

## Investigation of the Role of Structural, Leadership, and Strategy Factors in Cooperatives Entrepreneurship

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### ABSTRACT

There are more than one million agricultural cooperatives members in Iran. In the meantime, the rapid development of the animal husbandry in Iran has forced cooperatives to meet the members' scientific and practical needs for completing production cycle of the dairy industry. Livestock production covers a wide spectrum of livestock activities including bee keeping, silkworm raising, and aquaculture, indicating widespread business systems in Iranian animal husbandry. Due to significant livestock population, various animal products, such as raw milk, red meat, white meat (chicken and fish), eggs, and honey are produced. Thus, the mentioned cooperatives need to meet the markets demands for keeping competitive advantage more than any time before. Only when innovation is fostered, market competitive advantage can be maintained. Today, sustainability and innovation issues have a great importance in some organizations such as agriculture cooperatives. The term "entrepreneurship" is coined to describe this need to keep organizations in competitive situation by innovations tools. Presently, it is believed that entrepreneurship can be developed. Organizational, personal, and environmental aspects are important factors toward entrepreneurship fostering. This study took into consideration three factors in cooperatives, including structure, strategy, and leadership. The results of research revealed that these three variables play important role in entrepreneurship development in cooperatives. Thus, consideration of these aspects can help in development and boost cooperatives profits. The result of modeling by structural equations methods showed that 38% of the variance of entrepreneurship as a dependent variable could be explained by these three factors in cooperatives.

**Keywords:** Agricultural cooperatives, Cooperative Entrepreneurship, Organizational factors.

### INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, innovation is vital and a crucial factor in competitive environment for organizations. An organization's sustainability, development, and competitive advantage depends on its innovation. During past decades, change, diversity of resources, variety of products and services, and quality and quantity development of production have been considered (Salavou and Lioukas, 2003). However, the question concerning the common element of these terms and phrases

has not received due consideration. Indeed, in response to this question, we can consider humanistic, economic, cultural, and organizational and management factors, but, the general finding and agreement of these empirical research are the concept of innovation. On the other hand, Peter Darker believes that entrepreneurship means providing new products or services or identification and creation of new markets and supply and selling the existing products (Kwantes and Boglarsky, 2007). Thus, to achieve good level of innovation,

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organizations should consider entrepreneurship as an integral part of their mission and vision. This issue is more vital in production cooperatives because these organizations should be sustainable before being innovative and this sustainability depends upon their entrepreneurship level. Innovation brings some concepts such as change and renovation. The current need of cooperatives is to control the innovation management methods in processes and their outputs by entrepreneurial orientation.

Increasing interest among academics on issues of entrepreneurial orientation has been considerable in the last two decades. The concept of an entrepreneurial orientation (EO) to explain the mindset of firms engaged in pursuing new ventures provides a useful framework for researching entrepreneurial activity (Lumpkin and Dess, 2001). The concept of EO refers to the “process, practices, and decision-making activities that lead to new entry” into a business field (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). EO of an organization is based on how much it innovates, acts proactively, and is willing to take risks. Innovativeness refers to a general willingness to depart from proven practices. Entrepreneurial orientation reflects how a firm operates rather than what it does (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). The interrelationships among entrepreneurship, market orientation, learning orientation, innovation and its implications for business performance have been widely examined in the management literature (Chen *et al.*, 2009).

EO facilitates organizational members' willingness and ability to commit to market learning activities, to recognize the need to reduce uncertainty and take more calculated risk. In management literature, entrepreneurship orientation is viewed as a learning and selection mechanism that generates exploratory and risk-taking behavior in NPD (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). Organizations that behave proactively are those that act in anticipation of future problems and opportunities (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). Many evidences show that

organizations with a high degree of entrepreneurial orientation show better performance (Wiklund, 1999). There is an agreement in the literature that EO can be managed, fostered, or hindered (Covin and Slevin, 1991). There is also a consensus that a high degree of EO exists only when it is developed and supported through organizational structure, leadership style, and organizational culture, etc. (Covin and Slevin, 1991). In the following sections, three of EO antecedents are outlined.

### Organizational Structure

Entrepreneurship scholars have attempted to explain performance by investigating the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance (Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005; Zahra and Garvis, 2000). Some studies found that entrepreneurial orientation enables small firms or new ventures, which are defined as firms newly built or less than ten years old, to perform better than competitors and enhance firm performance (Ireland, *et al.*, 2003).

