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RELATIONS BETWEEN OUTSOURCING DECISIONS, BUSINESS MODEL AND ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Summary. The goal of the paper is the brief characteristics of the relations between outsourcing decisions, shape of the business model of company using outsourcing and the shape of organizational boundaries. The article has been divided into three parts. The first one includes the description of outsourcing from the business model perspective. In the second part, the research results in the area of organizational boundaries have been presented. The third and main part includes the description of the theoretical model which would include all the aforementioned concepts.

Keywords: organizational boundaries, business model, outsourcing, managerial decisions

MODEL ZALEŻNOŚCI MIĘDZY DECYZJAMI W OBSZARZE OUTSOURCINGU, MODELEM BIZNESU I GRANICAMI ORGANIZACJI: UJĘCIE TEORETYCZNE

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest krótka charakterystyka relacji między: decyzjami podejmowanymi w obszarze outsourcingu, kształtem modelu biznesowego przedsiębiorstwa stosującego outsourcing oraz kształtem granic organizacji. Artykuł podzielony został na trzy główne części. Pierwsza część zawiera opis outsourcingu z perspektywy modelu biznesu. W części drugiej zaprezentowano pokrótce wyniki badań poświęcone granicom organizacji. Trzecia i jednocześnie główna część artykułu zawiera syntetyczny opis propozycji modelu łączącego wymienione trzy kategorie.

Słowa kluczowe: granice organizacji, model biznesu, outsourcing, decyzje menedżerskie

1. Introduction

Performing the managerial roles in the twenty-first century results in facing many challenges. New managerial problems arise every day, caused both by the changes in the environment as well as the evolution of organizations operating on the competitive market. One of the significant effects of these changes is, on the one hand, that it is more and more difficult to determine the limits of organizations, on the other – the significant increase in the strategic importance of organizational borders issue. It follows that the success of the organization depends increasingly on important decisions made, in a way, at the joint between the organization and the environment. These decisions relate mostly to:

- the construction of company's value chain (e.g. the selection of the activities that bring high added value and, at the same time, can be carried out using the competences and resources of the organization),
- preferred forms of cooperation (e.g. joint venture capital),
- *coopetition* (cooperative competition): when to cooperate with the competitors and how to organize the cooperation,
- the position and roles of the company within the network,
- forms of relationships (both formal and informal) with company's stakeholders.

The aforementioned problems have an increasingly greater impact on the company's efficiency, its competitive position and thus, in the long run – the value of the company. This results in the increased importance of outsourcing decisions, which may lead to the success or failure of the whole enterprise. The changes which occur in the business environment influence also the way outsourcing is implemented; for this process is affected by the shape of the enterprise's boundaries and the forms of relationships with market partners. Therefore, the goal of the paper is *the brief characteristics of the relations between outsourcing decisions, shape of the business model of company using outsourcing and their impact on the organizational boundaries*. The article contains the description of the three aforementioned categories, in the form of theoretical model and is based on the concept of organizational boundaries, in particular – the conditions that trigger the process of changing these boundaries called the premises of organizational boundaries change¹.

¹ Cyfert S.: Granice organizacji. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny, Poznań 2012, s. 52.

2. Outsourcing nowadays: the business model perspective

The main problem faced today by people involved in outsourcing (both scientists and practitioners) is its constant evolution². Nowadays, the shape of outsourcing is very different from its form described as early as in the 80s of the past century. The current development phase of this method, often called the “third wave of outsourcing”³, is a response to changes in the contemporary business environment, such as:

- The virtualization of organizational structures, increasing level of the diversity of cooperation forms, business networks, more and more frequent competition, “the decomposition of organizational structures in the direction of inter-organizational relationships that exist in a tender and negotiation”⁴.
- Increasing opportunities to build relationships with companies: from exploration stage, finding a partner, to the stages of collecting data on the partner, the communication and negotiation phase, etc.
- Globalization, which in this context particularly results in the less and less restrained information and capital flow.
- Increasing diversity of capital sources necessary for the development of the company (such as investment funds, incubators, the New Connect market, etc.).

The author undertook the problem of strategic outsourcing in his previous works⁵. These researches confirmed the presence of significant correlations between the form of outsourcing projects and business strategy of the companies applying this method of management. The current shape of business environment, however, results in the fact that the classical strategy becomes less and less important⁶, which is caused mostly by the increasing turbulence of business environment. Therefore, there is an urgency for a category in the field of management science that would enable, at least, a comprehensive description of

² Wodecka-Hyjek A.: Ewolucja koncepcji outsourcingu. Prace z zakresu metod organizacji i zarządzania. Zeszyty Naukowe, nr 775. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny, Kraków 2008, s. 102-105.

