

IRENEUSZ BIELSKI

## Evolution of managers' opinions on usability of different resources for developing competitive advantages

### 1. Introduction

Market competition takes place in different fields and disciplines, being either the choice of a company or a necessity imposed by the business environment. Specific environmental factors are connected with the global economic crisis whose causes are commonly associated with excessive expansion of financial institutions and a collapse of business ethics in organizations which so far have been considered as institutions of public trust (Bielski 2012, p. 316). This has caused a change in customers' behaviors due to their new approach to risk. Today's customers, which was already observed before the crisis, do not attach as much importance to products and services as to honest trade and the risk of fraud (Assael 1995, s. 148). The current key to success - marketing may not be good enough, if it does not involve shifting procedures and putting emphasis on the customer and on being close to them. The key features of the contemporary enterprises, especially municipal ones, (Bielski 2013, ss. 26-32), may appear to be trustworthiness, reliability, transparency, safety, competence and consistence of behavior with the declared values (Pirson 2008, s. 60).

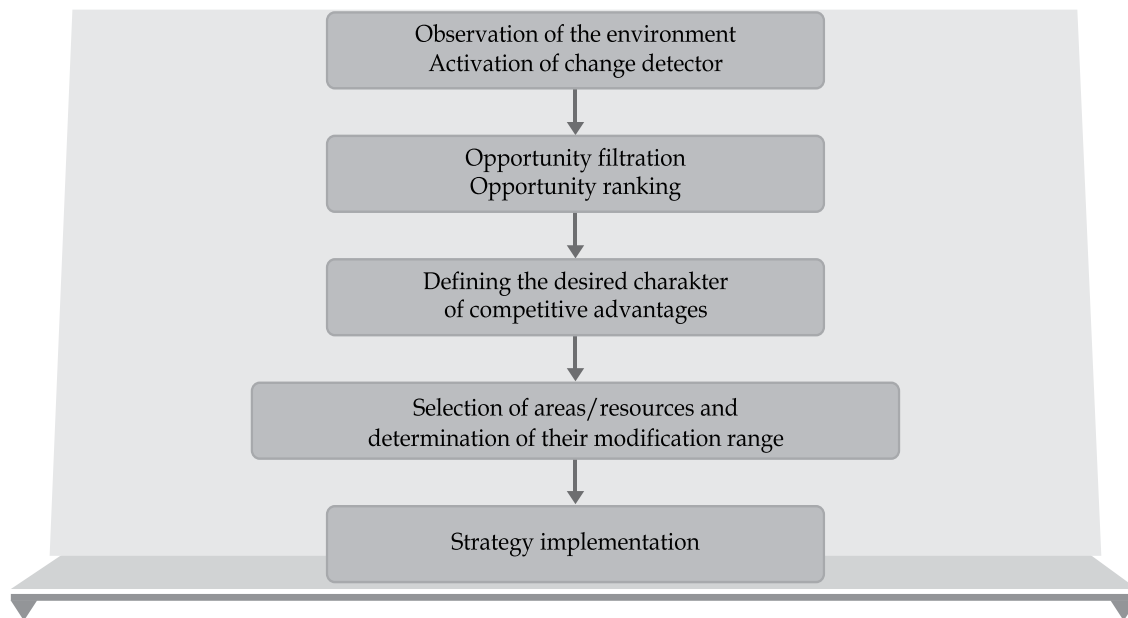
Ph.D. Ireneusz Bielski  
University of Technology and Life  
Sciences in Bydgoszcz  
Faculty of Management

Verification of the quality of services offered by each organization is being carried out by customers and responsible organs, and the assessment is largely dependent on the type of relations developed by the organization by means of available instruments and its ability to use them efficiently. According to Milton Friedmana (Friedman 1962, p. 13,) economic organizations operating in the conditions of the free market economy are required to use the resources in a proper way and take new actions in order to bring profit. This obliges the companies to use their resources in a rational way, modify them, create new ones and offer combinations of resources in order to obtain competitive advantage over others. This in turn allows to take advantage of chances generated by the environment and ensures long and effective functioning on the market.

## **2. Entrepreneurial strategy as a rational approach to competition in a dynamic environment.**

Operation of an enterprise on a dynamic market, meeting demands of the society as well as development and expansion can be carried out only through implementation of an efficient competitive strategy. The process of strategy formulation needs to account for both the goals and their achievement methods. According to the classical endogenic approach, strategies used to be built on the basis of SWAT analysis (Andrews 1971) assuming that the resources owned by an enterprise determine the strategies to be pursued by it. Nowadays, according to (Machaczka, Machaczka 2011, s. 166) egzogenic concept, successful strategies are entrepreneurial ones. Whereas, entrepreneurship is defined as a kind of management which involves creating or taking advantage of chances regardless of currently available resources. (Kirzner 1973; Stevenson, Roberts, Grousbeck 1989; Timmons, Smollen., Dingee 1985). The consequence of entrepreneurial approach is a necessity to monitor the environment with special emphasis on changes which provide business opportunities to be taken advantage of within an acceptable period of time. Changes that occur in the business environment can be of various character and intensity. What for some can be perceived as a threat for others may appear to be a great opportunity. It all depends on the company configuration and position. The observed changes need to be filtered (Krupski 2006, s. 16), opportunities must be separated from threats and a ranking of events that are likely to occur needs to be made with regard to probability, time and costs involved in the chosen reaction option (fig. 1).

