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THE RELATIONSHIP OF ATTITUDE TO BEHAVIORAL INTENTION: CASE STUDY IN THE MESOREGION OF TOLEDO IN PARANÁ, BRAZIL

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the behavioral experiences of family members through the attitude construct of the Theory of Planned Behavior in decision-making for diversification or specialization of production. To meet the proposed objective, research of an applied and exploratory nature was used, with field research procedures, with a qualitative approach, being the object of study of family members with shared and specialized production. The results indicate that there is no intention on the part of family farmers with a diversified productive character to migrate to specialization, on the other hand, a small portion of farmers with trained specialized production intend to diversify their production, but the volume is low compared to specialized ones. who has no intention of changing his productive style.

Keywords: Human Behavior; Productive Crops; Theory of Planned Behavior.

Resumo

Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar as intenções comportamentais dos agricultores familiares através do constructo de atitude da Teoria do Comportamento Planejado na tomada de decisão pela diversificação ou especialização da produção. Para atender ao objetivo proposto, utilizou-se a pesquisa de natureza aplicada e exploratória, com procedimentos de pesquisa de campo, com, com abordagem qualitativa, sendo o objeto de estudo os agricultores familiares com produção diversificada e especializada. Os resultados indicam que não há intenção por parte dos agricultores familiares de caráter produtivo diversificado em migrar para a especialização, por outro lado, uma pequena parcela dos agricultores com produção especializada demonstrou ter intenção de diversificar sua produção, mas sendo o volume baixo comparado aos especializados que não tem intenção de mudar seu estilo produtivo.

Palavras-chave: Comportamento Humano; Culturas Produtivas; Teoria do Comportamento Planejado.

INTRODUCTION

Family farming is one of the most expressive and expressive forms within the formats of agriculture and in the economy of Brazil. This space, composed of routine challenges, no matter what, the family farmer constantly needs to make decisions. At the same time that management is one of the characteristics and one of the central elements of family farming, it is also characterized as one of the greatest challenges, mainly due to the fact that these family farmers are constantly in decision-making processes, from the simplest and routine, to the most complex and challenging.

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Due to this complexity in decision-making, not restricted to family farming, methods, techniques and theories have been experimented to help decision-makers to choose the most acceptable or satisfactory alternative. Among these, there is the Theory of Planned Behavior, which has already proven its effectiveness in several studies of the most diverse sciences.

Based on this, this research aims to identify the expressiveness of the attitude construct, one of the three constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior, in the decision-making of family members in the mesoregion of Toledo in Paraná - Brazil.

To achieve the objective of this research, through a qualitative approach, define the Toledo mesoregion due to its expressiveness within family farming. The field research covered 40 family farmers, from the 20 municipalities covered by the Instituto de Desenvolvimento Rural do Paraná da Regional de Toledo (IDR), with two family members per municipality, one with differentiated production and the other with specialized production.

The work is divided into three sessions, the first with theoretical approaches to the themes, addressing family farming, diversification and specialization of agricultural production, decision-making and the Theory of Planned Behavior. The second part is composed by the detailing of the methodology used to reach the objective of the study. Next, the results and discussions on these results are contained. And finally, I understood them.

The results of this research open gaps and motivate new researchers for future research that cover decision-making in family farming, as well as the Theory of Planned Behavior.

FAMILY FARMING

For Perondi and Schneider (2019), family farming has only gained relevance in the Brazilian academy by the mid-1990s; until then, research focused on peasant production or small production. In the same vein, Abramovay (1997), one of the main Brazilian researchers on family farming, states that for a property to be considered as family farming it must present the three following basic attributes: family management, property and work.

Family farming can thus be defined as the cultivation of land carried out by small rural owners, using labor force essentially from the family nucleus (PLOEG, 2016; NEPOMOCENO 2021; NASCIMENTO, AQUINO, DELGROSSI, 2022).

