theoretical perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV) has been explicitly or implicitly

contemplated in the main internationalization approaches (Kovacs, 2009). Penrose (2006) realized that, since 1959, companies have needed competitive resources in order to face external forces and maintain their necessary growth rate. The economic gains from their growth were also identified as an opportunity to strengthen business. This perspective inspired Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1991), leading them to generate substantial knowledge on the subject.

The heterogeneity and imperfect mobility of resources underpin the reach of the competitive advantage. Those two criteria, plus the requirement of analyzing the competition's anterior and posterior limits, form the four conditions to attain sustainable competitive advantage (Peteraf, 1993).

The concept of dynamic capabilities is suggested by Teece et al. (1997). This approach embraces the premise that the organization experiencing changes can achieve competitive advantage if it has the ability to "reshape" its capabilities in appropriate timing and space. Griffith & Harvey (2001) adopt that perspective for international business transactions, making it possible to identify how the RBV explains the formation of competitive advantages as a result of the existence of special resources.

Competitive resources are essential in internationalization and the entrepreneur's role is paramount in its development. The shortage of competitive resources could derail the concretization of negotiations with foreign buyers (Keupp & Gassmann, 2009).

In accord with the objective of this study, Chart 1 shows the main competitive resources reported in the international entrepreneurship and business literature reviewed. The analysis of the bibliographic references identified essential intangible assets such as commitment, knowledge, creativity and innovation, experience, leadership, social networking and responsiveness. Entrepreneurial activities are essential to exploiting such resources and can be interpreted in the VRIO model as the "O" (Organization) — the ability to be organized in order to exploit resources to acquire competitive advantage (Barney, 2002). Moreover, Chart 1 makes it possible to see that intangible resources make up most of the set of assets of companies that internationalize.

The physical infrastructure, financial resources, location, fiscal incentives from the host country, and human resources form the *pool* of tangible resources. These advantages, by nature, contribute in the activities of production, sale, trade, and transfer of assets (Sharma & Erramilli, 2004).

Using and transferring resources are strategic capabilities of the entrepreneur (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1987). Resource allocation in different countries (Johanson & Vahlne 1977; Vernon, 1966) and the relationship with suppliers (Dunning, 1988; Johanson

& Vahlne, 2009) through governance of assets located in different countries, yield transactional benefits and lower transaction costs (Dunning, 1988). The aforementioned Chart 1 summarizes the main resources that enable internationalization.

The managers' commitment to the market is considered an intangible asset. International relations between firms require commitment to resources (Sharma & Erramilli, 2004), plus commitment to the decisions that depend on the entrepreneur's experience (Andersen, 1993). However, it is of no use to develop resources when one does not know how to strategically position them for the competitive advantage of the company (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977) nor adapt them to the needs of the business (Schweizer et al., 2010).

As for the mode of entry into the foreign market, besides tangible resources, the knowledge linked to human resources is crucial (Andersen, 1993). However, in agent-mediated negotiations, the opportunity to approach and gather more knowledge about the target market is forfeited, unlike in the direct entry mode (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). In international entrepreneurship, unique resources define whether the firm will have a sustainable internationalization, which in turn depends on the entrepreneur's ability to develop them (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994).

Finally, it is noted that there is a similarity between the IE models presented by Oviatt & McDougall (1994) and Zahra & George (2002). In fact, in both studies, the authors emphasize the power of the resources in achieving competitive advantage. Such understanding is also shared by Mtigwe (2006),

which presents resource advantage as an indicator in the constitution of IE. Thus, allocable assets and the transfer of mobile resources collaborate and facilitate the negotiations between countries. Further, innovation is another type of competitive resource, which is circumstance dependent and can be implemented incrementally (Porter, 1999), and is related to creativity (Butler et al., 2010).

### 3 Methodological procedures

Because of this study's purpose, the internationalization process was examined retrospectively, comprising a longitudinal research as recommended for IE studies by Kiss et al. (2012). In view of the complex nature of this phenomenon, the ATLAS.ti software version 7 was employed to support the qualitative data analysis.

Following the study of each of the companies, comparison tests among the companies was conducted and is titled "cross cases analysis" (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). The case study approach is characterized by featuring an in-depth analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2001) and has several selection levels (Merriam, 1998). For this study, four levels were intentionally adopted, namely, region, economic sector, companies and individuals.

