



## **Collaborative Growth: The Relationship between the Development Mode and the Profile of Moroccan SME**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this article is to study the relationship between the profile of Moroccan SMEs (size, age, organizational structure, strategic orientation, etc.) and the use of collaborative growth when implementing strategic choices. To carry out this study, we first operationalize the key concepts of our research, namely: Collaborative growth and the profile of SMEs, then and through an empirical study on a sample of 100 Moroccan SMEs, we are trying to study the relationship between SMEs profile and their use of collaborative growth over the past 3 years (2019, 2018 and 2017). The results show that there is a statistically significant relationship between size, manager training, strategic direction and the use of collaborative growth.

**Keywords:** Collaborative Growth, SMEs, Strategy Implementation, Development Mode, Alliance

**JEL Classification:** M100

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

SMEs are an essential link in the economic fabric of most countries, whether developed or developing. In Morocco, SMEs represent around 95% of production capacity. The business context globalization has forced SMEs to intensify their race towards scale economies, minimum cost strategies and exploitation of all business opportunities around the world. In this context, SMEs must question their initial strategies in the direction of improvement such as product diversification, internationalization, integration. However, these development strategies require a large investment capacity.

In Morocco, several programs are established by the government to support the SME and facilitate its financing, however, this financing remains for the SME a major obstacle to its development.

In order to implement their strategies, SMEs can consider three main options: 1-Internal growth based on the company's own resources, 2-External growth such as mergers, acquisitions or

equity participation and 3 - collaborative growth also called inter-company cooperation in the form of an alliance or partnership (Lecoq et al., 2013).

Faced with financing issues of SMEs in Morocco, collaborative growth would present an attractive potential for SMEs because it would allow them to finance their strategy through cooperation with another company while remaining independent (Garrette and Dussauge, 1995).

In Morocco, the use of strategic alliances is not the same for all SMEs. This is how we ask ourselves the following question: Are Moroccan SMEs predisposed to forging business-to-business alliances as a strategic development option? What are the characteristics of SMEs using inter-company cooperation in Morocco?

The objective of this paper is to know the relationship between the SMEs profile (size, age, organizational structure, strategic orientation, etc.) and the use of collaborative growth.

Therefore, to carry out our research, we begin by understanding the concept of collaborative growth in order to highlight its possible usefulness and its main risks and challenges for the growth of SMEs. Next, we analyze the different links between the organizational and strategic characteristics of SMEs and collaborative growth over the past 3 years (2019, 2018 and 2017).

In addition, we present the methodological aspects relating to the sample choice, measuring instrument and selected research variables. Thereafter, we present and discuss the obtained results.

## 2. DEFINITION OF COLLABORATIVE GROWTH

Abundant research on the concept of collaborative growth also called inter-company alliance, strategic alliance or joint growth, has given rise to several definitions to define this relationship between companies. The definition most referenced in papers is that of Bernard Garrette and Pierre Dussauge who describes collaborative growth as a form of rapprochement between several companies so that the independence of partner firms is maintained (Garrette and Dussauge, 1995).

Partner companies join forces to pursue common objectives while retaining their own interests. In other words, collaborative growth is a combination of resources and skills of several independent companies that choose to carry out a specific common project, activity or objective.

Other more recent research completes these definitions by summarizing the main characteristics of collaborative growth, which presents itself as “a cooperation agreement between independent companies, which pool resources in order to jointly achieve a common objective and share its results, taking place over a rather long period and possibly based on a certain formalization (contractualization)” (Meier and Missonier, 2009).

And finally, to understand this concept more, other researchers have focused on forms of collaboration, specifying that they can take the form of a contractual agreement, a minority financial participation or a common company (Mayrhofer, 2007).

In addition, several studies tackle the concept of international cooperation, these works simply underline that these cooperations are established with companies of different nationalities (Blanchot, 2006).

Ultimately and through all these definitions cited, we retain that a collaborative growth is mainly based on resources and skills sharing in addition of risk and profit in order to achieve a common strategic objective without the allies losing their autonomy and their legal independence.

Thus, after having reviewed the concept of collaborative growth, it is now necessary to provide an analysis of the usefulness compared to the risks of this form of development for SMEs.

