
Managerial Role: Comparing Small and Large Firms in Brazil

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to compare the managerial work carried out by small business owner-managers to that of executives in large firms, proposing an incisive response to the debate on the similarities or differences between the work of these two categories of managers. This comparative analysis is based on Mintzberg's (1973) role approach. All cases presented in this article replicate the data collection method - structured observation - used by Mintzberg (1973) to study the work of corporate managers, thus permitting comparisons and analyses to be made. It was concluded that the work of an owner-manager can be described by the role approach, specifically by the roles of: substitute; specialist; decisional and informational operator. It can be said then that small business owner-managers do not recognise themselves as playing interpersonal roles. The article contributes by developing and refining specific management techniques for the small business sector.

Keywords: *Managerial role; Small businesses, Small business owner-manager.*

Introduction

Since Carlson (1951) first studied executive behaviour systematically, a long and extensive tradition of research on the nature of a manager's work and its essential characteristics was established. In his book "Managing", Mintzberg (2010) drew attention to the lack of systematic research on the nature of managerial work. After all, such studies perhaps would uncover important factors for the development of management theories, such as the nature of the relationship between managers and subordinates (Rodrigues; Barrichello; Morin, 2016).

Although not the main focus of his study, Mintzberg (1973) addressed the differences between the work of small business owner-managers and managerial work in large companies, but after that few studies revisited this topic (Florén; Tell, 2003; O'Gorman; Bourke; Murray, 2005; Oliveira et al. 2015).

Furthermore, in small firms, in order to understand the meaning of managerial work, a long and comprehensive tradition of research is required (Rosso et al., 2010), however no such research has been carried out recently in this respect. Small businesses contribute significantly to the economic growth of nations (Bruce et al., 2009), as agents of sustainability by diversifying the economies of many countries (Coppa; Sriramesh, 2013).

Thus, viewing small firms as a specific sector requiring management theories, in-depth research seeking to identify management techniques in this sector is important and necessary (Fuller-Love, 2006).

There is a vast body of literature on small firms that focuses on managers (Kevill, Trehan, Easterby-Smith, 2017; Wapshott, Mallett, 2015; Escrivão Filho et al, 2017; Gielnik, Zacher, Schmitt, 2017), however there is a lack of studies that specifically address the work of small business managers (O'Gorman; Bourke; Murray, 2005; Tengblad; Vie, 2012). The few studies on this topic include more those that describe managerial work analysing activities and adopting methods used by Mintzberg (1973) rather than verifying if the description of

managerial roles, proposed by the same author, explains the work of small business managers.

Moreover, from the point of view of developing these specific management techniques for small businesses, it is not always necessary to start from scratch but rather, as suggested by Jones (2005), to test and verify the general management theories that can be applied to this sector. Therefore, this study poses the following question: is it possible to describe the nature of the work of small business owner-managers using Mintzberg's (1973) managerial roles?

In order to answer this question, this article presents and discusses empirical data collected by the authors from seven Brazilian small business owner-managers. Moreover, it compares these primary data with secondary data from the following three studies:

- Mintzberg (1973) on the work of five executives from large US firms;
- Florén and Tell (2004) who conducted research with six Swedish small business owner-managers;
- O'Gorman, Bourke and Murray (2005) who carried out a study with ten Irish small business owner-managers.

Mintzberg's (1973) work was a milestone in the literature related to describing the work of a corporate manager and, although from a certain period and somewhat simplistic, it was revisited, updated and reaffirmed in later studies such as Kurke and Aldrich (1983), Tengblad (2006) and new research by Mintzberg (2010; 2013).

The findings of this article are pertinent as they support the development of specific management programs for small businesses. Management programs are a way to improve firm competitiveness, the theory and practice of human resource development and, thus, the economy as a whole (Fuller-Love, 2006; Ardichvili; Kuchinke, 2009).

Literature Review

The classic study by Mintzberg (1973) is considered an example of a method to be followed regarding the tradition in research on the work of a corporate manager. Such a trend has also been identified in the studies on the nature of the work of small business owner-managers.

The work of the corporate manager

Mintzberg (1973) created the role approach, also known as the work activity school, which addresses the field of study of how managers spend their time (Stewart, 1976, 1979). His approach stems from Carlson's (1951) studies, and has been influenced by managerial concepts such as those proposed by Chester Barnard and Herbert Simon (Escrivão Filho; Mendes, 2010).

Following the publication of "The Nature of Managerial Work" in 1973 and the Harvard Business Review article, "The Manager's Job: Folklore and Fact" in 1975, many studies were based on this theoretical and methodological framework concerning their investigations (Kurke; Aldrich, 1983; Florén; Tell, 2004; O'Gorman; Bourke; Murray, 2005; Gabriellsson; Tell, 2009; Florén; Tell, 2007; Andersson; Tell, 2009; Andersson; Florén, 2011; Florén; Tell, 2012; Tell; Gabriellsson, 2013; Hales, 2002).

According to Mintzberg (1973), studies on process approaches had low empirical validity, since they were not based on observing the actual work of a manager. Many studies were then carried out by the author - Mintzberg (1975; 1994; 2010) – adopting a method based on understanding the nature of managerial work, using structured observation.

Mintzberg (1973) studied five CEOs from large and medium-sized US firms. Notes were made on pre-planned forms and field diaries while activities, carried out by executives, were closely observed. In conclusion, Mintzberg found managerial work to be more fragmented and brief than what was described by Fayol; that managers work more with other people and little time is spent on solitary tasks such as the intellectual task of planning. According to Mintzberg (1975; 1994), what the manager really does is respond to the pressures of everyday life.

The author thus proposed an explanation for the performance of a manager's activities based on ten component roles of the position divided into:

- Interpersonal: a manager keeps in touch with the firm's areas and with his subordinates and is a figurehead, leading and interconnecting areas and people;
- Informational: a manager is aware of internal and external information and acts as a monitor and spokesperson; and
- Decisional: based on the information he/she has, a manager makes decisions, sets out objectives, allocates resources and deals with conflicts.

