

Competitive Ability as an Instrument for *ex-ante* Evaluation of Enterprise's Competitiveness

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Competition is the principal form of interaction of economic entities (in this work – enterprises) in market economy. It can be perceived statically, i.e. as a specific structural fluxion of the market which implies 'tension' between enterprises, or dynamically, i.e. as a process or 'struggle' of market participants in the course of which a new situation is formed. The position of the enterprise in the market as well as its potential in the competitive struggle is traditionally described as competitiveness.

In regard of the necessary knowledge that the companies as the participants of the market must have at their disposal, the procedure of selection of resources and actions to facilitate the acquisition of future competitiveness is of the utmost importance in theoretical and practical studies. In other words, it is necessary to define in advance the state of things which can lead to gaining competitive advantage. This state should be determined by studying the expected efficiency of actions performed on the basis of the enterprise's competitive potential and which can be regarded as the potential of successful competition.

The above mentioned circumstances are the main motif to introduce an additional element into the structure of competitiveness which can provide the possibility for all concerned (researchers, experts, managers) to identify and assess the resources and related actions which are to determine future competitiveness of the enterprise. Ability to compete consists of two interrelated parts, i.e. ability as physical possibilities to do something (resources, labor, equipment, raw materials, operating abilities, etc.) and knowledge, i.e. knowing how to efficiently make use of competitive potential (how much and, which is most important, what resources are necessary and how they are to be utilized).

This work suggests the competitive ability assessment model which consists of five successive and interrelated elements:

- formation of the list of resources, operational capabilities and external circumstances;
- identifying the importance of resources, capabilities and external circumstances within the framework of the sector;
- assessment of the enterprise's strength' of competitive potential elements (competition instruments);
- assessment of the enterprise's management competencies (i.e. knowing how to compete);
- synthesis of the assessed results and the formation of opinion about the enterprise's capability to compete.

The assessment of competitive ability is not an end in itself. The measured level of this ability can serve as a

certain instrument to be used in making managerial decisions. The further summary of the results or the decision to make use of partial indexes depend on the needs of those applying this instrument (i.e. the goals of the planned analysis).

Keywords: competitiveness, competitive ability, competitive potential, strategic resources, core competencies, assessment model, assessment methods.

Introduction

Competition is the principal form of interaction of economic entities (in this work - enterprises) in market economy. It can be understood in a static sense, i.e. as a fluxion of some structure of the market which implies 'tension' between enterprises, or dynamically, as a process, a struggle of market participants where a new situation is formed in this market. The position of the enterprise in the market as well as its potential in the competitive struggle is traditionally described as competitiveness.

Due to its importance, competitiveness (not only of enterprises, but also of other economic entities), enjoys the greatest attention of scientists. As a research object, it is characteristic of some specific features due to which the research results are enormously diverse which to some extent impedes the very perception and assessment of competitiveness as a feature of this entity (Snieska, Bruneckiene, 2009). Of the utmost importance is the fact that competitiveness does not have indexes to measure it directly (Gorynia, 2002). Therefore, the obtained research results reflect not only competition in general, but, rather, the state of the relevant entity in regard of other similar entities.

Gaining future competitive advantage is the essential condition for survival and the main goal of the enterprises and other entities, which require fulfillment of certain actions immediately. The boundaries and direction of such actions are defined by the attitude to competitiveness not as to the feature of the enterprise providing the possibility to participate in the competitive struggle, but, rather, to the ability to create and utilize favorable conditions for growth (Porter, 2006b), i.e. ability to compete. Competitive ability is a prerequisite to gain competitive advantage (i.e. become competitive in the future in regard of other enterprises).

The answer to the question **how according to the parameters influencing the performance of the enterprise, it is possible to evaluate its ability to compete, i.e. to be competitive in the future**, is an important scientific and practical **problem** addressed in this work.

This problem is aggravated by the fact that this ability of being at an advantage in the market is determined by a number of fairly diverse circumstances. The phenomena resulting in these circumstances change rapidly, and the rate of changes is constantly growing; therefore, some of the existing theoretical solutions or their practical applications lose their value and relevance. In addition, even the most relevant solutions require adaptation to be of use under new conditions.

The research object: conditions for the enterprise's competitiveness.

The aim of the research: to substantiate the assessment methodology for competitive ability as the feature illustrating the relationship between the company's resources, capabilities, environment factors and chances for success in competition struggle.

The research methods: systematic and comparative analysis of scientific literature, summary and synthesis of the results of the obtained information.

The shortcomings of practical assessment of the enterprises' competitiveness

At present there exists a rather objective opinion that the competitiveness theory is far more advanced than practice (Porter, 2001; Skawinska, 2002; Arend, 2006, etc.). This is proved by the lack of empirical research of the enterprises' competitiveness described in scientific literature:

1. The authors tend to use one single theoretical conception: Oral (1986), Markus (2008), Chikan (2008) – Porter's 'diamond' of competitive advantage; Hermann (2008) – resource-based attitude to competitiveness; Shinno et al. (2006) – SSGG (SWOT) analysis principle; Gardner (2005), Kazlauskaite, Buciuniene (2008) – human resources management; Barkema, Grogendijk (2007) – the enterprises' internationalization theory, etc.

2. A great many researches are focussed on the analysis and assessment of the effect of a particular group of resources or capabilities on the enterprises' competitiveness: economies of scale – Maksvytiene (2002), knowledge and its management – Stankiewicz (2006), Morkvenas (2010), marketing – Golebiowski, Witek-Hajduk (2006), technologies – Khalil (2000), Shee (2002), clusterization – Malakauskaite, Navickas (2010).