In the same vein, Schneider (2003, p. 29) defines family farming as: "[...] a social form recognized and legitimized in most developed countries, in which the agrarian structure is mostly composed of farms in which family work assumes a key importance." Lamarche (1993) adds that family

farming corresponds to a unit of agricultural production, in which property and work are closely linked to the family. These three interdependent factors necessarily engenders more abstract and complex notions, such as heritage transfer and the reproduction of exploitation.

DIVERSIFICATION AND SPECIALIZATION OF PRODUCTIVE CROPS

Farmers with properties of equal or identical sizes, with similar cultural characteristics, customs and beliefs, residing in the same municipality often work with different productive models: some opt for agricultural diversification while others prefer to specialize their production (ROSA, MCELWEE, SMITH, 2019).

Similarly to Hoffmann *et al.* (1987), Senger (2016, p. 24), in his thesis, considers that a property is specialized when "50% or more of the income originates from a single rural activity, the farm was considered specialized; the higher this value, the greater is its specialization." For Hoffmann *et al.* (1987, p. 125) "diversification is understood as the production of various market products, and in this case the farmer will depend on various sources of income."

Schäffer (2011) states that diversification aims to adapt family farming, in a planned manner, to the largest number of options that allow, in case of crop failure, to ensure its stability and income generation through the most diverse productive options. On the other hand, some producers opt for production specialization, that is, when farmers choose to improve and work focused on just one crop (HOFFMANN *et al.*, 1987; SCHNEIDER, 2003).

Production specialization can often provide conditions to obtain gains due to scale, better use of processing, storage and transport facilities, reducing costs. When compared with diversified systems, specialized systems usually require simpler management and less intense labor. Another positive factor of specialization in a particular agricultural activity is that more in-depth and specific knowledge about the activity in question is obtained (HOFFMANN *et al.*, 1987; SENGER, 2016).

DECISION MAKING

Decision making is part of everyday life, whether in the simplest, such as deciding what clothes to wear to work, or more sophisticated decisions, such as financial investments. In both cases, people make their decisions guided by their experiences, beliefs, perceptions, information, their own knowledge, and external factors (SIMON, 1963; SANTOS; BULGACOV, 2021).

In agriculture, especially family farming, as in any other institution, decision making is also present and challenging the farmers' daily lives (ESAU, 2019). Many variables influence farmers' decision making, such as the size and location of the farm, schooling level, crops, customs, age, gender, spouse's influence, trust in the market, and credibility in the government (SOK *et al.*, 2020).

Some peculiarities differentiate decision-making in agriculture from other institutions, mainly due to its risks. Since this sector works with live production, the activities depend on biological cycles, are subject to production seasonality, climate variations, product perishability, market and economic instability (ESAU, 2019).

Thus, farms, like any other enterprises, often need to go through decision-making, which can be considered one of the most important, complex, and challenging moments for the decision maker. It is precisely because of this great challenge and individuals' limitation in making decisions that the Theory of Planned Behavior becomes an ally and gains space among family farmers when deciding between crop diversification or specialization.

THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

Proposed by Professor Icek Ajzen in 1985, the Theory of Planned Behavior seeks to explain the individual's intention in performing a certain behavior. Since the intention to act is the immediate determinant of behavior , the stronger the intention to engage in a certain behavior, the more likely it will be performed (AJZEN, 1991; 2005; SENGER, 2016).

The Theory of Planned Behavior admits that there are independent constructs that determine behavioral intention (AJZEN, 1991).