This description also gained ground in Management Theory and, over the years, was tested and validated by other authors. Kurke and Aldrich (1983) reproduced it ten years after the original study. These authors' findings reinforced the image of managers operating in an environment characterised by fragmentation, brevity, and dependence on others to initiate contact. Hales (2002) reaches the same conclusion as Kurke and Aldrich (1983) and states that the fundamental characteristics of managerial work are basically the same as those identified by Mintzberg in 1973.

Thirty years after Mintzberg's original study, Tengblad (2006) made a comparison of the original study, identifying that there are significant similarities between the new and old ways of working. It was concluded that these similarities show that the claims of emerging radically different managerial work are exaggerated. It was also shown that new work practices were included in traditional practices (Tengblad; Vie, 2012; Simard; Rice, 2006; Tonidandel; Braddy; Fleenor, 2012; Mintzberg, 2010).

In order to give even more theoretical and methodological validity to the original study, after observing 29 executives from large firms and also hearing in management discourses that "we live in times of great changes", in his book "Simply Managing" Mintzberg (2013) returned to this discussion and reinforced the idea that a manager's practice has not changed. These facts, however, were verified on the basis of large firms; therefore, the validity of such statements in the specific context of small businesses needs to be verified.

The work of small business owner-managers

Various studies have focused on having a clearer understanding of small business owner-manager behaviour (Osiyevskyy, Dewald, 2015; de la Garza Carranza, Soria, Estrada, 2016; Cooper, Peake, Watson, 2016). However, there is still a lack of research on the work that small business owner-managers carry out (O'Gorman et al., 2005; Floren, 2006; Andersson; Floren, 2008; Tell, 2015).

Due to this lack of studies about the work carried out by small business managers, it is not known if it is possible to use the description proposed by Mintzberg (1973) in the role approach to describe small business owner-managers. This is further aggravated by a widely held, though unfounded, belief that the small business managers need to professionalize and utilize management techniques adopted by large companies (O'Gorman et al., 2005).

For a more in-depth discussion, we reviewed the following articles: Chorán (1969 apud Mintzberg, 1973), Muir and Langford (1994), Florén and Tell (2004), O'Gorman et al. (2005), Florén (2006), Andersson and Florén (2008), Tell and Gabrielsson (2013), and Tell (2015). Except for the research conducted by Florén and Tell (2007) and Andersson and Florén (2008), which are theoretical reviews, all the others have made structured observations about manager behaviour in different types of small firms.

Choran (1969 apud Mintzberg, 1973) conducted structured observation research on three small business owner-managers in Canada. Each manager was observed over a two-day-period. Based on data comparison, the author arrived at the following conclusions regarding the differences between the work that small business owner-managers carry out and the work managers in large firms do:

“(…) in smaller organisations, managers pay more attention to operational problems; tending to carry out part of the work of the employees in order to replace them when necessary, and to assume non-managerial functions; they see themselves more as entrepreneurs and are less involved in formal activities such as meetings and duties related to the public relations role” (Mintzberg, 1973, p.107).

Following this, the author proposes two additional roles to the work carried out by small business owner-managers: the role of replacing the operator and the role of specialist. The specialist role refers to the fact that small business owner-managers require and are knowledgeable about the business in terms of physical inventory, that is, they know what is lacking, they buy materials, they sign for things and issue invoices (Mintzberg, 1973). It is like concentrating all the functional areas of the company on the manager. The role of replacing the operator, however, reflects the speed of the manager's job which, acting generically, is always ready to move from one role to another when operational problems arise, such as replacing an employee on the production line.

Years later, Florén and Tell (2004) argued that due to the limited scope of Chorán's study (1969 apud Mintzberg, 1973), the author's proposal to describe a manager's work should be confirmed in future studies. They resumed research on the work of small business owner-managers, replicated the original study, and investigated six small business owner-managers and approximately 17 to 43 employees in Sweden. Observations were made over a six-week period. The authors, however, did not comment on the two additional roles proposed by Chorán (1969 apud Mintzberg, 1973) for small business owner-managers, focusing only on comparing the results of the structured observation of managers with the numbers from Mintzberg's study (1973).

O'Gorman, Bourke, and Murray (2005) also conducted an investigation with ten small business owner-managers in Ireland considering two full days of work each one. These firms represented 10 out of the 45 small firms that most grew during the study period and all had fewer than 250 employees. The main focus of the study was to verify whether the size of the firm represented some influence on the nature of managerial work, therefore, despite analysing the differences between observation results, they did not propose to answer whether the role approach can be used to describe a manager's work. Florén (2006) and Andersson and Florén (2008) made attempts to reconcile the results of the studies carried out so far and proposed a definition for the work carried out by small business owner-managers. Andersson and Florén (2008) also proposed some new hypotheses to be discussed.

In attempts to consolidate the research results, there has been no further attempt to understand which of Mintzberg's (1973) roles can clearly be used to represent the nature of a manager's work and which roles should not be used to that end. Table 1 summarises the contributions of the studies to the evolution and development of the topic.