³ Nogalski B., Waśniewski J., Kalicki S.: Outsourcing a kooperencja w aliansach strategicznych w polskim sektorze ochrony zdrowia, [w:] Wybrane problemy kooperencji w rozwoju współczesnych organizacji. Łódź 2012, s. 117.

⁴ Gancarczyk M.: Struktura zarządzania w ujęciu O.E. Williamsona jako przedmiot decyzji menedżerskich. „Organizacja i Kierowanie”, nr 2, 2010, s. 66.

⁵ See: Drzewiecki J.: Strategiczny kontekst outsourcingu w sektorze zarządzania nieruchomościami – wyniki badań, [w:] Zakrzewska-Bielawska A. (red.): Koncepcje i metody zarządzania strategicznego oraz nadzoru korporacyjnego. Doświadczenia i wyzwania. C.H. Beck, Warszawa 2010; Drzewiecki J.: Cele, procesy i relacje jako determinanty wyborów strategicznych dotyczących outsourcingu, [w:] Urbanowska-Sojkin E. (red.): Zeszyty Naukowe, nr 170. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny, Poznań 2011.

⁶ Krupski R.: Planowany czy nie planowany rozwój małych firm. Co z teorią zarządzania strategicznego? „Przegląd Organizacji”, nr 3, 2005, s. 15-16.

the organization in the new conditions of doing business. One of these categories is the *business model*.

In the literature on management, the business model did not yet receive the explicit definition. This is mostly due to: business model's complex nature, the researchers' differentiated approach to the problem and the relatively young age of the concept⁷. The review of the business model definitions proves it⁸, which leads to the conclusion that although it is yet difficult to treat business model as a coherent and mature concept, one can at least specify the business model compounds as well as its characteristics. The analysis of different business model concepts carried out by M. Morris *et al.* shows business model as the business idea, which should at least answer the following questions:

- How and for whom does the organization create value?
- What is the source of organization's (key) competences?
- What should be the company's position against the market competitors?
- How can an organization generate profits?
- What are the plans of the organization regarding: the projected period of running the business, its scope and size of the organization?⁹.

In modern economy market, growing turbulence of the business environment, globalization processes and their consequences, the most important characteristics of properly constructed business model can be indicated. They are:

- offering customers unique value,
- focus on innovation (innovation seen as a necessary condition to generate profits by the company)
- temporality, variability, periodicity, susceptibility to aging, and the resulting opportunity (if not even necessity) to redefine the model,
- consistency, expressed first and foremost by the adjustment of business model's components - in a properly constructed business model, its individual elements are not only matched, but also complementary,
- the difficulty of imitation,
- the systemic nature of the concept¹⁰.

⁷ Nogalski B., Szpitter A.: Model biznesu jako instrument zarządzania współczesnym przedsiębiorstwem, [w:] Zimmiewicz K. (red.): Instrumenty zarządzania we współczesnym przedsiębiorstwie – nowe kierunki. Zeszyty Naukowe. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny Poznań 2009, s. 384.

⁸ See: Gołębiowski T., Dudzik T. M., Lewandowska M., Witek-Hajduk M.: Modele biznesu polskich przedsiębiorstw. SGH, Warszawa 2008, s.19-30.

⁹ Morris M., Schindehutte M., Allen J.: The entrepreneur's business model: toward a unified perspective. "Journal of Business Research", Vol. 58, 2005, p. 727-728.

¹⁰ Drzewiecki J.: Model biznesu a strategia organizacji: podobieństwa, różnice, [w:] Przybyła M. (red.): Nauki o zarządzaniu. "Management Sciences", No. 8, 2011. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny, Wrocław 2011, s. 337.

These business model attributes mean that it is more and more frequently being seen as an alternative for company strategy. Incremental nature of the business model, its complexity, the fact that it takes into account many different elements of the organization (and the relations between them) allow for versatile use of the business model as a strategic management tool. It is more and more frequently used to describe the company, compare the organizations, plan new projects (e.g. business plan)¹¹, etc.

