



Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurial orientation and religion: the Pastor as an entrepreneur

Orientação empreendedora e religião: o Pastor como empreendedor

Orientación emprendedora y religión: el pastor como emprendedor

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Abstract

In recent decades Brazil has witnessed radical changes in its religious composition, with rapid expansion of Evangelical communities. Within these communities there exist various religious associations in which pastors play a key role. Using the theoretical framework of Entrepreneurial Orientation, and based on interviews with 20 Neopentecostal pastors in Belo Horizonte/Minas Gerais, this article shows that, in their work developing their churches, pastors exhibit characteristically entrepreneurial behavior (innovation, proactivity, competitive aggressiveness, risk-taking, autonomy). This study further demonstrates the importance and explanatory power of the Entrepreneurial Orientation theoretical framework and may open new research perspectives for social managers, social scholars and practitioners in related fields.

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Keywords: Entrepreneurial orientation; Entrepreneurship; Religion; Pastor; Independent Neopentecostal churches

Resumo

O Brasil tem presenciado, nas últimas décadas, transformações radicais em sua composição religiosa, com rápida expansão das comunidades evangélicas. No interior destas comunidades, proliferam diferentes agremiações religiosas, onde os pastores exercem papel-chave. Este artigo, de natureza teórico-empírica, investiga a atuação de 20 pastores neopentecostais, de pequenas igrejas independentes, localizadas na região metropolitana de Belo Horizonte, apropriando-se da mais recente literatura sobre Orientação Empreendedora. Ao fazer isso, mostra que os pastores, visando o desenvolvimento de suas igrejas, combinam, sob diferentes maneiras, atributos inerentes ao comportamento empreendedor (capacidade de inovação, proatividade, agressividade competitiva, capacidade de assumir risco, autonomia). Ao iniciar, no Brasil, o estudo empírico do empreendedorismo religioso, o artigo abre novas perspectivas de reflexões e investigações na área.

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Palavras-chave: Orientação empreendedora; Empreendedorismo; Religião; Pastor; Igrejas Neopentecostais Independentes

Resumen

En las últimas décadas, Brasil ha visto cambios radicales en su composición religiosa, con una rápida expansión de las comunidades evangélicas. Dentro de estas comunidades existen varias asociaciones religiosas en las que los pastores desempeñan un papel clave. En este estudio, de enfoque

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teórico-empírico, se analiza la actuación de 20 pastores neopentecostales, de pequeñas iglesias independientes, ubicadas en la región metropolitana de Belo Horizonte, con base en los más recientes estudios sobre Orientación Emprendedora. Se muestra que, en el trabajo de desarrollo de sus iglesias, los pastores exhiben un comportamiento típicamente emprendedor (capacidad de innovación, proactividad, agresividad competitiva, toma de riesgos, autonomía). Este trabajo, al iniciar los estudios empíricos de la iniciativa empresarial religiosa en Brasil, abre nuevas perspectivas de reflexión y análisis en el área.

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Palabras clave: Orientación emprendedora; Iniciativa empresarial; Religión; Pastor; Iglesias neopentecostales independientes

Introduction

In recent decades Brazil has witnessed radical changes in its religious composition, with rapid expansion of Evangelical communities. During the 1990s these communities almost doubled, from 13 million members in 1991, to over 26 million in 2000 (Pierucci, 2004). Coincident with this period of Evangelical expansion has been not only on-going competition between the Evangelical and Catholic churches to recruit believers, but also a strong and growing rivalry between the Evangelical churches themselves. As noted by *Editora Abril* (2012) magazine, Evangelical churches attract believers where the Catholic Church had not prepared to congregate and adapted the message to various audiences. Currently, more than 42 million people – 22% of the Brazilian population – identify as members of an evangelical faith (Pierucci, 2011). The growth of the Brazilian Evangelical community has been especially pronounced with respect to Neopentecostal churches. Called by one scholar the true protagonist of the admirable expansion of Protestantism in Brazil (Pierucci, 2011, p. 476), and known to be especially popular among the poorest Brazilian communities (Rivera, 2010, p. 60), the Neopentecostal movement is generally recognized as ‘the hot issue’ of Brazilian religiosity (Passos, Zorzin, & Rocha, 2011, p. 709). Pacheco, Ribeiro da Silva and Ribeiro (2007, p. 55) have even gone so far as to call the expansion of Brazilian Neopentecostalism the most important event within Christianity in the last century. It has been noticed by Pacheco et al. (2007) that, should the current growth trend continue, within several decades – no more than 30 years – Brazilian Evangelicals will number the same as Brazilian Catholics.

In Brazil the term ‘Evangelical’ is a generic one, more or less synonymous with the term ‘Protestant’ (Pierucci, 2000, p. 284). ‘Evangelical’ thus encompasses all churches of historical Protestantism (Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Adventists, Mennonites, etc.), plus Pentecostal churches (Pierucci, 2011, p. 475). Both the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), in its Demographic Census of 2010 (<http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/>, retrieved on 16 Jan 2014), and the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, in its Map of Religions (2010), classify each of these churches and religious denominations as Evangelicals, distinguishing the Pentecostal Evangelicals (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, Assembleia de Deus, etc.), the Evangelicals of mission (Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc.), and other Evangelical categories. According to Pacheco et al. (2007) and Rabuske, Santos, Gonçalves and Traub