Table 1 – Consolidation and evolution of a manager’s work

Author/Year	Method	Description of the manager’s work
Choran (1969)	Structured observation	Managers are inclined to do the work of staff, constantly shifting from operational to managerial tasks. Define two new roles. Replacement Operator: do a job when any need arises. Specialist: daily operations of the firm and concern with internal operational issues.
Muir, Langford (1994)	Structured observation	Identifies intuitive judgement as the predominant instrument of owner-manager behaviour. He/She interacts with other people, using preferred forms of communication and contact, regardless of formality. Performs all three of the basic managerial technical, human and managerial skills, however, they use more middle and lower level as they need to be both businesspeople and technicians.
Floren, Tell (2004)	Structured observation	Small business owner-managers relate more to people outside the organisation than executives, interacting mainly with customers, suppliers and associates. More active in operational activities, with work marked by informality and constant interruptions.
O’Gorman, Bourke, Murray, (2005)	Structured observation	Brevity, fragmentation and variety are characteristics of managerial work. There is a preference for verbal communication using informal communication patterns. They have a pace of working without rest.
Floren (2006)	Secondary data	Small business owner-managers’ work is unplanned, informal, agitated and fragmented. They use real-time and easy information, which means that they tend to reject formal information, such as management reports. They also use informal means of communication and do not schedule meetings. They constantly shift their attention from one issue to another (operational and managerial). They can be defined as a "Jack of all trades" having a limited internal network of relationships.
Andersson e Floren (2008)	Theoretical review	A manager's job is unplanned, informal, agitated, and fragmented with a stream of unpremeditated and ad hoc activities. In the day-to-day running, one thing leads to another, which leads to another. He/She works with information in real time and tends to reject formal and rigid reporting information. He/She rarely uses recognised management tools. Informal communication is the first choice of communication and scheduled meetings occur only sporadically. A manager is always interrupted by others and changes quickly between different administrative and operational functions. His/Her job is to perform a complex set of functions and at the same time make use of a complex set of skills. He/She does not delegate and has a very restricted internal network of relationships.
Tell, Gabrielsson (2013)	Structured observation	A manager's job is characterised by constant interruptions. They devote much of their time to administrative and operational work and have little time for reflection. Fragmentation of tasks, poor communication structures and few scheduled appointments are also part of the job characteristics.
Tell (2015)	Structured observation	Although a manager performs many activities during the workday, he/she focuses strictly on a few. Thus, due to a generic type of work, he/she devotes an average of 30% of the time to administrative activities, 55% to operational activities, and only 15% of the time is spent on strategic activities.

Recently, new studies on the subject have reappeared, but these studies investigate more about owner-manager behaviour than the routine work (Kevill, Trehan, Easterby-Smith, 2017; Wapshott, Mallett, 2015; Escrivão Filho et al, 2017; Gielnik, Zacher, Schmitt, 2017). If the nature of the work of small business managers is not known, how can techniques for improving his/her performance be suggested? From the few articles that have studied the work carried out by small business owner-managers, all of them focused on describing managers' activities based on the method proposed by Mintzberg (1973) and do not specifically test if the roles developed by the author can be used to describe the work carried out by small business owner-managers. Moreover, which roles, suggested by Mintzberg (1973), can be used to describe the work of small business owner-managers? All of them or are there some that prevail over others?

This shows the need for further research and conclusions because in order to define the work of small business owner-managers, as well as in large firms, a long and extensive tradition of research is needed (Rosso; Dekas; Wrzesniewski, 2010), mainly pointing out observations of the daily routine of small business owner-managers, as indicated by Carlson (1951).

More recently, Tell and Gabrielsson (2013) and Tell (2015) have addressed the topic once more, conducting further studies. However, in general, the results of these studies reaffirmed the main characteristics already consolidated in literature reviews proposed by Florén (2006) and Andersson and Florén (2008) to describe the work of small business managers. They did not discuss the possibility of using Mintzberg's role approach (with the two additional roles of Chorán (1969)), or indicate which roles describe the work carried out by small business owner-managers, except for Oliveira et. al. (2015).

Work carried out by small business owner-managers in Brazilian studies

In Brazil, little research has been done to evaluate the nature of managerial work in small firms and, to the best of our knowledge, the pioneer in research on the tradition of managerial work using structured observation was Teixeira (1979). From what is understood from the results, Mintzberg's (1973) considerations about the difference between the work carried out by owner-managers and executives are also confirmed in the paper by Teixeira (1979).

The author also emphasises that managers' work processes would be incompatible with the growth of the firm due to excessive fragmentation and insufficiency of scheduled meetings, mentioning that this characteristic is very common in Brazilian firms (Teixeira, 1979). It is worth mentioning that at this time there was still a strong belief that the desire of all small business owner-managers was to make the firm into a big business.

Following the work of Teixeira (1979), other Brazilian studies on the subject appeared only in the late 1990s, with the publication of a doctoral thesis by Escrivão Filho (1995). However, research that effectively followed the protocols of the research tradition in managerial work, and consequently adopted structured observation as a method, were only found in the 2000s. These studies were carried out by the Small Business Organisational Studies Research Group (GEOPE in Portuguese) considering the studies conducted by Gromik (2011) and Rosim (2013). The results of both surveys served as a comparative basis for this study and will be presented below.

It should be mentioned that Oliveira et al. (2015), from the same research group, also conducted a study on the work of small business owner-managers, however, their results were not compared here because it is a quantitative experiment.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, the results obtained by Florén and Tell (2004) and O'Gorman, Bourke and Murray (2005) represented the cases of small business owner-managers in an international context. Gromik (2011) and Rosim (2013) reported on cases about Brazilian owner-managers and Mintzberg (1973) on cases regarding executives in large firms.

Managerial role and small business owner-manager

In this section, we present an association between the "theory" already developed about the work of small business owner-managers and Mintzberg's roles. The two additional roles proposed by Chorán (1969 apud Mintzberg, 1973) are also posited because they are considered to be part of the role approach. Table 2 presents this association as the basis for propositions of this paper.