Although the number of publications on business models in the last few years is impressive¹², the concept of business model still seems to be somewhat vague. There are only few monographs devoted to business models of Polish enterprises¹³. The analysis of outsourcing from the business model perspective seems to be particularly justified since many authors indicate the relations between the business model compounds and the outsourcing form. The examples of such relations can be found in recent works on business models¹⁴. Value chain design – the issue directly related to outsourcing – is considered by many authors as one of the key elements of the business model¹⁵. Both the phenomenon of outsourcing as well as the issue of business model affect the mechanism of organizational boundaries formation, which “by determining the scope of impact of the organization, serve as a mechanism of integrating the organization with its environment, which allows for the implementation of measures aimed at ensuring the survival and development”¹⁶.

3. The organizational boundaries¹⁷ and outsourcing: the research results

In this context, attention should be paid to *the research on the problem of organizational boundaries as well as the relationships between organizational boundaries and the business*

¹¹ More on the business model as a strategic management tool – see e.g.: Drzewiecki J.: Model biznesu jako narzędzie zarządzania strategicznego: zastosowanie, dylematy i wyzwania. Materiały Konferencyjne „Dylematy Współczesnego Zarządzania” 03-05.06.2013, Kraków-Zakopane 2013 (during the publication).

¹² For the research review in this area – see e.g.: Zott C., Amit R., Massa L.: The Business Model: Recent Developments and Future Research. “Journal of Management”, Vol. 37, No.4, 2011; Osterwalder A., Pigneur Y., Tucci C.L.: Clarifying Business Models: Origins, Present and Future of the Concept. “Communications of AIS”, Vol. 15, May 2005, p. 6.

¹³ See e.g.: Gołębiowski T., Dudzik T. M., Lewandowska M. op.cit.; Duczkowska-Piasecka M., Poniatowska-Jaksch M., Duczkowska-Małysz K.: Model biznesu. Nowe myślenie strategiczne. Difin, Warszawa 2013.

¹⁴ See e.g.: Macias J.: Istota i rozwój nowych modeli biznesu. „Przegląd Organizacji”, nr 9, 2012; Demil B., Lecocq X.: Business Model Evolution: In Search Dynamic Consistency. “Long Range Planning”, Vol. 43, 2010.

¹⁵ Oblój K.: Tworzywo skutecznych strategii. PWE, Warszawa 2002; Morris M., Schindehutte M., Allen J.: op.cit..

¹⁶ Cyfert S.: Role organizacyjne w zarządzaniu granicami – propozycja definiowania i wyniki badań empirycznych, [w:] Stabryła A., Wawak S. (red.): Metody badania i modele rozwoju organizacji. Mfiles.pl, Kraków 2012, s. 184.

¹⁷ For the description of organizational boundaries concept, see: Cyfert S.: op.cit., s. 16-41.

model shape, carried out by Prof. Szymon Cyfert in Polish medium and large enterprises. Some vital conclusions of this research are that:

- the respondents positively assess the possibility of influencing the organizational boundaries defining the level of activity in the value chain,
- defining the limits of the activity level in the value chain is of high importance for the organization's efficiency,
- all the business model compounds¹⁸ identified in the research influence the decision-making processes,
- the most frequently transformed organizational boundaries are the limits of the organization in the product offer and the boundaries determining the level of activity in the value chain,
- outsourcing is one of the most frequently used methods of managing organizational boundaries and
- the likelihood of positive impact of the processes extending the organizational boundaries is higher than that of their shortening; while the managers are characterized by the ability to properly use the mechanism of extending the boundaries, the efficiency of shortening them is significantly lower¹⁹.

The results of the aforementioned research confirm the high importance of both the organizational boundaries and business model to the effectiveness of the organization, as well as their importance for strategic management. Interestingly, the results seem to suggest problems with using outsourcing (which usually results in shortening the organizational boundaries) in Polish medium and large enterprises.

Also, the *previous researches carried out so far by the author*²⁰ confirm both the high popularity of outsourcing and its importance for Polish companies. The researches have shown that, in the researched companies:

- both the key and the supporting processes were frequently outsourced,
- there was strong relationship between the use of outsourcing and ability to achieve strategic goals,
- using outsourcing enabled to achieve low-cost strategy as well as to acquire of resources relevant to the implementation of the strategy²¹,
- the advanced forms of outsourcing, especially in terms of the relationships with outsourcing partners, were almost non-existent.

¹⁸ These are going to be explained in the next part of the paper.

¹⁹ Cyfert S.: op.cit., s. 102-127.

²⁰ The results of the researches described in: Drzewiecki J.: *Strategiczny...*, op.cit.; Drzewiecki J.: *Cele...*, op.cit.

