Running head: *Linking Altruism and Organizational Learning Capability*

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Title: *Linking Altruism and Organizational Learning Capability: A study from excellent human resources management organizations in Spain*

Abstract: The new features of the business environment have expanded the concept of organizational learning capability (OLC). In today's competitive business environment, OLC has been recognized as an essential means to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. However, the effective development of that capability has not been sufficiently analyzed in the organizational learning literature. Prompted by a recent paradigm shift in the organizational sciences, this research explores the link between altruism and OLC testing a wider picture that includes two intermediate steps: Relationship Conflict and Organizational Trust. To check our hypotheses we used structural equations to analyze data from a survey of Spanish firms with recognized excellence in human resource management. Results indicate that organizational trust mediates on the altruism-OLC relationship; however such linkage is not mediated by relationship conflict. Findings suggest that altruism and trust should be promoted in organizations in order to boost OLC.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of organizational learning capability (OLC) has gained increasing importance over recent years. Among the main reasons for the expansion of this concept are the need for innovation and the current complexity and competitiveness in a rapidly changing environment (Camps et al., 2011; Chiva and Alegre, 2009b). OLC refers to the organizational and managerial characteristics that facilitate the organizational learning process or allow an organization to learn (Chiva el al., 2007). Developing and enhancing OLC provide the basis for the survival and success of the firm well into the future (Akgün et al., 2007). Organizational learning is an essential element to successfully compete in a global market (Jerez-Gómez, 2005). Organizations capable to learn stand a better chance of sensing, acting, adapting and surviving in this competitive and dynamic environment (Camps et al., 2011). Accordingly, one of the current major challenges for organizations is how to generate work environments with a high capacity for organizational learning.

However, although research in OLC has provided some relevant findings, there are still some significant areas that have not been sufficiently investigated. In this sense, some authors (e.g., Akgün et al., 2007; Jerez-Gómez et al., 2007) mentioned that there is still debate about how managers can efficiently develop a learning capability in their organizations. Although the relevance of OLC for creating competitive advantage has attracted an increasing academic interest (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003; Flores et al., 2012), the antecedents of OLC should be expanded in order to leverage the understanding of how firms can develop such capability (Akgün et al., 2007). Thus, some academics (e.g., Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005; Van Grinsven and Visser, 2011) have proposed that future research should continue uncovering the antecedents of OLC.

Previous studies on organizational learning have demonstrated that some leadership styles, such as supportive, transformational, spiritual or authentic leadership, trigger a positive effect on organizational learning (e.g., Berson et al., 2006). All these leaders share an altruistic motivation as an essential common feature of them, demonstrating a genuine care and concern for people (Brown and Treviño, 2006). Furthermore, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) are also closely linked to OLC (Chang et al., 2011; Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2004). OCBs refer to employee work behaviors of a discretionary nature that are not part of employees' formal role requirements such as helping others or going beyond the normal expectations on their job (Organ et al., 2006). And an essential common dimension of OCB models is altruism (Valentine et al., 2011). Accordingly, we consider that may be particularly relevant to reveal whether altruism could stand as an antecedent of OLC.

Moreover, the unsustainability, the increasing inequity, the escalating environmental problems, the global financial crisis, and the growing interdependence present in today's world are calling for a reconsideration about current business strategies (Pirson and Lawrence, 2010; Pirson and Turnbull, 2011; Rynes et al., 2012). In this sense, recently different scholars have mentioned a paradigm shift in organizational sciences, management theory and practice (e.g., George, 2014; Karakas, 2010; Pirson and Lawrence, 2010; Rynes et al., 2012) in which include a change from self-centeredness to interconnectedness and stewardship (Karakas, 2010). This alternative paradigm proposes a more balance view over human being viewing individuals as more collaborative, empathetic, altruistic, and also motivated by caring about the well-being of others (Brown et al., 2012; Rynes et al., 2012). Thus, according to this more humanistic approach, altruism could play an important role in organizational settings. However, altruism has not been conceived as significant or as beneficial in the world of

business (Kanungo and Conger, 1993) and the research of it in organizational literature has been significantly marginalized (Healy, 2004). Moreover, some authors have indicated that some contextual variables may explain and condition the effects of different types of OCB such as altruism in organizations (Bolino et al., 2013). Consequently, it is necessary to examine the mediating processes through which altruism may influence other organizational variables such as OLC or organizational trust.

Based on these considerations, we aim to ascertain if altruism within organizations can improve OLC, and whether this relationship might be explained by other organizational variables (e.g., organizational trust and relationship conflict). The aim is to identify intermediate steps between these two variables offering a wider picture of the altruism-OLC relationship.

On the one hand, altruism has also been linked to the mitigation of relationship conflicts in the context of family firms (Eddleston and Kellermanns, 2007; Kellermanns and Eddleston, 2004). Nevertheless, the particular characteristics of relationships attached to such enterprises could result in that the effects of altruism on relationship conflict may not be the same in non-family firms (Kellermanns and Eddleston, 2004). This, it would be necessary to determine whether the effects of altruism on relationship conflict can also be attributed to non-family firms in order to achieve a more precise understanding of such linkage. In turn, relationship conflict appears to prevent certain essential behaviors for organizational learning. Thus, the absence of relationship conflict in organizations encourages experimentation, taking risks, interaction with the environment, dialogue, and participation in decision making. As a result, relationship conflict may restrict the organizational learning process.

On the other hand, some researches have suggested that altruistic behaviors could foster trust among members of the organization (Ferrin et al., 2006). Altruistic behaviors in organizations could help generate a positive expectation of the other party's behavior or intentions, thereby allowing trust to develop between parties. In turn, there are theoretical foundations to support the notion that trust fosters certain behaviors which are determinant in OLC such as risk taking, experimentation, participation and dialogue (e.g. Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Mayer et al., 1995) which has been identified as essentials facilitating factors of organizational learning (Chiva et al., 2007). Indeed, the organizational learning process consists of the acquisition, dissemination, and use of knowledge (Argote et al., 2003), and organizational trust has been identified as a decisive factor in acquiring, spreading and using knowledge (McElroy, 2002). Therefore, organizational trust can be considered as an essential condition to enhance OLC.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the relationships between altruism, relationship conflict, organizational trust and OLC. More specifically, we aim to examine the role played by organizational consequences of altruism, such as relationship conflict and organizational trust, within the altruism-OLC relationship. We propose that relationship conflict and organizational trust play a mediating role in the altruism–OLC linkage and that such mediations are relevant in order to get a better understanding of the altruism–OLC relationship. We want to provide a complete picture of the altruism–OLC relationship that highlights the role of relationship conflict and organizational trust in such linkage.

To examine this gap in the research, we carried out a quantitative analysis of a sample of Spanish firms with recognized excellence in human resources management. We

select this sample of firms because we consider that they set a benchmark for many other organizations.