Structure of an organization can be classified according to its technology: mechanistic versus organic. The mechanistic structure represents a high degree of specialization, division of labor, vertical communication, centralized authority, and low autonomy. Mechanistic organizations tend to be more traditional, more tightly controlled, and more hierarchical in their approach. On the other hand, the organic structure allows less strict task differentiation, less clear hierarchy, and a relatively higher degree of autonomy (Moreno and Casillas, 2008). Entrepreneurial orientation involves a willingness to innovate, search for risks, take self-directed actions, and be more proactive than competitors toward new marketplace opportunities (Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005). The research on internal antecedents of EO emphasize that contend organizational structures determine the

degree of EO because they affect communication and information flows through the organization and how organization members interact (Aloulou and Fayolle, 2005). In general, an organically structured organization is more adaptable, more openly communicative, more consensual, and more loosely controlled. Organic structures support the systematic discovery of innovative opportunities and foster opportunities through facilitation and motivation (Lumpkin and Dess, 2001). Organizational structure has a direct effect on staff participation in the management. The organizational structures have to comprise the ideal conditions for the employee communication inside the enterprise and with the partner's enterprises, suppliers, purchasers, etc. comprising the alliances (Naldi, *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, the first hypothesis was offered as:

H1: Organizational structure has a significant role in cooperatives EO.

### Leadership Style

There is widespread agreement that a strong degree of participation is beneficial to EO (e.g., Parry and Proctor-Thomson, 2003). Sarin and McDermott (2003) identified two aspects of a transformational leadership style: first the degree of participation, and second, the degree of consideration. Participation refers to the intensity with which superiors encourage the stakeholders' active involvement in the decision-making process, and consideration refers to the leader's level of concern for his or her team members. Proactiveness requires that a new idea is rapidly brought to market. New projects based on participative decision-making are less likely to be canceled because the team can identify with the project. Highly entrepreneurial organizations are characterized by a transformational leadership style (Morris *et al.*, 2007).

In fact, resistance against change is lower with participative leadership because

stakeholders are more willing to accept change when their ideas are part of the process; which helps the organization to be more proactive. In addition, participation positively impacts innovativeness because a participative leadership leads to more effective communication among team members (Wilemon and Thamhain, 1983). Thus, one can assume that there is a positive association between leadership style and entrepreneurial performance. Therefore, the second hypothesis was offered as:

H2: Organizational leadership style has a significant role in cooperatives EO.

### Organizational Strategy

Entrepreneurial organization is described as firms with strategies oriented toward innovation and growth through their capacity to assume relevant risks (Moreno and Casillas, 2008). Ireland *et al.* (2009) define corporate entrepreneurship (CE) strategy as a vision-directed, organization-wide reliance on entrepreneurial behavior that purposefully and continuously rejuvenates the organization and shapes the scope of its operations through the recognition and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunity. Meeting and exceeding the various needs of customers should be the key management and entrepreneurial strategy (Li *et al.*, 2005). Different definitions for organizational strategies are presented by different scholars. For instance, some scholars believe that corporate strategies are set of rules and guidelines that facilitate decision making with the aim of guiding the expansion of business or organization. Although corporate strategy generally refers to diversification, mergers and acquisitions, alliances, joint ventures, and so on, it is also associated with the sort of strategic decision that most organizations face when considering the widening range of products or services or a movement in geographical area (Moreno and Casillas, 2008). In this research, our definition of strategy is based on



cooperatives growth strategy. Cooperatives growth in terms of new products or new technologies and cooperatives growth by paying attention to new needs or new markets. The study by Lumpkin *et al.* (2010), which emphasized the positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance, can be taken as empirical evidence in this regard. Moreno and Casillas (2008) showed that the growth of the firm will be greater when prospector is dominant strategic pattern, because the degree of development of new products, technology, new needs, and markets is greater. Therefore, organizational entrepreneurial strategy should be diverse enough to address a spectrum of technological, financial, and human issues on one hand, and it should be in congruence with the future scenario envisaged for organization, on the other hand. Therefore, the third hypothesis was offered as:

H3: Organizational strategy has a significant role in cooperatives EO.

According to literature review, the following model for entrepreneurship orientation in cooperatives, based on dominant organizational factors, was developed (Figure1).