In the first stage, the Brazilian semiarid region was studied because: (i) it is a peculiar geographical area that can generate academic insights; (ii) eight out of the nine states that make up that region are part of the Northeast — a site lacking in research development and scientific/technological resources; (iii) this work belongs to part of a research group that has been making efforts to investigate Northeastern businesses;

**Chart 1.** Main competitive resources that enable internationalization.

Nature	Competitive resources	Authors
Intangible	Commitment	Andersen (1993); Johanson & Vahlne (1977)
	Knowledge and information	Andersen (1993); Ferreira et al. (2010); Johanson & Vahlne (1977, 2009); Oviatt & McDougall (2005); Porter (1999); Sharma & Erramilli (2004); Vernon (1966)
	Creativity and innovation	Butler et al. (2010); Dimitratos & Plakoyiannaki (2003); Porter (1999); Oviatt & McDougall (1994); Zahra & George (2002)
	Experience	Andersen (1993); Dhanaraj & Beamish (2003); Johanson & Vahlne (1977, 2009); Lam & White (1999); Schweizer et al. (2010)
	Leadership	Dhanaraj & Beamish (2003); Porter (1999)
	Relationship networks	Ferreira et al. (2010); Dimitratos & Plakoyiannaki (2003); Johanson & Vahlne (2009); Oviatt & McDougall (1994); Porter (1999); Schweizer et al. (2010)
	Responsiveness	Bartlett & Ghoshal (1987); Vernon (1966)
Tangible	Physical structure	Johanson & Vahlne (1977); Sharma & Erramilli (2004)
	Financial resources	Johanson & Vahlne (1977); Vernon (1966)
	Location	Dunning (1988); Lam & White (1999); Vernon (1966)
	Host country incentives	Dunning (1988); Porter (1999); Root (1994); Vernon (1966)
	Human Resources	Andersen (1993); Lam & White (1999); Porter (1999); Vernon (1966)

Source: Prepared by the authors (2015).

(iv) and because of the researchers' commitment to the improvement of that region.

In a second phase, the prominence of fruit cultures as Brazilian exports of this region stood out. Between January and September of 2011, fruit exports accounted for US\$ 206 million in revenue (Brasil, 2011), a very significant value for the region. Given the economic performance and local natural vocation for this type of crop, the choice to study the fruit-growing business segment was made.

In the third stage, the number of fruit-culturing companies to be selected was estimated in order to construct theories through multiple case studies as according to Eisenhardt (1989). Four companies representing the states of Bahia, Ceará, Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Norte were selected. These states account for approximately 100% of the total fruit exports from the semi-arid region (Brasil, 2011).

Individuals and cases were selected according to the convenience criteria due to readily accessible information (Merriam, 1998). As for the selection of the companies, the following parameters were considered: (a) be located in the cities of greater fruit volume export; (b) have management headquarters in any of the semi-arid municipalities; (c) have export revenues in the US\$1 to US\$100 million range; (d) have at least eight years of activity in the trade due to the longitudinal analysis; (e) have originated (founded) in the Brazilian semi-arid; (f) be considered a large company by SEBRAE in the classification defined according to the number of persons it employs (SEBRAE, 2011); and (g) have study-relevant information available.

Special Fruit is the oldest company in the market while Ara Agrícola has only eight years of activity. Agrícola Famosa employs 5,000 people and Agro Melon employs 500, but both have the melon as their main export product.

It is noted that the representatives for Agrícola Famosa, Special Fruit and Ara Agrícola authorized the disclosure of their company's name for this research by signing the consent form. The Mossoró-RN exporter is the only exception to that, therefore, to ensure the confidentiality requested by their representative, the company is hereafter referred to as "Agro Melon".

Regarding the respondents, preference was given to those who had information on the competitive dynamics of the semi-arid region, on the segment in which they operate, and on the decisions concerning implementation of investments for international strategies. The number of respondents was defined when the categories reached the saturation point appropriate to meet research objectives (Paiva & Leão, 2011), i.e., 31 individuals.