3. The research 'product' has a limited practical value for an individual enterprise as the research results are summed for one chosen group of companies or a business sector. The company is not able to see its own position in the group (which is more important) because of the confidentiality of the intermediate (i.e. partial) research results (Dubinas, Stonkuvienė, 2005; Gardner, 2005; Shinno et al., 2006; Barkema, Grogendijk, 2007; Markus, 2008; Szerb, Ulbert, 2009; Navickas, Malakauskaite, 2009; Zostautiene, Daraskeviciute, 2009).

4. The 'product' of the research reflects what was achieved in the past, or, at best, what is at present. The fact is that many works offer recommendations for the company actions to ensure success, however, they do not allow the company to see and evaluate its possibilities in the future. These works make an assumption "if it is so, it will be all right", without even trying to develop the mechanism to justify this assumption.

These shortcomings show that the available practical competitiveness assessment instruments:

- are developed without sufficient employment of the existing theoretical research results;
- do not sufficiently consider the complexity of competitiveness origin;
- do not provide the instrument to judge about the degree of the company's preparation for competitive struggle.

The crystallization of the concept of competitive ability

In regard of the knowledge that the enterprises as the participants of the competitive struggle must have at their disposal, the process of selection of actions to be used for gaining future competitiveness is a very important area of practical and theoretical research: it is necessary to be able to assess the state of the enterprise well in advance which can allow it to gain competitive advantage. This state should be identified by studying the expected efficiency of the company's actions based on its competitive potential, this, in turn, being regarded as the strength of the enterprise's ability to compete. In other words, **competitive ability is a potential competitive advantage which the company may gain in the future.**

The circumstances mentioned are the main motif to introduce an additional element into the competitiveness struggle which allows those concerned (researchers, experts, managers) to identify and assess the resources and actions with them which will determine the company's future competitiveness.

It is interesting that the concept '*competitive ability*' is but very rarely used in economics and management in scientific writings of Anglosaxon origin: out of over 50 articles published between 1998 and 2009 in the magazines "*Strategic Organization*", "*Journal of Management*", "*Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*" and "*European Small Business Journal*" on competitiveness, strategic management and similar problems, only a few were found to have used this concept. It, however, very often occurs in the literature on biology in reference to the ability of live organisms or plants to survive in their environment. The definition of this concept is likely to have been formulated by borrowing it from the study of this field (Goldberg, 1996): competitive ability should be regarded as the property showing direct relationship between individual characteristics of the enterprises and chances for success in the competitive struggle.

The concept 'ability' in Lithuanian as well as its equivalents in other languages means knowing how and being able to do something. The words 'knowing how' is associated with the knowledge of the subject how to do something, while the words 'being able' is related to the physical capability. While transferring these statements to the sphere of competitiveness analysis, it can be said that the ability to compete consists of two interrelated parts:

- being able, i.e. physical abilities to do it (resources, labour, equipment, raw materials, operational abilities, etc.);
- knowing how, i.e. knowledge how this competitive potential should be used as efficiently as possible (how much and, most important, what actions with these resources should be performed).

The origin of these two parts consists in the enterprise's material and immaterial resources.

The ability to compete largely depends on the aggregate environment of the enterprise, which influences both being able and knowing how to compete (Bossak, Bienkowski, 2004; Wan, 2005; Dacin et al., 2007; Brouthers et al., 2008; Herrman, 2008, Rutkauskas, 2008). Consequently, environment factors should also be reflected in the assessment methodology of competitive ability.

In associating the concept of competitive ability with the systematic attitude to the enterprise, it can be said that the enterprise's competitiveness originates when the enterprise:

- is able to find or purchase and/or develop resources (material or immaterial) within the company,
- is able to perform resource-based operational actions leading to the development of exceptional goods or services,
 - is able to sell the goods or services to the customers (utilizes its abilities in the market),
 - is able to see opportunities in the environment and make use of them to its own advantage,
 - what is most important, is able of doing it better than the competitors.

The boundaries of theoretical search for the parameters defining the enterprise's competitive ability

This chapter aims to identify which parameters of the enterprise's performance can be used in the assessment of its competitive ability. This task is aggravated by the fact that the object of theoretical and practical research has attracted great attention of the researchers. Therefore, it is essential to adopt the main conceptions, theories and approaches to define the trends and boundaries in search of the answer. In the opposite case, due to the abundance of information, there exists a great possibility of a mistake – both in underestimation and overestimation, which is a very common practice in some research.

Sanchez and Heene (2004) derive the modern theories, conceptions and approaches of competitiveness from three fundamental sources: economy of industrial organizations, business growth theory and general management (Harvard) school. The authors suggest that currently all conceptions mentioned in the diagram are evolving into the theory of competences-based strategic management – “theory of integrated strategy which unites organizational and behavioural things into a dynamic, systemic, cognitive and holistic framework“ (Sanchez, Heene, 2004). It is hard to reject the arguments of the authors, once you get to know them. However, it is equally inconvenient or even impossible to make use of this integrated theory to reach the goal of this work, since the concept ‘competences’ as well as the concept ‘competitiveness’ are barely perceptible and far too fundamental. They lack direct characteristics, in the assessment of which it can be possible to judge about the enterprise's having particular competences or capability to compete. By splitting it into primary elements, we get to the enterprise's resources

(material and immaterial), i.e. to the resource-based approach. In this work competences are given the role of the ‘invisible substance’ to summon up the resources and underlying possibilities for the creation of value.