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

With respect to the purpose of the current study, this research is of the applied type done by causative-relational method, and is performed based on covariance-variance

matrices analysis. Research statistical sample was comprised of dairy cooperatives in Iran. Six provinces were randomly selected as a representative of each geographical region. In this area, 1012 active dairy cooperatives were identified. Daniel's formula was employed for sampling and 105 cooperatives as a representative of the general population were selected.

$$n = \frac{NZ^2 p(1-p)}{d^2(N-1) + Z^2 p(1-p)} \quad (1)$$

Where,  $n$ = Sample size,  $N$ = Population size,  $Z$ =  $Z$  statistics for a level of confidence,  $p$ = Expected proportion (prevalence is 5%), and  $d$ = Precision (suggested precision is 0.04).

Based on proportional allocation method, the required sample for each province was determined. We tested our hypotheses with quantitative data collected from deans of selected dairy cooperatives. In order to pre-test the survey and ensure that its questions were clear and understandable, we undertook informal interviews with five academics to detect ambiguous, vague, or unfamiliar terms. Then, 25 deans of cooperatives (not included in the final sample) received and filled out research questionnaire about their cooperative. Alpha coefficient was calculated for reliability assessment (Table 1), and its values showed that research instrument satisfied capability to collect data. Then, the second phase of data collection was started. In the second wave, a questionnaire was conveniently sent to the participants for data gathering. To

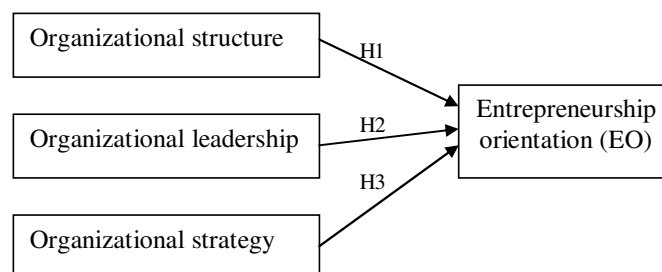


Figure 1. Research conceptual framework.

determine validity of the questionnaire, face validity method and then convergent validity by determining average variance extracted (AVE) were used. The coefficient showed what percentage of the studied construct was affected by observed variables. For data processing, LISREL software, version 8.54, was employed. LISREL software is usually used to do structural equations model in the form of two approaches of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and path analysis for the purpose of hypotheses testing. Indeed, the structural equations model is a comprehensive statistical approach to test hypotheses about the relations between observed variables and latent variables. Through this approach, we could test acceptability of theoretical models in special societies. Generally, the relations among variables in structural equations model are divided into two general fields: (1) The relations between latent variables with observed variables (measurement step or confirmatory factor analysis model), and (2) the relations between latent variables with latent variables (structural step or path analysis model).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As was mentioned, in data processing state, two-state approach of structural equations model was used and in the first stage, the model was measured, then, in the second stage, path model was analyzed. In the measurement model, the relation between the questionnaire questions and constructs was investigated, while in the structural model, the relation of the studied construct with each other was considered to

test the hypotheses. In fact, after proving the fact that indicators or items of questionnaire measured latent variables well, the relations could be tested. Thus, to prove whether the concepts were measured well, measurement model or confirmatory factor analysis was used (Table 2).

Table 2 describes, first, the loadings of each item in order to analyze their individual reliability. Second, the reliability of the constructs is represented by means of the composite reliability (CR), the value of which must be higher than 0.7 (Fornell and Lacker, 1981). Third, it includes the convergent validity of these latent variables, using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which must be higher than 0.5. All of our constructs satisfy this condition. In other words, indicators have the required precision to measure research constructs (Table 2). The existence of confirmation in measurement model means that the effects of these variables on other variables are reliant in the model. In the second stage of the research, path analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. In Figure 2, the result of modeling by maximum likelihood method in LISREL software is shown.

To show the validity of the model, fit indices were used. LISREL provides a chi-square value and five additional indices that assess the path models goodness of fit, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), the normed fit index (NFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square residual (RMSR). The fit indexes of path analysis ranged from adequate to excellent (GFI= 0.92, AGFI= 0.91, NFI= 0.95, CFI= 0.95, RMR= 0.16, RMSEA= 0.076).