These choices are crucial for effectiveness of the selected strategy. The more original and innovative they are the bigger success can be achieved (Noga 2009, s. 96).



**Figure 1. General model of entrepreneurial strategy development**

Source: author's own research

Undertaking creative actions involving the act of biosciation, that is perception of two co-occurring events (Jay 1996, s. 99), of which at least one is of dynamic character, is the key to success.

Implementation of a strategy based on the observed changes involves defining the character of competitive advantages to be developed and choosing the resources to be used for shaping a given advantage. Thus, the process of creation and transformation of resources for the purpose of being used adequately to a given opportunity, is often carried out as early as in the course of implementation of the accepted strategy, whereas full consistence is usually reached when the strategy is changed. Advantage over rivals will result from diversified quantity and quality of resources allowing to shape an outstanding offer. Resources are the only source of advantages. It can be said that a company resource is each factor the company has access to or any other being under its influence that can be used for developing competitive advantages. According to J. Barney

(2001, s. 91-119), in order to be able to create sustained competitive advantage, the company resources need to be of strategic value, rare, hard to imitate and substitute. At this point it should be noted that rarity of resources is connected with access to their sources or high specialization and in fact it determines their small mobility which in turn leads to an increase in the number of barriers and threats for their owner. Decision connected with strategic directions of resources transformations are taken in consistence with knowledge and attitudes of the management staff though it seems that in it often happens in conditions of significant information gaps and without a suitable analytic apparatus.

**Table 1. Classification of competitive advantages**

Criterion	Varieties	Comment
Type	Quantitative - qualitative	Competitive advantage can usually be gained in two ways. the first one leads to the company growth the second to its development
Number of sources	Focused/concentrated or dispersed	There can be one or more sources of advantage. Concentrated advantage even of high intensity can still be perceived for the environment and relatively easy to imitate.
Tangibility	Tangible - intangible	More precious, harder for the business environment to define and more mobile are advantages based on intangible factors. High flexibility of an organization makes it possible to use surprising strategies.
Feasibility	Real - apparent	Even resources perceived as being weak can lead to success if perception of some the offer component is changed
Openess	Demonstrated -secret	Not each advantage has to be perceived by the market, in order to provide the expected result. It is possible to indicate clearly the factors which provide the basis for success (product innovations) or hide the sources of advantages making imitation harder or more difficult (technological innovations)
Sustainability	Sustainable - temporary	The possibility of long exploitation is one of the most desirable attributes offer for developing competitive advantage. This period depends on many factors especially on the difficulties that appear while defining the sources of competitive advantages.

Dynamics	Curently available - new	Each enterprise needs to consider the issues involved in so far existing resources, which served as the base for competitive dadvantage developmet - whether to maintain them unchanged? modernize them? Change their configuration? or whether to create new ones.
Originality	Unique - copied	The sustainability of competitive advantage is determined by the substitutes it has That is whether they are simple or not.
Mysteriosness	Perceptible - unperceptible	Sustainability of an advantage can be obtained by making definition of the advantage sources more difficult for rivals. . Cover actions can include: promotion instruments, the company name or the product name.
Placement	Internal - external	It is possible to increase operation efficiency interfering with internal processes but it is also possible to activate the company environment particularly its basic resource-customers
Availability	Commercial - exceptional	Competitive advantage can be built by investment purchase or thanks to the effort of corporate teams whose effects are properly secured and protected, as a new resource being owned merely by the company and can be made available in time that is convenient for it.
Agregation ability	Single - and synergic	Some factors have natural tendency to occur in the company of others. (eg. motivation system, service quality, culture of organization), allowing at the same time to achieve the effect of synergy through unique composition of dispersed advantages.
Relations	Primary - secondary	Competitive advantages, like the company goals, are related to each other Distinguishing which of them are of primary and which of secondary character is important in terms of creating and aggregating as well as decisions concerning their overtness.
Updatedness	Utilized - frozen	Each enterprise needs to take conscious decisions on the market position,in with regard to the way its offer is perceived by the market.
Market position	Monopol- monopson	Benefits provided by the position of the monopolist are evident. Competitive advantage can also be the effect of monopsonic behavior characteristic for large companies which buy products and services imposing their terms on their suppliers.