(2012), especially since the late 1970s Pentecostal churches have differentiated into two basic types: the classical Pentecostals – including Congregação Cristã no Brasil, Assembleia de Deus, Evangelho Quadrangular, Deus é Amor, O Brasil para Cristo, etc. and the Neopentecostals. Pierucci (2000, p. 288) has characterized churches belonging to the latter category as doctrinally uncomplicated and as offering a very efficient form of religiosity in practical terms. Neopentecostal churches base their worship on the specialized offering of magical-religious services of a therapeutic and thaumaturgical nature, centered on promises of divine concession of material prosperity, on physical and emotional healing, and on solving family, affective, love, and sociability problems (Rabuske et al., 2012, p. 264). Within the Neopentecostal category there are both recognized institutions – such as Universal do Reino de Deus, Internacional da Graça de Deus, Mundial do Poder de Deus, Renascer, and Sara Nossa Terra (Pierucci, 2000, p. 288) – and independent churches (Rabuske et al., 2012), many of which are small in size. More than 14 million Evangelicals, about 35% of all Evangelicals in the country, attend independent Neopentecostal churches, according to an inference drawn from the IBGE demographic census. It is this portion of the overall Brazilian Evangelical population, the independently organized churches, that is the context of the current study.

In this religiously vigorous and competitive environment, a specific actor stands out, the Neopentecostal pastor, who is the focus of the present investigation. This paper, a novelty in the area, seeks to analyze the entrepreneurial behavior of the Neopentecostal pastors responsible for the creation and management of small independent churches located on the periphery of Belo Horizonte/Minas Gerais and in the metropolitan area. As noted by Mariano (2003, p. 120), these pastors are mainly inserted into ‘an autonomous Pentecostalism’, and are responsible for forming small and independent communities scattered mainly on the periphery of the great urban centers and organized, [mostly,] around the charismatic attributes of its leaders (Pacheco et al., 2007, p. 55). For this, we use the theoretical approach of Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) (Pearce, Fritz, & Davis, 2010; Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, 2009). In this approach, entrepreneurs, whether religious or not, can be identified by their ability to combine flexibly different but related methods, practices, and behaviors in the service of improving the performance of their organizations (churches, in the current case). Such entrepreneurs share a capacity for innovation, proactivity, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy, and are

generally willing to take risks (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Pearce et al., 2010; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005).

As noted by Engelbert, Fisman, Hartzell and Parsons (2014, p. 3), pastors are “important determinants of church growth.” Many analysts view the active stance of these actors as contributing to the growth of their congregations. For Mariano (2008) and Pierucci (1996, 2006a, 2008), Neopentecostal pastors differentiated their churches from other evangelical churches when they began to act more actively and professionally, seeking to attract more believers. Demonstrating more commitment to and militancy in spreading their message (Mariano, 2008), they redirected energies from unproductive processes and unpopular services to more effective tactics and methods, in the way that is typical of business rationality (Iannaccone, 1995; Mariano, 2008). It is worth emphasizing that such behavior would be typical of entrepreneurs in competitive organizational environments, inserted in the productive market.

While investigating the relationship between entrepreneurship and religion has been considered a productive field of research since Weber’s 1905 Protestant Ethic (Dougherty, Griebel, Neubert, & Park, 2013; Nwankwo, Gbadamosi, & Ojo, 2012; Wiseman & Young, 2013), in the view of many researchers such relationships have not yet received the scholarly attention they deserve (Audretsch, Boente, & Tamvada, 2007, 2013; Griebel, Park, & Neubert, 2014; Rietveld & Burg, 2013). Studies investigating these subjects are in fact “surprisingly sparse and inconsistent” (Dougherty, Griebel, Neubert, & Park 2013, p. 401) in both international (Dougherty et al., 2013; Finke, 1997; Frigerio, 2008; Iannaccone, 1995, 1997) and national contexts (Serafim, Martes, & Rodrigues, 2012). No literature on the subject of religious entrepreneurship can be found in the Portal de Periódicos da Capes, in specialized magazines in Brazil (RAC, RAE, O&S, RAUSP & BAR, etc.), or in the proceedings of relevant academic conferences (EnAnpad, Eneo, SemeAd & Egepe). At the same time, it has been observed that the subject of entrepreneurial orientation “has been neglected as a research topic in nonprofit sectors” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 219), of which the religious sector is one (Pearce et al., 2010). Although sporadic evidence suggests its efficacy, “the role of entrepreneurial behavior in a religious context is unexplored” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 228). On Web of Science, the only paper available on the subject of religious entrepreneurship is that by Pearce et al. (2010), and this deals with a very specific context. As these authors note, “a tighter conceptualization and measurement of the individual entrepreneurial behaviors is necessary” in the religious field (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 238).

This study is divided into four parts. In Section ‘Theoretical basis: entrepreneurial orientation and pastors as entrepreneurs’, the theoretical basis of entrepreneurial orientation is presented. Section ‘Research methodology’ describes the methodology of the present study, and Section ‘Research findings’ the results of the investigation. Finally, in Section ‘Final Considerations’, we offer final considerations of the value of the present research. This study begins in Brazil a series of empirical studies based on field research on religious entrepreneurship, a topic that has been generally overlooked in the literature, including literature published by organizational analysts.

Theoretical basis: entrepreneurial orientation and pastors as entrepreneurs

As Iyer points out (2016, p. 395), approaching the economy of religion as an established field of knowledge is still relatively new. Among the many interesting features of this research area is religious organization, and how behavior within and between religious organizations is analogous to business behavior, including the phenomenon of competition. Assessing the future prospects for this new field – the study of religious economies – Iyer stresses the importance of organizational theory, in particular the principles of marketing and management in the study of religion. For Iyer (2016, p. 433), “as religious organizations are themselves becoming more professional in the way they are presenting and marketing themselves to populations globally, there seems to be a very large gap in studies that blend theories from the marketing and management literature, to examine their behavior and operations more closely.” In this context in which religious organizations become more professionalized, the theme of religious entrepreneurship stands out.

