

PRO-INNOVATIVE PERCEPTION OF ENVIRONMENT IN FAMILY BUSINESSES

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Introduction/background: Family businesses play a very important role in modern economic processes around the world in both developed and developing countries. Family companies are currently experiencing higher and more complicated requirements, which are directed to them from the environment. The increase in the above requirements is a derivative of the increasing variability of this environment, but also of the fact that the set of people, entities, and often social groups interested in the activities of a given business that has been expanded.

Aim of the paper: The aim of this paper is to characterize the process of perception of the environment of companies and to identify pro-innovation perception of the environment in family firms on the basis of Oslo Manual 2018 guidelines.

Materials and methods: This research is a part of a project carried out in the Department of Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness of family and non-family businesses – a comparative analysis in selected areas. Stage II. Innovation: family and non-family businesses in Poland based on methodological assumptions of Oslo Manual. The survey was conducted from June to August 2020 by the Center for Research and Knowledge Transfer of the University of Economics in Katowice.

Results and conclusions: The presented results of empirical research indicate selected areas of perception of the environment in innovation processes from the perspective of family firms. Based on the presented results, it can be observed that family firms should pay special attention to monitoring the environment of the market on which they operate.

Keywords: family businesses, innovation, perception of environment.

1. Introduction

Family businesses play a very important role in modern economic processes around the world in both developed and developing countries. Family companies are currently experiencing higher and more complicated requirements, which are directed to them from the environment. The increase in the above requirements is a derivative of the increasing variability

of this environment, but also of the fact that the set of people, entities, and often social groups interested in the activities of a given business that has been expanded (Sadkowska, 2015, p. 10). The business development strategy and its management structure are strongly determined by the nature of the environment and the dynamics of its changes. The possibility of survival and development of an enterprise in the long term is determined by its ability to adapt to the constantly changing environment (Popczyk, 2013, p. 13). For this purpose, family businesses should take into account the signals coming from the market about the intensity of competition and adapt the undertaken competitive strategies to the market realities (Leszczewska, 2014, p. 271). In turn, issues related to the search for sources of innovation in the environment and perception of the environment in terms of emerging opportunities become particularly important. The purpose of this paper is to characterize the process of perception of the environment of companies and to identify pro-innovation perception of the environment in family firms on the basis of Oslo Manual 2018 guidelines.

2. Characteristics of family businesses

Based on the analysis of the literature on the subject, it is possible to put forward a thesis that these companies cope with crises and changes, are able to survive in difficult times. They contribute to generating growth and economic development. Family companies are entities with a significant economic potential, playing an important social role. They are clearly becoming valuable links in the economy, so it is worth getting to know the specifics of their functioning, goals and values that they are guided by in order to be able to use not only economic, but also social potential inherent in them (Hunger, Hunger, 2017, p. 15). In Poland, the issue of family businesses is mainly related to the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises, as they generate a significant share in various sectors of the economy.

The growing importance of family businesses in Poland requires conducting in-depth empirical research in various aspects of their functioning (Dźwigoł-Barosz, 2018, p. 42). Defining the concept of family businesses is usually based on two criteria: ownership and management. In the case of the criterion of ownership, a company is considered as family-owned if it has more than 50% of shares (stocks) or the dominant (largest) owner is a family. With respect to the management criterion, there are soft criteria (i.e. family influence on company management, significant participation of the older generation in management, major decisions made by the family, family control in management, at least two generations of control over the company) and hard criteria (i.e. a family member is the president of the company, more than one member of the board of directors comes from the family, the majority of the board of directors are family members), which determine whether a company is family-owned or not (Mandl, 2008, pp. 17-18).