Table 2 - Conceptual comparison between the role approach and job description of small business owner-managers

	Roles and key features Mintzberg (1973)	Evidence of relationship with owner-managers' work
Interpersonal	Representative: refers to ceremonial duties and public relations.	None.
	Leader: he/she is responsible for the work of all employees, motivating them in order to reconcile personal and firm goals.	None.
	Contact: develops a network of internal contacts and an external network to help decision making.	None.
Informational	Monitor: monitors the environment, asking information from contacts and subordinates, in search of non-formalised information.	Always making verbal and informal contacts (Muir; Langford, 1994; Florén; Tell, 2004; O'Gorman; Bourke, Murray, 2005; Florén, 2006; Andersson; Florén, 2008).
	Disseminator: shares privileged information with subordinates.	None.
	Spokesperson: sends information to the external environment and deals with various stakeholders.	Interacts with people outside the organisation and maintains a restricted internal network of relationships (Florén; Tell, 2004; Florén, 2006)
Decisional	Entrepreneur: constantly seeks to improve unity proactively.	None.
	Problem solver: unintentionally solves problems that occur without his/her control.	Needs to be both an entrepreneur and a technician; pays more attention to operational tasks (Choran, 1969; Muir; Langford, 1994; O'Gorman; Bourke; Murray, 2005; Florén, 2006; Andersson; Florén, 2008, Tell; Gabrielsson 2013; Tell, 2015).
	Resource allocator: the executive decides who will do what in the firm, designs the structure and the relationship model to carry out activities. Makes important decisions.	Centralises the day-to-day operations of the firm, especially those in the functional areas, and is concerned with internal issues. "Jack of all trades". (Choran, 1969; Florén, 2006; Andersson; Florén, 2008; Tell; Gabrielsson, 2013; Tell, 2015).

	Negotiator: spends time negotiating, since he/she has the information and authority to make decisions on the matters in question.	Interacts primarily with customers, suppliers and subordinates and makes decisions based on intuitive judgment (Choran, 1969; Muir; Langford, 1994; Florén; Tell, 2004; O’Gorman; Bourke; Murray, 2005; Florén, 2006; Tell; Gabrielsson, 2013).
Additional	Replacement operator: does a job when any need arises, both managerial and organisational.	They devote much of their time to administrative and operational work (Choran, 1969; Florén, 2006; Muir; Langford, 1994; Florén; Tell, 2004; O’Gorman; Bourke; Murray, 2005; Florén, 2006; Tell; Gabrielsson, 2013; Tell, 2015).
	Specialist: conducts daily operations of the firm and is concerned with internal operational issues.	Centralises the day-to-day operations of the firm, especially those in the functional areas, and is concerned with internal issues. “Jack of all trades” (Choran, 1969; Florén, 2006; Muir; Langford, 1994; Florén; Tell, 2004; O’Gorman; Bourke; Murray, 2005; Florén, 2006; Tell; Gabrielsson, 2013; Tell, 2015).

Methodology

Based on the discussion and theoretical revision of the previous section, and in order to facilitate the analysis and discussion of the results, the following propositions are presented to verify how the work carried out by small business owner-managers can be described:

P1: interpersonal, informational and decision-making roles (Mintzberg, 1973);

P2: the additional substitute role (Choran, 1969) that results from carrying out certain activities, such as operational activities;

P3: the additional specialist role (Choran, 1969) that results from doing certain activities that involve internal, specific details related to the functional areas of the business, such as finances, human resources and supplies.

To validate these propositions, this study adopted a qualitative research approach, in the positivist paradigm, adopting mixed methods to collect and analyse the data. The research design was the case study and the data used were from two sources: primary and secondary. To collect the primary data, structured observations were used similar to that recommended by Carlson (1951) (Luthans, Rosenkrantz, Hennessey, 1985).

Thus, there were seven cases with small business owner-managers in Brazil, chosen according to the convenience of location and availability to participate in the research. These seven cases correspond to the primary data. The secondary data were 16 cases of managers of small international firms (six from Sweden and ten from Ireland) and five cases from executives at large firms in the United States (Mintzberg, 1973). As already discussed, both primary and secondary data were originally collected through structured observation, replicating Mintzberg's (1973) research protocol.

For the seven Brazilian cases, the data collection instruments were pre-planned, tested in a pilot study, and consolidated into a protocol. In this protocol, as well as in the protocol of Mintzberg (1973), the types of activities, the activities, the duration, the participants and whether or not there was scheduling were recorded. Fieldwork was conducted between 2012 and 2017, in which one week was allocated for each manager. Figure 1 illustrates the data collection process.

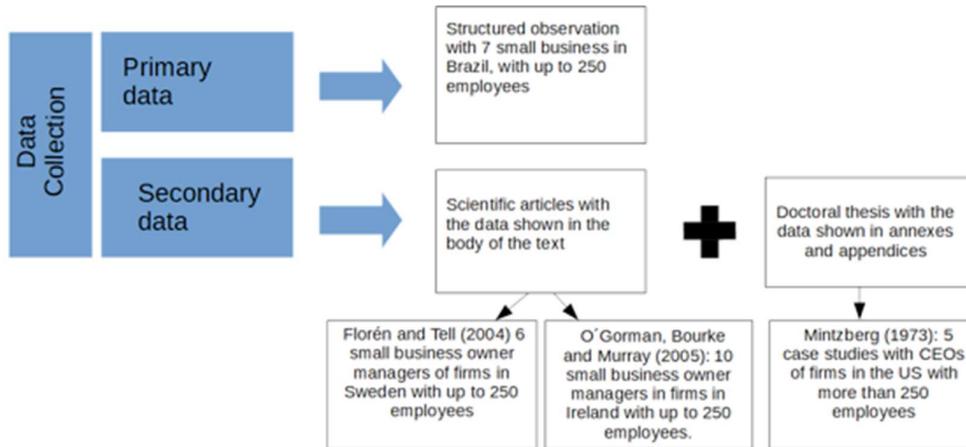


Figure 1 - Structure of data collection procedures

In order to even out the metrics, the criteria for analysis were quantitative and the same as those adopted by Mintzberg (1973). Therefore, all the comparative studies collected the time of the beginning and end of each activity. Using descriptive statistics, the average time spent on each of them was compared.

To organise the data, the results were arranged individually in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then bar charts were generated showing the mean value of each category analysed, obtaining the general mean of the hours of the activities of all individuals in each category, namely:

- Executives at large firms;
- Small business owner-managers in Sweden and Ireland; and
- Small business owner-managers in Brazil.