The study of Engelberg et al. (2014) is one of the few studies that have carried out a microeconomic analysis of religions centered on the figure of the pastor. The authors worked with a sample of Methodist congregations from Oklahoma during the period 1961–2003, and showed that the pastors greatly influenced the performance of their religious organizations. To measure performance, they used as an indicator the growth in the number of congregants. The authors saw a strong causal relationship between the pastors’ performance and the growth of their churches. The study raises the question of whether or not it is possible to evaluate the entrepreneurial capacity of the pastor. In seeking to answer this question we decided to adopt the entrepreneurial orientation (EO) approach.

Recognized as an important construct of strategic management in recent years (Covin, Green, & Slevin 2006; Rauch et al., 2009) and a key ingredient for organizational success (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996), the EO approach “provides organizations with a basis for entrepreneurial decisions and actions” (Rauch et al., 2009, p. 763). It can be conceptualized as a set of distinct, but related, methods, practices (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005) and behaviors that have the following dimensions: (i) capacity for innovation, (ii) proactivity, (iii) competitive aggressiveness, (iv) ability to take risks, and (v) autonomy (Pearce et al., 2010).

The ability to innovate “refers to a willingness to support creativity and experimentation in introducing new products/services, and novelty, technological leadership and R&D in developing new processes” (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, p. 142). It implies creating new combinations that improve the operations of institutions, or provide them with a new basis to meet the needs of consumers (Lyon, Lumpkin, & Dess, 2000; Pearce et al., 2010; Rauch et al., 2009; Wang, 2008; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). Schumpeter (1982) was a pioneer in emphasizing the role of innovation in the entrepreneurial process. In coining the term “creative destruction,” he emphasized how market structures are corrupted by the introduction by entrepreneurs of “new

combinations” of unprecedented goods and services. These new combinations change the resources of companies, forcing them to grow (Schumpeter, 1982, p. 105). “Little has been done to address innovation in a not-for-profit context, particularly so among religious organizations” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 239). Even small religious organizations can be innovative and creative (Pearce et al., 2010).

Proactivity is the ability to anticipate future problems, needs, or changes (Hughes & Morgan, 2007; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Lyon et al., 2000; Rauch et al., 2009; Wang, 2008; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). The proactivity is “forward-looking” (Lyon et al., 2000, p. 1056) and refers to the fact that people are pioneers in their actions (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). In a market context, entrepreneurial proactivity involves introducing new products or services ahead of competitors, acting in anticipation of the demand to form the environment (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001; Wang, 2008). According to Pearce et al. (2010), in religious economies proactivity is negatively associated with the performance of churches. This is because in religious contexts proactive behavior is interpreted as disrespectful and as insulting to, even destructive of, the religious tradition. “Consequently, proactiveness [sic] by congregations is discouraged by overarching religious institutions” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 226).

Competitive aggressiveness reflects the “intensity of a firm’s efforts to outperform industry rivals” (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001, p. 431). It refers to behavior aimed at expanding the market share of a given institution (Pearce et al., 2010; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, 2001; Lyon et al., 2000) and how it relates to its competitors (Hughes & Morgan, 2007; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Wang, 2008). It entails, through its “strong offensive posture” (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001, p. 433), conflicts and retaliation (Pearce et al., 2010), and requires a willingness – in a direct and intensive way – to challenge the actions of opponents (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, 2001; Rauch et al., 2009). Several scholars have investigated rivalries between churches (see, for example: Finke, 1997; Finke, Guest, & Stark, 1996; Finke & Stark, 1992) and concluded “that while the preferred form of competition ranges from subtle to overt, all denominations strive to maintain and grow their membership through competitive means” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 227).

The capacity to take risks manifests in the propensity to act, under uncertain future conditions, outside accepted practices and norms (Hughes & Morgan, 2007; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Lyon et al., 2000; Nwankwo & Gbadamosi, 2013; Pearce et al., 2010; Rauch et al., 2009; Wang, 2008). Lumpkin and Dess (1996, p. 144) emphasize that “all business endeavors involve some degree of risk.” These risks range from “safe,” such as depositing money into a bank, to “unsafe,” typically bold actions such as investing in unexplored technologies or introducing new products into new markets (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, 2001). In religious economies, the ability to take risks and navigate uncertainties can be encouraged by belief in divine glory (Nwankwo & Gbadamosi, 2013). Such beliefs have the “potential to facilitate exceptional results, especially in a setting where predictable behavior is characteristically high, such as in church settings” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 227).

Finally, autonomy is the ability of an individual or team (Hughes & Morgan, 2007; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, 2001; Lyon et al., 2000; Rauch et al., 2009) “to take independent action” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 225). It is “the ability and will to be self-directed in the pursuit of opportunities” (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, p. 140). In religious context “congregational autonomy may increase responsiveness to environmental imperatives” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 227). Autonomous pastors and congregations are better able “to identify, develop, and initiate changes in church programs and activities (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 227).