The way of definition based on the management factor was adopted by R. Donelley, according to whom a family business is such a business in which "at least two generations of the family can be identified and when this connection (between generations) affects the policies of the company and the interests of the whole family (Donelley, 1964, pp. 93-105). On the other hand, R. Donckels and E. Fröhlich, adopting the ownership criterion, consider as a family business such a business in which family members own at least 60% of the capital (Donckels, Fröhlich, 1991, pp. 99-105). Gallo and Sven supplemented this definition with the thesis that family businesses in the world function according to the same logic and are basically similar in terms of their components, processes occurring in them and existing barriers and problems. Thus, the most important features of such companies are ownership, family succession and family involvement in running the business (Gallo, Sven, 1991, pp. 1-8). On the other hand, Ł. Sułkowski defines a family company as an entity with a family structure, in which the strategic control is exercised by this family, its members participate in management, and more than one generation is involved in the functioning of the company (Sułkowski, 2005, p. 13).

3. Perception of the business environment

The environment of the organization affects the functioning of the company with great force, so the perception of its elements is very important. The essence of the organization's environment is emphasized in the literature, defining opportunities as "all events and processes in the environment that create a favorable situation for the company" (Penc-Pietrzak, 2010, pp. 69). Thus, the success of an organization can be seen in its ability to smoothly adjust its strategy and dynamically changing environment (Budzik, Zachorowska, 2016, p. 92). Perception of the environment is an individual process of selecting given features of the environment that are relevant to a given organization. It enables the observation and study of the environment and then directing the strategy of the enterprise (Bednarczyk, 1996, p. 68). The behavior of the environment determines the behavior of enterprises, at the same time enterprises affect the formation of the environment. To be able to monitor the environment is important to know it in an orderly way, and scanning the environment should be carried out according to strictly defined categories (Wach, 2008, p. 57).

Generally, the environment of an organization can be defined as a set of elements that do not belong to it, but are in some interactions with it (Bielski, 1997, p. 126). In literature there is also a definition that defines environment as "a set of conditions created by various demographic, social, cultural, economic, legal, organizational, technical and environmental factors" (Penc-Pietrzyk, 2002, p. 31). Thus, the company functions in an environment in which its various elements affect the possibilities of its development. Due to the nature of the relationship between the organization and the environment, we can cite the basic division of

the environment, commonly considered in the literature, which distinguishes (Budzik, Zachorowska, 2016, p. 91):

- macro-environment, otherwise known as the further environment – it includes individuals and organizations, as well as factors that affect the functioning of the company and its results, but not in a direct way, but creating the conditions for the functioning of the company. In this area special attention is required to identify opportunities for the company resulting from changes in trends and unmet needs (Wolanski, 2013, p. 49). The influence of the macro environment on the organization can be observed in five segments: macroeconomic, technological, political-legal, sociocultural and ecological (Bednarczyk, 1996, p. 47);
- micro-environment - competitive, task-oriented, direct - these are the units and elements located outside the organization, which can influence its functioning and which are influenced by the organization itself. There are direct interactions between the micro environment and the organization. The most significant elements of this area include customers, suppliers, competitors (Budzik, Zachorowska, 2016, p. 91).

M. Bednarczyk in his publication, in addition to the above categories of environment, distinguishes additionally meso-environment, which is an intermediate layer between macro- and micro-environment. It includes field units and entities supporting the functioning of enterprises (Bednarczyk, 1996, pp. 46-47).

In the literature, defining the environment is imprecise, so there are, in addition to the categories indicated, many characteristics by which the organization's environment can be described. Within the framework of strategic management, the perception of enterprise environment has been proposed due to four perspectives: adaptive, resource, cognitive and ecological. The most often cited adaptive perspective indicates that the environment affects the activities of organizations, which actively adapt to the evolution occurring in it. It should be noted that within this perspective, it is the characteristics of the environment that largely determine the need to look for new ways to operate the organization (Zakrzewska-Bielawa, 2017, p. 176). Based on another characteristic of the environment proposed in the publication of M. Bednarczyk, its features were distinguished according to the following categories (Bednarczyk, 1996, pp. 42-45): differentiation, which considers the multiplicity of types and species present in the environment (homogeneous, heterogonic), the dynamics of the environment considers the changes in the properties of the environment over time (stable, turbulent), uncertainty, which considers the differentiation and dynamics of the environment considered in the context of the decision-making process (determined, risky), the pressure of the environment reflects the strength of the impact of the environment (high pressure, liberalization), the mode of impact considers the presence of tools of influence of the environment on the organization (direct, indirect).