A final category "d) owner-managers' average" was added in order to compare cases from small businesses with those of large companies. For this category, the weighted average of the cases of small Brazilian business owner-managers and small firms from other countries was used. The weighted average was adopted because there was a difference in the number of cases; 16 international cases and 7 Brazilian cases. The Brazilian cases were presented separately in order to identify the primary data collected for this research. For a clearer understanding, please see Figure 2.

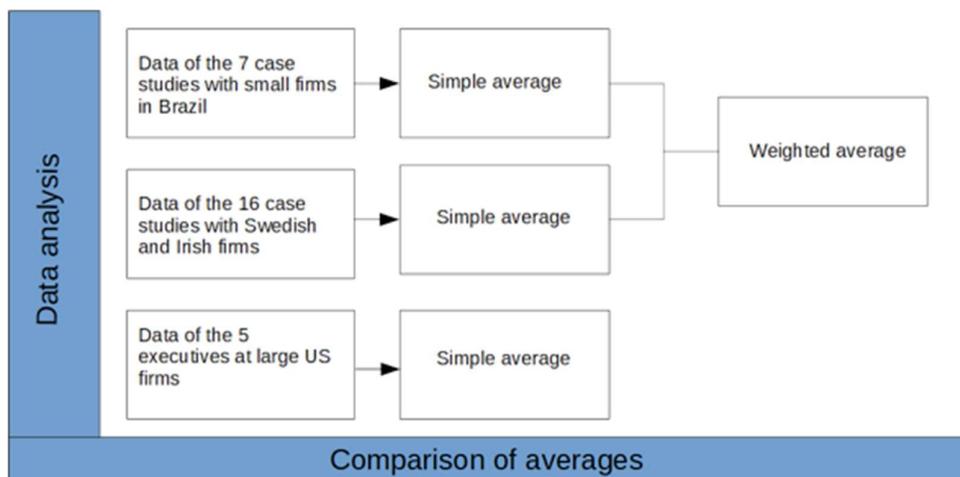


Figure 2 - Structure of data analysis procedures

To compare the averages and fit the manager's job characteristics into "similar", "the same" or "different", an inductive analysis of the data was performed, which resulted in the following metrics:

- For a difference of up to 5 percentage points, the results are considered the same; as there will always be some differences between one individual and another, whatever the activity.
- If the difference is greater than 5 percentage points and less than double, the results are considered similar; this fact indicates that although it is greater than five percentage points, there is still no marked and accentuated difference, which may be related to a mixture of individual characteristics with small specific points of the work itself;
- If the difference is double or more, the results are considered different. Here it is a marked and significant difference. This difference exceeds any limit of individual characteristics and shows a marked difference in the way of doing the work.

The methodology adopted follows most of the studies from the research tradition in managerial work. As it is a job of monitoring and observing the manager in his/her daily life and in his/her natural work environment, information can be considered very faithful to the reality of the facts. A single point that could impair the result somewhat is the interference of the researcher's presence in the manager's environment. The data that were collected and observed were consistent in terms of arriving at a conclusion.

Results and Discussion

Figure 3 shows the average daily hours that executives and managers worked during the days they were observed.

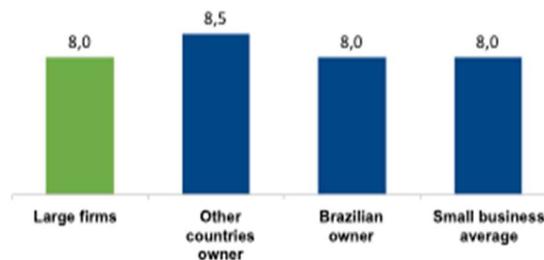


Figure 3 - Average daily working hours in hours

From the analysis, both corporate executives and small business owner-managers have the same working hours, around 8 hours a day. According to this data, it is not possible to say that small business managers work more than executives from corporations or vice versa. This fact can also be confirmed by Figure 4 which shows the weekly average of working hours, whose data can be considered a variation of Figure 3 and confirms that the executives' working hours are the same as the managers' working hours.

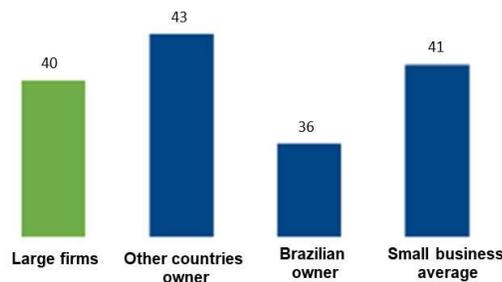


Figure 4 - Average weekly working hours in hours

Figure 5 shows the average number of activities performed during a workday. From the data it can be understood that, regarding brevity and fragmentation, the nature of the work of

small business owner-managers is different from the nature of the work of executives since the work is even less and more fragmented in small firms.

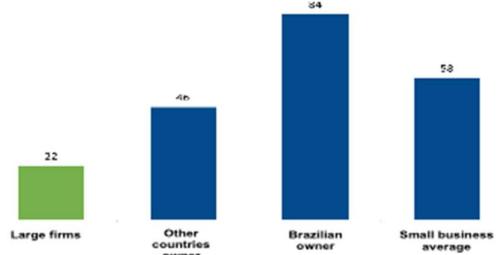


Figure 5 - Average number of activities performed per day

Figures 6 and 7 show the duration of activities. Figure 6 presents the percentage of time the owner-managers and executives spent on activities of less than 9 minutes and activities of more than one hour, respectively. The work in the two analysed categories can be understood as similar regarding this issue. Figure 7 shows the percentage of time spent on activities lasting more than 1 hour. Only 2% of the owner-managers' time is dedicated to activities with more than an hour of duration whereas concerning the executives, this value is of 10%, thus showing a difference between the two categories in that issue.