In a quantitative study of entrepreneurial behavior in a religious context, Pearce et al. (2010) investigated semi-autonomous congregations affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Their units of analysis were the congregations. The authors mailed questionnaires to pastors of 493 congregations in the United States, from which they obtained 252 usable responses. They concluded that the investigation of the impact “of entrepreneurial behaviors in religious congregations [. . .] is a valuable undertaking” and, more particularly, that the “innovativeness and autonomy elements of an Entrepreneurial Orientation are more strongly associated with the improved performance of nonprofit religious congregations than proactiveness, risk-seeking, and competitive aggressiveness” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 240). The last three (proactiveness, risk-seeking, and competitive aggressiveness), inclusive, would not provide contributions. Their findings did “not support proactiveness and risk seeking as independent behaviors associated with improved organizational performance” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 239). At the same time, “anecdotal evidence reinforces the theoretical plausibility that religious congregations do not value interdenominational or intercongregational competitiveness” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 239).

The five dimensions of EO focused on here (capacity for innovation, proactivity, competitive aggressiveness, ability to take risks, and autonomy) are related to entrepreneurship insofar as “they contribute to the development and implementation of new resource combinations to improve competitiveness and facilitate entry into new markets” (Pearce et al., 2010, p. 219). As such, they serve as important reference points when analysing the behavior of the pastors.

Research methodology

In 2011 the editors of the Academy of Management Journal declared a new age for qualitative research, one in which “the use of nontraditional data sources” would become of primary importance (2011, p. 235). Such is the case of the present investigation, qualitative (Bauer, 2002; Gil, 1999; Godoy, 1995) and descriptive (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gil, 1999; Godoy, 1995, 2006; Ridder, Hoon, & McCandless, 2009; Soy, 1997; Yin, 2010). Data collection was carried out between April and August 2014, involving 20 pastors responsible for the creation and management of small independent Neopentecostal churches that were active at the time this research was conducted. The churches were all located in the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte/Minas Gerais. In this way, we opted for an “intentional sample” (Eisenhardt, 1989; Meyer, 2001; Ridder et al., 2009). The selection of pastors was

based on three main criteria: (i) the snowball technique (Godoi & Mattos, 2006), in which pastors indicated new interviewees; (ii) ease of access to interviewees, and (iii) ease of access to interviewees. The names of the pastors were changed so as to avoid identification.

Although Eisenhardt (1989) holds that the ideal number of cases for a study such as ours ranges from four to ten, the number used for our study (20) was arrived at based on “theoretical saturation or redundancy” (Duarte, 2002; Gaskell, 2002; Godoi & Mattos, 2006; Godoy, 2006; Hancock, 1998; Voss, Tsikriktsis, & Frohlich, 2002; Yin, 2010). Through in-depth interviews, composed of semi-open questions (Creswell, 2007; Gaskell, 2002) and guided, fluid, non-rigid conversation (Yin, 2010), we sought to identify pastors’ beliefs, attitudes, values, and motivations (Creswell, 2007; Gaskell, 2002; Godoy, 2006), with which we hoped to uncover evidence of entrepreneurial behavior. Altogether more than 51 h of interviews were recorded.

The analysis, recognized as one of the most difficult stages of such case studies (Yin, 2010), comprised examination, categorization and tabulation of evidence to draw conclusions based empirically (Yin, 2010, p 154). The strategy of ‘analytical generalization’ (Meyer, 2001; Yin, 2010) was used. The specific inductive technique used was based on cross-synthesis of the data (Yin, 2010) and included content analysis (see, for example: Bardin, 1977; Bauer, 2002; Campos, 2004; Chizzotti, 2006; Mozzato & Grzybowski, 2011). The process of data analysis took place at different times, including: (i) by listening to each interview, immediately after its realization, in order to evaluate themes and opportunities still unexplored; (ii) in reading the transcripts of interviews, when additional notes were made; (iii) in the categorization of interview responses, and (iv) in the description and final analysis of the data.

One observation deserves special mention up front. All the pastors interviewed characterized as negative a certain entrepreneurial behavior they could identify only in the “other” pastors (never in themselves). One of the interviewees (Humberto) acknowledged the difficulty of capturing research interest constructs in relation to the pastors analyzed. When talking about how pastors often try to attract members of other Evangelical churches by offering them different advantages (financial or otherwise), he stated that “no one likes to comment that does it” (Humberto). “If you ask,” he pointed out, “you will find pastors who speak like this: I do not do this, not at all. But, some other pastors. . .” In effect, all interviewees strove to present themselves to the researchers as “good shepherds.” In this case, behaviors considered by them possibly unethical and inappropriate to the religious context were only performed by other pastors.

Research findings

After analysing our data according to the five behavioral categories of interest, we came to recognize the great importance of innovation capacity. We observed this behavior operating in several actions described to us by the pastors, including three highlighted here. The first is the job offer (Humberto). Pastors offer jobs to believers and potential members as a way to attract

them. Some create employment agencies for this purpose. The second is associated with a drop in tithing percentage. Though little used, this strategy – a novel one in the Evangelical context – meets the wishes of those who seek to pay less for religious services. “If you [. . .] find out you can pay tithing of 9.5% and receive the same blessings from those who pay 10%. Look at [. . .] the implicit capitalist liberalism. Best offer for the same service” (Humberto). Finally, the third relates to support for entrepreneurs. In order to serve entrepreneurs, Gilberto’s church created a specific consultancy for them.

