

COMPETITIVENESS VS. STREAMLINING COLLABORATION

Ilie BORCOSI, Associate Professor,
„Constantin Brâncusi” University from Târgu Jiu, ROMANIA

ABSTRACT: In the current context, the concept of competitiveness can take on new possibilities and valences. Through this article, I try to reinterpret competitiveness not as a form of rivalry between people (both employees and learners participating in educational activities) or organizations (companies, firms, institutions etc.), but rather as a process of mutual self-development oriented toward effective collaboration. In this way, we introduce the term sustainable competitiveness. The underlying idea is that sustainable and effective competitiveness requires sustainable and effective performance, and sustainable performance cannot exist without cooperation and efficient collaboration. The article presents the responses provided by participants following the administration of an exploratory questionnaire on these aspects.

KEY WORDS: competitiveness, rivalry, streamlining collaboration, sustainable competitiveness, education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of competitiveness emerged, in some form, with trade and social/human interactions. Although the modern term competitiveness was not used in antiquity, the basic principles of commercial competition and the superiority of goods (an example could be those that produced goods of better quality or at a lower cost) were found in trade.

The foundations of economic theory were laid in the early modern era, developing concepts about productivity, the division of labour, competition, and comparative advantage (which form the basis of what we call competitiveness today) [1] [2].

In the 20th century, the competition intensified in all fields and at all levels (including in the health, educational, and political fields, as well as the economic and military ones).

After the Second World War, competition intensified (surpassing the national borders of states, not to mention community boundaries), as solutions and recipes for success were sought in international trade.

Starting in the 1990s, Michael Porter introduced the concept of 'national competitive

advantage' [3]. This has shaped strategies in many areas, regions, and even countries, based on this concept. Amid the momentum of intensifying global competitiveness, Porter's ideas and involvement led to the creation of hundreds of clusters worldwide [4]. Thus, „national competitive advantage” can be transposed to maximize the advantages of international competition / competitiveness. However, from the perspective of the community and/or society, are there only advantages regarding the competitiveness between organizations?

2. PROBLEM FORMULATION

Reconsidering Adam Smith's traditional idea that certain elements of the division of labour at a national level can generate diversity and prosperity, and starting from the necessity and advantages of forming clusters, a fundamental question arises: *Can this approach give birth to a new paradigm in interpersonal and inter-organizational relations?*

This potential new paradigm suggests that the relationships between employees/learners, as well as between organizations, companies, and institutions, could transcend simple

competition. They could be redefined by „efficient collaboration” or the „streamlining of collaboration”, based on a uniform and balanced distribution of the division of labour, resources, and the flows of ideas, information, and knowledge.

Under current conditions, in many situations, collaboration between employees / learners of an organization has become a way of working.

But competition between organizations has also surpassed the paradigm of pure/traditional competition. A new strategic mindset has emerged that combines competition with collaboration, called co-opetition [5], which refers to a new strategy between rival organizations that determines a blend of competition and cooperation (i.e., a simultaneous interaction). Even if organizations cooperate to achieve their proposed goals together, they also compete, they are in competition (rivals). And for this reason, we are trying to answer the following question: *Although co-opetition acknowledges collaboration and cooperation, can partnerships be robust enough if rivalry is recognized and accepted?*

3. PROBLEM SOLUTION

As many authors have noted — capturing the essence of strategic management, organization, competitiveness, competitive context analysis, business development strategies, and the creation of a competent workforce—the necessity of innovation, adaptation, finding high-performing elements for current competitiveness (to move it away from a classical / barren / myopic and ultimately fierce competitiveness), and a balance that integrates strategic collaboration and the creation of shared value was highlighted [8], [9], [10], [11] [12].

Therefore, it is necessary to identify innovative elements that ensure the adaptation of the needs of employees/learners as well as those of the organizations, while also enhancing their performance. This is essential for improving competitiveness in the short term, but also in the long term, by choosing an „appropriate” form of competitiveness.

To find the answer to the previous question, competitiveness can be redefined in the sense of individual development (individual excellence) within the organization, enabling it to engage effectively in various partnerships and collaborations (rather than in the sense of rivalry or positioning itself ahead of others). This opportunity for personal development and individual excellence can likewise be achieved for people (employees and learners).

Likewise, the same context can be applied to education. In school, within educational and instructional activities, many team projects and group tasks are proposed, yet assessment is carried out individually, which can lead to increased rivalry.

In this article, the opportunity to change the paradigm regarding traditional competitiveness is desired to be analyzed. It was stated that this paradigm was changed with the introduction of the concept of co-opetition, which maintains the idea of competition and rivalry among the actors involved (organizations, employees, learners).