Scientific literature can offer diverse approaches to which factors determine the enterprise's competitiveness: cultural competitiveness (Hult, et. al., 2003); strategic belief (Foss, 2007), configurational approach (Snow, et. al., 2005); time-based competitiveness (Sapkauskiene, Leitoniene, 2010); innovation-based competitiveness (Adekola, et. al.); ‘soft’ factors (Juscus, Snieska, 2008). The authors themselves derive these conceptions from the resource-based approach, therefore, the attempt to involve them into the round of discussions would resolve the information obtained from the analysis into a bigger number of groups rather than consolidate it. Actually, as the very attempts to compare or to unite the competitiveness conceptions show, their origin lies in the resource-based approach, and/or they are joined by the concept of competitiveness (Sanchez, Heene, 2004). For example, Helfat et al. (2007) define dynamic capabilities as the organization's capability to purposefully create, accumulate and modify its resource base – tangible and intangible, human assets and specific capabilities. Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), Tecce, Pisano and Slueen (1997), Tecce (2007) view dynamic capabilities as a process in the course of which companies seek to obtain, integrate, reconfigure and activate the resources which result in creation and reasonable allocation of new resources. These elucidations accentuate resources as the focus of discussion, this showing the relationship with the resource-based approach, and the utilization of resources, which is related to competences.

This situation allows us to apply three of the mentioned conceptions in Figure 2 to the solution of the primary problem of this section without major negative effect on the analysis results, but, rather, with the positive effect on its transparency:

1. The Porter's model of the value creation chain;
2. Resource-based enterprises' (competitiveness) theory;
3. Conception of core competences.

It should be emphasized that in order to reinforce the solution of the problem, other theories and approaches dealing with the nature of competitiveness were also involved in the course of the analysis: market-driven organization conception, model of systematic competitiveness, dynamic capabilities, competitive advantage of nations, etc. The analysis is conducted with the awareness of links between different theories, conceptions and approaches, however, without getting too deep into them. The awareness of the existence of these links ensures that they are considered in formulating parameters influencing competitive capability.

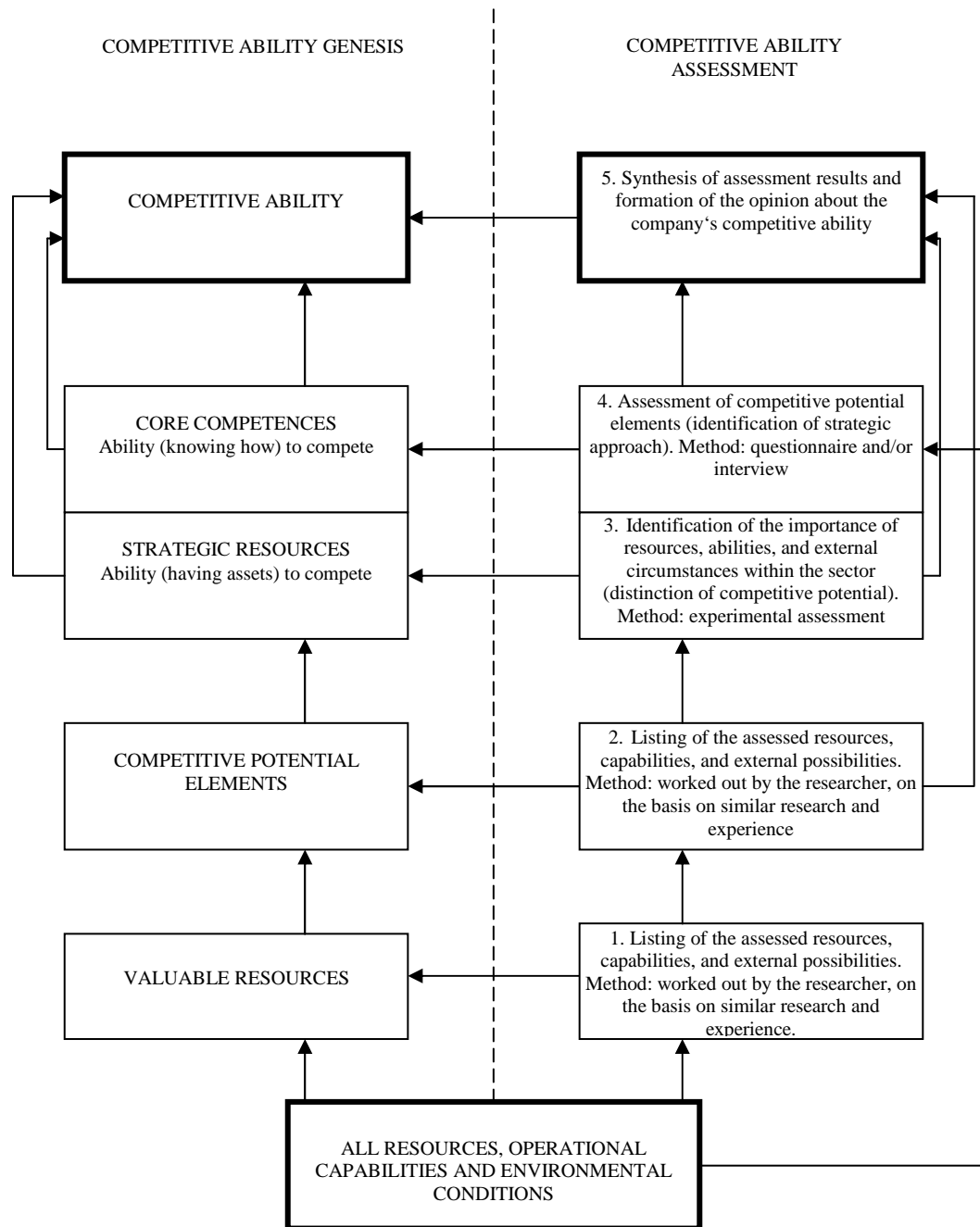


Figure 1. Competitive ability assessment model

Assessment model for the competitive ability of the enterprise

To work out the competitive ability assessment model means to identify the sequence of assessment procedures of the constituent parts of this concept, i.e. competitive capability (resources, capabilities and external possibilities) and knowing how to compete (competences), their interrelations as well as the possibilities for the synthesis of the obtained results. In addition, the model should identify the procedure methods and synthesis of the results. Obviously, such model must be related to the ability to compete as to the process of the appearance of this feature.