On the other hand, the pastors’ proactivity, that is, the pioneering of their actions (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005), manifests in their search to convert individuals to their church. In this, they employ recruitment strategies ahead of competitors, pursuing emerging opportunities through anticipation of people’s religious demands (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001; Wang, 2008). These strategies include: (i) inviting non-Evangelicals to worship, where they attempt to convert new arrivals using coercive methods or through utilitarian appeals (Abelardo; Edmundo; Fernando); (ii) evangelizing “door to door” (Kaio; Osvaldo; Pedro); (iii) helping Catholics (Damião; Humberto; Kaio); (iv) promoting couples’ meetings (Edmundo; Kaio; Marcelo; Osvaldo; Raimundo; Valdomiro; Zulmira); and (v) creating events in public squares (Cristiano; Damião; Edmundo; Itamar; Raimundo; Ulisses); among others.

Competitive aggressiveness, or the “intensity of a firm’s efforts to outperform [. . .] rivals” (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001, p. 431), is evidenced in nearly all of the pastors’ actions. The strong competitive pressures that exist among shepherds encourage such behavior. Cristiano points out that pastors “tend to watch the church of other pastors, to see if there are many believers, if there are few, if the participation is good or not” (Cristiano). There is “competition as if it were supermarket advertisement” (Fernando). Competitive aggressiveness was one of the entrepreneurial behaviors that was most manifest in the research. Pastors demonstrate it most often in pursuing two important goals.

The first of these goals is the growth of their churches. This occurs mainly through proselytizing members of other congregations. Fernando stresses how “it is easier to seek an already formed believer than to get a person out there to take care.” Many specific strategies are employed to this end: (i) visiting religious leaders of other churches and manipulating them (Abelardo; Edmundo; Humberto); (ii) deprecating other ministries (Cristiano; Edmundo); (iii) inviting Evangelicals from other ministries and offering them incentives to join (Fernando); (iv) sending believers to other churches to recruit new members there (Edmundo); (v) creating ‘revelation campaigns’, inducing members of several churches to move away from there (Abelardo); among others.

The second important goal pastors seek through competitive aggressiveness is ensuring the loyalty of their congregants, thus lowering the chance that they will lose congregants to other churches. In a religious context, overcoming competitors (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001) means not losing them to competing faiths or charismatic leaders. “The greatest fear of the pastors is that their sheep go to another church, enjoy the food they have

there, [“feeling better” (Humberto)] and “stay there” (Ulisses). “Nobody wants to lose a member” (Valdomiro). In pursuit of ensuring congregant loyalty, pastors engage in competitively aggressive behavior. Seven specific behaviors stand out: (i) requiring members to request authorization to visit other ministries (Abelardo; Fernando; Itamar; Kaio; Marcelo; Osvaldo; Valdomiro); (ii) prohibiting external visits and publicly cursing the congregant who seeks such visits (Damião; Edmundo; Kaio; Raimundo; Teodoro; Zulmira); (iii) holding events simultaneously with those held by competing congregations (Damião; Humberto; Osvaldo); (iv) giving leadership roles to the more fortunate believers (Edmundo; Humberto); (v) publicly despising other pastors (Humberto); (vi) discouraging members from opening their own ministries (Kaio); and (vii) promoting within their congregation the idea that believers are spiritually dependent upon the pastor, especially with regards to communing with Jesus (Humberto).

Pastors commonly evidenced their willingness to take risks. One way in which they did so was in their relying upon the contribution of auxiliary pastors. For the communities we studied, auxiliary pastors functioned as something of a double-edged sword: the additional aid and services they could offer both the incumbent pastor and his congregants could potentially boost the rate at which the congregation grew; yet the position of authority auxiliary pastors were expected to assume within a given congregation also increased the chance of conflict between auxiliary and incumbent pastor, which could lead to the ministry’s closure (Cristiano; Edmundo; Fernando; Humberto; Marcelo; Raimundo; Teodoro; Zulmira). “There is a pastor that his auxiliary went out and led the whole church. He had to start everything from scratch” (Zulmira). “Sometimes situations occur where the [auxiliary] pastor takes 100% of the church” (Raimundo). Pastors therefore face the possibility of both risk and reward when taking on an auxiliary pastor, which makes a dilemma out of the decision of whether or not to hire one: they can delegate power at the risk of dividing their churches; or they can retain all power for themselves and risk not growing their church at a competitive enough rate.

Finally, pastors commonly exhibited autonomy, the ability to be independent in their search for opportunities (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). In fact, our criteria for selecting pastors were such that our pool of pastors was more likely than not to include individuals who demonstrated this behavior to a high degree. Ours is a study of independent pastors, many of whom happen to be the very person responsible for the creation of the congregations they currently manage. We note, in summary, how our pool of Neopentecostal pastors was generally able to take advantage of the principal abilities and behaviors associated with an EO, namely innovation, proactivity, competitive aggressiveness, willingness to take risks, and autonomy. We found, moreover, that pastors demonstrated these behaviors in a number of particular ways. Eight such ways stand out.

The first has to do with the way they demonstrated innovation. As stressed by Pearce et al. (2010), religious organizations, even small ones, can be innovative and creative. Neopentecostal churches clearly demonstrate this. Their pastors routinely created new ideas and services. Examples of this from our study

are the introduction of the employment agency (Humberto), the reduction of tithe percentage (Humberto, Kaio), and support for entrepreneurs (Gilberto). These Neopentecostal pastors are, therefore, innovators in their religious context.