As a qualitative study, with interest in the nature of the phenomenon, different data collection techniques were used, among them, semi-structured interviews,

literature review and document analysis (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

The interviews were gathered in two different occasions, recorded and transcribed, yielding a total of 1242 minutes of audio content with an average of 40 minutes per respondent. After the first primary data collection (1st stage), the information was analyzed in an exploratory manner, thus, few inconsistencies and contradictions were identified prompting the return to the field in order to validate and consolidate data interpretation. Through this technique, 30 respondents were interviewed once and 1, the commercial manager from Agrícola Famosa, was interviewed a second time.

The interviews took place in Mossoró-RN; farms located on the state line between RN and CE; and in the cities of Petrolina-PE, Juazeiro, Bahia and Recife-PE. Most happened individually except for two which were conducted in a group setting; namely, P6, which included the participation of respondents 6, 7, and 8; and P16 with respondents 18 and 19.

Documentation analysis is also appropriate for this type of study. Thus, the secondary data — printed and digital — were obtained from the interlocutors during interviews, and from governmental websites, institutional websites, and the websites of the companies surveyed.

The bibliographic research is comprised of theses, dissertations and articles related to the Mossoró-RN/Icapuí-CE and the Juazeiro-BA/Petrolina-PE hubs. The material available in the digital format was analyzed in ATLAS.ti and classified by the system as documents P30 to P45 (codes assigned by the software when receiving files).

Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted at Brazil Melon in Mossoró-RN, which has operational and agricultural structure features similar to Agro Melon. The commercial manager was interviewed in order to improve the interview script built on the theoretical framework and to gain valuable experience while perfecting the dialogue in order to facilitate data collection from research participants (Merriam, 1998). The completion of the pilot study provided benefits such as: correction and re-elaboration of some question items; identification of key industry players and issues that had not been contemplated; discovery of insights that contributed to the construction of the interview script for representatives of the organizations in that sector.

Upon completion of the pilot study, one of the authors participated in the International Irrigated Tropical Fruit Fair (Expofruit) in June 2012 to approach and meet industry stakeholders.

Finally, the notes from the pilot study, and its primary data collection (interviews), were recorded in the digital field diary in a Microsoft Word file format. Doubts, information discrepancies, reflections,



contact information, among other data were reported in the journal, thus collaborating in the organization of the interviews and revealing missing gaps about the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

With concern for these gaps, content analysis was adopted (Bardin, 2011) to identify connections, existing codes and categories in the interview transcripts. The ATLAS.ti software supported this stage of the research. One analysis phase occurred simultaneously with data collection for being essential for qualitative studies (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Finally, in order to achieve scientific rigor, validation and reliability criteria were adopted, namely: triangulation; research corpus construction; clear, rich and detailed descriptions; feedback from informants (communicative validation); and surprise and reflexivity (Paiva & Leão, 2011).

## 4 Results

The data are presented in two stages; the first reveals the expressiveness of resources in each of the four companies, and the second stage reports data on the cross-examination of cases.

### 4.1 Individual examination of companies

#### 4.1.1 Agrícola Famosa (AF)

Agrícola Famosa is the largest international exporter of melon, has tax registration in the Icapuí-CE municipality, and holds 20,807 hectares. The company owns five farms that together total 14,999 hectares and rents eight more that make up 5,808 hectares (Agrícola Famosa, 2012).

It is a *born-global company* (Rennie, 1993) established in 1995 to export melon. This strategic position was inherited by the experience acquired by one of the founding partners when he used to manage his own trading company.

The company's founders demonstrated skills in the development of competitive resources that sustain internationalization. Figure 1 shows the features most emphasized by the subjects participating in the research, namely: knowledge (and foreign language), team (and marketing), liquidity, quality, production, brand and relationships.

Intangible assets — knowledge, foreign language, quality, brand and relationships — get more attention at the expense of tangible ones, a reality that favors the achievement of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, 2002).

#### 4.1.2 Agro Melon (AM)

Agro Melon was established in September, 1997, it is considered the second largest producer of melon in the region, and features 1,000 hectares. Their tax address, administrative office, and part of their farms are situated in Mossoro-RN, plus they own another production unit in Ceará.

The company was established to export, an internationalization positioning imprinted by the experience and training of its founder. It is a *born-global company* that has been exporting since its first year (Rennie, 1993). In the beginning it exported indirectly by supplying Del Monte, in its fifth year through a partnership, and finally independently on its eighth year.