## 3. CONTRIBUTION OF COLLABORATIVE GROWTH TO SMES

In an open and globalized environment, most of the work focusing on SMEs continues to present the constraints hampering their development, the most common of which are the difficulty of access to financing, management and exploitation of technological resources, the inability to innovate and develop new international markets (Rothkegel et al., 2006).

Faced with this situation, several studies claim that SMEs are increasingly using collaborative growth to remedy their handicap and find an option allowing them to develop and cope with this environment which has become very complex (Sulej et al., 2001).

Indeed, inter-company cooperation is an undoubtedly important contribution for SMEs. In terms of efficiency, these collaborations allow sharing of investment costs, reduction of transaction costs, improvement of bargaining power and thus the achievement of an economy of scale and better competitiveness (Chrysostome et al., 2005).

With regard to access to resources and skills, this cooperation will enable SMEs to overcome the problems of shortages and high cost of resources and also to reduce the risk linked to the use of new technologies. Regarding access to new sectors or markets, alliances provide SMEs with rapid, simpler and less risky entry into new markets, particularly international ones that SMEs can never reach by itself (Cheriet, 2006).

In addition to these advantages, through collaborative growth, SMEs benefit from an acceleration of institutional, organizational, cultural and collaborative learning. Ultimately, we emphasize through all these advantages that inter-company cooperation allows SMEs to achieve their strategic objectives with great efficiency and effectiveness (Cheriet, 2009).

However, despite these advantageous contributions that this form of growth offers to SMEs, the risks and obstacles relating to this mode of development should not be overlooked (Menguzzato, 1992).

When an SME decides to embark on a collaboration, it would be able to confront the organizational, cultural and management differences that there may be between allies, these elements which may seem manageable at the start of the process may become over time an obstacle to the whole cooperation success (Menguzzato and Dasi, 1999).

Furthermore, it is true that at the outset the objectives appear clear and cooperation seems to be considered as a source of competitive advantages for the allies. In addition, given that each company involved in a collaboration pursues, of course, common and/or complementary objectives, but also, simultaneously, its own objectives, over time, the environmental conditions evolve just like the strategies of each company. As a result, an imbalance between the achievement of common objectives and objectives specific to each company can make cooperative relationships unstable and ambiguous (Gomes-Casseres, 1987).

Also, the form and duration of the collaboration, the differences in size and power between the allies, can create an unbalanced weight of powers. One can grow at the expense of the other, which implies a risk of opportunistic behavior by one of the partners which is completely against the spirit of sharing and cooperation (Kogut, 1988).

Likewise, a management conflict may arise if the management body is not identified; without a previously defined decision-making committee, the coordination of efforts and the decision-making process will not be effective and will not allow the objectives of the alliance to be achieved.

To conclude, collaborative growth is certainly an attractive option for implementation of SMEs strategic decisions with efficiency and effectiveness, however, it should not be denied that it is a decision that requires great managerial prudence, a powerful system of coordination and control because it could be complex, unstable or even dangerous for the SME future itself.

The decision of cooperation or non-cooperation remains difficult even if the leaders know the advantages and disadvantages, it is for this reason that we allow ourselves to think that there are strategic and organizational characteristics which can influence the recourse or not to collaborative growth.

## 4. PROFILE OF SMES AND USE OF COLLABORATIVE GROWTH

Several studies have referred to the characteristics of SMEs which use collaborative growth in their development trajectory. We were mainly inspired by the study carried out by Domingo Martina Menguzzato -Boulard, Alejandro Escriba-Esteve and Luz Sanchez- Peinado related to "Cooperation agreements: A strategy for all companies?". We will try to verify the influence of size, age, organizational structure, manager training and strategic orientation on the decision of SMEs to use inter-company cooperation or not.

### 4.1. Influence of Size

Size is one of the main criteria that characterize an SME in a large company. In fact, the smaller the company is, the simpler its structure and its resources and strategic capabilities are. Some studies have shown a positive relationship between size and cooperation agreements such as joint ventures (Kogut, 1988; Gomes-Casseres, 1990; Mutinelli and Piscitello, 1998). Even so, some arguments have also validated that as the company grows, it resorts to inter - company alliances (Hagedoorn and Schakenraad, 1994).