Second, we found that the way our pastors demonstrated proactivity runs counter to the expectations set up by Pearce et al. (2010), who argued that this attribute would be negatively associated with the performance of churches. We did not find this to be the case in our study, where the proactivity of pastors contributed to an increase in the number of believers and to increased fundraising for their church. We interpret this discrepancy between our findings and those of Pearce et al. (2010) as arising from the different cultural focus of our two studies. Recall that, in their study several US religious organizations – all “affiliated with a large mainline denomination”, namely the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America – Pearce et al. (2010) hypothesized that entrepreneurial proactivity on the part of pastors would be interpreted by congregants as disrespectful, and as an affront to the traditions they hold dear. In secularized Brazil, however, where de-traditionalization has been increasing (Mariano, 2013; Pierucci, 2004, 2006b), we found pastoral proactivity to be not only a valuable entrepreneurial behavior, but even necessary. Proactivity of the pastor is fundamental to the growth of Neopentecostal church, making it the duty of every Neopentecostal pastor to exhibit this behavior. The interviewee Damião points out that “the kingdom of God must be multiplied. If you have 50, you must have 100. If you have 100, you must have 200. It is our obligation to generate souls. God begs children.”

Third, and regarding competitive aggressiveness, Pearce et al. (2010) noted that churches adopt competitively aggressive practices in order to grow their membership. Neopentecostal churches clearly evidence this when they adopt the most invasive practices. This leads to an important observation. The literature on EO clearly lays out how competitive aggressiveness is related to the efforts of market actors attempting to expand the market for a given enterprise (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, 2001; Lyon et al., 2000; Pearce et al., 2010). The evidence obtained complements this conclusion, in that it suggests that competitive aggressiveness can also manifest in the diligences performed for its own maintenance. Although Pearce et al. (2010) observed this in passing, they did not stress its full importance, which is that discussions of competitive aggressiveness need to be expanded to incorporate the concept notions of behaviors related to market maintenance of enterprises, whether religious or not.

Fourth, Nwankwo and Gbadamosi (2013) and Pearce et al. (2010) have argued that pastors are incentivised to engage in risk-taking behavior by their belief in divine glory. Our study did not find this. Although pastors take risks, our evidence suggests that this behavior is driven by factors other than an entrepreneurial orientation. One of these factors is strong inter-congregational competitiveness, which encourages pastors to adopt risky practices in order to overcome competitors. Another factor is the determination they have to grow their churches, which in turn encourages some pastors to employ help in the form of auxiliary pastors. Furthermore, although the researches of Nwankwo and Gbadamosi (2013) and Pearce et al. (2010)

suggest that willingness to take risks has potential for influences the growth of churches, such outcomes do not seem, as proposed by the authors of these other studies, to be enhanced by benefits derived from predictable configurations. On the contrary, the Brazilian Neopentecostal context is highly unpredictable and plural. Pastors often act in an unexpected way in order to gain advantages. Evidence of this is given by Humberto. In referring to proselytizing practices, he said that they were sometimes “opportunistic,” that is, unplanned. Sometimes, if a pastor “meets a dissatisfied believer, he says: oh Brother! Are you dissatisfied there? Come here! How are you going to serve God with sorrow in your heart?” (Humberto).

Fifth, [Pearce et al. \(2010\)](#) argued that autonomy enabled pastors to respond to environmental imperatives, and allowed them to identify, develop, and initiate changes in their programs and activities. The pastors appeared to be capable of this. Their autonomy allowed them, for example, to be aggressive in the search for Evangelicals and in their responses to the actions of competitors. At the same time, it allowed them to act independently in formulating and modifying strategies that impacted on congregational performance. Examples of this can be seen in the tactics certain pastors employed to grow their churches. Raimundo, for example, promoted meetings of couples and events in public squares. Humberto, in turn, claimed that pastors commercially exploit religious miracles, adopt proselytism, and help non-Evangelicals.

Sixth, and in relation to three EO behaviors, namely willingness to take risks, proactivity, and competitive aggressiveness, [Pearce et al. \(2010\)](#) found that these did not contribute to benefiting church performance. But our research found the opposite to be true. The combination of all three behaviors in a single pastor appears to generate important benefits for the performance of Neopentecostal churches. In fact, it is through these behaviors that pastors obtain new believers by converting or seeking them from other Evangelical churches, preventing loss of members to competitors, avoiding a shortfall in the resources that make it possible to sustain their institutions, increasing fundraising, and enabling financing investments that allow the congregational advance. This relates directly to our seventh observation.

While [Pearce et al. \(2010\)](#) found that a pastor’s capacities for innovation and autonomy are most strongly related to the performance of his church, the present study suggests that it is rather the combination of a pastor’s proactivity, competitive aggressiveness, willingness to take risks, and autonomy that most contributes to the performance of his Neopentecostal church. Of these four, the combination of competitive aggressiveness and autonomy appeared to be the most powerful. This is not to say that we found a pastor’s capacity for innovation capacity to be unimportant. On the contrary, and as we have already discussed, Neopentecostal churches benefit greatly from innovative pastors. Our data simply indicates that innovativeness is proportionately less important than proactivity, competitive aggressiveness, willingness to take risks, and autonomy. They do not allow, however, inferring the benefits and repercussions of its greater application. Sporadic elements point to the possibility that more innovative pastors, for example, could achieve better church performance.

Eighth, and finally, [Pearce et al. \(2010\)](#) found that the congregations they studied devalued inter-denominational and inter-congregational competitiveness. We did not find this in our study. On the contrary, we found that it is precisely because of inter-congregational competition that Neopentecostal pastors employ many of the strategies that promote the growth and maintenance of their churches. In other words, Neopentecostal pastors value inter-congregational competition, and reinforce it. For the pastors, “a church that has another plaque is a competitor” (Benedito). Brazilian religious pluralism and the intense competition resulting from it ([Pierucci, 2006a, 2006b, 2008](#)) seems to require this sort of approach on the part of Neopentecostal pastors.