P.F. Drucker, based on his study of environmental variability, indicated that the environment is a source of innovation opportunities for companies. He signed out factors outside the organization that generate innovation opportunities, i.e.: demographics, changes in perceptions, meanings, values, and new knowledge within and outside of science. However, in order to be able to identify opportunities for the enterprise, it is necessary to constantly observe the environment, as well as to include entrepreneurial management instruments in management (Bednarczyk, 1996, pp. 15-16). The process of observing the organization's environment should be carried out systematically and methodically. It takes into account the following consecutive, orderly stages (Kafel, 2000, p. 39):

- identification of the key environment of the enterprise,
- monitoring of typical trends in the environment,
- prediction of future trends of changes in the environment,
- measurement and evaluation of future changes in the states of the environment.

Conducted study of the environment according to the process approximated above gives a chance to improve the organization.

In the context of determining the orientation of the company in relation to its environment, it becomes important to properly recognize the potential of the external environment, its assessment, as well as its use. This skill of the management consequently can create favorable conditions for the organization to persist and develop (Matejun, 2017, p. 22). It is important that the environment also determines the necessity of using different management methods. It is not possible to apply a universal approach to management in different situations (Kawczynska, 2020, p. 40). The aspect of the organization's environment and its importance is referred to in modern management concepts and methods, including benchmarking, outsourcing, corporate social responsibility (Mateja, 2017, p. 22).

In order to adapt effective management techniques and strategies to the environment, methods of strategic analysis are used. Among the most frequently mentioned in the literature, the analysis of the environment includes PEST analysis (Babatunde, Adebisi, 2012, pp. 27-28), SWOT analysis (Fleisher, Bensoussan, 2015, pp. 105-122), Porter's 5 forces (Bednarczyk, 1996, p. 50), map of strategic groups (Flak, Hunger, 2012, p. 130). Thanks to the indicated methods, it is possible to identify pro-development factors that build market advantage of the organization (Wyrwicka, Jaźwińska, 2014, pp. 261-263). The effectiveness of the strategic orientation and the innovativeness of the company depends on environmental factors, so managers must appropriately adjust the strategy to the environmental conditions, because the external environment can moderate the relationship between strategy and company performance.

In the context of enterprise development opportunities, the literature indicates that the dynamic environment of an organization that is characterized by a constant rate of change opens up market opportunities. In such an environment, firms will pursue change and innovation to achieve competitive advantage. In contrast, a competitive or hostile environment poses a high

degree of threat to the organization. Companies operating in this type of environment tend to pay more attention to resource protection in defining strategy (Prajogo, 2016, pp. 242-243).

Business organizations are in constant interaction with their environment. Changes in the environment can cause changes in inputs, in processes, in firm performance, and these in turn can cause further changes in the organization's environment. The internal and external environment should be viewed as interrelated and interdependent rather than as separate entities. Various external factors affecting business organizations are also often interrelated. Examples include government decisions that can affect the level of demand, which can lead to changes in the general economic climate and have a significant impact on business. The combined effect of these factors can create a turbulent environment that will present challenges or opportunities for the organization. Such changes in the organization's environment can determine an increase in the health of the company or a significant decrease in its potential (Worthington, Britton, 2009, pp. 12-13).

4. Methodology of conducted empirical research

This research is a part of a project carried out in the Department of Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness of family and non-family businesses - a comparative analysis in selected areas. Stage II. Innovation: family and non-family businesses in Poland based on methodological assumptions of Oslo Manual. The survey was conducted from June to August 2020 by the Center for Research and Knowledge Transfer of the University of Economics in Katowice.

A total of 203 family businesses participated in the survey. The research sample was characterized in terms of the period of conducted business activity, the size of employed people and the dominant business profile.

According to the criterion of the period of business activity, companies that have been in business for up to 5 years accounted for 12.81% (26 companies). On the other hand, companies that have been in business for 6 to 10 years accounted for 23.15% of the research sample (47 companies), while companies that have been in business for 11 to 15 years accounted for 13.179% (28 companies). Companies with seniority in business were the most represented, as their share was 50.25% (103 companies).