The diversity of the sources of information and methods of the competitive ability assessment model can also ensure higher quality of assessment results (i.e. compliance with the real situation). Therefore, the principle of triangulation is applied in this work (cf. Kardelis, 2007). The enterprise's competitive ability is assessed from three positions – the importance of resources, abilities and external possibilities for the company's performance, the level of their strategic features and the compliance of the management competences with the criteria of core competences. Some fears in connection with the application of this principle in practical research can be felt in the literature of this area.

These works emphasize that triangulation can cause the effect of the 'prism', when the information obtained in the assessment process is irreversibly 'split into flows' (Richardson, Pierre, 2005).

Therefore, the methods involved in the triangulation process and integrated into one single model 1) should produce results of the same type (absolute or relative); 2) the way how the results of individual assessment 'actions' can be synthesized should be provided (not mechanically the opinion about the company's capability to compete (Figure 1). It should also be mentioned that in the model being created the triangulation effect is backed by the distinction of the additional stage of so-called 'valuable resources' category which uses a different method.

Procedure of competitive ability assessment

Listing of the enterprise's resources, operational capabilities and external possibilities. The purpose of this stage is to work out the list of internal resources, operational capabilities and external factors which can be utilized by the enterprise in competition. In making such a list the well-known scientific and practical works can be used. The resources, abilities and external opportunities are considered to be everything that the company can have at its disposal in its operation and seeking its goals. The words 'at its disposal' do not mean the necessity to possess that as a property, but, rather, as a possibility to make use of these factors routinely. While the concept 'everything' poses certain problems since in order to ensure the company's operation, not only the core resources and capabilities, which are later ascribed to the elements of competitive potential, but also a number of additional means, for example, security, communication, transportation, supporting employees, etc. are necessary.

The list of the external conditions can be formed as a basis by making use of the systematic competitiveness model (Meyer-Stamer, 2005). In this model the enterprise's environment is divided into three levels, in which the country's viewpoints and attitudes, the provisions demonstrated by the government and the circumstances created by the macroeconomic and branch (mezo-level) politicians are involved. All these factors cannot be considered the enterprise's property, i.e. they cannot be the enterprise's resources in a direct sense. However, these factors can be transformed into the possibilities to be used in competition.

The enterprise's resources, operational capabilities and external circumstances due to their abundance can be grouped in terms of their purpose, material value, place in regard of the enterprise or other features.

Identification of the importance of operational capabilities, external opportunities and resources. The aim of this stage is to assess the importance of the listed resources, operational capabilities and external capabilities to the performance of the enterprise. This assessment should be carried out by the experts of the area, i.e. theoreticians and practitioners who should work out the consensus-based rating of the assessed elements.

The following stage should include the most important resources of the enterprise, capabilities and external opportunities further referred to as competitive potential.

All the potential and finances of the enterprise should be consolidated for their development, maintenance and exploitation, because, according to P.F. Drucker, "the secret of efficiency, if any, lies in concentration" (1994).

The assessment of strategic approach of the elements of competitive potential. The aim of this stage is to elucidate the "quality" of the elements of the enterprise's competitive potential, i.e. the availability of resources for competition.

Those in favour of the resource-based approach unanimously admit that only the resources and abilities characteristic of particular features determine the creation of the value higher than the average (e.g. Barney, 1991, 1997; Branzey, Thornhill, 2006; Ben-Yar, et. al., 2007). Mostly they are referred to as strategic, which shows the possibility, or, rather, the necessity to make use of them in creating the enterprise's capability for future competition (Stankiewicz, 2005). On the other hand, only very few empirical researches are available, the authors of which seek to explain how the enterprises transform rather diverse resources and capabilities into exceptional products or services (Barney, 1997; Coff, 1997; Bratnicki, 2000; Cockburn et al., 2000; Miller, 2003; Peteraf, Barney, 2003) and exploit external conditions to facilitate creation of such products/services. According to Fahy (2000), scientific works in this area are characteristic of conceptual, rather than empirical applicability. Scientific literature of this area contains quite a few suggestions on which features of capabilities and opportunities can attribute them to a group of strategic ones, however, only a few have developed into a practically applicable methods (e.g. Barney, 1997; Bratnicki, 2000; Stankiewicz, 2005).

With regard to the sources mentioned in this part of the work, the assessment criteria of strategic approach of competitive potential elements were formulated (Table 1).

Table 1

Strategic assessment criteria of the strategic approach of competitive potential elements of the enterprise (composed by the authors with reference to the sources mentioned in the text)

No	Criterion
1.	Enables the enterprise to create and implement innovations (i.e. innovative cheaper and/or higher quality products, more advanced technologies and/or processes leading to lower costs and/or improved quality)
2.	It is unique, characteristic of only this enterprise (i.e. competitors are not able to purchase, develop or create it)
3.	It is difficult to simulate (i.e. competitors are not able ,to copy' it)
4.	It is time-sustainable (i.e. will remain at the enterprise's disposal for as long as necessary)
5.	It is mobile within the enterprise (i.e. it can be used in different areas within the enterprise)
6.	It is fully utilized within the company (i.e. its ,excess' is not a burden for the enterprise)
7.	It is not too costly (i.e. does not affect the price of the good/product unproportionally to input)
8.	It is under full control of the company (i.e. its utilization does not depend on the external factors)
9.	It is of a sufficient amount (i.e. for the current or desirable activity)
10.	It is ,sustained' by other resources of the enterprise (i.e. amount and quality of other resources do not limit its use).