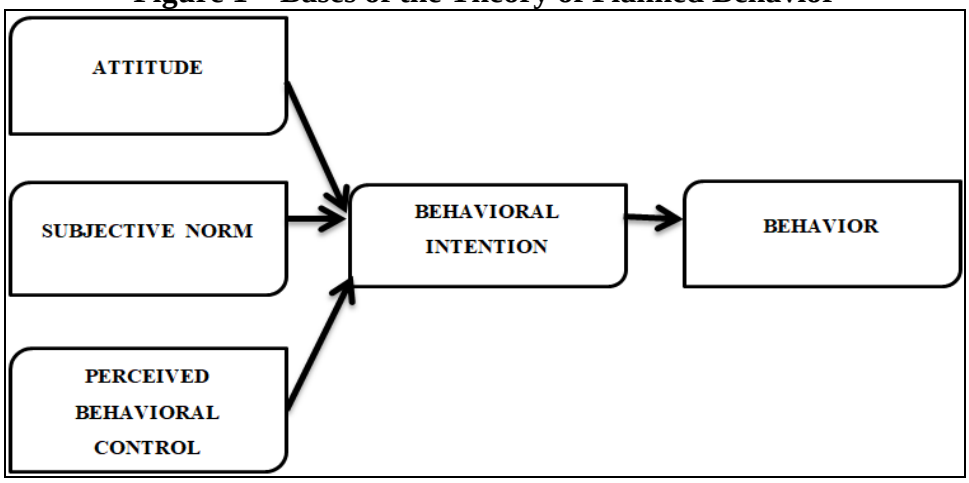
It assumes that motivational factors can influence behavior, followed by measuring the amount of effort individuals are willing to invest to carry out the action, and then verify to what extent they are willing to carry out such action (AJZEN, 1991). Thus, the theory takes on as a core aspect the individual's intention to perform the action (SENGER, 2016; AJZEN, 2020).

Ajzen (1991) highlights three aspects on which human behavior is based: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and beliefs about control (Figure 1). Behavioral beliefs are linked to the possible consequences of individuals' behavior, those antecedents that lead to a favorable or unfavorable behavioral attitude.

Normative beliefs are associated with expectations of perceived behavior concerning other people, a social pressure, of how others will react to the behavior in question, which result in the subjective norms. Finally, beliefs about control, which concern the elements that can facilitate or hinder

behavior performance, are the antecedents that lead to perceived behavioral control (MARTINS; SERRALVO; JOÃO, 2014).

Figure 1 – Bases of the Theory of Planned Behavior



Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from Ajzen (2005).

Attitude, focus of this study, is the degree to which an individual evaluates favorably or unfavorably a certain behavior, and is connected with the judgment of consequences (AJZEN, 1991; 2005).

This construct is elaborated and based on a person's perception of what may be true about a given topic (AJZEN, 1991). Perception of attitude may or may not be based on data, information, facts, knowledge, or be an emotional reaction to some action, which may be based on the individual's values and beliefs (SENGER, 2016).

Ajzen (2005) considers the attitude construct as one of the predictors of behavioral intentions and has its origin on two variables linked to behavioral beliefs between probability and consequence evaluation. Behavioral beliefs correspond to the beliefs an individual has based on a specific behavior. In turn, behavioral evaluation refers to the positive or negative evaluation people make of the possible consequences from this behavior.

METHODOLOGY

As a qualitative research, we sought to understand, detail and propose conclusions based on explicit and implicit data from the interviewed family farmers (BERG, 2001). It is also an applied research, given the alignment of the general objective with the sample (PEREIRA; MEDINA; MARTINS, 2020).

To achieve the proposed objective, we conducted an exploratory research aiming to get closer to the universe of family farmers, and to explore as much data as possible. In terms of procedures, this study can be characterized as a field research due to the interviews conducted with family farmers.

The field research included 40 family farmers, from the 20 municipalities covered by the Toledo Regional Rural Development Institute of Paraná (IDR), with two family farmers per municipality—one with diversified production and the other with specialized production. This region is one of the main agricultural centers of family farming in the country, thus justifying our choice (IBGE, 2017).

The Toledo Regional IDR consists of the following municipalities: Assis Chateaubriand, Entre Rios do Oeste, Formosa do Oeste, Guaíra, Iracema do Oeste, Jesuítas, Marechal Cândido Rondon, Maripá, Mercedes, Nova Santa Rosa, Ouro Verde do Oeste, Palotina, Pato Bragado, Quatro Pontes, Santa Helena, São José das Palmeiras, São Pedro do Iguaçu, Toledo, Terra Roxa and Tupãssi.

Thus, our choice for this location is justified by the expressiveness of family farming, in which one can find family farmers who opt for crop diversification and those who decide for specialization.