Following this introduction, we briefly review the concepts of altruism, OLC, relationship conflict and organizational trust, and propose four hypotheses on their relationships. We then describe the methodology used in the study. Finally, we report the results, and discuss the implications and limitations of the study, together with proposals for future research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Altruism

Altruism refers to the enduring tendency to think about the welfare and rights of other people, to feel concern and empathy for them, and to act in a way that benefits them (Van Emmerik et al., 2005). In the same view, according to Simmons (1991, p. 3) "altruism seeks to increase another's welfare, not one's own; is voluntary; is intentional, meant to help someone else; and expects no external reward".

At the organizational level, altruism refers to "discretionary behaviors that have the effect of helping a specific other person with an organizationally relevant task or problem" (Organ, 1988, p. 8). Thus, altruism in organizations is characterized as a helping behavior, which involves voluntarily helping others with work-related problems including actions such as "helping others who have been absent," "orienting new people even though it is not required," "helping others who have heavy workloads," and "assisting [the] supervisor with his or her work" (Smith et al., 1983, p. 657). It should be noted that although the literature has predominantly considered altruism at the

individual level, we propose to assess it at the organizational level in order to ascertain the overall presence of altruism in the organizational context.

Organizational learning capability

The concept of organizational learning capability (OLC) emphasizes the importance of the facilitating factors of organizational learning or an organization's propensity to learn (Chiva and Alegre, 2009b; Chiva et al., 2007). As we noted, OLC refers to the organizational characteristics and guidelines that facilitate organizational learning or allow an organization to learn (Chiva and Alegre, 2009b; Goh and Richards, 1997). Reciently, five facilitating factors of OLC were identified by Chiva et al. (2007): experimentation, risk taking, interaction with the environment, dialogue, and participative decision making. We adopt this conceptualization of OLC.

Relationship conflict

Workplace conflict emerges when one party—be it an individual or a group of individuals—perceives its goals, values, or opinions being thwarted by an interdependent counterpart (De Dreu, 2008). Within organizations, perceived differences and opposition evolve around work- and task-related issues, or around socio-emotional and relationship issues (De Dreu and Beersma, 2005; Jehn, 1995). Accordingly, the literature on conflict makes a clear distinction between task (or cognitive) and relationship (or emotional) conflict.

Task conflict refers to conflicts which arise over substantive issues (such as differences of opinion or ideas about the correct way to approach a task or solve a problem),

whereas relationship conflict refers to socio-emotional or interpersonal disagreements that are usually associated with feelings of annoyance and animosity (Jehn, 1995). Thus, relationship conflict is a kind of conflict with a strong personal and emotional component, characterized by friction and personality differences among individuals, such as interpersonal style, attitudes and preferences, and personality (De Dreu and Van Vianen, 2001).

Organizational trust

Mayer et al. (1995, p. 712) define organizational trust as "the willingness of one party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party". Thus, one person's trust in another is generally based on his or her expectations of the intentions or behavior of the other party (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust represents an individual's faith that the other party will act in a fair, ethical and predictable way (Luhmann, 1979).

Organizational trust is a multidimensional construct that consists of lateral and vertical elements (McCauley and Kuhnert, 1992). Lateral trust refers to the trust that can exist between workmates or equals sharing a similar employment position, while vertical trust concerns trust between workers and their immediate superiors, their subordinates, top management or organizations as a whole (McCauley and Kuhnert, 1992).

Hypotheses

Based on the definitions from the previous section, we introduce the conceptual model shown in figure 1. Our research model explores the mediating role of relationship conflict and organizational trust on the altruism-OLC relationship. Accordingly, we put forward and test the following hypotheses:

 (1)   *Relationship conflict acts as a mediating variable between altruism and OLC;*

(2)   *Relationship conflict acts as a mediating variable between altruism and organizational learning;*

(3)   *Organizational trust acts as a mediating variable between relationship conflict and OLC.*

(4)   *Organizational trust acts as a mediating variable between altruism and OLC.*

As we noted, the literature seems to suggest the presence of altruism within organizations may favor organizational learning (Berson et al., 2006; Chang et al., 2011; Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2004). Thus, we want to ascertain if altruism might be understood as an antecedent of OLC. For this reason, we aim to link altruism to the dimensions or factors that facilitate OLC proposed by Chiva et al. (2007): experimentation, risk taking, interaction with the environment, dialogue, and participative decision making. Indeed, we propose that between altruism-OLC linkage, relationship conflict and organizational trust could play a relevant role.

Altruism is conceived as a feeling of concern and empathy for the interests of others, consideration for their welfare and acting in a manner that benefits them (Van Emmerik

et al., 2005). Empathy refers to feeling others' emotions in oneself which helps people to take into account and accept more easily other people's viewpoints. As altruism is linked to an emotional response, namely, feeling concern and empathy for others (Cialdini et al., 1997), altruism may contribute to accept and understand other people's opinions or decisions more easily. As a result, altruism in organizations may facilitate that workers' decisions are taken into account, making the decision-making process much more participatory. Altruism within organizations may therefore boost participative decision making which is an essential ingredient for the learning process.

Moreover, altruistic behaviors seek to benefit another person even if it entail a personal cost or sacrifice (Monroe, 1996), without expecting any reward (Simmons, 1991). Altruism therefore means being prepared to make sacrifices for the benefit of others, and accepting the risk that no gain or even a cost may be incurred in exchange. In fact, according to Piliavin and Charng (1990), altruistic individuals are more willingly to assume risks that others try to avoid and seem to be more inclined to engage in risky behaviors. Accordingly, the presence of altruism within organizations can be positively linked to a vital component for organizational learning such as risk-taking.

As we noted, altruism in organizations includes spontaneous behaviors aimed at helping a particular individual in a particular task. For example, voluntarily helping colleagues on a project in which one is not directly involved, or without being asked to do so, or helping new employees integrate into the organization (Becton et al., 2008). As a result, altruism promotes employees participation on activities which extend beyond those formally required by their job. Consequently, altruism in organizations could cause workers to experiment with new processes or behaviors which are other essential condition for OLC.

Furthermore, when an individual behaves altruistically, helping or cooperating voluntarily with another on a task, the interaction between parties is encouraged. Thus, since altruistic behaviors intended to assist or cooperate with others, they increase the chance of contact and interaction with others. Therefore, altruism within organizations may boost information exchange and communication. In fact, the organizational literature indicates that altruism is positively related to cooperation (Schulze et al., 2003), information exchange (Daily and Dollinger, 1992) and communication (Gersick et al., 1997). As a result, altruism enhances the possibility of interaction with others, which could help to promote and facilitate dialogue and communication, and also open up possibilities for interaction with the external environment. Thus, altruism in organizations seems to be positively associated with two essential dimensions for OLC such as dialogue and interaction with the external environment.