The researcher can work out the criteria-based questionnaire designed for the management or other interested persons in the enterprise. It should be noted that the manager of the enterprise can also identify which elements of competitive potential can serve as a basis for developing competition strategy. The scientific literature indicates that a bigger number of strategically important potential elements facilitates the task of creating such strategy (Porter, 2001; Rokita, 2005; Bernd, et. al., 2007; Vaitkevicius, 2007; Murov, Staver, 2008; Vila, Candes, 2008; Auruskeviciene, et. al., 2008; Krupski et al. 2009; Bivainis, Tuncikiene, 2007).

Assessment of core competences. The aim of this stage is to explain whether the enterprise's management is aware of the available competitive potential, i.e. whether it knows how to compete (or is capable of competing). The knowledge of how to accumulate, activate and coordinate the resources, operational capabilities and external factors within the company plays the role of the 'joining substance' and is called 'core competencies' (Hamel, Prahalad, 1996; Rumelt, 1997; Koch, 1997; Sanches, 2004; Stankiewicz, 2005; Arend, Bromiley, 2009; Boguslauskas, Kvederaviciene, 2009; Gimzauskiene, Staliuniene, 2010). In formulating the competence assessment criteria, the idea of Prahalad and Hammel was used that in the presence of unconformity of resources and ambitions of the enterprise, there occurs a 'dynamic tension' which in its turn releases the so-called 'leverage' of the resources (Hamel, Prahalad, 1996; Hamel, Prahalad, 1999). The authors maintain that the leverage effect is achieved in five complementary ways by:

- concentrating the resources,
- accumulating the resources,
- supplementing the resources,
- 'safeguarding' the resources,
- 'recovering' the resources.

The ability to perform these actions should be regarded as the task of primary importance of the enterprise's leader and the assessment criterion for the company's competences and professionalism (Hamel, Prahalad, 1999). This work is based on the approach demonstrated in the conception of core competences that the knowledge of how to perform the actions mentioned is the source for the possible better than average results in the future. In other words, this know-how is equal to the knowledge of how to compete (i.e. competitive ability). In the process of the study the actions mentioned were operationalized, i.e. it was made clear what the concepts defining these actions mean. The operational definitions represented in Table 2 can serve as criteria whereby the researcher (or the company's manager) can identify the level of core competences of the enterprise.

Synthesis of the assessment results, their interpretation and possibilities of use

As mentioned above, the application of the triangulation principle breaks the information on the enterprise's competitive ability into several streams, since during the process of assessment, the importance of resources, operational abilities and external factors within the sector, their strategic nature (strength) within the enterprise and the competence to activate them (core

competences) are identified. To this effect the assessment methodology covers the principles of information synthesis as well as interpretation and utilization of the results.

Table 2

The assessment criteria of the enterprise's criteria (worked out by the authors on the basis of the sources from the text)

<i>Actions</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
Concentration of resources	1. Possibility to channel resources to the realization of one strategic idea
	2. Possibility to accumulate (allocate) resources in the successive stages
	3. Possibility to concentrate on just a few (not many) major problems
Accumulation of resources	4. Possibility to distinguish specific potential in the available resources
	5. Possibility to learn from the gained experience
	6. Possibility to make use of the partners' resources
Supplement of resources	7. Possibility to combine resources with the view of future advantage
	8. Possibility to create novel resources, i.e. industrial or commercial secrets, patents, trade marks, brands
	9. Possibility to exploit resources not only locally, not simultaneously, not for the sole purpose
	10. Possibility to persuade the competitors to cooperate in specified areas
Security of resources	11. Possibility to safeguard the resources from direct loss
	12. Possibility not to divulge the original (direct) sources of success
Recovery of resources	13. Possibility to shorten the time of the resources buy-off

Formalization and interpretation of the assessment results. As early as during the expert assessment and questionnaire the researcher should allow for the way how the information obtained can be transformed into the numbered coefficients, for example, from 0 (the smallest value of the assessed parameter) to 1 (the highest value of the assessed parameter). This could allow the calculation of partial (i.e. related to particular element of competitive potential) coefficients of the competitive ability:

$$(GK)_i = (SvK)_i * (StrK)_i * EK \quad (1),$$

here, $(SvK)_i$ is a relative coefficient of the i-th resource, ability or the importance of external possibility, $(StrK)_i$ is the coefficient of its strength in the enterprise,

EK is the coefficient of core competences.

The 'combination' of the product of the strategic importance of competitive potential elements as well as the coefficients of the competences level best reflect both the very structure of competitive ability and genesis of this characteristic of the enterprise. The product of $(SvK)_i * (StrK)_i$ illustrates the enterprise's level of competitive ability. The coefficient $(SvK)_i$ is a certain index of importance of StrK. In other words, even a highly strategic element of competitive potential does not provide the capability to compete, if it is not very important within the scope of the sector. On the contrary, the element, even though not very important strategically in a particular enterprise, can yield very good results.

The coefficient of the competences level (EK) shows the enterprise's capability (knowing how) to compete, i.e. knowledge how to attain, activate, create and save resources which constitute the basis of competitive potential. As mentioned above, through this it also reflects to what extent the available resources are useful for the performance of these actions. The coefficient (EK) can be understood as a coefficient of the importance of competitive ability (SVK*(STRK). It means that for big 'being able', but small 'knowing how' the enterprise will have a negligible competitive ability, and, on the contrary, even with 'weak' elements of competitive potential the enterprise can achieve good results if only it has strong core competences.