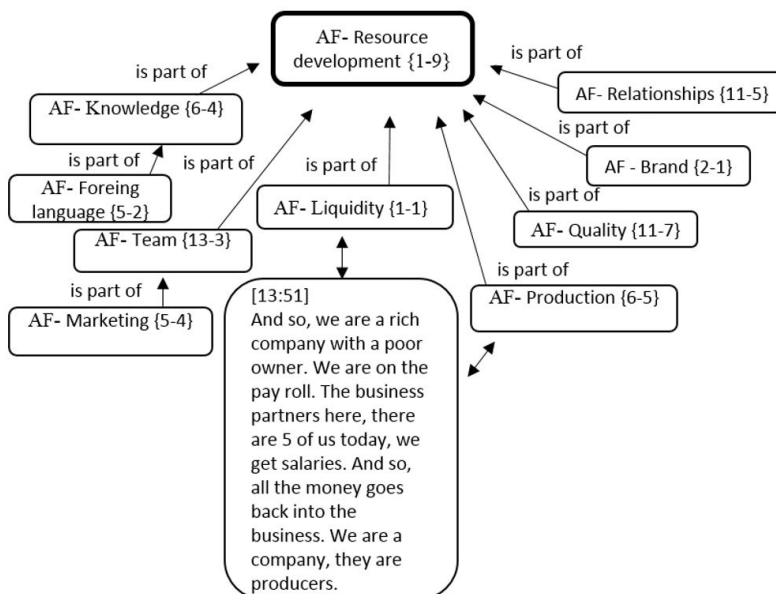


Figure 1. Agrícola Famosa Resources. Source: Prepared by the authors.

The Agro Melon entrepreneur, besides being a bold marketing mentor, is competent in developing resources, such as: knowledge, association, foreign language, brand, production, team, liquidity, quality and relationships (Figure 2).

Similar to the results found for Agrícola Famosa, most of the features highlighted in the Agro Melon interviews — knowledge, association, foreign language, brand, quality and relationships — are intangible and enable the construction of competitive advantage, as pointed out by Oviatt & McDougall (1994).

### 4.1.3 Special Fruit (SF)

Special Fruit is recognized as a successful company with over 1,700 employees and 600 hectares dedicated to the production of mangos and grapes

(Special Fruit, 2012). Although internationalization was not its initial intention, the company can be classified as a born global (Rennie, 1993), having quickly entered the foreign market.

With regards to competitive resources, Special Fruit is a classic case of efficiency. The founder of the company arrived in the city of Juazeiro-BA with scarce organizational resources, starting out in a farm cooperative of the Curaçá project to end up as a business owner after acquiring the farm, expanding it, and becoming a medium-sized business entrepreneur, thus becoming the administrator one of the largest developments in the region. He accomplished that by relying on team, knowledge, brand, production, quality and relationships (Figure 3). Like the two companies previously presented, the intangible resources also received special attention from the entrepreneur.

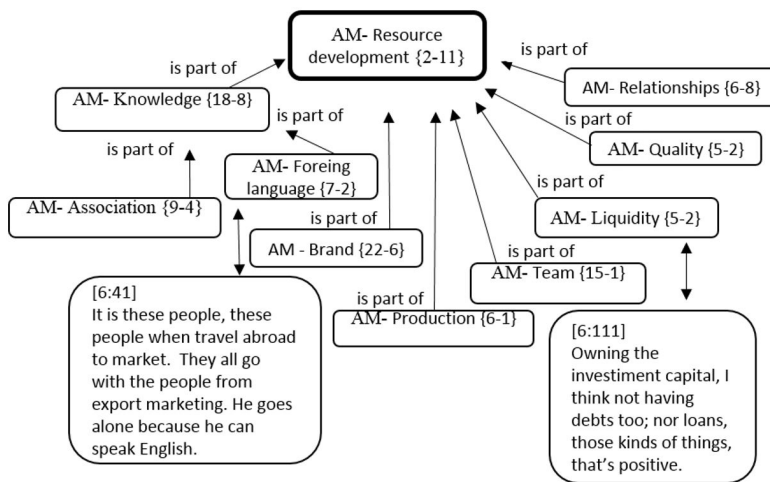


Figure 2. Agro Melon resources. Source: Prepared by the authors.