Bearing in mind the above arguments, altruism may be closely linked to the dimensions or factors that facilitate organizational learning proposed by Chiva et al. (2007). Therefore, the presence of altruism in organizations might favor risk taking, participatory decision making, experimentation, interaction with the environment, and dialogue. Thus, the presence of altruism in organizations could be positively related to OLC. However, as Bolino et al. (2013) have recently suggested, it is necessary the inclusion of certain contextual variables to understand how altruism eventually is transferred to other larger organizational results.

Some authors have also indicated that individuals feel close and connected to others whom they perceive to be responsive and supportive of their needs (Lemay et al., 2007). As altruism is characterized by perspective taking and by feeling concern and empathy for the welfare and rights of other people, altruism helps to create an emotional and affective bond between individuals (Islam et al., 2012). When affective and emotional

bonds are created with others the likelihood of personal animosities and incompatibilities may be less likely to arise. The establishment of this emotional connection may lead to perceive fewer less interpersonal disagreements. Hence, the empathy and understanding of the interests of others that accompany altruism may prevent relationship conflict from arising. Accordingly, altruism in organizations may decrease relationship conflict among employees.

In turn, by impeding open communication, openness to new ideas, the assimilation and processing of information, active participation and cooperation, and listening and constructive dialogue between people (Amason et al., 1995; Greer et al., 2008; Griffith et al., 2003; Panteli and Sockalingam, 2005), relationship conflict may impede organizational learning. Conversely, the lack of relationship conflict between individuals may encourage certain behaviors that facilitate OLC such as risk taking, participatory decision making, experimentation, interaction with the environment, and dialogue (Chiva et al., 2007).

According to the above arguments, altruism may reduce relationship conflict, which in turn could enhance learning in organizations. We therefore put forward the following hypothesis:

H1: Relationship conflict acts as a mediating variable between altruism and OLC.

Trust has been postulated as a vital component in organizational life which has positive consequences for both the organization and its members and a source of competitive advantage for organizations (Altuntas and Baykal, 2010; Tan and Lim, 2009). Nevertheless, literature has suggested that study on organizational trust is still limited (Mayer and Gavin, 2005; Tan and Lim, 2009) and more research is necessary in order to

determine the antecedents of this construct (Schoorman et al., 2007). For the purpose of examine this gap in the literature we aim to propose some antecedents of organizational trust.

Holmes and Rempel (1989) stated that one person's trust in another can be determined by the latter's perception of the former's behavior. We base our decision to trust or not on the knowledge we have and on existing evidence of the other party's trustworthiness (McAllister, 1995). Thus, workers can show their trustworthiness and honesty by voluntarily helping their peers (Ferrin et al., 2006). According to McAllister (1995), this recognized behavior—based on a personal decision that goes beyond formal requirements, serves the needs of others and shows concern and care for their interests––may be essential to the development of trust. Previous research (e.g. Fisher and Brown, 1988; Zand, 1972) finds that trust develops when concern and benevolence are shown for the interests of others. Thus, one party will place his or her trust in another in the expectation that the other party will behave benevolently (Sorrentino et al., 1995). Conversely, if selfish behavior is shown, only furthering self-interest without regard to the interests of others, a climate of distrust is likely to be created (Butler, 1995).

Hence, behavior that is considered to be performed voluntarily, beyond formal requirements, without recompense or formal approval, may be interpreted by the recipient as a sign that the person is trustworthy (Ferrin et al., 2006). The reason for this is that voluntary behavior provides information about the internal character and motives of the other party, and in the end, his or her trustworthiness (Ferrin et al., 2006). In sum, the literature seems to suggest that voluntary behavior aimed at helping another person may influence our decision to trust someone, signaling that this person is trustworthy. Altruistic behavior may help create a positive expectation of the behavior or intentions of others, which may allow trust to develop among members of an organization.

Altruism may be seen as an indicator of trustworthiness on which to base our decision to trust. Hence, the presence of altruism within organizations could help to generate greater organizational trust.

Furthermore, as we noted before, altruism in organizations may also help to mitigate the presence of relationship conflict in organizational settings. Moreover, there is broad consensus that affect and emotion influence how people develop trust in each other (e.g, Jones and George, 1998; Lau and Cobb, 2010; McAllister, 1995). Relationship conflict typically provokes negative reactions among individuals such as hostility, cynicism, apathy and distrust (Amason et al., 1996; Panteli and Sockalingam, 2005). The negative affect produced by relationship conflict encourages negative attributions of the other party (Simons and Peterson, 2000), the actual breaking of promises (Jehn and Bendersky, 2003) and sharpens the difference among coworker values, perspectives and attitudes (Williams, 2001). As a result, this type of organizational conflict adversely affects the conditions necessary for the development of trust in organizations (Lau and Cobb, 2010). In the same way, Panteli and Sockalingam (2005) affirm that relationship conflict can promote divide, weaken relationships and reduce trust between parties. Therefore, the common presence of relationship conflict in organizations can result in lower levels of organizational trust.

According to the above arguments, altruism, by reducing the common presence of relationship conflict in organizations, could facilitate organizational trust. The following hypothesis is therefore put forward:

H2: Relationship conflict acts as a mediating variable between altruism and organizational trust.

As we noted, relationship conflict impedes open communication, cooperation, openness to new ideas, the assimilation and processing of information, active participation and cooperation, and listening and constructive dialogue between people (Greer et al., 2008; Griffith et al., 2003; Panteli and Sockalingam, 2005). As a result, relationship conflict has been proposed as a restrictor learning in organizations (Amason et al., 1995; Panteli and Sockalingam, 2005). Hence, relationship conflict may be negatively associated with the facilitating factors of OLC.

In this sense, the literature suggests that when individuals perceive discrepancies, incompatible wishes or desires, it can result in antagonistic and hostile interaction among them (Chuang et al., 2004). When this situation arises employees involved in the conflict are less willing to interact, and therefore dialogue and communication between them suffer. The absence of relationship conflict could therefore foster greater dialogue between the parties (Amason et al., 1995; Panteli and Sockalingam, 2005).

On the other hand, as relationship conflict limits individuals' information processing ability (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Simons and Peterson, 2000), members with interpersonal incompatibilities may be distracted from observing and interacting with the external environment. Indeed, in a relationship conflict individuals focus much of their efforts and attention on discussing, resolving or ignoring their personal incompatibilities, discrepancies and disaffections (Jehn, 1995). As a result, relationship conflict may prevent employees from focusing on the organization's immediate environment and establishing relations and connections with it.

Likewise, as their cognitive capabilities are restricted, individuals involved in a relationship conflict may be less inclined to listen, assimilate and accept new ideas, or assess new information (Jehn and Bendersky, 2003). In contrast, individuals who

experience a high degree of connectivity with others create expansive emotional spaces that open possibilities for creativity and trying out new ideas (Losada and Heaphy, 2004; Spreitzer et al., 2005). So that, the absence of relationship conflict at work may enhance the opportunities for experimenting with new processes and procedures, and may create a more comfortable environment for workers to put forward new ideas or suggestions.