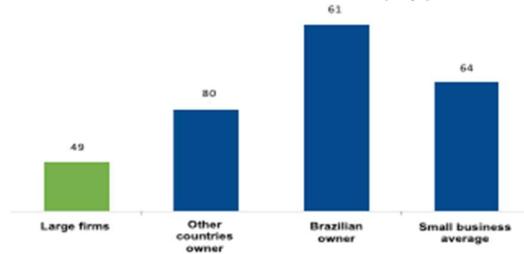


Figure 6 - Percentage of activities lasting less than 9 minutes

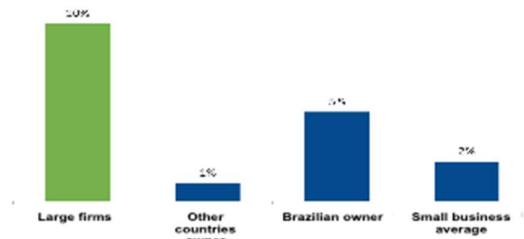


Figure 7 - Percentage of activities lasting more than one hour

An additional comment regarding Figures 6 and 7 is that the workday of small business owner-managers is practically dedicated to activities lasting less than 9 minutes (74%), but in the case of executives there is no such predominance as the activities do not take up even half the working day. The executives' routine focuses more on activities that range from 10 minutes to 59 minutes long.

Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11 refer to the percentages of time that executives and owner-managers spent on each type of activity. In Figure 8, which refers to the percentage of scheduled meetings, it shows that more than half of the executives' time is dedicated to scheduled meetings, whereas this number does not reach half the time of the owner-managers, occupying only 18% of their workday. It can be concluded, therefore, that regarding scheduled activities work conducted by small business owner-managers is different from the work done by executives from corporations.

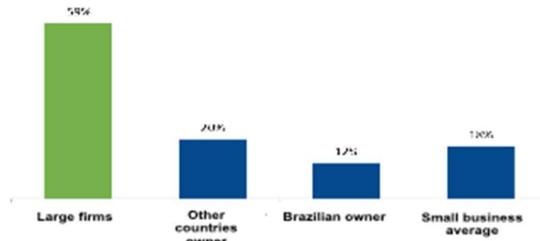


Figure 8 - Percentage of time spent on scheduled meetings x total of activities

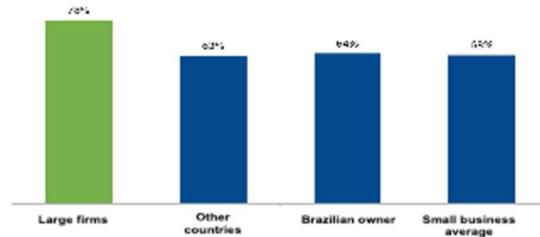


Figure 9 - Percentage of time devoted to verbal communication x total of activities

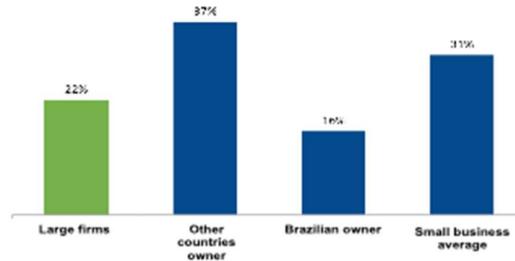


Figure 10 - Percentage of time spent on desk activities

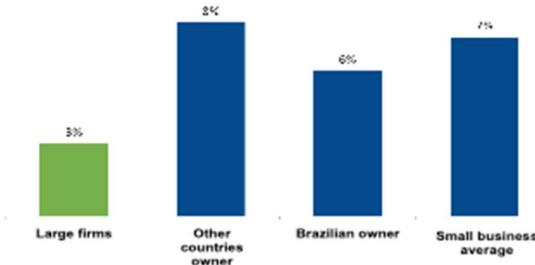


Figure 11 - Percentage of time spent on internal visits

Regarding Figure 9, the percentage of time spent on verbal communication shows that there is a small difference in relation to one category. Making it also a point of similarity, in the other it can be observed that both executives and managers dedicated more than half of their time to this type of activity.

In Figure 10, desk-based activities, based on their duration, can apply the same reasoning as verbal communication, because there is a difference of only 9 percentage points between owner-managers and executives. It can be said, then, that desk-based activities are similar and characterise the work carried out by owner-managers (31%), as well as executives (22%). Data from internal visits, shown in Figure 11, show an even smaller difference between the category of owner-managers (7%) and executives (3%). This difference is so inexpressive that it does not reach 5 percentage points, thus it can be understood that the data were

practically the same for the two categories, which leads to the conclusion that internal visits are little practiced by both owner-managers and executives.

Figures 12, 13, 14 and 15 show the percentage of time that executives and owner-managers spend in contact with people on a workday. Figure 12 shows that small business owner-managers spend 18% of their time with suppliers. Executives spend practically the same proportion of time, 17%, on this activity, and therefore these data can be considered practically the same for the two categories. Figure 13 shows that the percentage of time that the investigated owner-managers spend with subordinates is practically the same since the difference is only 3%. Thus, it can be observed that spending time with subordinates is a routine practice of owner-managers and executives.

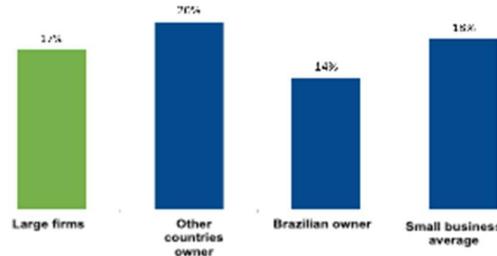


Figure 12 - Percentage of time with suppliers

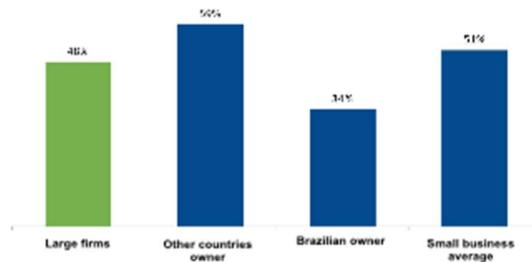


Figure 13 - Percentage of time with subordinates

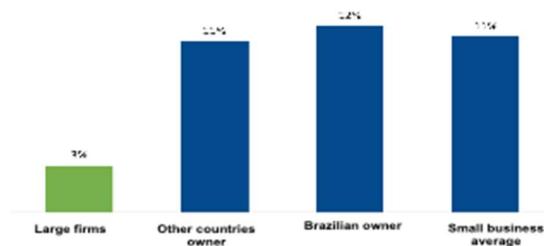


Figure 14 - Percentage of time with clients

The percentage of time spent with clients is shown in Figure 14, indicating that the time that owner-managers spend with their clients (11%) is different from the time executives spend (3%).