**Table 1.** The results of validity and reliability analysis of the studied structures with indices.

latent variables (Construct)	AVE	Reliability coefficient of Cranach's alpha
Organizational structure of cooperatives	0.589	0.725
Policy of plans and activities	0.631	0.802
Characteristics of management and leadership	0.602	0.789
Entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives	0.653	0.813

**Table 2.** The values of factor load related to each of indices of structure.

Construct	Items	Factor loading	t <sup>a</sup>	P <sup>b</sup>	AVE <sup>c</sup>
Organizational strategy	Good environment of informal relations.	0.37	3.72	0.01	0.589
	Varied and flexible organizational structure.	Dropped	---	---	
	Participation of consulting groups and specialized committees in decision making.	0.73	8.16	0.01	
	Supporting new thoughts and ideas.	0.84	10.06	0.01	
	Giving importance to researches in cooperative.	0.67	7.29	0.01	
	The power of cooperative in its organizational duties.	0.36	3.53	0.01	
	Cooperative structures based on observing organizational hierarchy.	0.25	2.42	0.01	
Organizational strategy	Formulating future orientations of business.	0.61	6.43	0.01	0.631
	Estimation of required resources for good performance of activities.	0.57	5.91	0.01	
	Logical division of required credits of each of cooperative sections.	0.46	4.56	0.01	
	Renovation of organization via creating new processes as continuously.	0.44	4.37	0.01	
	Giving importance to researches in cooperative.	0.57	5.97	0.01	
	Creating required mechanisms for common decisions.	0.45	4.56	0.01	
Organizational leadership	The speed in decision making.	0.52	5.41	0.01	0.602
	The existence of good encouragement system based on performance.	0.22	2.14	0.01	
	The least errors in financial documents.	0.32	3.26	0.01	
	The support of management of small pilot plans.	0.52	5.39	0.01	
	The support of cooperative of new ideas of members.	0.69	7.52	0.01	
	Establishing good system of proposals in cooperative.	0.58	6.19	0.01	
Entrepreneurship orientation (EO)	Preparing the required background for new business.	0.16	2.08	0.01	0.653
	More emphasis on developing problem solving methods and decision techniques.	0.64	6.55	0.01	
	Improving the morale of team work and making team in cooperative activities.	0.55	5.52	0.01	
	Increasing satisfaction of educated people of presence in production cooperatives.	0.52	5.28	0.01	
	Increasing motivation of cooperative members to give new ideas.	0.45	4.72	0.01	
	Giving more importance to experiences and job records of members.	0.52	5.23	0.01	
	Increasing inclination to work ignoring the type of work.	Dropped	---	---	
	Increasing relation with other successful and entrepreneur cooperative companies.	0.32	3.12	0.01	
	Increasing the consideration to entrepreneurship as a background to develop entrepreneurship.	0.53	5.42	0.01	
	Increasing emphasis on learning legal issues and special rules of cooperatives.	Dropped	---	---	
	Increasing emphasis on training members and managers in the success of cooperative.	Dropped	---	---	
	Increasing the emphasis on saving costs and increasing efficiency in cooperative.	0.45	4.70	0.01	