Furthermore, positive working relationships provide workers with a state of psychological safety in which they feel confident to experiment and take risks (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The experience of psychological safety can allow organizational members to participate more easily in behaviors for which outcomes are unpredictable (Edmondson and Mogelof, 2006). Therefore, workers who feel safe and connected to each other are more comfortable taking risks, such as trying something new or contributing ideas. Conversely, interpersonal disaffections and feelings of interpersonal incompatibility may evoke hostile relationships in which employees feel uncomfortable taking risks and accepting mistakes. Therefore, we propose that absence of relationship conflict may facilitate risk taking in organizations.

Accordingly, relationship conflict seems to impede risk taking, experimentation, participation, dialogue and interaction with the environment. Thus, relationship conflict could be negatively linked to OLC. Furthermore, as we noted previously, the absence of relationship conflict in organizations could boost organizational trust. In turn, the presence of a climate of organizational trust in firms could encourage the organizational learning process. Organizational trust allows employees to adopt behaviors involving risk (Mayer et al., 1995) such as delegation of responsibilities (Mayer et al., 1995), cooperation (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Rousseau et al., 1998), greater worker participation (Tzafrir, 2005), expression of ideas (Dirks, 1999), less control or

supervision (Cook and Schilke, 2010; Dirks, 1999), or experimenting with new behaviors (Nyhan and Marlowe, 1997). In sum, risk taking that comes with trust enables parties to delegate, participate, cooperate, experiment or engage in dialogue. Accordingly, conditions and behaviors brought about by trust could facilitate OLC.

Based on these evidences and lines of argument, organizational trust may be understood as a mediating variable between relationship conflict and OLC. We therefore put forward the following hypothesis:

H3: Organizational trust acts as a mediating variable between relationship conflict and OLC.

As we previously stated altruism in organizations seems to boost OLC, however to achieve a better understanding about the effects of altruism on larger organizational variables the incorporation of certain mediating processes is recommended (Bolino et al., 2013). Moreover, as it has also been pointed out, altruism in organizations can encourage a climate of trust within organizational contexts. In turn, as we also mentioned, organizational trust stimulate certain behaviors that facilitate OLC. Based on the previous arguments and proposals, the positive relationship between altruism and OLC may be explained by organizational trust. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Organizational trust acts as a mediating variable between altruism and OLC.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection and sampling

The empirical study was based on a population of 402 Spanish firms with proven excellence in human resource management. The population was obtained from merging different databases or lists of firms that consider people as a key element of their organizations and are regarded by their workers as good firms to work for, or organizational environments where human resources management is considered important. The databases used were taken from the lists of 'CRF Top Employers', 'Great Place to Work Institute', 'mercoPersonas', and 'Actualidad Económica'. We consider that many other firms could take them as models. These lists and rankings meet high quality standards that identify and classify excellent places to work, among which are included the most innovative and successful firms in human resource management. They only include firms that reach the highest standards of excellence in the conditions they provide to their employees. The analyses carried out by these consultants assess human resource management and the conditions the workers enjoy within the organization. Each of these firms has demonstrated that it has an excellent working environment and is among the firms most highly valued by their workers. Moreover, because the particular qualities and conditions shared by these firms, we believe that the relationships among the variables arising in these working environments can be a subject worthy of in-depth examination.

Each of these firms was sent a pre-designed questionnaire. This questionnaire was addressed to managers with at least two years' experience at the firm, preferably human

resources managers. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 28 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, showing the level of agreement or disagreement with the content of each item. Before starting the fieldwork, the questionnaire was pretested in order to ensure that the items were comprehensible to the recipients. This was achieved with the cooperation of people from the academic sphere whose research and interest revolve around human resources, as well as various human resources managers from different firms. A total of 251 valid questionnaires were received. The sample obtained therefore represented 62.44% of the study population, which is considered to be a satisfactory response rate. The number of responses exceeded the minimum threshold of one hundred subjects necessary for the application of structural equation methodology and to test the psychometric properties of the measurement scales (Spector, 1992; Williams et al., 2004). Data were collected between October and December 2010.

Measurement instruments

Measurement scales were taken from previous studies to measure each of the constructs or dimensions in this research. The four dimensions in this study are altruism, OLC, relationship conflict and organizational trust.

Altruism

The scale proposed to measure the altruism construct was based on Podsakoff et al. (1990) instrument designed to measure organizational citizenship behavior. This scale includes the five dimensions of citizenship behavior identified by Organ (1988), one of which is altruism. The psychometric properties of the scale used had been analyzed

previously and the validity of the measuring instrument was verified. Finally, the authors include a total of five items to measure the 'altruism' dimension. These items were selected to measure the construct in the present study.

Organizational learning capability

This scale was based on the work of Chiva et al. (2007) and Chiva and Alegre (2009b), which suggests measuring organizational learning as a multidimensional construct bringing together proposals from the social perspective (e.g., Brown and Duguid, 1991; Weick and Westley, 1996), the individual perspective (e.g., Hedberg, 1981; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000) and the learning organization (e.g., Pedler, 1997; Ulrich et al., 1993). The individual perspective considers learning as an individual phenomenon and consequently understands that organizations learn through individuals (Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Simon, 1991). The social perspective considers learning as a social phenomenon and therefore understands that organizations learn through communities and groups (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Chiva and Alegre, 2005). The learning organization or prescriptive literature mainly focuses on the development of normative models for the creation of a learning organization (Alegre and Chiva, 2008; Ulrich et al., 1993). This literature (Goh and Richards, 1997; Pedler, 1997) describes a set of actions that ensures learning capability: effective generation of ideas by implementing a set of practices such as experimentation, continuous improvement, teamwork and group problem-solving, observing what others do, or participative decision making. The final scale consisted of five dimensions and a total of 14 items. These dimensions are experimentation, risk-taking, interaction with the external environment, dialogue and participation (Chiva and Alegre, 2009b).

Relationship Conflict

To measure relationship conflict we used Cox's (Cox, 1998; Friedman et al., 2000) organizational conflict scale. Cox's five-item scale focuses on the degree of active hostility found in relationship conflict and contains items such as "much plotting takes place behind the scenes" and "one party frequently undermines the other". Its authors test the validity of the measurement scale and demonstrate that it is a psychometrically valid and viable measurement instrument.

Organizational trust

The construct of organizational trust has been measured based on a measurement instrument designed by Nyhan and Marlowe (1997). This instrument measures interpersonal trust (supervisors and peers) and the level of trust in the organization. Nyhan and Marlowe (1997) tested the validity of the measurement scale and demonstrate that it is a psychometrically valid and viable measurement instrument. Finally, of the twelve items making up the original measurement scale, we have selected the four items that measure the level of organizational trust. The scale used is a 1- to 5-point Likert type one, with 1 being the lowest level of trust and 5 the highest.