In Figure 15, which refers to the percentage of time with others, it can be observed that owner-managers spend 14% of their time with others and executives 8%. This shows a similarity (difference of only 6 percentage points) between the time that both categories spend with other people.

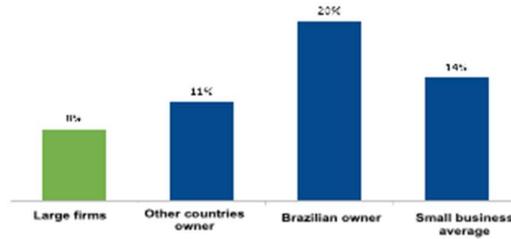


Figure 15 - Percentage of time with others

In summary, from the cases analysed in this study and from the overall framework of the results of the structured observations of the owner-managers adopting the criteria of "different", "similar" or "the same" concerning work carried out by executives, it was understood that small business owner-managers are:

- Different in terms of their schedules, the amounts of activities carried out on a workday and longer activities;
- Similar in terms of verbal communication, at the desk and in doing many short activities; and
- The same in terms of time spent with subordinates and suppliers and in the workday.

These results affirm that the description of the work carried out by small business owner-managers is very fragmented, informal, and includes short activities. Moreover, they spend time on verbal communication mainly with clients, suppliers, subordinates and other people. This description of the work done by small business owner-managers, when compared with the replacement operator, specialist, informational and decisional roles was accepted by the results of this investigation. This reflects that propositions 1, 2 and 3 were confirmed, except for the "interpersonal role" in P1, in which we do not have sufficient evidence to prove that the owner-managers have similarities to the CEOs in large firms. In this case, proposition one is considered partially accepted in this study. These results point to some explanations. The fact that the small business owner-managers do not have an organisational apparatus with the same breadth and robustness as the executives in corporations, means that they are "Jack of all trades" of the firm. Thus, when anything goes wrong with the company's progress, the solution is always for the owner-manager to occupy that space and perform the activity. Hence, it is possible to speak conceptually in a role of replacement operator which describes the owner-manager forever changing from one activity to another, replacing employees, performing activities and performing functions of any nature. Such condition may be the reason for the activities being short and very fragmented.

The fact that owner-managers are knowledgeable about their firms; on the grounds that small businesses are often founded based on a trade that the owner-managers had previously undertaken, they know the technical aspects well. Add to this the fact that he is the main owner-manager and owner, concentrating all the information necessary for business management. This is another factor that complements the performance of the replacement operator role and implies that owner-managers also play the role of specialist.

The fact that small firms have a simple organisational structure, reinforced by the performance of the specialist role by the owner-manager, means they need to communicate verbally as all guidance comes from them. Verbal communication expressed by owner-managers to provide guidance to others also explains the informal relationships that can take place. Verbal and informal contact works well in this type of business.

By merging with the specialist role, we find informational and decisional roles. The informational role also materialises in the fact that owner-managers are specialists in their own business. In other words, an owner-manager is someone who disseminates information

to others providing guidance. Owner-managers also concentrate all the information necessary for decision making, thus materialising the decisional role.

Finally, the results confirm those from previous studies concerning brevity as a consequence of owner-managers' fragmented work. In order for activities to take place and tasks to be fulfilled, owner-managers often resort to informality in relationships, thus leading to constant interruptions.

Informality materialises in simpler and faster communication means, such as verbal communication, which works well in firms with a simple organisational structure. This is because in this type of organisational structure, functional areas are not well defined, and owner-managers quite often carry out administrative functions. They often centralise the information of the firm, leading management to increasingly revolve around them. This accumulation of activities centralised around the owner-manager is not favourable in terms of carrying out long-lasting activities or reflecting, because everything he/she needs to know to solve the problems that arise in the firm are quickly accessed from his/her own informal knowledge base. The existence of this informal knowledge base determines what some authors put forward as intuitive decision making (Muir; Langford, 1994; Florén, 2006).

The results observed here go beyond mentioning only intuitive decision making and suggest something more related to improvisation, after all, such decision-making focuses on solving problems as they occur and without time for deep reflection. It is from this improvisation that owner-managers become experienced in their own business, bringing their work closer to a process of constant learning. Kolb's theory of learning styles (2014), for example, would understand the manager's work as active experimentation, which is where the individual learns through his/her own experience.

Thus, from the issues addressed as the objective of this article and the comparison made with Mintzberg's (1973) role approach, it was found that the work carried out by small business owner-managers, when compared to the work of corporate executives can be explained by the role approach, however owner-managers do not necessarily recognise themselves playing interpersonal roles.

According to the results, it is inferred that owner-managers did not recognise themselves in interpersonal roles because they were not observed spending much time with people other than those with whom they are already used to working with or making new contacts. This fact has also been observed by Tell and Gabrielsson (2013) who stated that the contacts of small business owner-managers are always restricted to the same few people during the workday.

The interpersonal role states that managers keep in touch with the firm's areas and with their subordinates as a representative, leading and interconnecting areas and people. However, this study shows that this occurs more in large firms than small ones. This reinforces the operational role of the small business owner and shows the main difference between him/her and the CEO based on Mintzberg's role approach.

This fact corroborates with the affirmation presented in the literature review that in smaller organisations, managers pay more attention to operational problems; tending to carry out part of the work of the employees in order to replace them when necessary, and to assume non-managerial functions (Mintzberg, 1973).