**Source:** the author's own research

The type of competitive advantage is connected with the specificity of the

respective market and the type of competition the company is involved in. Assuming that it is necessary to reach for complex characteristics of competitive advantages in terms of matching them with the chosen strategy, a classification of advantages has been elaborated (Bielski 2007, ss. 34-37) with acceptance of criteria which also provide a perspective for verification of the area and scale of actions to be taken (Tab.1). Since implementation of each strategy involves choosing resources, with the use of which the advantage can be designed, shaped and later used, it is proper to make an analysis of the character of the desirable competitive advantage which to be used as the point of reference for developing the strategy.

### **3. Assessment of usefulness of the resources for developing competitive advantages according to empirical tests**

Aiming at rational allocation of financial resources to obtain a new shape of the company resources it is recommended to take into consideration the market sensitivity to the impact of particular components of an offer and the company sensitivity to the environmental impact. Thus, the issue of selection of resources for shaping new competitive advantages has become the key to optimal marketing strategy and to long-term competitive ability. Determination of the hierarchy of resources is also an indication of the value of innovation areas for the company competitive ability. A general review of the value of particular resources in terms of their being useful for developing competitive advantages and possibilities, hence of using particular resources in marketing strategies before and in the advanced stage of the world crisis, is provided by a ranking of resources made on the basis of survey tests.

Surveys of the management staff attitudes toward the problems of using resources in implementation of effective competitive strategies were carried out in the years 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2013, focusing on machine industry manufacturers (tab. 2). The same questionnaires were used in all the surveys (for interviews or sent by mail). They contained a list of 26 resources to be rated in the scale from 0 to 10 points. The sum of points determined the the resource position in the ranking. The surveys were performed on the territory of Poland though mostly in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province (70-85%). As obtainment of a representative research sample was expected to be difficult it was decided to take up purposeful research sampling with random selection of respondents. In the beginning the surveys were carried out on a sample of 72 (1998), later 226 (2001) companies and since 2005 as many as

155 marketing oriented firms (including 100 machine industry manufacturers as the major group), which have existed on the market minimum for 5 years and belong to the group of small and medium companies. In the comparative sample analyzed in the years 1998, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2013, consisting of 55 different economic organizations (tab. 3) there were 19 enterprises operating in the field of municipal infrastructure (3 companies involved in waste disposal and utilization; one municipal landfill; 2 water supply and sewage system companies: 2 transport companies; 1 taxi agency; 1 inland sailing – water tram company; 2 hospitals; 1 earth gas supplier; 1 supplier of electrical energy; 2 public schools; 1 nonpublic college; 1 road and bridge maintenance company; and 1 company involved in maintenance and management of urban green areas and a cemetery. Comparison of managers' notes concerning usefulness of particular resources – areas which provide the best conditions for creation of competitive advantages for enterprises functioning in the sphere of municipal infrastructure, has been made only for the years 2007 and 2013.

**Table 2. Resources ranking 1988-2013 – machine industry**

L p.	Zasoby	Ranking						Diffe- rence 1998- 2007	Diffe- rence 2007- 2013
		1998	2001	2003	2005	2007	2013		
1	Location	10	14	25	26	24	25	-14	-1
2	Technology	2	6	5	2	10	12	-8	-2
3	Machine park	6	7	6	5	20	23	-14	-3
4	Buildings	13	12	26	25	26	24	-13	+2
5	Own capital	18	18	17	18	11	16	+7	-5
6	Distribution network	5	9	19	24	12	19	-7	-7
7	Logistic	16	20	18	15	18	18	-2	0
8	Contacts	9	10	15	16	21	20	-12	+1
9	Licences	26	26	23	21	25	26	+1	-1
10	Intellectual property	14	4	7	9	15	14	-1	+1
11	Bdatabases	23	24	22	22	13	8	+10	+5

12	Leaders	17	15	12	7	6	3	+11	+3
13	Human resources	11	13	13	8	7	5	+4	+2
14	Know - how	12	11	9	13	14	6	-2	+8
15	Connections with suppliers and distributors	4	3	14	23	3	22	+1	-19
16	Reputation of products	1	2	4	4	8	9	-7	-1
17	Reputation of company	3	1	1	3	4	1	-1	+3
18	Environment friendliness	25	19	20	12	23	13	+2	+10
19	Innovativeness	20	16	11	11	16	21	+4	-5
20	flexibility ability to manage a change	21	25	10	14	5	11	+16	-6
21	quality	7	8	2	10	2	4	+5	-2
22	Service	19	23	8	1	17	7	+2	+7
23	Customer loyalty	8	5	3	6	1	2	+7	-1
24	Team work ability	15	17	21	17	22	10	-7	+12
25	Educational mobility	24	21	16	19	19	15	+5	+4
26	Research and development possibilities	22	24	24	20	9	17	+13	-8