Psychometric properties of the measurement scales

The psychometric properties of the measurement scales were analyzed to test the dimensionality of the scales measuring the concepts and constructs used in the theoretical model, reliability, validity of content, convergent validity and discriminant validity (see table 1 for the means, standard deviations and correlation factors). Firstly,

we analyzed the one-dimensionality of the measurement scales for the altruism, conflict and organizational trust constructs using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA indicators reported confirm the one-dimensionality of the altruism construct (p-value > 0.05; RMSEA = 0.037; BBNFI = 0.987; CFI = 0.996), the relationship conflict construct (p-value > 0.05; RMSEA = 0.000; BBNFI = 0.991; CFI = 1.000) and the organizational trust construct (p-value > 0.05; RMSEA = 0.000; BBNFI = 0.999; CFI = 1.000). The multidimensionality of the OLC construct was tested with a second-order factor analysis (Chiva and Alegre, 2009b), whose goodness of fit indicators showed a good fit for the model (p-value > 0.05; RMSEA < 0.05; BBNFI > 0.90; BBNNFI > 0.90; CFI = 0.987; and $\chi 2$ / d.f. = 1.20) (see figure 2). We used two indicators, namely composite reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and average variance extracted (Alegre and Chiva, 2008), as well as Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), to test the reliability of the scale. All Cronbach's alpha coefficient values and those for composite reliability are above the minimum acceptable value 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). In all cases, the average variance extracted shows values greater than or very close to the recommended minimum of 0.5 (Hair et al., 1998; Nunnally, 1978). Content validity was established through the use of previously validated measures and through the pre-test we also carried out. The variables used to measure altruism were those proposed and used by Podsakoff et al. (1990); OLC was measured using the scale proposed by Chiva et al. (2007); conflict was measured with Cox's (1998) Organizational Conflict Scale; and, finally, organizational trust was measured using the instrument designed by Nyhan and Marlowe (1997). Convergent validity was evaluated using the BBNFI indicator obtained from the confirmatory factor analysis. The values obtained in the BBNFI, as well as the factor loadings for each construct, lie above 0.90 (Ahire et al., 1996) and the factor loadings of the items in each scale had values above 0.4 (Hair et al., 1999), with a

t value of more than 1.96 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1982), confirming the convergent validity of the measurement scales. Discriminant validity was assessed using CFA; all correlation coefficients are significant and below 0.9 (Luque, 2000) and the average variance extracted in each dimension is clearly above the square of the correlation of a construct with the others making up the measurement scale (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), verifying the discriminant validity of the model.

As we used subjective evaluation measures, we conducted a Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986; Podsakoff et al., 2003) to check for common method variance and to address the potential social desirability of the responses. The results of the CFA with the 28 indicators loading onto a single factor ($\chi2$ (350) = 2785.763; CFI = 0.212; RMSEA = 0.167; BBNFI = 0.197; $\chi2$/d.f. = 7.96) showed a poor fit, suggesting that the single factor does not account for all of the variance in the data. Consequently, and in accordance with this procedure, we do not consider common method variance to be a problem in our research.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the indicators considered in the study. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the theoretical model, using the statistical program EQS 6.1 for Windows.

In order to examine the proposed relationships (figure 1), we followed the procedure described by Tippins and Sohi (2003), which involves estimating two structural models. The first is a direct effects model that tests the effect of independent variables on dependent variables. For this mediation to exist, the coefficient in the direct effects model—referring to the effect of altruism on OLC—must be significant for testing of the mediator effects to continue. In the direct effects model (Figure 3), we confirmed that the coefficient of the relationship of altruism to OLC is significant ($\beta 1 = 0.482$; t=4.089; p<0.01).

This direct effect may be arrived at via a variety of direct and indirect forces (Hayes, 2009). According to our research model (figure 1), H1-H4 represent mediation hypothesis, which posit how, or by what means, an independent variable (altruism) affects a dependent variable (OLC), through mediating variables or mediators (conflict and trust). Therefore, the second model is a multiple mediated model that includes the mediator variables (conflict and trust).

The fit indexes for the models are presented in Figures 3 and 4. Table 3 shows the structural equations of the models. The contribution of the mediated model in terms of the effect of altruism on OLC lies in the analysis of relationship conflict and trust as mechanisms that mediate this relationship and allows the information provided by the direct effects model to be extended.

Figure 4 shows the results of the structural equations analysis. We carried out the analysis including all the items and all the dimensions described in the measurements section. The chi-square statistic for the model is significant, but other relevant fit indices suggest a goodoverall fit (Satorra-Bentler Chi-Square = 406.58; degrees of freedom = 339; p= 0.007; Bentler-Bonnet Non-Normed Fit = 0.976; Comparative Fit Index: 0.978; root mean square error of approximation = 0.028).

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The analysis of the multiple mediated model (Figure 4) shows that H1 is not supported. According to Tippins and Sohi (2003) if relationship conflict acted as a mediator between altruism and OLC, we would find a significant relationship between conflict and OLC. However, this condition was not met.

The mediating effect of conflict on the relationship between altruism and trust is established due to the following conditions (Tippins and Sohi 2003). First, there is a

negative relationship between altruism and conflict. Second, there is a negative relationship between conflict and trust. And third, the direct effect of altruism on trust is significant. These results provide support for H2 by showing a partial mediating role of conflict on the relationship between altruism and trust.

The mediating effect of trust on the relationship between conflict and OLC is also supported. First, there is a negative relationship between conflict and trust. Second, there is a positive relationship between trust and OLC. And third, the direct effect of altruism on trust is nonsignificant. These conditions provide compelling evidence for the full mediating effect of trust on the relationship between conflict and OLC and lend substantial support to H3.

Finally, the mediating effect of trust on the relationship between altruism and OLC is also supported (H4). First, there is a positive relationship between altruism and trust. Second, there is a positive relationship between trust and OLC. And third, the direct effect of altruism on trust is significant, showing a partial mediating role of trust on the relationship between altruism and OLC.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

DISCUSSION

In an increasingly uncertain, constantly changing economic environment, OLC is understood to be a vital characteristic in enabling organizations to remain competitive and achieve long-term success (Chiva and Alegre, 2009b; Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005). It is therefore essential to promote learning among members of the organization and generate working environments with a high learning capacity. In this study we have attempted to explore some antecedents of organizational learning.

As an alternative paradigm over economics-based management theories, recently some scholars have proposed a more humanistic view about human motivations and behavior (e.g., Melé, 2009; Pirson and Lawrence, 2010; Pirson and Turnbull, 2011; Spitzeck et al., 2009). This paradigm shift includes a change from self-centeredness to interconnectedness and moving from self-interest to service and stewardship. In contrast to economics-based management theories, the humanistic paradigm views the individual as a relational person who is intrinsically motivated to serve humanity through his or her actions (Pirson and Lawrence, 2010; Pirson and Turnbull, 2011). Thus, individuals are seen as more collaborative, empathetic, altruistic, and motivated by caring about the well-being of others (Brown et al., 2012; Rynes et al., 2012). Accordingly, this research has sought to link some of those behaviors with other organizational variables such OLC, organizational trust and relationship conflict.