²¹ According to the Resource-Based View (RBV).

While the research results demonstrate the strategic importance of outsourcing used in Polish enterprises, doubts arise about the manner in which outsourcing is used. This evidence indicates problems during the outsourcing decision-making process as well as mistakes made by managers during outsourcing implementation.

4. The model of relations between organizational boundaries, business model and outsourcing decisions: identification and characteristics

The research results (both empirical and literature) allowed to formulate *the model of relations between three major categories described in the article*. These categories are (fig. 1):

- the premises of organizational boundaries changes,
- the shape of business model and
- the form of outsourcing project.

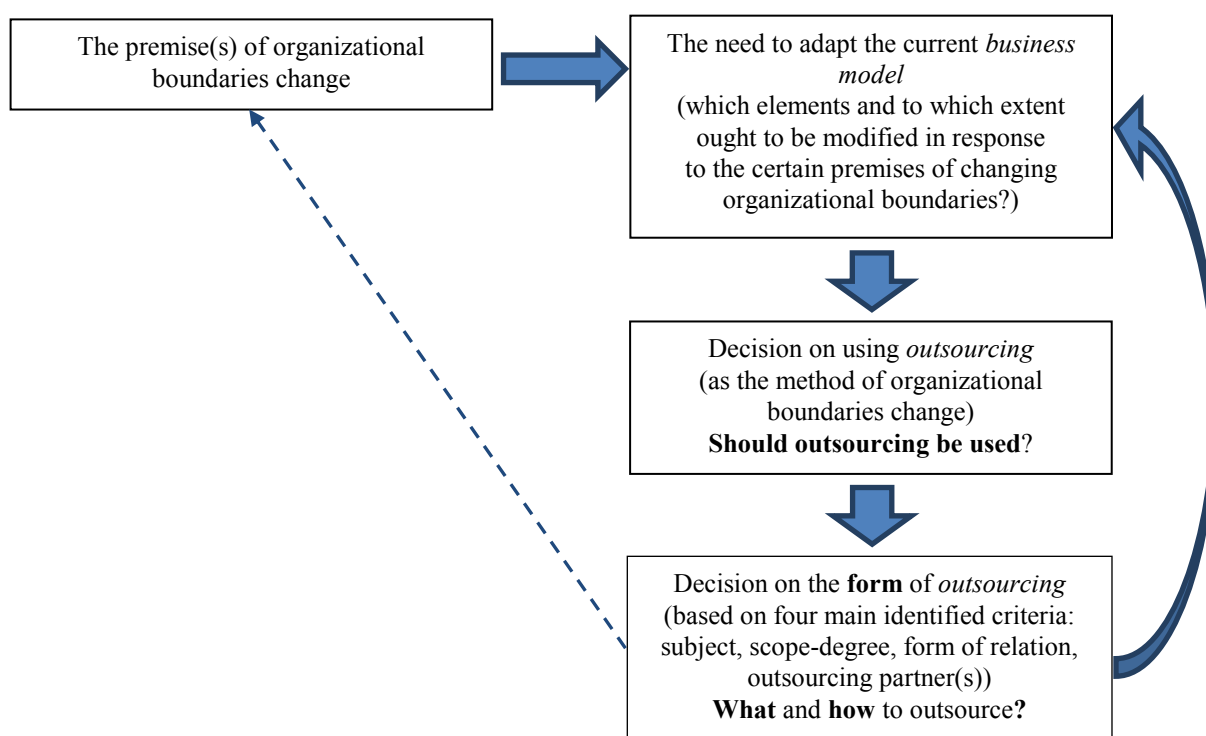


Fig. 1. Outsourcing as the method of changing organizational boundaries and adapting business model

Rys. 1. Outsourcing jako metoda zmiany granic organizacji oraz modyfikacji modelu biznesu

The model's main assumption is, that the existence of one or more premise(s) of changing the organizational boundaries results in the need of modifying the company's business model²². For example, the need to concentrate on core business may result in changing target customer(s) (i.e. reducing number of segments in which the company operates). Modification in one business model compound may result in changes of other parts of the business model, i.e.: distribution channels, partner network, cost structure, and so on.