We therefore consider that the use of collaborative growth becomes easier as the size of the company increases, given the improvement of its resources and skills, besides the ability to adapt to the required organizational changes.

### 4.2. Influence of the Company Age

Several studies show that there is a positive correlation between the use of strategic alliances and the age of the company. (Tan

et al., 2001) stresses that the use of inter-company collaborations evolves according to the development of the life cycle of the company, in other words, the more it grows, the more company tends to cooperate to ensure its sustainability.

### 4.3. Influence of the Organizational Structure (Family or Non-family)

A business in which only one family owns and controls is considered to be a family business. The purpose of this type of business is to pass it on to another generation (Gallo, 2004). This characteristic makes us suspect a reluctance on their part (Menguzzato and Dasi, 1999). In this sense, for managers who are members of the owner family, continuing to control the future of the business, and preserving strategic autonomy is a priority (Kets de Vries, 1993).

Thus, these so-called family businesses prefer to give up growth if it risks threatening control of the business (Abella, 2000). As a result, collaborative growth may seem an adequate option for this type of business because it constitutes a faster means of growth than internal development and makes it possible to maintain their independence unlike external growth.

### 4.4. Influence of Manager Training

Knowledge is seen as a source of sustainable competitive advantage and a necessary pillar for the growth and sustainability of the business. As a result, in certain research works (Cheriet, 2009), the recourse to collaborative growth is positively linked to the training and experience of the manager allowing him first to know the advantages and challenges of this type of growth and also to carry out this collaboration requiring a high degree of organizational coordination, management and control.

### 4.5. Influence of Strategic Orientation (Internationalization, Diversification)

The relationship between internationalization and strategic alliances has been confirmed in several research works. Thus, for example, there is a vast literature on international joint ventures as a means of entry into international markets, (Kogut, 1988; Hennart, 1991; Kim and Hwang, 1992; Agarwal and Ramaswami, 1992; Hagedoorn and Narula, 1996; Madhok, 1998; Chen and Hu, 2002), cooperation being then considered as an alternative method to the establishment of an own subsidiary and the acquisition of a local business. This research stipulates that the establishment of cooperation agreements helps companies that are internationalizing to reduce the risk of operating in highly volatile markets in terms of technological, economic, political and social cultural changes by taking advantage of market knowledge and environment of the local partner, to gain rapid access to certain resources and complementary skills of local businesses, which cannot be acquired on their own.

Furthermore, cooperation agreements can serve SMEs not only to internationalize but also in the context of strategic diversification (Menguzzato and Dasi, 1999). Indeed, inter-company cooperation allows SMEs to access new technologies and skills to diversify their activities (Garrette and Dussauge, 1999).

Thus, after having described the characteristics of SMEs that have been confirmed in the literature as being able to influence the use of inter-company cooperation, we present in the following the coding that has been retained for these research variables.

## 5. THEORETICAL RESEARCH MODEL

### 5.1. Variables of the Research

Our research model contains an independent variable which is the use of collaborative growth as a mode of development and six dependent variables namely: size of the company, age of the company, organizational structure (family or not family), manager training and strategic orientation of the business (Diversification or internationalization). These dependent variables are operationalized as follows:

- Size of the company: The number of employees within the company is used to measure its size (Merchant, 1984; Hoque and James, 2000; Malmi, 1999).
- Age of the company: Is measured by number of years since creation of the SME. This variable was used by Holmes and Nichols (1989) and Yasuda (2005).
- Organizational structure: This variable takes 0 when the business is family and 1 when the business is non-family (Sharma et al., 1997).
- Manager training: Is a variable that takes 0 when manager does not have university studies and 1 when he does. Studies such as that of Lussier and Corman (1996) and Cooper and Kleinschmidt (1991) measured the manager variable as a binary variable.
- Internationalization: Is a variable that takes 1 when the company is internationalized (at least 20% of sales are made abroad) and 0 when the company is not (Anand and Delios, 2002).
- Diversification: Is a variable that takes 1 when the company is diversified and 0 when the company is specialized (Mutinelli and Piscitello, 1998).

Therefore, after having operationalized and codified the key concepts of our research, we present in the following the selected research hypotheses.