[Table 1](#) outlines the main theoretical constructs proposed by previous studies and summarizes how they compare to the findings of the present study.

Final considerations

Much as did the study by [Engelberg et al. \(2014\)](#), this paper also analyses an internal factor of religious organizations – the pastors’ entrepreneurial behavior – to help uncover some important dimensions of religious phenomenon in Brazil. First of all, the identification of entrepreneurial behavior in the surveyed pastors is consistent with the greatly expanding Neopentecostal Evangelical communities. The Entrepreneurial Orientation approach thus proves to be a particularly useful tool in analysing the behaviors of these pastors. If, as noted by [Iyer \(2016\)](#), [Engelberg et al. \(2014\)](#), and [Pearce et al. \(2010\)](#), pastors’ behavior can help explain the performance of their churches, then the entrepreneurial stance of Neopentecostal pastors could help explain the rapid growth of Evangelical Neopentecostal churches in the country.

The pastors interviewed managed to increase the performance of their churches. This can be seen, for example, (i) in their ability to recruit new members (by converting people or through proselytizing practices expressed in the competitive dispute by those already converted); (ii) in their ability to prevent the departure of believers; and (iii) in their ability to seek out and obtain resources, financial or otherwise, fundamental to the creation, maintenance, reform and expansion of their churches. It therefore seems clear that pastors of a more entrepreneurial orientation have certain advantages over pastors without this orientation.

Comparing the findings of previous literature ([Pearce et al., 2010](#)) with the results of the present study, we find several points of disagreement. The first of these regards the effects of the pastors’ proactivity on the performance of their churches: we observed a positive correlation between proactivity and church performance, whereas [Pearce et al. \(2010\)](#) did not. The second regards the concept of competitive aggressiveness, which, we argue, needs to be expanded. While previous studies have conceived of competitive aggressiveness as a behavior whose goal is simply the growth of a given institution ([Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, 2001; Lyon et al., 2000; Pearce et al., 2010; Wang, 2008](#)), the results of our study suggest that the concept needs to be extended to include behavior directed at maintaining/sustaining a given

Table 1

Theoretical propositions by previous studies about EO in religious economies as compared to the findings of the present study.

Propositions\Authors of interest	Evidence	Empirical analyses
Religious organizations can be innovative and creative (Pearce et al., 2010)	Confirmed	Neopentecostal churches, even small ones, can be innovative and creative.
Proactivity is negatively associated with the performance of churches. Its manifestation is interpreted as disrespectful to the tradition of the congregants. It is discouraged by religious institutions (Pearce et al., 2010)	Reworked	Proactivity is positively associated with performance of churches examined. Its manifestation is not interpreted as disrespectful by the congregants. Pastoral proactivity is encouraged by Evangelical communities.
Competitive aggressiveness aids in expanding the market share of a given institution (Pearce et al., 2010; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, 2001; Lyon et al., 2000; Wang, 2008)	Confirmed + Extended	Competitive aggressiveness aids in expanding and also maintenance the market share of a given institution.
Churches adopt competitive practices to maintain and grow their membership. These practices range from subtle to overt (Pearce et al., 2010)	Confirmed	The churches examined adopt competitive practices to maintain and grow their membership. These can be subtle, but are more often overt.
A pastor's ability to take risks can be increased by belief in divine glory. Risk-taking has the potential for exceptional results in settings where predictable behavior is the norm, such as in churches (Nwankwo & Gbadamosi, 2013; Pearce et al., 2010)	Reworked	The pastors demonstrated the ability to take risks, although such behavior has not been encouraged by their belief in divine glory. They were certainly influenced by other factors, however, such as congregational competitiveness and their goal of church growth. Although risk-taking behavior has potential for eventually exceptional outcomes, these outcomes will not always derive from predictable configurations.
Autonomy can increase the ability of churches to respond to environmental imperatives. It can make them capable of identifying, developing, and initiating changes in their programs and activities (Pearce et al., 2010)	Confirmed	Autonomy can increase the ability of churches to respond to environmental imperatives. It can make them capable of identifying, developing, and initiating changes in their programs and activities.
Investigating entrepreneurial behavior in the context of religious congregations is a valuable initiative. Churches benefit from the entrepreneurial behaviors of pastors (Pearce et al., 2010)	Confirmed	Investigating entrepreneurial behavior in the context of Neopentecostal churches is valuable. Churches benefit from the entrepreneurial behaviors of pastors.
Capacity for innovation and autonomy are more strongly related to increased performance of churches than are proactivity, willingness to take risks, and competitive aggressiveness (Pearce et al., 2010)	Reworked	Proactivity, competitive aggressiveness, willingness to take risks, and autonomy appear to be more strongly related to increased performance of Neopentecostal churches than is a capacity for innovation. Of these, competitive aggressiveness and autonomy are the most significant.
The ability to take risks, proactivity, and competitive aggressiveness do not contribute to the performance of churches (Pearce et al., 2010)	Reworked	The ability to take risks, proactivity, and competitive aggressiveness do contribute to the performance of Neopentecostal churches.
Congregations do not value inter-denominational or inter-congregational competitiveness (Pearce et al., 2010)	Reworked	Neopentecostal shepherds value inter-denominational or inter-congregational competitiveness. They give importance to it.

market. The third regards the pastor's tendency to take risks. Our study suggests that we need to broaden our understanding of what motivates pastors to take entrepreneurial risks to include such factors as congregational competitiveness and growth. The fourth regards the importance of the combination of risk-taking, proactivity, and competitive aggressiveness in the person of the pastor for improving church performance, which confirms what was proposed by Pearce et al. (2010) on the subject. The fifth regards the role of the combination of proactivity, competitive aggressiveness, willingness to take risks, and autonomy in church performance. This result re-interprets Pearce et al. (2010) reflections that this would result, above all, from the association between innovation capacity and autonomy. Finally, the sixth regards whether or not churches value inter-denominational competitiveness. The churches studied by Pearce et al. (2010)

did not, while the churches examined by the present study did.