Outsourcing, in this model, is the method of both changing the organizational boundaries and adapting the business model. It results in the fact that, during making outsourcing decisions, both the changes introduced in the business model as well as the current premises of organizational boundaries change ought to be taken into consideration. In the aforementioned example, the company may increase both the level of outsourcing, as well as change its form to more advanced. However, in this case the managers should ask themselves the question: how implementing outsourcing is going to change our business model? Is it going to be helpful in this particular situation? Therefore, the described model requires to make more thorough analysis of outsourcing decisions, which should be vital for the managers in charge.

Based on the research on organizational boundaries of Polish enterprises, carried out by prof. S. Cyfert, the following main *premises of changing the organizational boundaries* have been identified. They are:

1. Ensuring competitiveness.
2. Increasing the created value added.
3. Risk diversification.
4. Focus on core business.
5. The use of economies of scale.
6. Reducing the limited possibilities of internal development.
7. Reducing the cost of the organization.
8. Enabling the use of redundant resources.
9. Using the environment opportunities.
10. Reducing the negative impact of environment threats.
11. Increasing the flexibility level²³.

²² This relation has been described by S. Cyfert and confirmed by his research which have been quoted in the previous part of the article.

²³ Cyfert S.: op.cit., s. 140.

Based on the research results as well as literature review, the *nine business model building blocks* have been identified (table 1). The structure of business model is based on the business model concept proposed by A. Osterwalder, Y. Pigneur and C.L. Tucci²⁴. There were two main reasons for choosing this particular business model framework. The *first* reason was using this concept in S. Cyfert's research, where the influence of all the elements on the organization's development, as well as on decision-making processes, was confirmed as high. This fact *justifies all the elements of business model as of vital importance to the enterprise existence and growth*. Of course, the open question is still about the way each particular element of business model influences outsourcing decisions, as well as the strength of this impact; answering it requires conducting further empirical research.

Table 1

Nine Business Model Building Blocks

Pillar	Business Model Building Block	Description
Product	Value Proposition	Give an overall view of a company's bundle of products and services
Customer Interface	Target Customer	Describes the segments of customers a company wants to offer value to
	Distribution Channel	Describes the various means of the company to get in touch with the customers
	Relationship	Explains the kind of links a company establishes between itself and its different customer segments
Infrastructure Management	Value Configuration	Describes the arrangement of activities and resources
	Core Competency	Outlines the competencies necessary to execute the company's business model
	Partner Network	Portrays the network of cooperative agreements with other companies necessary to efficiently offer and commercialize value
Financial Aspects	Cost Structure	Sums up the monetary consequences of means employed in the business model
	Revenue Model	Describes the way a company makes model through a variety of revenue flows

Source: Osterwalder A., Pigneur Y., Tucci C.L.: Clarifying Business Models: Origins, Present and Future of the Concept. "Communications of AIS", Vol. 15, May 2005, p. 18

The *second* premise of using this particular business model framework was the fact that Osterwalder's proposal includes all the most important business model compounds vital for two processes of business model's evolution: *improvement* and *innovation*²⁵. The process of *business model improvement* deals mostly with the *Infrastructure Management* part. During this process, the managers make decisions mostly about the way of organizing the activities within the company's value chain. The emphasis is put on the *optimizing* the use of internal and external resources so that the company's actions could be cost-effective and, at the same

²⁴ Osterwalder A., Pigneur Y., Tucci C.L.: Clarifying..., op.cit., p. 18.

²⁵ These two processes has been explained in Osterwalder's books and articles, see e.g.: Osterwalder A., Pigneur Y.: Tworzenie modeli biznesowych. Podręcznik wizjonera. Helion, Gliwice 2013.

time, would enable to achieve specific production results. The process of *business model innovation* deals mostly with the *Customer Interface* part of the model. Here, according to Osterwalder, the managers make decisions that should lead to:

- meeting the clients` (both existing and new ones) needs,
- introducing new technologies, products and services to the market,
- using the business model to introduce the revolutionary changes on the existing market(s) or
- creating new market(s).

Here, the emphasis is put rather on *creativity*, which should lead to finding new ways to increase cash-flow²⁶.

What is important, that *both the process of excellence, as well as the process of innovation should contribute to creating the value added for the customer*. According to this concept, the value is created first and foremost when managers are able to find the **balance** between what the company is *able to do* (either by itself or by using different forms of cooperation) and what it *must do* in order to be successful on the market(s), both current and/or future ones. Finding this balance is, according to Osterwalder, the best (if not only) way to ensure company`s profitability in the long run. In other words, the dichotomy of this particular business model concepts seems to be rather ostensible, while both of the aforementioned processes vital to the business model shape can be looked at as two sides of the same coin.