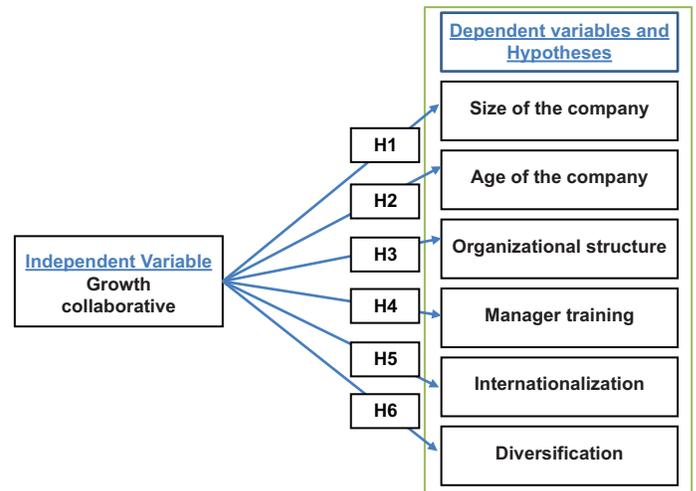
### 5.2. Research Hypotheses

General hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between organizational characteristics of SMEs and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years (2019, 2018, 2017).

This general hypothesis was broken down into six research hypotheses as presented in Figure 1:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between size of SMEs and use of collaborative growth over the past 3 years (2019, 2018, 2017).
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between age of SMEs and use of collaborative growth over the past 3 years (2019, 2018, 2017).
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between organizational structure (family or not) of SMEs and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years (2019, 2018, 2017).
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between training of SME managers and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years (2019, 2018, 2017).

Figure 1: Theoretical research model (variables and hypotheses)



H<sub>5</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between internationalization of SMEs and use of collaborative growth over the past 3 years (2019, 2018, 2017).

H<sub>6</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between diversification of SMEs and use of collaborative growth over the past 3 years (2019, 2018, 2017).

The hypotheses being defined, we present in the following, our research methodology.

## 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the light of our positivist epistemological positioning, we favor the adoption of the quantitative method to carry out our empirical study.

Through our quantitative study, we try to statistically assess the relationship between organizational characteristics as measured by the chosen variables and use of collaborative growth during the past 3 years (2019, 2018, 2017).

Before establishing the empirical results of the study, we first present our sampling plan.

### 6.1. Survey Population

As part of our research, we are interested in Moroccan SMEs given their significant importance in the economic field (more than 95%). So, referring to the definition of SME [1], our population includes 742 SMEs whose turnover is <75 million dirhams excluding taxes and whom workforce is <200 people. These are the 742 ranked among the top 1,000 SMEs, all sectors and regions combined, with the highest turnover in 2018, classified by the firm Inforisk in journal *Économie et entreprise* in June 2019.

### 6.2. Sample and Sampling Method

For the choice of our sample of 100 SMEs, we proceeded to a non-probability sampling method and more precisely to the quota method. The main significant characteristic that we have in our mother population is the city that we have converted into a region according to the advanced territorial regionalization of

**Table 1: Proportion of the sample chosen by region according to the quota of the survey population**

Regions	Number of SMEs by region in the total population	Proportion of SMEs by region of the total population	Number of SMEs by region in the sample	Proportion of SMEs in the sample (%)
Casablanca – Settat	428	58 %	57	58
Rabat - Salé – Kenitra	88	12 %	12	12
Tanger - Tétouan - Al hosseima	67	9 %	9	9
Fès – Meknès	45	6 %	6	6
Sous – Massa	43	6 %	6	6
Marrakech – Safi	39	5 %	5	5
Oriental	15	2 %	2	2
Beni mellal – Khenifra	9	1 %	1	1
Laayoune - Sakia al hamra	4	1 %	1	1
Draa – Tafilalet	3	0 %	0	0 %
Edakhla - Oued eddhab	1	0 %	0	0 %
		Sample to be tested	100	

Morocco launched in 2014 (Le360.ma, 2014) [2] (12 regions). Thus, given the significant importance of the distribution of SMEs by region (concentration on the Casablanca-Rabat axis), the representativeness criterion used for the quota method is the region.

Thus, according to the method of quotas by region, our sample of 100 cases will be chosen from the survey population according to the quotas of the regions presented in Table 1 above. In the following, we describe the measuring instrument and methods of data processing and collection.