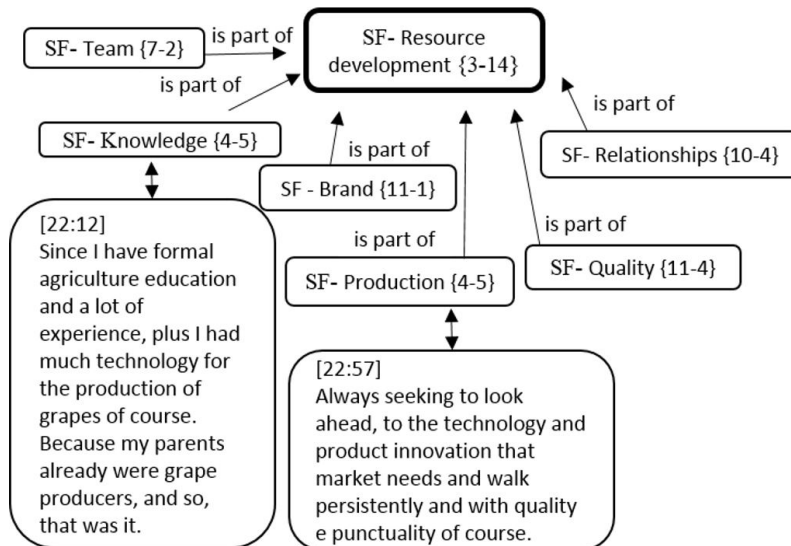


Figure 3. Special Fruit resources. Source: Prepared by the authors.

The existence of certain resources facilitates the mode of entry into the consumer country and the meeting of the international clients' requirements (Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003; Sharma & Erramilli, 2004). The entrepreneur who has the competence to develop and manage them properly has more chances of bringing the company to an early entry into the international market (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994).

**4.1.4 Ara Agrícola (ARA)**

Among the four companies analyzed, Ara Agrícola is distinguished for being the youngest and for being a strategic family-run business unit (Barney, 2002). The farm where it is located was acquired in 2004 with the aim of exporting seedless grapes — the only product grown since its inception (*born global* - Rennie, 1993). During harvest season, this enterprise employs approximately a thousand employees (Interviewee-PEeBA\_16, 14 27; 14:54).

The father used to work as an agricultural entrepreneur in cotton culturing in Limoeiro-PE. The actual history of the ARA Enterprise owner, however, goes back to his civil engineering student days when he started his first business as a construction subcontractor of apartment homes projects (Interviewee-PEeBA\_30, 27:8). As the business evolved, the Recife based company was established on several fronts, namely: real estate development projects, industrial manufacturing, agriculture and energy (ARA Empreendimentos, 2012).

This study adheres to researching the Ara Agrícola agribusiness unit, located in Petrolina-PE, that is recognized as one of the largest and strongest exporters in the region (Interviewee-PEeBA\_17, 15:21).

Since Ara Agrícola is a unit of a larger business, it already started in the industry with a set resources.

But in order to become stronger, the leaders developed new features and improved the existing ones. Knowledge, foreign language, team, liquidity, brand, quality, production and relationships are the developed resources that received strong emphasis in their entrepreneurial activities (father and son), as seen in Figure 4.

Thus, in line with the companies already analyzed, intangible resources received more attention from leaders, which increased chances of gaining competitive advantages. Such results are in line with Barney (2002), and Oviatt & McDougall (1994).

**4.2 Cross case analysis**

Knowledge, team, liquidity, brand, production, quality and relationships are the resources developed by entrepreneurs from Agrícola Famosa, Agro Melon, Ara Agricultural and Special Fruit during the internationalization process (Chart 2). These resources are the common factors to all of the companies. The emphasis on intangible assets — potential sources of differentiation (Barney, 1991, 2002) — is obvious and is paramount for the international entrepreneurship approach where the purpose is to aggregate value (Dimitratos & Plakoyiannaki, 2003; Mtigwe, 2006) and gain a competitive edge (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Zahra & George, 2002).