To judge the competitive capability of one particular enterprise (the model is designed for this purpose), one must see the whole of partial coefficients of competitive ability. This is achievable by grouping them (e.g. in descending order) in a table or in a graph.

Possibilities of the utilization of the results of competitive ability assessment. It should be noted that these highly summarized results are of only an introductory and a rather limited practical value. They can be made use of, for example, when checking the enterprise's possibilities prior to taking a loan, expanding the area of operation or entering foreign markets, in other words, in creating a specified strategy. Then the strengths and weaknesses of the enterprise are identified by means of a rather objective analysis, rather than with reference to the researcher's or manager's feelings.

The highest level of generalization, when the general coefficient of the enterprise's competitive ability is measured (e.g. as a mean average of partial coefficients), has no sense for a particular enterprise., because it is incorrect to express such property, as competitive ability, in a single figure. This is justifiable in case the possibilities of the enterprise of a specific sector are to be identified (for example, in creating development strategy of the sector).

Ironically, the least generalized assessment results are of the greatest practical value. This is only natural, because they attest to the quality of the primary resources of competitive ability. In seeking the answer to the question how to enhance this ability, the elements of competitive potential and competences tend to become the objects of managerial decisions, and their assessment criteria - the way to making a decision. For example, in carrying out the testing of this methodology in public catering enterprises, it was found that in this sector the major competitive potential element is the opportunity to operate in a cluster, i.e. in a group with other enterprises or organizations (SvK= 0.96). One of the enterprises taking part in the survey did not attach strategic value to it (StrK= 0.28), though actually it had provided services to the people of a major organization and used its infrastructure, i.e. formed a specific cluster. Following the analysis of the assessment results, it was found that the reason of this is low rating of this element according to the criteria of maintaining time-sustainability, mobility within the enterprise, insufficient volume and other resources (Figure 2).

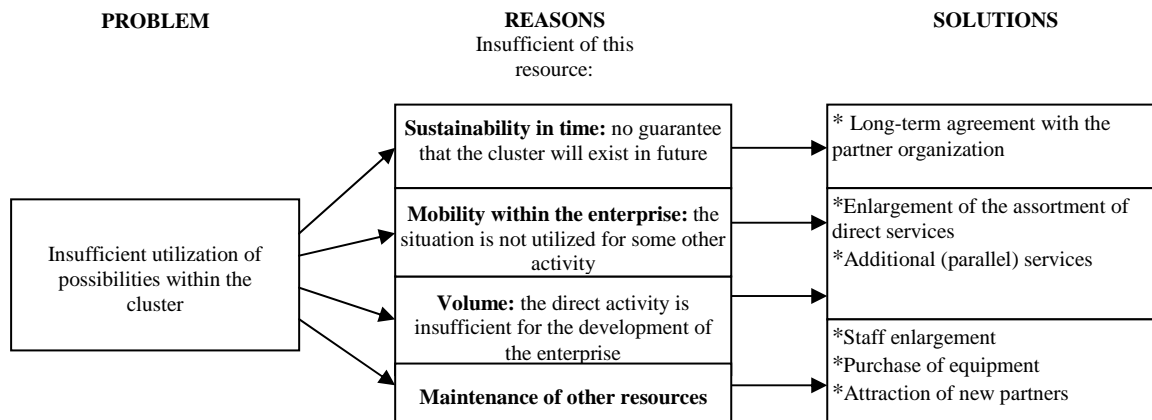


Figure 2. Utilization of the results of competitive ability assessment

With regard to this, the manager of the enterprise took actions

Firstly, he persuaded the management to draw a long-term contract to provide services by using marketing measures. This gave the enterprise a feeling of stability, due to which its operation was expanded including the take-away service of basic dishes, such as coffee, tea, sandwiches, etc., holding seminars, conferences and providing services for partnership organizations and other events in hired premises. To this effect the enterprise purchased or hired inventory, new positions for employees were introduced, and, what is most important, the

cooperation agreement was concluded with the enterprise of organizing events, i.e. the cluster was expanded. These actions were facilitated by favourable assessment results of competences (knowing how to compete) according to numerous criteria listed in Table 2.

The competitive ability assessment is not an end in itself. The level of competitive ability found can serve as an instrument in making managerial decisions. The following summary of the assessment results or a decision to make use of partial results depend on the needs of the one using this instrument (on the aims of the planned analysis).

Conclusions

1. With regard to the acquisition of knowledge which the enterprises as the participants of competitive struggle must possess, it is of great importance to be able to assess the state which can provide the enterprise the possibility to gain competitive advantage. This state should be identified in studying the expected efficiency of the operations performed on the basis of competitive potential which in its turn can be regarded as the strength of the possibilities of the enterprise to participate in competitive struggle, i.e. capability to compete. In other words, competitive ability is a potential competitive advantage to be gained in future.

2. This work and the created methodology of competitive ability assessment is based on M. Porter's conception of value creation chain, resource-based competitiveness theory as well as the conception of core competences. The conception of market-driven organization, the model of systematic competitiveness, dynamic capabilities and competitive advantage of nations were used as auxiliary measures. The analysis was carried out being aware of interrelations between different theories, conceptions and models, however, without going too deep into them. The awareness of the existence of such interrelations provided the possibility to consider them in formulating the parameters which make an influence on competitive ability.

3. The proposed model of competitive ability consists of the following successive and interrelated elements:

- making a list of the resources, operational capabilities and external circumstances to be assessed. The method: it is developed by the researcher on the basis of similar research and experience.