A recommendation to owner-managers would be to strive to understand their own management profile and, if necessary, to develop what they believe may be lacking in their work, encouraging them to develop more strategies and, consequently, improving the firm's performance and competitiveness.

This result may also reiterate some warnings for owner-managers in conducting business, such as the fact that owner-managers' work overlooks more strategic issues in favour of activities whose nature is more operational, as pointed out by Tell (2015). Osowycki and

Devald (2015) are also concerned with owner-managers' more strategic profile, emphasising the importance of understanding what influences owner-managers' more strategic decision-making processes.

The interpersonal role and the role of information disseminator carry a strategic nature in themselves as they involve questions such as maintaining a network of contacts; motivating employees to achieve the firm's strategic objectives; and representing the firm at events or places where new business opportunities could arise, as demonstrated by Elfring and Hulsink (2003).

By providing evidence that these more strategic roles are not performed in small business owner-managers' work routines, the results suggest a point for improvement in their job. Tell and Gabrielsson (2013) show concern about the non-strategic nature of owner-managers' work by mentioning that their current style of work can lead them to a reactive stance towards the firm's competitive environment, causing them to miss out on new opportunities.

When describing owner-managers' "public relations" managerial style, Oliveira et al. (2015) reinforce the idea that managers should be attentive to activities of a more strategic nature for the firm, when drawing attention to the fact that when there is contact with the external environment, it is usually initiated by the external agent because the owner-manager does not see advantages in organising this type of activity.

Thus, creating and maintaining contact networks is overlooked reflecting a desire for non-intervention of third parties in technical aspects of the business (Oliveira et al., 2015b). Florén (2006) also agrees with these remarks by stating that small business owner-managers have a very restricted network of relationships. This owner-manager work format can often cause confusion between managing a small business or being just a "small business owner" as described in Fillion (1999), when one can expect more from this person and their position as an owner.

Agreeing with Vidal et al. (2017) that in small business things go well although in a strange way, the results of this article are far from wanting to totally change the way owner-managers work. On the contrary, the findings suggest reflecting on where owner-manager want to go with the firm and how their work routine can be optimised to do that. When questioning their routine, owner-managers should also reflect on the purpose of their activities, and whether they really cannot be delegated in order to give them more time to devote to strategic issues and firm competitiveness. This is a reflection that is being hampered by the frenetic pace of their work in the way it is being done today (Tell, 2015; Florén e Tell, 2012; Oliveira et al., 2015). In addition to this reflection, it is also suggested that owner-managers find a balance between operational, administrative and strategic activities, also involving the interpersonal role and function of information disseminator in their routine and not adopting habitual and limited behaviour, mentioned as a concern by Tell and Gabrielsson (2013).

Mintzberg (2010) points out the importance of finding this balance when he mentions that non-leading managers are boring and, on the other hand, leaders who do not manage have no idea of what is happening in their business. The author reinforces this by considering reflection while developing their craft to be an art, because it allows them to develop ideas and vision of business while doing their work (Mintzberg, 2013).

The impression is that owner-managers in the first years after the firm's foundation even maintain a more strategic behaviour for setting up the business, however over the years and with the firm acquiring stability, especially financial, this behaviour tends to fade and disappear. Thus, owner-managers become trapped in a single trajectory, while the firm's development calls for other types of behaviour to respond to the demands of the business environment (Tell, Gabrielsson, 2013).

The final suggestion, therefore, is for more strategic behaviour to be recovered and gradually be incorporated into owner-managers' work routines in order to improve or even, in many cases, re-establish the health and success of the business.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to discuss and analyse the work carried out by small business owner-managers in order to answer if it can be described by the role approach. To do this, three propositions were established at the beginning of Section 3.

The three propositions found support and consistency in the results, and the first proposition was partially accepted, because it was found that small business owner-managers do not recognise themselves in the interpersonal role.

From this it was then found that the work of small business owner-managers in general can be described by the role approach. Specifically, it may be said that the work carried out by small business owner-managers can be described as a composite of the additional roles of replacement operator and specialist by Chorán (1969); and by the decision-making and informational roles of Mintzberg (1973).

This conclusion implies, according to the discussion presented, a need for owner-managers to pay more attention to the performance of interpersonal roles and the role of "disseminator" in their work routine in order to reflect on these aspects and incorporate them into their daily lives, carrying out more activities that add value to the business. The suggestion is to find a balance between operational activities, administrative activities and more strategic activities.

As in all scientific studies, this research has some limitations, such as the time lag between observations, due to the lack of resources to perform all the observations in a single period; the different sectors of the firms investigated, as they may present differences in relation to this; and finally, a methodological limitation on structured observation, since the presence of the researcher in the firm following the owner-manager's routine may have caused them to change some behaviour. In order to minimise these limitations, it is suggested that further research on the subject be carried out, applying other scientific methods.

The findings and conclusions should be considered in future research to further consolidate these results and develop a management theory specific to this business sector. It is suggested that research be developed that questions the way owner-managers work and the performance of the firm; research that also considers describing the work carried out by owner-managers in different phases of the business such as setting up the business; after a few years of stability; and at moments when the owner-manager intends to close down the business.

It is also worth finding results on owner-managers' views of interpersonal roles and to see whether they relate such behaviour more strategically with an improvement in the firm's indicators. Another issue to be considered in future research is behaviour and the industry, for example, in a software technology firm, the owner-manager's operational activities may be those that add value to the product, unlike in the metallurgy sector.

The limitations of the research are mainly based around the presence of the researcher observing and accompanying the manager during the observation. The fact that the owner-managers knew that they were being watched may have caused even minimal interference in the way they performed their tasks. The number of cases is still insufficient for inference, so it is suggested that the results from this research be tested by other methods.

A survey or even a focus group could be conducted to examine whether or not small business owner-managers validate the description of their work from what has been observed by a

third party. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct research of this type that would reveal owner-managers' own opinions on the subject.

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