For this reason, and because the researcher was unfamiliar with most of the locations surveyed, the family farmers to be interviewed were chosen by the municipal IDR officers or by representatives of the agricultural departments of the municipalities. Classification and definition of these family farmers as diversified or specialized was done by the IDR technicians, and in their absence, by employees of the agricultural departments.

To maintain participant anonymity and the integrity of the interviews, when tabulating the data, the farmers were randomly identified as “interviewees” plus a number from one to 40 —one to 20 the diversified family farmers, and from 21 to 40 the specialized farmers—followed by the letter D, for diversified, or the letter E, for specialized, according to the following examples: “interviewee 1 D,” “interviewee 21 E.”

After data collection, we used the Structural Equation Models (SEM), which aims to consolidate a combination of factor analysis with multiple regression analysis, to simultaneously measure a series of dependency relations (BABIN; HAIR; BOLES, 2008; MALHOTRA, 2012).

Among the SEM methods, we chose the Partial Least Squares (PLS), which aims to maximize the oscillations illustrated in the dependent constructs and thus evaluate the quality of the data based on the measurement model properties (MALHOTRA, 2012).

Tabulation and analysis were performed on the MAXQDA version 2022, according to Nodari *et al.* (2014), software used to analyze qualitative data and mixed methods in academic, scientific and commercial research. In this phase, the tests were performed in two stages: the first aimed at adjusting the measurement model to verify reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity; the second

aimed at verifying the reflective structural model used. For Jarvis, Mackenzie, Podsakoff (2003), in this model the direction of causality goes from the construct to its latent indicators.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The attitude construct totaled 221 MAXQDA codes. Remembering that this construct refers to the degree to which an individual evaluates favorably or unfavorably a certain behavior (AJZEN, 1991).

The interviewed family farmers can express favorable or unfavorable propositions regarding changing or maintaining the current production model, which may be related to factors such as the cost-benefit of change, availability of resources, previous experiences, social pressure, among others. Propositions favorable to change can be linked to factors such as the possibility of increased productivity, improved product quality, crop diversification, reduced environmental impact, and appreciation of local products, among others. These propositions can be expressed with a high expressiveness, demonstrating enthusiasm and confidence about the change (MARANGON *et al*., 2020).

In turn, propositions unfavorable to change can be linked to factors such as financial risk, lack of technical knowledge, lack of incentives, regional tradition and culture, among others. These propositions can be expressed with a high expressiveness, demonstrating concern and resistance about the change (FERNANDES *et al*., 2019).

Interview coding revealed six important propositions related to behavioral intention within the attitude construct: two favorable and four unfavorable propositions for changing the current production model. The six propositions listed by the interviewees obtained distinct expressiveness (high, medium and low). Perceptibly, family farmers view changing the current production model as disadvantageous.

The four variable variables to negative factors, two had strong expression, influences the change in the productive format, with a large scale, and, the decrease, difficulty and financial insecurity also had great expression. Good yields with the current production format and the inability of the property to change production were listed, but with a much lower expression than the first two. Thus, demonstrating the concern of family members with financial issues.

In the positive elements for changing the current production format, linked to the attitude construct, expressiveness was similar, the first with a little more expression was the evaluation of how the change in the production format was carried out, the second a little less expressive, but linked in the first, it was more financial income and greater financial security with the change, confirming again the financial connection with the attitude construct.

Regarding the intention to change or maintain the current production model, the attitude of the family farmers interviewed can be influenced by both favorable and unfavorable propositions. If the favorable propositions are more expressive and convincing, we may observe a greater intention towards change. Conversely, if unfavorable propositions are more expressive and present, we may see a greater intention to maintain the current production model (MARANGON *et al*., 2020).

Importantly, the family farmers' attitude towards changing or maintaining the current productive model can be influenced by several contextual factors, such as the availability of financial resources, public policies, weather conditions, market demand, among others. Thus, one must consider all these factors when assessing the attitude and intention of farmers towards change.