<sup>a</sup> test, <sup>b</sup> Plevel, <sup>c</sup> Average Variance Extracted

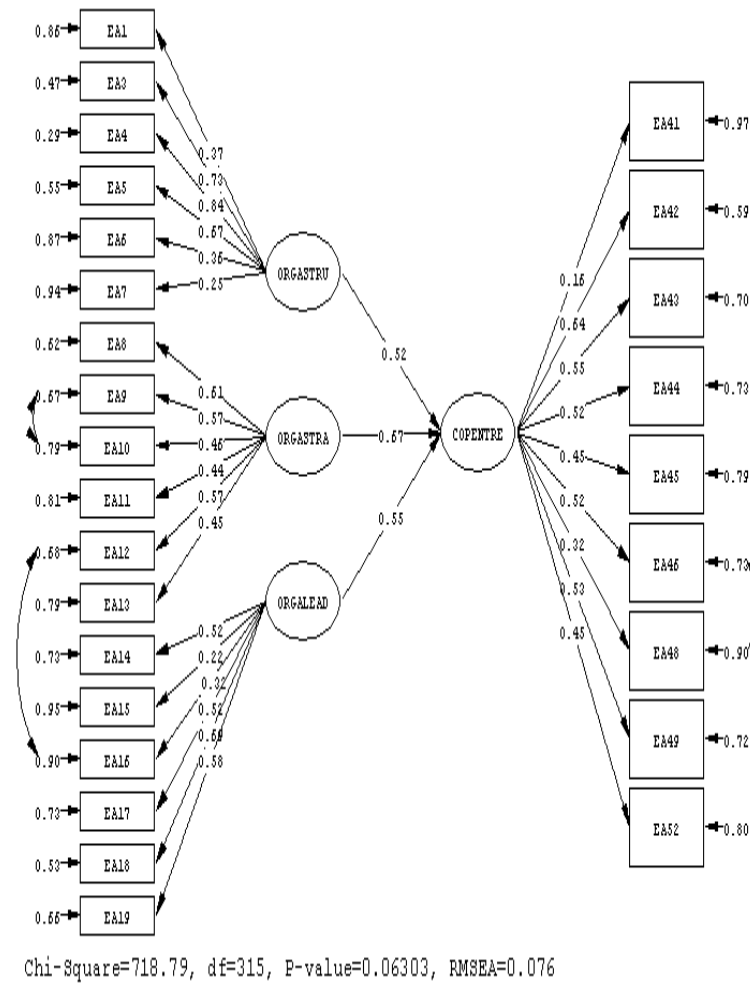


Figure 2. Structural model of Organizational factors and EO.

The first hypothesis of this research shows that organizational structure of a cooperative has significant role in its entrepreneurship dimensions. Considering model 2, as shown in Table 3, the coefficient of the calculated path for this hypothesis is 0.52 and the t value is 4.07, which is more than 1.96. Thus, null hypothesis with confidence of 99% is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted that states cooperative structure has significant role in entrepreneurship dimensions of cooperative. In other words, by providing good conditions for organizational structure, entrepreneurship dimensions will have linear growth in

cooperatives. Thus, it can be claimed that a part of creating entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives is subject to the condition of organizational structure.

The second hypothesis of the research states that the policy of plans and activities has significant role in formation of entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives. Table 3 shows that the coefficient of plans policy path and activities on dependent variable of entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperative is estimated at 0.67 and, for this parameter, t value reached 6.70, therefore, this path coefficient is statistically significant. Thus, the null

**Table 3.** Path coefficients with their significant test.

path	Path coefficient	t-value	R <sup>2</sup>
Organizational structure → Entrepreneurship	0.52	4.07	
Plans and activities policy → Entrepreneurship	0.67	6.70	0.38
Leadership and management → Entrepreneurship	0.55	4.23	

hypothesis with confidence of 99% is rejected and the alternative hypothesis, which states that policy of plans and activities has significant role in the formation of entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperative companies, is accepted. Thus, the condition of plans and activities policy of cooperative companies can have statistically significant predicting role in the formation of entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives.

The third hypothesis of the research indicates that management and leadership characteristics have significant role in the formation of entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives. Table 3 shows that path coefficient of management and leadership characteristics toward dependent variable of entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives is estimated at 0.55 and, for this parameter, t value is calculated at 4.23, indicating that this path coefficient is statistically significant. Therefore, the other hypothesis is supported that states leadership and management characteristics have significant role in the formation of entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives. Thus, management and leadership characteristics of cooperatives have predictive role in the formation of entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives.

Since the above coefficients are the results of standard estimation, we can compare them with each other. Thus, the most important factor determining entrepreneurship dimensions in cooperatives among the three studied independent variables is the plans and activities policy. In other words, the policy of plans and cooperative activities are the main factors determining the condition of

entrepreneurship of the studied cooperatives. “Formulating future orientations of business”, “estimation of the required resources for good performance of activities”, logical division of the required credits of each part of cooperative”, “renovation of the organization by creating new processes as continuously”, “giving importance to creating competitive situations”, “creating required mechanisms for making common decisions” are issues that are important as policy of cooperative companies in entrepreneurship fostering.

After policy variable, the second predictive variable of entrepreneurship fostering is leadership and management characteristics variable and, here, considering some issues such as speed and determination in decision-making, the good encouragement system based on performance, reducing errors in financial documents, supporting management of small pilot plans, etc. can solve the problematic issues. Organizational structure of the cooperatives is in the third rank and it shows that the condition of organizational structure due to some variables such as good information relations environment and variable and flexible organizational structure, etc. can determine the condition of cooperative companies' entrepreneurship. The results show that these three variables can determine 38% of variance changes of dependent variable of entrepreneurship dimensions of cooperatives.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research show that the entrepreneurship morale in the studied