### 6.3. Measuring Instrument and Data Collection

As part of our work, the questionnaire is our research tool. The questions are closed. They are objective and facilitate codification and exploitation.

Also, to collect data that constitute the basis of our research, we went to the field, with the companies in our sample with our questionnaire.

In fact, a first contact was made by telephone with each of the companies in our sample in order to solicit their participation, while explaining to them briefly the purpose of the research. Once acceptance of the collaboration, an appointment was fixed in order to answer the questionnaire. These meetings meant multiple trips.

The main constraint of this stage lies in the fact of joining the person at the top of the hierarchy, namely managers of these companies or their equivalents considered as the appropriate declaring persons for our empirical study.

Ultimately, using this approach, we were able after 5 months to collect 96 questionnaires in addition to the 4 companies that agreed to participate in our pretest. This gives us a total of 100 usable questionnaires. These questionnaires will be processed according to the method described in the next point.

### 6.4. Data Processing Method

The purpose of multiple regression is to isolate a relationship between a variable to be explained and several explanatory variables and to put them into equation. This relation is expressed

**Table 2: Summary of the general model results (use of collaborative growth/characteristics of SMEs)**

Regression statistics	
Multiple coefficient of determination	0.88568271
Determining coefficient of R <sup>2</sup>	0.776348017
Standard error	0.2541019
Observations	100

in the form of a regression equation which presents the variable to be explained as the sum of the explanatory variables affected by their regression coefficients to which is added a constant term according to (Evrard et al., 2003). To carry out this study, we used the Excel tool.

## 7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 7.1. Statistical Results and Hypotheses Test

The results of this research will be presented on the basis of indices calculated according to the methodology previously described.

Table 2 below summarizes the coefficients that have been calculated. The general hypothesis test (HG) carried out through a multiple regression between the level I construct (the use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years) and the 6 level II constructs (Size, age, manager training, organizational structure and strategic direction (internationalization and diversification).

The general linear regression model shows a strong correlation between the level I construct (the use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years) and the level II constructs (size, age, manager training, organizational structure, internationalization and diversification) with a correlation coefficient R equal to 0.88, close to 1.

The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) of the general linear regression model gives a value of 0.77 (superior than 0.5) which gives the general model a good explanatory level.

Similarly, according to Table 3 above, the robustness of the model produces a value of F (Fisher test) equal to 56.35, greater than read F (2.52 \* 10<sup>-27</sup>) at the significance level (P = 0.000 <5%) for degrees of freedom of 5 and 94.

**Table 3: Variance analysis**

Variability source	Degrees of liberty	Squares sum	Squares average	F	Critical value of F
Regression	5	18,8406291	3,76812582	56,35923241	2,52482E-27
Residual	94	6,069370902	0,064567776		
Total	99	24,91			

**Table 4: Summary of the sub-models results**

Variables	T Statistics	P value
Constant	1,08	0,28
Size	2,10	0,02
Age	0,16	0,88
Manager training	2,87	0,01
Organizational structure	0,20	0,80
Internationalization	5,90	0,03
Diversification	3,42	0,01

All coefficients comply with the prescribed standards. The model shows good explanatory power; similarly, the observed coefficients confirm a causal link between level I and level II variables. Ultimately, the general hypothesis (HG): “There is a statistically significant relationship between organizational characteristics of SMEs and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years” is generally validated.

## 7.2. Analyses des Résultats

According to Table 4:

Student’s t-test relating to the size construct is significant (different from 0) = 2.10 at the thresholds of 0.02 <5%. These values comply with standards. Ultimately, hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> according to which “There is a statistically significant relationship between size of SME and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years” is validated.

Student’s t-test relating to the age construct is not significant (other than 0) = 0.16 at the 0.88 thresholds >5%. These values do not conform to standards. Ultimately, hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> according to which “There is a statistically significant relationship between age of SME and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years” is not validated.

Student’s t-test relating to the leader’s training construct is significant (different from 0) = 2.87 at the thresholds of 0.01 <5%. These values comply with standards. Ultimately, the hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> according to which “There is a statistically significant relationship between training of SME manager and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years” is validated.