Perceptibly, family farmers with diversified production have no intention of changing their productive model, for they consider this change disadvantageous, well, the 20 family members with production have grown, they have no intention of changing their production format. In turn, most of the specialized family farmers disagree that a change in production style has no advantages, as only eight among them considered it disadvantageous.

In analyzing the profile of specialized family farmers who see changing the current productive model as disadvantageous, we note that these farmers have larger land areas and greater resource availability. Thus, we can consider that more established family farmers have no intention of modifying the productive reality on their property.

As few specialized family farmers considered changing their current productive model as disadvantageous, we can assert these farmers intend to increase the number of crops on their properties. During the interviews, family farmers with diversified production stated repeatedly that changing their current production model would be wholly disadvantageous, justifying such assertion by listing factors related to financial issues, as producing only one crop would result in less income input.

Some also argued that since their properties are structured for diversification, an organization that occurred gradually, such a change would require new or more resources, which would probably make ownership unfeasible. Moreover, several family farmers have well-defined niche markets, and this change would require opening new spaces and commercial partnerships.

In this regard, the financial reduction, difficulty, and insecurity is the second most expressive element considered by the interviewed family farmers.

Information that corroborates the previous results that the family members of diversified characters have no intention of changing their current productive format. Again, this is because they believe that changing their productive model is disadvantageous and will result in reduced income, and financial difficulty and insecurity.

Financial reduction, difficulty, and insecurity are important factors that influence the attitude of family farmers regarding changes in the current productive model. Financial instability can be a limiting factor for adopting new techniques, technologies or agricultural crops. Lack of financial resources can lead to difficulty in acquiring inputs and equipment necessary for production, as well as difficulty in investing in new ventures (MARANGON *et al*., 2020).

Most diversified family farmers explained that the more crops they produce, the greater the income. According to them, this phenomenon occurs because they have smaller areas of land and limited resources. Several among them stated wanting to further increase their number of crops, but being unable to do so due to limited resources.

Financial insecurity can also be a barrier to change, as family farmers may be unwilling to take on financial risks or invest in something that offers no guaranteed return. Moreover, decrease in income can be a demotivating factor for change, since farmers may not want to risk an even greater income loss (FERNANDES *et al*., 2019).

Data referring to specialized family farmers are similar to those already discussed, showing greater intentional possibility within this group to change their productive model, as only three among them indicated reduced income, financial difficulty and insecurity as a result of such change.

In analyzing the profile and reality of these three family farmers, we observed that all have small areas of land structured for this type of production, making it unfeasible to include more crops. The other specialized family farmers stated the opposite. For them, increasing the crops produced would result is more income and, consequently, greater financial security. Thus, family farmers, especially those with diversified production, consider having good financial yields with multiple crops, which is why they have no intention of changing their production style.

In this regard, again, the various family members would ensure satisfaction with the current productive form, aimed at satisfactory and lack of intention to change linked to financial income.

Thus, financial reduction, difficulty, and insecurity are factors to be considered when evaluating the attitude of family farmers regarding changes to the current productive model. Public policies and private initiatives should offer solutions to reduce these barriers, such as financial incentives, credit lines, financial advising, among others. This would encourage change and the adoption of more sustainable and efficient practices within family agriculture, contributing to improve the quality of life of farmers and to protect the environment (FERNANDES *et al*., 2019).

Divergent information, when compared with the other information, results from specialized family farmers who reported having good financial yield with the current productive model. This phenomenon does not mean that this group of family farmers has no intention of changing, for an

increase in crops will result in more financial inputs. Rather, it only asserts that almost half of the specialized family farmers are getting good financial returns from their crops.

Satisfaction with good financial returns is significant in all diversified family farmers, which, again, points to a lack of intention towards productive change, and almost half of the specialized family farmers are also satisfied with the income from their productive model. However, this data does not allow us to affirm that specialized farmers do or do not intend to change their productive model. They may be satisfied with the returns from their crop, but they know that more crops will generate more income.