animal husbandry cooperatives is affected by variables such as policy and plans, management and leadership, and organizational structure of the cooperatives. The results show that in the organizations that are managed as cooperative, policy and plans variable are the most important variables in predicting the condition of entrepreneurship variable. In other words, the variables of policy and plans in terms of considering some dimensions such as good orientation to future business of cooperative, exact estimation of required resources, logical division of credits to different sections, emphasis on competition and emphasis on taking common decisions, cause entrepreneurship behaviors of the members. The results of the study demonstrated that having determined and distinguished policy and strategy, which appear in the form of entrepreneurship variables, are important factors in strategic renovation of cooperative companies, innovation, stability, and profitability of cooperatives. Leadership and management characteristics of cooperatives were introduced as the second effective variable on entrepreneurship factors in the studied cooperative companies. Thus, the speed of decision making, defining good encouragement system, reducing errors in accounting documents, and supporting pilot plans and ideas are variables that can cause entrepreneurship behaviors among members in the form of cooperative manager's characteristics. It is obvious that entrepreneurship behaviors at individual level can cause dynamics, inclination to leaning, completion feeling, innovation, etc. at cooperative level. Organizational structure variable is the third effective variable on entrepreneurship in cooperative companies. Thus, emphasis on entrepreneurship characteristics in organizational structure including good informal communication environment, participation of different groups in decision making processes, the existence of research structure, and logical level of power in doing the obliged duties and the good structure of cooperative

hierarchy can be among the factors of strategic renovation of cooperatives. The general result of the research shows that acceptable level of entrepreneurship in production cooperative companies of agriculture depends on policies, plans, leadership and management characteristics and organizational structure. In other words, we can observe a logical relation between these levels and entrepreneurship in cooperative companies and the focus of the managers of cooperative companies on this component can help the development and profitability of production cooperative companies and their sustainability in long term period. This implication highlights entrepreneurship importance for cooperatives sustainability.

This study includes some limitations that offer opportunities for further research. First, our focus was on self-report rather than actual status of factors. Additional research can examine assessor's judgments on these factors status. The second limitation in our argument is that organizational factors lead to entrepreneurship directly, but this might not necessarily be the case and additional research can examine how mediation relations affect the value of  $R^2$ . Also, considering experimental design or longitudinal study in other empirical researches is suggested.

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## بررسی نقش عوامل ساختاری، رهبری و استراتژی بر کارآفرینی تعاونی ها

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## چکیده

بیش از یک میلیون عضو تعاونی های کشاورزی در ایران وجود دارند. از سوی دیگر با توسعه سریع دامپروری در ایران، تعاونی ها نیاز دارند تا به نیاز های علمی و عملی اعضاء خود، در کنار تکمیل چرخه تولید در صنایع لبنی پاسخ دهند. فعالیت دامپروری در برگیرنده طیف وسیعی از فعالیت ها شامل زنبورداری و کرم ابریشم نیز می شود که بیانگر گستردگی نظام کسب و کار در دامپروری ایران است. با توجه به حجم بالای تولیدات دامی در ایران، شامل محصولات دامی متنوع از جمله شیر خام، گوشت قرمز، گوشت سفید، تخم مرغ و عسل، سبب می شود تعاونی ها مورد نظر باید به تقاضاهای بازار برای حفظ موقعیت رقابتی خود بیش از هر زمان دیگری توجه کنند. تنها در صورت توجه به نوآوری است که این مزیت رقابتی حفظ خواهد شد. امروزه موضوع پایداری و نوآوری از اهمیت زیادی در برخی سازمان ها از جمله تعاونی های کشاورزی برخوردار شده است. واژه کارآفرینی در واقع برای توضیح این نیاز برای نگاه داشتن سازمان ها در موقعیت رقابتی و با توجه به ابزار نوآوری به کار گرفته شده است. امروزه این دیدگاه پذیرفته شده است که کارآفرینی می تواند پرورش یابد و عوامل محیطی، فردی و سازمانی برای توسعه آن عوامل مهمی محسوب می شوند. پژوهش حاضر سه عامل ساختار، راهبرد و رهبری به عنوان متغیر های اساسی را در این زمینه مورد توجه قرار گرفته است. نتایج تحقیق نشان داد این سه متغیر نقش اساسی در توسعه کارآفرینی تعاونی ها بازی می کنند. لذا تمرکز بر آنها ثمرات مثبتی برای تعاونی ها خواهد داشت. نتایج مدلسازی آماری نشان داد ۳۸ درصد کارآفرینی تعاونی ها به حصول شرایط مناسب برای این متغیر ها وابسته است.