In accordance to this new humanistic paradigm, organizational literature has suggested that altruism in leaders and employees has a positive relationship with the organizational learning process (e.g., Berson et al., 2006; Chang et al., 2011; Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2004). Therefore, in this research we aim to ascertain the effect of altruism on OLC. For this purpose, we have proposed that a climate of altruism in

organizations can be related to Chiva et al.'s (2007) five dimensions of OLC. Additionally, as some authors recommended (e.g., Bolino et al., 2013) we have include some mediating variables in order to understand more deeply the effects of altruism in organizations. Consequently, in this research we also suggest that the relationship between altruism and OLC cannot simply be considered as a direct relationship, but it is also conditional or dependent on other organizational factors like relationship and organizational trust. This research provides a complete view and examinations of the effects of altruism in organizations and offers some mechanisms to boost OLC. Findings introduce some insights and outcomes on the phenomenon of altruism in organizations and also report some organizational conditions that facilitate OLC.

Our findings make an important contribution to the research of altruism in organizations and to the organizational learning literature focusing on the intermediate links between altruism and OLC. We have found relationship conflict and organizational trust playing a mediating role in the altruism-OLC relationship. Results indicate that altruism reduces relationship conflict, and increases organizational trust, which in turn enhances OLC. Moreover, our results also suggest that altruism directly enhances OLC.

This study also provides a more complete examination of the effects and antecedents of organizational trust and relationship conflict. The findings also represent a contribution to the organizational literature by providing evidence of the importance of trust and relationship conflict on organizational learning. However, as the results indicate, despite organizational trust acts as a mediating variable between altruism-OLC relationship, in the case of relationship conflict the same mediating effect is not satisfied. In any case, the mediating role of relationship conflict can be attributable through organizational trust. These findings suggest that organizational trust has a more predominant role on the enhancement of OLC than relationship conflict. Thus, fostering a culture of trust in

organizations can be considered as an essential element to boost the organizational learning process. Likewise, this study shows that creating an altruistic work environment without the presence of relationship conflicts is a key condition to encourage organizational trust.

The results are in accordance with the recent new paradigm on management theory which focuses on a more humanistic and compassionate approach of organizations. Altruism in organizations is directly related to the dimensions that facilitate OLC proposed by Chiva et al. (2007). Thus, individuals in organizations who behave altruistically engage in experimentation, risk taking, dialogue, interaction with the external environment and participative decision making, and as a result boost organizational learning. Furthermore, altruism in organizations promotes the development of healthy relationship with strong affective and emotional connections in which interpersonal disagreements and discrepancies are less likely to occur. Thus, altruism can prevent the occurrence of relationship conflicts in organizations. On the other hand, altruism in organizations may be interpreted by their recipient as a sign that the person is trustworthy (Ferrin et al., 2006). As a result, the common presence of altruism in organizations can enhance the level of organizational trust. In turn, organizational trust fosters behaviors which involve a risk (Mayer et al., 1995) that allows individuals in organizations to engage in the necessary actions for learning such as delegating, participating, cooperating, experimentation or dialogue. Finally, the absence of relationship conflict in organizations can put in place the conditions for the development of organizational trust, as relationship conflict sharpens interpersonal differences among coworkers and promotes divide and weaken relationships (Panteli and Sockalingam, 2005; Williams, 2001).

Therefore, in this study we suggest that implementing a climate of altruism in organizations can be understand as a management action in order to boost OLC and the level of organizational trust. Due to the importance of OLC and organizational trust for organizations today, altruism in organizations is a component of the organizations that cannot be ignored by their managers and should be fostered in firms. Furthermore, managers need to encourage a climate of altruism in their organizations to reduce the presence of counterproductive work relationships relationship embedded in interpersonal disputes which can report negative consequences for organizations and their employees. So that, we consider that encouraging an altruistic environment in organizations can be an essential way to obtain a competitive advantage in the current competitive global market, as OLC represents a strategic mean for achieving long-term organizational success.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The organizations included in the sample all consider people and human resource management as relevant. Thus, the generalizability of our results may be limited and should be validated in larger samples of firms in which human resource management is not so important. Moreover, the sample includes organizations from various sectors and sizes. Therefore, further studies might replicate this research in a single sector and with firms of a similar size. Another limitation concerns the causal direction between the constructs proposed in the model. The cross-sectional nature of our study does not allow inferences about the causality in the observed associations. In any case, this is a common limitation of cross-sectional studies. Thus, longitudinal-type studies are necessary in order to identify the direction of causality in these relationships.

As OLC is considered as an essential condition for organizations to obtain long-term competitiveness in the current organizational environment (Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005; Alegre and Chiva, 2008), we propose that researchers should continue to explore ways of creating organizational environments with a high OLC. Furthermore, due to the benefits of altruism in these firms, we therefore suggest that future research should continue to analyze and explore the consequences of altruism in other kind of organizations. Finally, findings emphasize the need for further research and implementation of the new proposals and alternative approaches to come out of management theory in recent years.

Appendix: Research Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions about your company or organization. Indicate the number corresponding to the answer that best matches your opinion, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5, strongly agree.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	In accordance	Strongly agree
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

About altruism: Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter (1990).

1. Helps others who have been absent.	1-2-3-4-5
2. Helps others who have heavy workloads.	1-2-3-4-5
3. Helps orient new people even though it is not required.	1-2-3-4-5
4. Willingly helps others who have work related problems.	1-2-3-4-5
5. Is always ready to lend a helping hand to those around him/her.	1-2-3-4-5

About conflict: Cox (1998).

6. The atmosphere here is often charged with hostility.	1-2-3-4-5
7. Backbiting is a frequent occurrence.	1-2-3-4-5
8. One party frequently undermines another.	1-2-3-4-5
9. There are often feelings of hostility among parties.	1-2-3-4-5
10. Much "plotting" takes place "behind the scenes".	1-2-3-4-5

Organizational learning capability: Chiva, Alegre and Lapiedra (2007).