Analyzing the research sample in terms of the number of people employed, it can be concluded that the largest share in the research sample were companies with 10 to 49 employees – 39.90% (81 companies). Quite numerous were companies employing up to 9 people – 31.53% (64 companies). Companies employing between 50 and 100 workers constituted 18.23% (37 companies), and those employing between 101 and 249 workers – 6.90% (14 companies). The least numerous group are companies with more than 250 employees – 3.45% (7 companies).

In the surveyed companies the dominant profile of activity was service – 52.71% (107 companies), while other types of activity are represented by companies of a commercial character – 16.26% (33 companies), production – 15.27% (31 companies) and mixed – 13.30% (27 companies). Additionally, companies with a dominant profile of construction were distinguished – 2.46% (5 companies).

The survey questionnaire was designed based on the Oslo Manual 2018 (Guidelines for Collecting, reporting and using data on innovation. 4th Edition, OECD/EU). In this study, the responses to questions regarding family firms' perceptions of the environment were analyzed. This element of the survey research was related to the respondents' evaluation of the following statements:

- 1) The firm's products/services can be easily substituted by competitors' offerings.
- 2) The entry of new competitors poses a serious threat to the firm's market position.
- 3) The company has strong competition in the markets in which it operates.
- 4) Price increases on the firm's products/services usually lead to immediate loss of customers.
- 5) The firm's main competitors are micro, small and medium-sized firms.
- 6) The buyers of the company's products/services are public sector entities.
- 7) The sector in which the company operates has become more complex in recent years.

The evaluation of the statements was done on a 5-point scale, where 1 means a strongly disagree answer and 5 means a strongly agree answer.

5. Analysis of empirical findings

First of all, a general statistical analysis of the answers given in the analyzed scope was performed (Table 1). The results indicate the existence of strong competition on the markets on which the surveyed family businesses operate. The competitors are companies from the SME sector. At the same time it is worth noticing that these companies do not rather cooperate with public sector entities, although in case of this statement there is the biggest standard deviation in the assessments made.

Table 1.

Evaluation of the features of pro-innovation perception of the environment in the studied family firms

Evaluated statements	Average	Standard deviation
The company's products/services can easily be substituted for the competitors' offerings.	3,48	1,09
The entry of new competitors poses a serious threat to a company's market position.	3,36	1,13
The company has strong competition in the markets in which it operates.	3,78	1,02

Cont. table 1.

Price increases on a company's products/services usually lead to an immediate loss of customers.	3,36	1,16
The company's main competitors are micro, small and medium-sized companies.	3,70	1,17
The buyers of the company's products/services are public sector entities.	2,50	1,30
The sector in which the company operates has become more complex in recent years.	3,31	1,21

Source: own elaboration based on the analysis of conducted empirical research.

The analysis of the research results using the criterion of the period of operation of the surveyed family businesses (Table 2) shows that the tendency to perceive the sector in which the company operates as more complex decreases with the increasing period of operation. The youngest companies are characterized by the fear of their products/services being replaced by the offer of the competition, which is least intense in the case of the oldest companies. Similar regularities concern the issue of perception of threat from the entry of new competitors. However, the youngest companies assess the strength of competition in the market the lowest, which may indicate good positioning of the company in the period of planning the market entry.

Table 2.

Evaluation of the features of pro-innovative perception of the environment in the studied family firms according to the criterion of the period of their functioning

Evaluated statements	Period of operation of the company			
	up to 5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	over 15 years
The company's products/services can easily be substituted for the competitors' offerings.	3,27	3,36	3,18	3,68
The entry of new competitors poses a serious threat to a company's market position.	3,12	3,21	3,75	3,39
The company has strong competition in the markets in which it operates.	3,50	3,83	3,71	3,85
Price increases on a company's products/services usually lead to an immediate loss of customers.	3,38	3,30	3,43	3,37
The company's main competitors are micro, small and medium-sized companies.	4,23	3,62	3,57	3,65
The buyers of the company's products/services are public sector entities.	2,62	2,32	2,96	2,42
The sector in which the company operates has become more complex in recent years.	3,54	3,57	3,11	3,19

Source: own elaboration based on the analysis of conducted empirical research.