Knowledge can be enhanced during internationalization through the learning of the entrepreneurs. According to the views of Oviatt & McDougall (2005), knowledge, together with technology, increases the speed of internationalization. Schweizer et al. (2010) point out that experience complements knowledge and together they help the company meet the standards of global buyers by promoting the foreign market

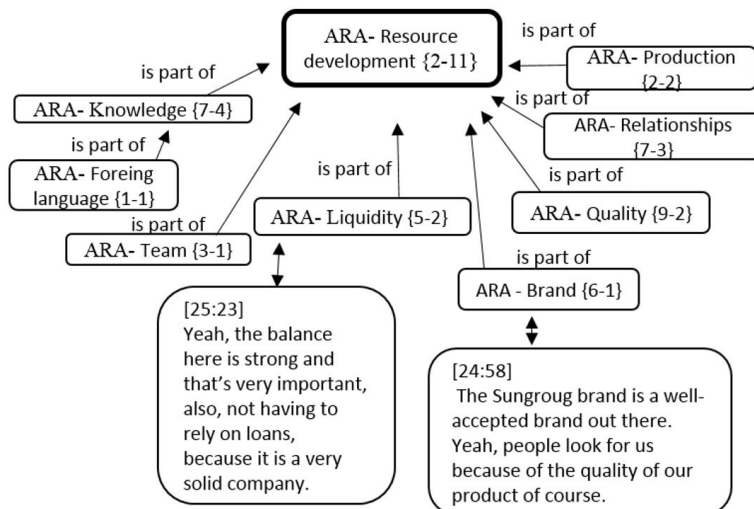


Figure 4. Ara Agrícola Resources. Source: Prepared by the authors.

**Chart 2.** Definition of competitive resources properties.

<i>Properties</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Agrícola Famosa</i>	<i>Agro Melon</i>	<i>Special Fruit</i>	<i>Ara Agrícola</i>
<b>Knowledge</b>	Foreign language	X	X		X
	Partnerships		X		
<b>Team</b>	-----	X	X	X	X
	Marketing	X			
<b>Liquidity</b>	-----	X	X		X
<b>Brand</b>	-----	X	X	X	X
<b>Production</b>	-----	X	X	X	X
<b>Quality</b>	-----	X	X	X	X
	Quality: certifications	X			
<b>Relationships</b>	-----	X	X	X	X

Source: Prepared by the authors.

entry process. That understanding is also advocated by Tondolo et al. (2008) and supported by the data obtained in this study.

Foreign language proficiency is considered a subcategory of knowledge. Surveys conducted in Brazil show that the lack of proficiency in the host country’s language is a deterrent to internationalization (Ribeiro & Pimentel, 2009). In most of the companies studied, the leaders got ahead of negotiations exactly by mastering the foreign language — knowledge which favored marketing and networking. Special Fruit was the only exception because the owner is not proficient in the English language and always needed a translator or a marketing manager to conduct the negotiations.

Promoting team development supports the internationalization of the company due to trade requirements and the need to comply with certification specifications. Several authors stress the need to emphasize human resources when seeking internationalization (Andersen, 1993; Lam & White, 1999; Porter, 1999; Vernon, 1966). The results achieved reinforce the arguments of Kiss et al. (2012) regarding the importance of assembling a work force suitable to the activities related to the business’ focus, with the entrepreneur as the catalyst of its development.

The data analysis revealed the entrepreneurs’ efforts to reach out to and appreciate the team. The majority of employees that work in agriculture have low educational level while those with formal education work as supervisors, managers and administrators. The leaders interviewed are sensitive to these profiles and try to foster the development of the worker’s commitment.

The liquidity to which respondents refer is associated with the organizational freedom from the lack of financing debts. The relative availability of financial resources is a tangible asset, essential in the production assigned to foreign markets (Johanson & Vahlne 1977; Vernon, 1966), and is likewise shown to

be important in the fruit segment. Special Fruit is the only one that does not focus on liquidity as a priority in the management of the organization, but it does take a posture of minimizing and controlling costs. That same attitude is found in other entrepreneurs of the companies analyzed.

The brand as an intangible asset (Barney, 2002) interrelates with reputation (Ribeiro & Pimentel, 2009). Reputation consolidates itself as a differentiating factor earned after a certain time of business activity and is a source of competitiveness (Kay, 1996). Such view is supported by the findings.