About experimentation:

11. People here receive support and encouragement when presenting new ideas.	1-2-3-4-5
12. Initiative often receives a favorable response here, so people feel encouraged to generate new ideas.	1-2-3-4-5

About Risk taking:

13. People are encouraged to take risks in this organization.	1-2-3-4-5
14. People here often venture into unknown territory.	1-2-3-4-5

About interaction with the external environment:

15. It is part of the work of all staff to collect, bring back, and report information about what is going on outside the company	1-2-3-4-5
16. There are systems and procedures for receiving, collating and sharing information from outside the company.	1-2-3-4-5
17. People are encouraged to interact with the environment.	1-2-3-4-5

About dialogue:

18. Employees are encouraged to communicate.	1-2-3-4-5
19. There is a free and open communication within my work group.	1-2-3-4-5
20. Managers facilitate communication.	1-2-3-4-5
21. Cross-functional teamwork is a common practice here.	1-2-3-4-5

About participative decision making:

22. Managers in this organization frequently involve employees in important decisions.	1-2-3-4-5
23. Policies are significantly influenced by the view of employees.	1-2-3-4-5
24. People feel involved in main company decisions.	1-2-3-4-5

About trust: Nyhan and Marlowe (1997).

25. Employees fully trust that this organization will treat them fairly.	1-2-3-4-5
26. The level of trust between supervisors and workers in this organization is high.	1-2-3-4-5
27. The level of trust between the people of this organization is high.	1-2-3-4-5
28. People depend heavily on each other in this organization.	1-2-3-4-5

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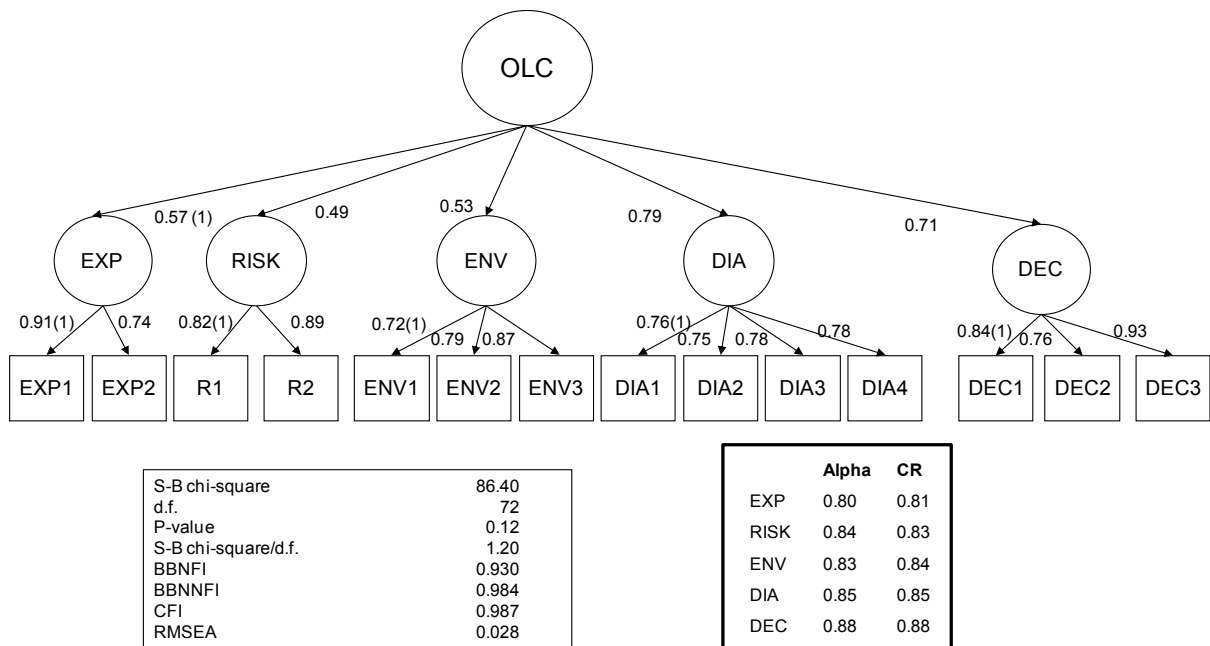Zand, D. E. (1972). Trust and managerial problem solving. Administrative Science Quarterly, 17(2), 229-239.

FIGURES

Figure 1. *Theoretical model of the research.*
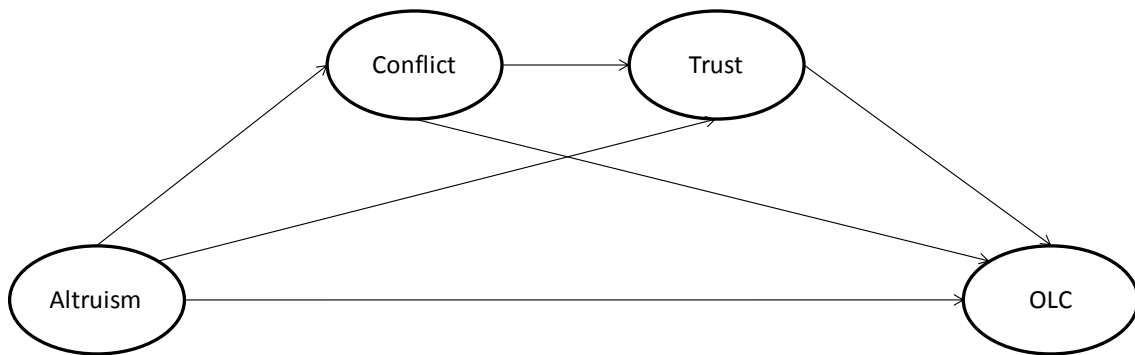
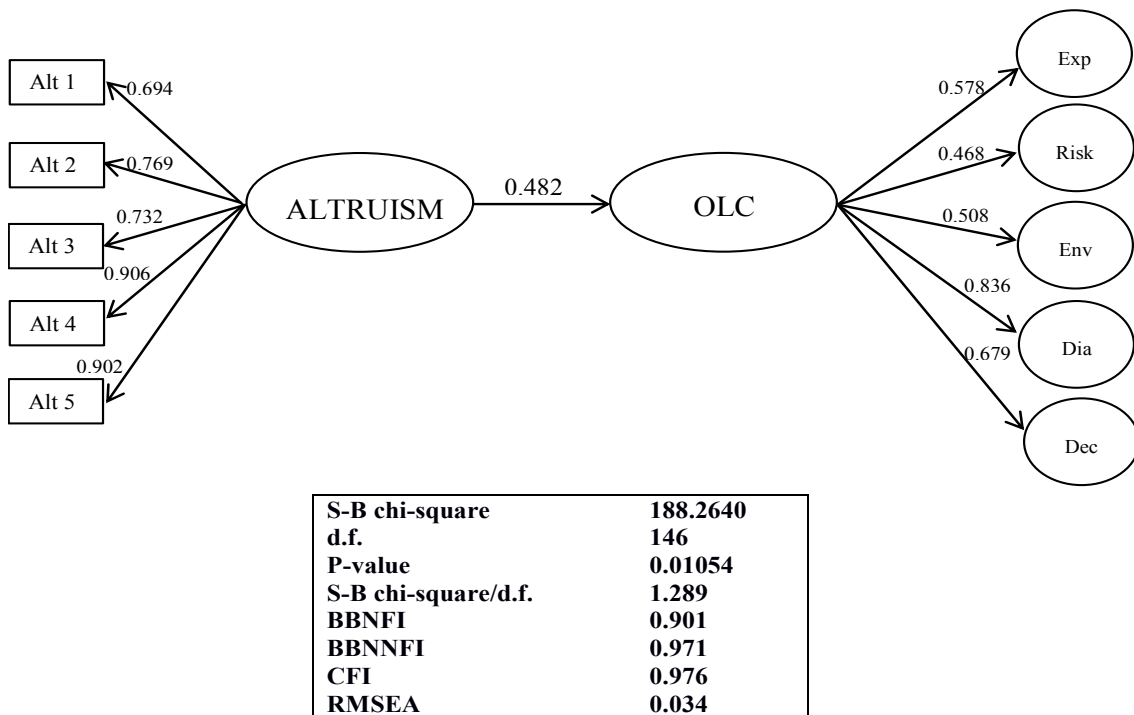*Note:* OLC= Organizational learning capability.