- Identification of the importance of resources, capabilities, and external opportunities within the sector. The method: expert assessment. The main factors are further

regarded as the elements of competitive potential of the enterprise.

- The assessment of the strength of competitive potential elements in the enterprise. Method: the questionnaire and/or the interview. The "strongest" elements are regarded as strategically important for the enterprise, i.e. such, the proper utilization of which could lead to gaining competitive advantage in future.

- The management's competences (knowing how to compete) assessment method: the questionnaire and/or the interview. The assumption is made that all the capabilities of the enterprise include those allowing it to activate the available resources, i.e. they can perform the role of core competences.

- The synthesis of the results assessed and formation of the opinion on the enterprise's competitive ability.

4. During the expert assessment and questionnaire, the researcher should plan how the obtained information is to be converted into numerical coefficients. This could lead to the calculation of partial (related to particular element of competitive potential) coefficients of competitive ability. These coefficients show the influence of individual elements of competitive potential and the corporate ability to use them on the corporate competitive ability.

The least generalized assessment results, i.e. partial coefficients of competitive ability, are of the greatest practical value. This is only natural, because they attest to the quality of primary sources of competitive ability of the enterprise. In seeking to find the answer to the question how to enhance competitive ability, the elements of the enterprise's competitive potential and competences tend to become the objects of managerial decisions (improvement) and their assessment criteria show the direction of managerial solution.

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Gebėjimas konkuruoti įmonės konkurencingumo *ex-ante* vertinimo instrumentas

Santrauka

Konkurencija yra pagrindinė ūkio subjektų (šiuo darbe įmonių) sąveikos rinkos ekonomikoje forma. Ji gali būti suvokiama statine prasme – kaip tam tikros rinkos struktūros išvestinė, reiškianti „įtampą“ tarp įmonių, arba dinamine prasme – kaip procesas, rinkos dalyvių „kova“, kurios metu rinkoje susidaro nauja situacija. Tiek įmonės pozicija rinkoje, tiek jos stiprumą konkurencinėje kovoje priimta apibūdinti viena sąvoka – konkurencingumas.

Šiuo metu gana pagrįsta nuomonė, kad įmonių konkurencingumo tyrimuose teorija labiau pažengusi negu praktika. Mokslinėje literatūroje aprašytų konkurencingumo įmonių lygmeniu empirinių tyrimų trūkumai rodo, kad praktiniai įmonių konkurencingumo vertinimo instrumentai sukurti, nepakankamai panaudojant esamą teorinį darbą, jie nepakankamai įvertina konkurencingumo ištakų sudėtingumą ir neleidžia spręsti, kaip ir kiek konkrečios įmonės pasirengusios konkurencinei kovai.

Dėl savo svarbumo konkurencingumui (ne tik įmonių, bet ir kitų ekonomikos subjektų) aptarti mokslininkai skyrė daug dėmesio. Kaip tyrimų objektas, konkurencingumas turi tam tikrų savitų bruožų, dėl kurių tyrimų rezultatai yra įvairūs ir dėl to tampa sunkiau suvokti ir įvertinti konkurencingumą, kaip įmonės ar kito ekonomikos subjekto savybę. Svarbiausia yra tai, kad konkurencingumas neturi rodiklių, leidžiančių tiesiogiai jį įvertinti. Dėl to įvairiuose tyrimuose gauti rezultatai atspindi ne konkurencingumą apskritai, o atitinkamo subjekto tam tikrą būseną kitų analogiškų subjektų atžvilgiu. Pavyzdžiui, vertinimas pagal pasiektus rezultatus rodo, kiek įmonė buvo konkurencinga praityje ir kodėl ji rinkoje užima būtent tokią konkurencinę poziciją. Vertinimas pagal turimus išteklius ir gebėjimus rodo, ar įmonė yra konkurencinga dabar. Toks vertinimas rodo tik konkurencingumo potencialą, nes, anot daugelio autorių, ištekliai (jų kiekis ir kokybė) dar negarantuoja konkurencingumo ateityje. Dviejų ar daugiau įmonių konkurencingumų palyginimas rodo vienos iš jų konkurencinį pranašumą prieš kitas.

Žinių, kuriomis turi disponuoti įmonės kaip konkurencinės kovos dalyviai, įgijimo požiūriu svarbi teorinių ir praktinių tyrimų sritis yra išteklių ir veiksmų, kurie padeda įgyti konkurencingumą ateityje, parinkimo procesas. Kitaip sakant, būtina iš anksto (lot. *ex-ante*) įvertinti būseną, kuri leistų įmonei įgyti konkurencinį pranašumą. Tokia būseną turėtų būti nustatoma tiriant įmonės konkurencinį potencialu vykdomų veiksmų numatomą efektyvumą – įmonės galimybių sėkmingai dalyvauti stiprybę.

Darbo tikslas – pagrįsti gebėjimo konkuruoti kaip savybės rodančios priklausomybę tarp įmonės išteklių, operacinių gebėjimų bei aplinkos veiksnių ir sėkmės galimybių konkurencinėje kovoje, vertinimo metodiką.

Tyrimo objektas – įmonės gebėjimo konkuruoti vertinimas.

Tyrimo metodai: mokslinės literatūros sisteminė ir lyginamoji analizė, gautos informacijos apibendrinimas ir sintezė.