The classical vision of competition, focused on intense rivalry and the zero-sum game (where one's gain means the other's loss), has its limitations, related to profit maximization, resource depletion, and restricted collaboration.

In the case of the co-opetition concept, the balance between competing and collaborating is fragile. Suspicions and frustrations over gains (gains that a partner wants maximized) can weaken trust in the partnership.

Therefore, the economic results (or school results, in the case of education) can be high in the short term (if the focus is on competitiveness), but, in the long term, the situation can change (if the focus is on sustainable competitiveness), because rivalry can hinder the evolution / development / growth of results.

The solution would be the introduction of a new concept called **Sustainable Competitiveness**. Using this new concept, the previous shortcomings (associated with pure and excessive competitiveness, as well as with co-opetition) can be overcome through the fundamental integration of sustainability and collaboration into a single, coherent strategy.

Using this concept and the related strategies, the following advantages can be developed:

- The alignment of economic performance objectives with social and environmental ones (not being a matter of compromise between profit, as economic performance, and social „well-being”).
- The equitable use and distribution of resources within the partnership, as well as care for the environment/resources (whether human or physical resources are concerned).
- The development of sustainable partnerships that share the same values, development strategies, technical and economic objectives, objectives that embrace the principles of personal development (for trainees and employees) and individual development (for organizations).
- The creation of long-term Value by replacing the vision of quick profit (short-term) with a vision of long-term shared value (for stakeholders).
- Therefore, concepts that accept rivalry as a competitiveness strategy may bring some disadvantages, most likely in the long term.

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To validate the new concept of **Sustainable Competitiveness**, an exploratory study was conducted by transmitting a questionnaire (with a few questions related to the concept) which was addressed to categories of trainees (and other persons close to them) who carried out certain didactic/educational activities at the „Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu Jiu.

Hereinafter, a few analyses regarding the responses obtained will be presented.

Several 122 respondents participated in the study, of which: nearly 80% worked/studied in a large state institution, around 54% were men, 99% were employees, and 34% were learners.

They provided the following responses:

- Nearly 40% believe that their organization places a *moderate* emphasis on

competitiveness, while 38.5% believe that the emphasis is *fairly high*.

- Around 72% believe that their organization places a *fairly high* emphasis on collaboration.
- Over 55% consider competitiveness and collaboration to be *balanced* within their organization.

For the questions with five response options (where 1 corresponds to *Strongly disagree* and 5 to *Strongly agree*, with an average of 2.5 representing a neutral, impartial position), respondents provided the following results:

- An average of 3.01 is associated with the view that *excessive competitiveness is an obstacle to organizational development*.
- An average of 3.81 corresponds to the belief that *enhancing collaboration between organizations would be more beneficial than emphasizing competitiveness*.
- An average of 3.90 corresponds to the belief that *enhancing collaboration among employees/learners would be more beneficial than emphasizing competitiveness*.
- An average of 2.67 corresponds to the view that *individual performance evaluations* (grades, individual bonuses, rankings) *negatively affect teamwork within the organization*.
- An average of 3.65 corresponds to the belief that *introducing mixed evaluation mechanisms* (individual + group components) *would improve both individual and organizational outcomes*.
- An average of 3.58 corresponds to the view that the *organization is open to changes that encourage cooperation* (interdepartmental, etc.) and *external collaboration* (partnerships).

Summarizing the results of this exploratory study, several arguments can be identified in favor of introducing the concept of **sustainable competitiveness**, which carries ethical, social–corporate, and collaborative responsibility. It represents a necessity shaped by modern social and economic realities, and the study’s findings further confirm its relevance.

Following the results of this exploratory study, it can be stated that the research may be

continued on a larger scale, through an applied study focused more deeply on enhancing collaboration (sustainable competitiveness).

Through this new concept (**Sustainable Competitiveness**), competition can be viewed as a form of individual development (achieved within the context of collaboration), necessary for organizations and individuals/learners to face the challenges and requirements of improving collaboration in order to achieve common goals.

Therefore, sustainable competitiveness is also beneficial for education, as learners gain more reasons and levers for collaboration, as well as potential mechanisms or evaluation elements related to teamwork.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The advantages of **sustainable competitiveness** can be superior, and they have the potential to redefine the very notion of economic success. It is no longer about achieving maximum profits in the present but about generating value in a way that is ethical, equitable, and feasible in the long term.

The old model, which places predominant emphasis on competitiveness, appears to be outdated and increasingly less relevant, while sustainable competitiveness offers a more robust, ethical, and pragmatic framework—one that is essential for keeping employees/learners and organizations in a relevant position within a dynamic and challenging global environment.

Of course, future efforts, challenges, and circumstances will ultimately determine the validation and practical adoption of the concept of competitiveness through enhanced collaboration (or sustainable competitiveness).

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