Finally, the literature research²⁷ allows to pre-define *four basic dimensions of outsourcing decision-making*. These are:

- Decisions on the subject of outsourcing: what should be outsourced? Functions, functional areas, processes, what types – primary, secondary? Etc.
- To determine the scope and degree of outsourcing: depth, width of outsourcing: how many processes and/or functions are to be outsourced? What range of activities within each of these processes and/or functions? Etc.
- Decisions on the form of relationships (both formal and informal) with outsourcing partners.
- Decisions about the choice of outsourcing partner(s) what are the criteria for selecting a partner? What information regarding the partner is collected? What is the significance of previous cooperation experience, the history of mutual relations? Etc.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 243-263.

²⁷ Niemczyk J.: Wyróżniki, budowa i zachowania strategiczne układów outsourcingowych. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny, Wrocław 2006; Trocki M.: Outsourcing. Metoda restrukturyzacji działalności gospodarczej. PWE, Warszawa 2001; Essinger J., Gay C.L.: Outsourcing strategiczny: koncepcja, modele i wdrażanie. Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2002.

The decisions made in each of the above four areas constitute the form of the outsourcing project used in a particular case. Identifying these decisions enables to measure the level of advancement of outsourcing project (table 2).

Table 2

The main criteria of choosing outsourcing project form		
Decision-making criterion	Advancement level of outsourcing project	
	low	high
1. Outsourcing subject	Only suport functions	Both support and primary functions and processes
	Low contribution to the value added	High contribution to the value added
2. Scope and depth of outsourcing	Low level of outsourcing scope	High level of outsourcing scope
	Low level of outsourcing depth	High level of outsourcing depth
3. The characteristics of the relationship with outsourcing partner(s)	Low frequency of: - profit and loss sharing, - strategic resources sharing, including: knowledge, workers etc., - long-term agreements, - shared investments.	High frequency of: - profit and loss sharing, - strategic resources sharing, including: knowledge, workers etc., - long-term agreements, - shared investments.
	No or weak informal relationship.	Strong informal relationship.
4. The criteria of choosing the outsourcing partner	Focus on costs of services provided by the outsourcing partner	Extensive analysis which takes into account, apart from the cost, also: the quality of the services, level of outsourcing partner`s experience, trust (history of contacts, experience of previous cooperation), match and organizational similarity organizational of outsourcing system`s elements

Some of the relations between business model changes and the form of outsourcing seem obvious; in particular, the three compounds of Infrastructure Management seem to be strongly influenced by the outsourcing implementation. But what about the others? How using influences Value Proposition, Relationship etc.? Answering these questions requires conducting thorough research.

It is worth noting that, according to the described framework, both the fact *and* the way of using outsourcing influences the possibility of introducing organizational borders changes and the business model shape. It means that the company which does not have the ability to implement outsourcing is going to encounter serious problems when attempting business model adaptation. In this case, either the changes in the business model and organizational boundaries should be reviewed, or outsourcing should not be used. This conclusion leads to the fact that *using outsourcing should be looked at as one of the organization`s competences*²⁸, for it requires certain skills, knowledge, experience and resources.

²⁸ In some cases – key competence.

5. Summary

The changes described briefly in the article and occurring in the environment of contemporary enterprises, as well as within the business organizations, require more thorough analysis of outsourcing decisions. The described model may serve as a tool during the outsourcing implementation process, especially in its planning phase. Here, the emphasis is put on the coherence between the form of outsourcing project, shape of company's business model and the premises of organizational boundaries change. It means that managers responsible for outsourcing decisions should nowadays ask themselves the question about the relations between the model's three vital categories. The model should not only enable to analyze and understand the significance of outsourcing for achieving company's goals, but also to realize that outsourcing can be used to support the change of the business model shape. Sometimes outsourcing may be the only way to radically change existing business model in short time; in such case, the company must identify the cooperation competences, which would enable business model revolutionary changes (outsourcing is treated as one of the company's key competences).

The presented model can also be the starting point for the research on the area of strategic management. Thorough research and analysis of the relations between model's three main categories would enable better understanding of business model and its role for the company's competitiveness. The analysis of outsourcing decisions in the context of business models would provide answers to questions regarding the nature of both the determinants and limits of the boundaries of companies operating in the twenty-first century, as well as the phenomena so important to society and the development of civilization, as cooperation, competition, business network creation etc.. It would also enrich the knowledge on the forms of business cooperation, especially in the managerial decisions context.

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