Figure 2. *Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Organizational Learning Capability (OLC).*

	S-B chi-square	86.40
	d.f.	72
	P-value	0.12
	S-B chi-square/d.f.	1.20
	BBNFI	0.930
	BBNNFI	0.984
	CFI	0.987
	RMSEA	0.028

	Alpha	CR
EXP	0.80	0.81
RISK	0.84	0.83
ENV	0.83	0.84
DIA	0.85	0.85
DEC	0.88	0.88

(1) The parameter was equaled to 1 to fix the latent variable scale. Parameter estimates are standardized. All parameter estimates are significant at a 95% confidence level.
*Note: OLC = Organizational learning capability; EXP = Experimentation; RISK= Acceptance of risk; ENV= Interaction with the external environment; DIA = Dialogue; DEC = Participative decision-making.*

Figure 3. *Direct effect model: Altruism and organizational learning capability.*

S-B chi-square	188.2640
d.f.	146
P-value	0.01054
S-B chi-square/d.f.	1.289
BBNFI	0.901
BBNNFI	0.971
CFI	0.976
RMSEA	0.034

(a) Organizational learning capability (OLC) is a second-order factor. For the sake of brevity, only the first-order loadings are shown. The item loadings for these first-order factors are all significant at p<0.001.
Note: OLC = Organizational learning capability; EXP = Experimentation; RISK= Acceptance of risk; ENV= Interaction with the external environment; DIA = Dialogue; DEC = Participative decision-making.

Figure 4. *Mediating effect model: Altruism, organizational learning capability, relationship conflict and organizational trust.*
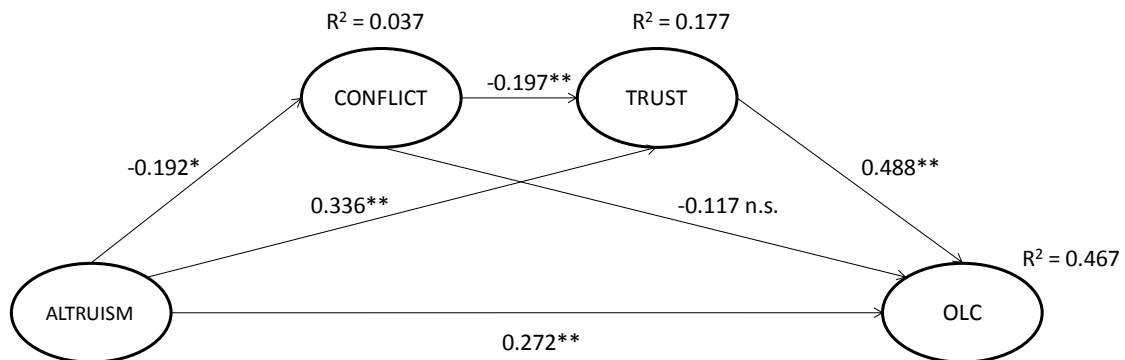
S-B chi square = 406.58; p = 0.007; d.f. = 339; S-B chi square/d.f. = 1.20
NFI = 0.883; NNFI=0.976; CFI=0,978; RMSEA=0,028

Notes: For the sake of brevity, only the loads on the hypotheses path are shown.
** Significant at 1% level (p < 0.01).
*Significant at 5% level (p < 0.05).
Parameters not shown here are all standardized, significant at p < 0.01, and above 0.4.

TABLES

Table 1. *Correlation factors, means and standard deviation.*

	Mean	S.D.	CONF	ALT	TRUST	EXP	RISK	INT	DIA	DEC
Relationship Conflict (CONF)	1.439	0.653	1							
Altruism (ALT)	3.812	0.563	-0.183**	1						
Organizational trust (TRUST)	3.850	0.581	-0.288**	0.344**	1					
Experimentation (EXP)	3.990	0.563	-0.211**	0.279**	0.344**	1				
Acceptance of risk (RISK)	3.371	0.852	-0.061	0.171**	0.243**	0.312**	1			
Interaction with environment (INT)	3.692	0.673	-0.061	0.156*	0.193**	0.175**	0.273**	1		
Dialogue (DIA)	4.126	0.549	-0.251**	0.413**	0.428**	0.404**	0.282**	0.345**	1	
Participative decision-making (DEC)	3.474	0.676	-0.219**	0.271**	0.484**	0.331**	0.315**	0.360**	0.495**	1

* Significant correlation ($p < 0.05$)
** Significant correlation ($p < 0.01$)
For the standard deviations and correlations between factors, we worked with the mean for the items making up each dimension.

Table 2. *Reliability of the measurement scales.*

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Extracted Mean variance
Relationship Conflict (5 items)	0.950	0.951	0.798
Altruism (5 items)	0.896	0.901	0.648
Organizational trust (4 items)	0.887	0.893	0.678
Experimentation (2 items)	0.802	0.810	0.684
Acceptance of risk (2 items)	0.842	0.845	0.733
Interaction with the external environment (3 items)	0.829	0.835	0.630
Dialogue (4 items)	0.849	0.851	0.589
Participative decision-making (3 items)	0.871	0.881	0.713

Table 3. *Structural equations to test the hypothesis that relationship conflict mediates in the relationship between altruism and organizational learning capability.*

Structural equation	R^2
Direct effect model	
OLC = 0.482*ALT (t = 4.089)	0.232
Multiple mediation effect model	
OLC = -0.117*CONF + 0.272*ALT + 0.488*TRUST (t = -1.541)　　(t = 3.255)　　(t = 4.977)	0.467
CONF = -0.192*ALT (t =-2.464)	0.037
TRUST= -0.197*CONF+0.336*ALT (t = -3.015)　　(t = 4.504)	0.177

Note: *OLC = Organizational learning capability; ALT = Altruism; CONF = Relationship Conflict; TRUST: Organizational trust.*