Student’s t-test relating to the organizational structure construct is not significant (different from 0) = 0.20 at the thresholds of 0.80 >5%. These values do not conform to standards. Ultimately, hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> according to which “There is a statistically significant relationship between age of SME and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years” is not validated.

Student’s t-test relating to the internationalization construct is significant (different from 0) = 5.90 at the thresholds of 0.03 <5%. These values comply with standards. Ultimately, the hypothesis H<sub>5</sub> that “There is a statistically significant relationship between

internationalization of SMEs and use of collaborative growth during the last 3 years” is validated.

Student’s t-test relating to the diversification construct is significant (different from 0) = 3.42 at the thresholds of 0.01 <5%. These values comply with standards. Ultimately, the hypothesis H<sub>6</sub> according to which “There is a statistically significant relationship between diversification of SME and use of collaborative growth during the past 3 years” is validated.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work was to analyze the main characteristics of SMEs that have resorted to the use of collaborative growth during its last 3 years through an empirical study on 100 Moroccan SMEs.

The research questions made it possible to check whether factors such as size, age, manager training, company structure (family or not) and its strategic orientation (Internationalization or diversification) influence the predisposition of companies to use collaborative growth.

We have seen in this paper that the use of collaborative growth constitutes an interesting strategic option for SMEs given their limited strategic capacities. This cooperation allows SMEs to implement their strategies effectively and efficiently: We have clarified that the alliance and/or partnership allows SMEs to reduce transaction costs, improve bargaining power, access to new technologies but also to new sectors and markets and thus to be more competitive in a highly competitive environment without losing control of their businesses.

However, through this study, we deduce that in general, the use of inter-company collaborations by Moroccan SMEs is still low, only 58% of the SMEs in our sample have used inter-company cooperation during the last 3 years.

The results obtained in this research are generally significant. The variables which explain the recourse to inter - company cooperation by the SME are mainly: size of the company, training of the manager and strategic orientation of the SME (diversification, internationalization).

Indeed, there is a correlation between size of the company and use of collaborative growth, the more company grows, the more it is predisposed to forging strategic alliances and partnerships. These results confirm the evidence already existing in several other works such as (Hagedoorn and Schakenraad, 1994). This could be explained by the fact that as the SME grows its management capacity expands, the latter will allow it to better cope with inter-organizational complexity of collaborative growth.

Regarding the hypothesis of the relationship between manager training and use of inter-company, it is highly positive, which agrees with the research results of (Menguzzato 2012). Therefore, it seems that this relationship is obvious since most of SME managers in our sample who have never used collaborative growth have no university degree and claim to ignore benefits of this option. They assert their inability to manage the complexities of managing this type of relationship.

In addition, our study allowed us to deduce a positive correlation between strategic orientation of the SME and use of inter-company alliances. The SMEs that use strategic alliances the most are diversified and internationalized. The latter assert that cooperation allows them to reduce transaction costs, improve customer and supplier bargaining power, this is especially the case for SMEs operating in textile and food industries. Also, for SMEs operating in computer technology, the use of strategic alliances has facilitated their access to new markets by crossing the legal and cultural barriers of this new environment. These results confirm several previous studies (Farok et al., 1988; Agarwal and Ramaswami, 1992; Murray and Mahon, 1993).

In addition, our results invalidate the relationship between age and organizational structure of SMEs and use of collaborative growth over the past 3 years.

With regard to age of the SME, it seems that the use of inter-company alliances is not influenced by (the years of its existence on the market). In fact, a young SME with a manager who is well trained in this type of relationship would be eventually more capable to resort to this mode of development rather than an SME which, despite its seniority on the market, has less management team experience and unable to carry out these complex inter-company relationships.

Regarding family character or not, this construct does not really influence use of inter-company alliances. We have quoted in this paper that family businesses seem to be reluctant to these inter-company relationships and refuse the loss of their autonomy, even partially. However, according to our study, it turns out that family businesses adopt the same behavior as non-family businesses.

Ultimately, we could confirm that use of collaborative growth is a very interesting strategic option for SMEs development. However, the use of this method of implementation by Moroccan SMEs is still very low. Thus, Moroccan government should consider, within framework of its financing and support programs for SMEs, training actions for managers to encourage them to the benefits and challenges of managing inter-company cooperation.

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