The term “production” translates to tangible assets involved in the operations that yield the final product. Land, machinery, packing house, irrigation, and wells are some of the items that make up production. Without the improvement and upgrade of those physical structures, a company would hardly become able to compete with rivals in the international context, therefore, the fact that all the leaders of the analyzed firms concentrated on developing such resources is observed in this study (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Sharma & Erramilli, 2004). That set of tangible resources do not differentiate an exporter from the other, but are rather essential for a company to compete globally in this market segment.

An agricultural product becomes competitive when it has quality, which is a basic requirement for it to be exported. Certifications help companies attain qualifications to engage in international trade. Therefore, quality emerges from the analysis of data as an intangible resource developed by the entrepreneur with the team’s support, and favors the product’s acceptance into the global market. Such evidence is consistent with the research by Tondolo et al. (2008). There are several international certifications for food and, depending on the buyer’s country, the exporters must prove they are certified before closing a deal with the customer.



Among the properties of the identified resources, the characteristics expressed by liquidity and foreign language were not identified in Special Fruit. On the other hand, Agrícola Famosa, Agro Melon and Ara Agrícola have all displayed both of those properties in the analyzed data. In regards to liquidity, Special Fruit's lack of emphasis could possibly be due to the organizational culture influenced by the entrepreneur who was born in Japan and abides to some customs and values of his country. Moreover, concerning foreign language knowledge, Special Fruit's founder limited himself to working in agriculture and did not dedicate time to the study of foreign languages. That simply has to do with his life's story and his career choices.

Armed with the information obtained from the empirical analysis, the consolidation of what is already a consensus in international entrepreneurship literature is observed (Dimitratos & Plakoyiannaki, 2003; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Welch & Welch, 2004). The empirical data show the relevance of competitive resources — and the entrepreneur's ability to coordinate them, as in the VRIO model (Barney, 2002) — in supporting and achieving competitive advantage (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Given the data, when it comes to exporting, the development of competitive resources as a dimension of international entrepreneurship is granted.

## 5 Conclusion

With the purpose of identifying the competitive resources developed by international entrepreneurs of exporting companies, the essential resources discovered are knowledge, team, liquidity, brand, production, quality and relationships. In addition, the importance of the entrepreneur's role in developing them is noted, and it can be said that, resource development is a dimension of international entrepreneurship.

In Agrícola Famosa, the world's largest melon exporter, knowledge (and foreign language), team (and marketing), liquidity, quality, production, brand and relationships were prominent competitive resources, whereas for its competitor (Agro Melon), knowledge, partnerships, foreign language, brand, production team, liquidity, quality and relationships was the resource set identified.

Ara Agrícola stands out as a strategic business unit of a diversified family-run company. Its resources — financial, knowledge and business experience — were paramount to doing business abroad in their first year of operation. Similar to Special Fruit, Ara Agrícola's entrepreneur prepares his succession by giving control of the fruit sector of the business to his oldest son, who since 2009, manages the agribusiness unit.

One can also say that business networking is to international entrepreneurship as strategy is to the strategist. They should not be ignored; relationship

building is a necessary attitude in international entrepreneurship.

It should be noted that competitive resources are those that indeed set companies apart. In this context, resources can be of tangible as well as of intangible nature, because although there is a consensus among scholars that intangible resources offer best conditions for achieving competitive advantage, tangible resources are found to be essential to leverage intangible ones, especially the financial resources that relate to liquidity.

It is believed that this study contributes to the International Entrepreneurship research field by identifying resources from two dimensions and by identifying how the interaction between these dimensions aids the achievement of competitive advantages. The entrepreneurial dimension is constituted by the knowledge and business relationships of the entrepreneur and the business dimension is formed by team, liquidity, brand, production and quality. Furthermore, the fostering of the relationship between both dimensions is what drives and strengthens the company that operates in the global market. Such understanding is essential, but was not reported by researchers in previous studies.

Therefore, when carrying out further research, the analysis of the interaction between the two dimensions (entrepreneurial and business) is recommended when studying competitive resources in IE. The investigation of the relationship between tangible and intangible competitive resources, in order to verify how tangible ones create positive conditions for achieving competitive advantage through intangible ones, is also a recommendation for future studies.

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