Next, the analysis was made using the criterion of the number of employed people in the studied family firms (Table 3). First of all, there is a noticeable tendency that firms have direct competitors among firms with similar employment size, which may also indicate a lack of inclination to operate in small and profitable market niches. In addition, the results indicate that

family firms both with a small number of employees and those with a large number of employees tend not to have many buyers of products/services among public sector entities. This may indicate that family firms are primarily associated with the small and medium enterprise sector, and entities belonging to the public sector may prefer large enterprises.

Table 3.

Evaluation of the features of pro-innovative perception of the environment in the studied family firms according to the criterion of the number of persons employed

Evaluated statements	Number of persons employed				
	up to 9 people	10-49 people	50-100 people	101-249 people	over 250 people
The company's products/services can easily be substituted for the competitors' offerings.	3,34	3,57	3,21	3,21	4,00
The entry of new competitors poses a serious threat to a company's market position.	3,34	3,47	3,27	2,93	3,71
The company has strong competition in the markets in which it operates.	3,75	3,75	3,86	4,00	3,57
Price increases on a company's products/services usually lead to an immediate loss of customers.	3,30	3,49	3,32	3,00	3,43
The company's main competitors are micro, small and medium-sized companies.	4,00	3,95	3,22	2,79	2,57
The buyers of the company's products/services are public sector entities.	2,58	2,16	2,95	2,79	2,71
The sector in which the company operates has become more complex in recent years.	3,39	3,01	3,59	3,86	3,43

Source: own elaboration based on the analysis of conducted empirical research.

The analysis using the criterion of the dominant business profile of the surveyed family firms (Table 4) indicates that trading firms are most threatened by easy substitution of their offer by competitors. Construction companies are least threatened by the entry of new competitors and price increases leading to the loss of existing customers. The highest assessment of the complexity of the sector in which the companies operate is given by companies with a dominant service profile.

Table 4.

Evaluation of the features of pro-innovative perception of the environment in the studied family firms according to the criterion of the dominant business profile

Evaluated statements	Dominant business profile				
	construction	commercial	mixed	production	services
The company's products/services can easily be substituted for the competitors' offerings.	3,80	4,06	3,22	3,58	3,33
The entry of new competitors poses a serious threat to a company's market position.	2,60	3,79	3,30	3,19	3,34
The company has strong competition in the markets in which it operates.	3,40	4,00	3,48	3,94	3,77
Price increases on a company's products/services usually lead to an immediate loss of customers.	2,40	3,45	3,33	3,42	3,37

Cont. table 4.

The company's main competitors are micro, small and medium-sized companies.	3,00	3,48	3,63	3,65	3,84
The buyers of the company's products/services are public sector entities.	2,00	2,36	2,37	2,42	2,62
The sector in which the company operates has become more complex in recent years.	3,00	3,15	3,30	3,23	3,40

Source: own elaboration based on the analysis of conducted empirical research.

6. Conclusions

The perception of ongoing changes depends on many factors, but the most important seems to be in the entrepreneur's awareness of the need to monitor ongoing changes in the environment and the internal environment of the company and the ability to respond by taking action aimed at anticipatory adaptation of the company to the new situation (Marjański, pp. 154-155). The presented results of empirical research indicate selected areas of perception of the environment in innovation processes from the perspective of family firms. Based on the presented results, it can be observed that family firms should pay special attention to monitoring the environment of the market on which they operate. In addition, the products/services of family companies, which are easily replaced by competitors, are a strongly threatened area. In this context, family companies should undertake activities aimed at forecasting changes in the indicated areas. The effect of undertaken activity by companies may be a chance for their development and introduction of changes and innovations.

In the future, research in the presented area could be connected with the analysis of the influence of environment perception processes on the effects achieved by family companies.

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