Minėtos aplinkybės yra pagrindinis motyvas į konkurencingumo struktūrą įvesti savo paskirtimi pagalbinį elementą, leidžiantį suinteresuotiesiems asmenims (tyrėjams, ekspertams, vadovams) nustatyti ir įvertinti tuos išteklius ir veiksmus su jais, kurie lems įmonių konkurencingumą ateityje. Sąvoka „gebėjimas“ lietuvių kalboje, kaip ir jos atitikmenys kitose kalbose, reiškia mokėjimą ir galėjimą ką nors padaryti. Žodis „mokėjimas“ yra siejamas su subjekto, kuris kažką daro, žinojimu, kaip tai padaryti. Žodis „galėjimas“ susijęs su fizinėmis subjekto savybėmis. Vartojant šiuos teiginius analizuojant konkurencingumą, galima teigti, kad gebėjimą konkuruoti sudaro dvi tarpusavyje susijusios dalys: galėjimas, t. y. fizinės galimybės tai daryti (išteklių, darbo jėgos, įrenginių, žaliavų, operacinių gebėjimų ir t. t. turėjimo) ir mokėjimas, t. y. žinojimas, kaip kuo efektyviau panaudoti konkurencinį potencialą (kiek ir svarbiausia kokių išteklių reikia turėti ir kokius veiksmus su tais ištekliais reikia atlikti).

Konkurencinio pranašumo įgijimas ateityje yra pagrindinė įmonių (ir kitų ekonomikos subjektų) gyvavimo sąlyga ir pagrindinis tikslas, kurio siekiant reikia jau dabar atlikti tam tikrus veiksmus. Tokių veiksmų ribos ir kryptis apibrėžiami požiūriu į konkurencingumą ne kaip į įmonės savybę, leidžiančią dalyvauti konkurencinėje kovoje, o kaip į gebėjimą sukurti ir panaudoti įmonei augti palankias sąlygas, t. y. **gebėjimą konkuruoti**. Įmonės gebėjimas konkuruoti yra prielaida konkurenciniam pranašumui įgyti (t. y. tapti konkurencinga kitų įmonių atžvilgiu) ateityje.

Susiejant gebėjimo konkuruoti sąvoką su sisteminiu požiūriu į įmonę, galima teigti, įmonės kaip sistemos konkurencingumas atsiranda tuomet, kai įmonė:

- geba surasti ir įsigyti ir (arba) sukurti įmonės viduje atitinkamus išteklius (materialinius ir nematerialinius);
- geba naudodama šiuos išteklius vykdyti veiksmus, kurie padeda sukurti išskirtinius produktus ar paslaugas;
- geba šiuos produktus ar paslaugas parduoti vartotojams (panaudoti savo gebėjimus rinkoje);
- geba aplinkoje įžvelgti galimybes ir pasinaudoti jomis;
- svarbiausia, kad geba tai daryti geriau negu konkurentai.

Įmonės gebėjimo konkuruoti vertinimo metodika buvo kuriama remiantis trimis pagrindinėmis koncepcijomis: M. Porterio vertės kūrimo grandinės modeliu, ištekliais grįsta įmonių (konkurencingumo) teorija ir esminių kompetencijų koncepcija. Siekiant giliau spręsti klausimus, analizuojant buvo pasinaudota ir kitomis teorijomis, koncepcijomis bei požiūriais, aiškinančiais įmonės konkurencingumo prigimtį: rinka paremtos įmonės koncepcija, sisteminio konkurencingumo, dinaminių sugebėjimų, tautų konkurencinio pranašumo modeliais ir kt. Modelis buvo kuriamas suvokiant skirtingų teorijų, koncepcijų ir požiūrių objektų sąsajas, tačiau nesigilinant į jas. Suvokimas, kad sąsajos egzistuoja, leido atsižvelgti į jas, išskiriant parametrus, darančius įtaką įmonės gebėjimui konkuruoti.

Darbe yra siūlomas įmonės gebėjimo konkuruoti vertinimo modelis, kurį sudaro penki vienas po kito einantys ir tarpusavyje susiję elementai:

- vertinamų išteklių, operacinių gebėjimų ir išorinių aplinkybių sąrašo sudarymas;
- išteklių, gebėjimų ir išorinių galimybių svarbumo sektoriuje nustatymas;
- konkurencinio potencialo elementų „stiprumo“ (turėjimo kuo konkuruoti) įmoneje vertinimas;
- įmonės (vadovybės) kompetencijų (žinojimo, kaip konkuruoti) vertinimas;
- vertinamų rezultatų sintezė ir nuomonės apie įmonės gebėjimą konkuruoti formavimas.

Jau atliekant ekspertinį vertinimą ir anketinę apklausą, tyrėjas turėtų numatyti, kaip gaunamą informaciją paversti skaitiniais koeficientais. Tai leistų apskaičiuoti dalinius (susijusius su konkrečiu konkurencinio potencialo elementu) gebėjimo konkuruoti koeficientus. Šie koeficientai rodo atskirų įmonės konkurencinio potencialo elementų ir mokėjimo jais naudotis įtaką bendram gebėjimui konkuruoti. Kuo didesnis šis koeficientas, tuo atitinkamas konkurencinio potencialo elementas yra svarbesnis įmonės rezultatams.

Gebėjimo konkuruoti vertinimas nėra savitiksliis. Atliekant šį vertinimą, nustatytas gebėjimo konkuruoti lygis gali tarnauti kaip pagrindas priimant vadybinius sprendimus. Tolesnis vertinimo rezultatų apibendrinimas ar sprendimas pasinaudoti daliniais rodikliais priklauso nuo besinaudojančio šiuo instrumentu poreikių (siekiamų planuojamos analizės tikslų).

Raktažodžiai: konkurencingumas, gebėjimas konkuruoti, konkurencinis potencialas, strateginiai ištekliai, esminės kompetencijos, vertinimo modelis, vertinimo metodai.

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