Moreover, the few specialized family farmers who reported being satisfied with the good financial returns may indicate that others in this group intend to introduce more crops to increase income. Thus, financial issues are directly linked to decision-making for family farmers. At this point, it becomes clear that financial issues are the main factors defining the attitude construct of family farmers.

The fourth unfavorable proposition touches precisely on this issue, with family farmers pointing to the unviability of rural properties in case of changes in the productive model. Although the least expressive unfavorable proposition within the attitude construct, this factor should be considered when analyzing the behavioral intention of these farmers.

Unlike the three-information discussed above, we found no unanimity among diversified family farmers, as two did not comment on such unviability. However, this result does not confirm an intention of changing the production model, only that these farmers believe such change will not result in the unviability of their properties.

Conversely, the few specialized family farmers who pointed to the unviability of rural properties if productive change occurs is similar to the previous results. This demonstrates that this group of family farmers are better structured and have more resources, even working only with one crop. In analyzing the four unfavorable arguments within the behavioral intention related to the attitude construct, we observed that a portion of diversified family farmers do not intend to change their current production model. Such refusal is mainly linked to financial factors.

In turn, the little expressiveness in the arguments of specialized family farmers related to the unfavorable propositions point to this group's intention of changing their production model. However, to confirm this logic we must analyze the positive prepositions regarding this intention—which are two, both with a good expressiveness index.

During the interviews, we sought to identify in the family farmers' answers arguments in favor of changing the current production model. These findings confirm the hypothesis previously raised that specialized farmers intend to change their production model, given the number of family farmers in this

group who believe that such change would be advantageous. This is because the expressiveness by specialized family farmers in the negative prepositions was low, whereas here 16 specialized farmers see the change as positive.

As most diversified family farmers do not consider this change advantageous, suggesting that this group has no intention of implementing it, this phenomenon corroborates the previous results.

Interestingly, the two-family farmers who consider it advantageous to change their productive model have also proposed disadvantageous elements. Empirically, we could argue that these two-family farmers understood the question as changing to more crops or other crops than those currently produced, and which could generate more income, and not as changing to only one crop. Based on the interviews, these family farmers also assume that changing their production model would solve their lack of labor force.

Moreover, specialized family farmers evaluate as advantageous the promotion of more crops as a strategy to increase income and, subsequently, to have greater financial security. In this regard, the second favorable proposition for changing the productive model is based on the possible resulting increase in income.

Interestingly, none of the diversified family farmers consider that changing their production model would result in more income, demonstrating that this group has no intention of implementing such change.

Conversely, the information features the highest rate of specialized family farmers of all those analyzed regarding behavioral intention linked to the attitude construct. This expressiveness points out, once again, that specialized family farmers intend to increase their crops to generate greater income input. Thus, the results related to the attitude construct show that diversified family farmers evaluate the change in production model as unfavorable, whereas specialized family farmers evaluate it as favorable.

Moreover, the satisfaction of the diversified family farmers is directly linked to financial issues. Their context of small areas of land, few resources and good financial returns result in no intention of changing their production model. It is from this economic perspective that the specialized farmers develop the intention for productive change. According to them, more crops represent higher inputs and greater financial security.

CONCLUSIONS

The methods adopted by the present study achieved results capable of answering the proposed research problem, namely, investigate the intentions of family farmers regarding decision-making for

permanence or change of their production design, analyzed by the attitude construct proposed in the Theory of Planned Behavior.

First, the attitude construct proved to be efficient and expressive in measuring the decision-making of these farmers. Moreover, the construct reveals that diversified family farmers have no intention in switching to specialization, whereas some specialized family farmer demonstrate intention to diversify their corps.

But even if a portion of specialized farmers intend to change their productive model, this intention has low expressiveness. Despite almost all family farmers in this group expressing interest in producing different crops, mainly to have more input and greater financial security, their wanting to remain in the current productive model is stronger.

As for the reasons for changing the productive model, the participants pointed mainly to the disadvantages, especially financial ones. Family farmers who expressed intention to switch models fear facing a reduced economic return as a result of this change. On the other hand, the less favorable to changing models attribute this decision to possible greater income inputs.

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