The results obtained allow us to extrapolate the specific literature about EO in the elaboration of important additional propositions. As has been noted, the entrepreneurial orientation tends to manifest in individuals deliberately in a planned or intentional way (see, for example: Hugles & Morgan, 2007; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Lyon et al., 2000; Rauch et al., 2009; Wang, 2008; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). EO is therefore the result of deliberate, proactive behavior. Lumpkin and Dess (1996), for example, argue that EO tends to arise when an actor deliberately searches for market opportunities. It is precisely this search for market opportunities that would condition the adoption by individuals of the entrepreneurial behaviors considered more adequate. Indeed, several characteristic behaviors of EO

would seem to imply the intentional nature of EO. Capacity for innovation, for example, which is nothing more than the “tendency to engage in and support new ideas” (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, p. 142), implies intentionality on the part of the actor. Proactivity, too, refers to the ability to anticipate future problems, needs, or changes, and the willingness to act on these anticipations. Similarly, autonomy is “the ability and will to be self-directed in the pursuit of opportunities” (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, p. 140). The results of the present study, however, suggest that we need to rethink the link between EO and intentionality. For instance, our study observed pastors exhibiting entrepreneurial behaviors in response to religious and economic necessity. To the extent that such behaviors arose passively, the EO of our pastors cannot be understood as the result of planning or deliberate agenda setting on their part. Indeed, many of the pastors in our study were forced to adopt an innovative or proactive stance, often aggressive and/or hostile, to prevent the diminution of their congregations, which would lead to the closure of their churches. In order to attract new believers, they were often able to reduce the sectarian rigor of their churches. To support the growth of their churches, they were forced to rely on auxiliary pastors, assuming different risks.

We would therefore revise, slightly, the understanding of how one can come to adopt an entrepreneurial orientation. As the literature clearly shows (Hughes & Morgan, 2007; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Lyon et al., 2000; Rauch et al., 2009; Wang, 2008; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005, among others), an EO can be adopted actively and deliberately. But we suggest that it can also be adopted passively; that is, an EO can emerge in response to environmental imperatives and economic need.

While the present study has demonstrated the entrepreneurial behaviors common to Neopentecostal pastors of independent Brazilian churches, it does not follow that pastors from other kinds of churches, or churches in other places, will also exhibit this same behavior. Further research must be carried out in order to determine whether or not this orientation is common to other types of Evangelical denominations, including historical Protestant and classical Pentecostal churches, as well as established and institutionalized Neopentecostals churches such as the Universal do Reino de Deus and the Internacional da Graça de Deus. Nevertheless, the results of the present study suggest several avenues for further research, particularly within the field of administration, including: (i) comparative investigations of different types of Evangelical churches or, possibly, of different types of churches in general; (ii) investigations of the profiles of religious entrepreneurs, considering aspects such as social status, motivations for church creation, evolution, etc.; (iii) research into the professionalization of churches, including the strategies such churches employ to effect their professionalization, the types of services they offer, market niches, marketing, etc.; (iv) research into the external and/or structural factors that influence the EO of religious agents; (v) investigations into how the EO of Evangelical pastors compares with that of other kinds of entrepreneurs working in the productive market, highlighting divergences and similarities between them.

Researchers who carry out such studies as the ones suggested here should consider that, although religious institutions may

have certain features in common with other kinds of market organizations (e.g. the entrepreneurial posture of their leaders, the use of marketing methods, management strategies, etc.), they are also peculiar in that they intersect directly with concepts not commonly considered in studies of market performance, namely faith, morality, and religious tradition. As noted by both classic (Weber, 1964) and contemporary authors (McCloskey, 2016; North, 1991; Prandi, 1991; Scott & Cantarelli, 2004), religion promotes special patterns of conduct that, when internalized, influence the way believers and pastors behave and interact with one another.

In his classic essay on religion, Weber (1964, p. 378) points out how religious communities can be characterized by a dualism comprising two fundamental principles. First, they can be characterized by the morality of our-group and the outer group; second, by the morality of our-group, simple reciprocity: ‘whatever you do to me, I will do to you’ (1964). In a recent study, McCloskey (2016, p. 21) discusses religion as a “social club, with costs and benefits.” McCloskey emphasises that “anyone who has actually belonged to a social club, of course, knows that it soon develops into moral rituals, customs with the force of law and the weight of sanctity” (McCloskey, 2016, p. 21). North (1991) has emphasized the role of institutions, including religions. They can serve as informal archetypes – restricting behavior through taboos, sanctions, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct – as well as providing formal rules, expressed by laws, constitutions, and property rights. North points out (1991, p. 97) that “throughout history, institutions have been devised by human beings to create order and reduce uncertainty.” Scott and Cantarelli (2004), in a study of young Evangelicals in Brazil, viewed churches as moral communities that encourage their participants to share values. The values serve to refer their lives, making them distinct from others who participate in other religions or beliefs, or who do not participate in any collective activity (Scott & Cantarelli, 2004, p. 377). Such reflections prove to be instigating for future investigations, including in interface to the theme of religious entrepreneurship.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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