**Source:** author's own research on the basis of surveys

The approach to resources depends on many factors including the methods accepted for the company management. Marketing based operation was declared by the great majority of enterprises but in 1998 only 42% of firms had their marketing plans in a written form. In 2013 the percentage share of such companies increased up to 62% in the machine industry, and to 48% in the remaining companies including municipal ones up to 53%. Apart from the size of enterprises, the form of ownership, branch and field of operation (Bielski 2007) this is are time and changes, that take place in the company environment, that are of particular importance in shaping entrepreneurs' opinion on the subject of competition areas and the shape of resource used for generation of competitive advantages. The years 1998-2007 is a period of transformation and adjustment



of Polish firms to the open European market and globally beneficial economic conditions. However, the year 2013 can be considered to be the final form of the world economic crisis.

**Table 3. Ranking of resources 1998-2013  
- comparative sample and municipal enterprises**

no.	resources	Ranking					Difference 1998-2007	Difference 2007-2013	Difference 2007-2013
		1998	2003	2005	2007	2013			
1	Location	1	6	2	11	23	<b>-10</b>	<b>-12</b>	9-25= <b>-16</b>
2	Technology	11	4	13	10	16	+1	-6	8-19 = -11
3	machine park	14	12	12	12	17	+2	-5	7-21 = -14
4	Buildings	9	11	10	16	25	-7	-9	17-23 = -6
5	Company capital	8	14	11	17	14	-9	+3	10 -15 = -5
6	Distribution network	7	10	8	13	12	-6	+1	21 - 22 = -1
7	Logistic	20	21	9	23	11	-3	<b>+12</b>	20 - 9 = <b>+11</b>
8	Contacts	10	9	19	9	20	+1	-11	1 - 11 = - 10
9	Licences	26	26	20	26	26	0	0	6 - 26 = 0
10	Intellectual property	19	23	21	20	18	-1	+2	19 - 18 = +1
11	databases	13	20	5	14	9	-1	+5	13 -6 = +7
12	Leaders	16	17	18	6	3	<b>+10</b>	<b>+3</b>	14 - 2 = <b>+12</b>
13	Human resources	12	8	17	15	7	<b>-3</b>	+8	12 - 5 = <b>+7</b>
14	Know - how	17	13	22	18	15	-1	+3	16 - 20 = -4
15	connections	3	5	7	7	10	-4	-3	3 -7 = -4
16	Reputation of products	2	2	1	1	5	+1	-4	2 - 8 = -6
17	Reputation of company	4	1	6	5	1	-1	+4	4 - 1 = +3

18	Environment friendliness	25	25	16	19	13	+6	+6	25 - 10 = +15
19	innovativeness	18	19	23	21	22	-3	-1	18 - 17 = +1
20	Flexibility	23	22	24	22	19	+1	+3	23 - 16 = +7
21	quality	5	3	4	3	2	+2	+1	5 - 4 = +1
22	Service	22	18	15	4	6	+18	-2	11 - 12 = -1
23	Customer loyalty	6	7	3	2	4	+4	-2	6 - 3 = +3
24	Team work ability	15	15	14	8	8	-3	0	15 - 14 = +1
25	Educational mobility	21	16	25	24	21	-3	+3	22 - 13 = +9
26	Research and development facilities	24	24	26	25	24	-1	+1	24 - 24 = 0

**Source:** author's own research on the basis of surveys

The survey results show that that the years 1998-2007 witnessed definitely larger changes in perception of different resources in the group of enterprises representing the machine industry as compared to enterprises of other branches. In this branch the total shift in the ranking was by 176 and in the years 2007-2013 by 119 versus 102 changes in the ranking of the remaining enterprises in the years 1998-2005 (Bielski 2007, s. 111) and 110 positions in the ranking of the remaining enterprises in the years 2007-2013. It can be said that it was the machine market which was exposed to the biggest pressure from the European open market in the years of transformation, and the time of crisis brought the necessity of further modifications though on a smaller scale. In enterprises belonging to the municipal infrastructure, a significant change (totally by 156 positions) was reported in 2007- 2013 (Bielski 2013, ss. 29-30), which was probably connected with applying for funds from the European Union. In the period from 1998 to 2005, in many companies, high qualifications and experience of the personnel were still considered to be of little importance for the market competition. Resources such as: licenses, ecological awareness, possession of facilities for research and development, intellectual property, ability to manage a change as well as

databases, especially innovativeness, indicated that the resource based approach to strategy development was not popular among the surveyed companies at that time. The distinctive feature of a company resource-based theory is viewing it as an economic entity searching for competitive advantages which are difficult to imitate. In order to provide the basis for knowledge based strategy it is necessary to be able to use the available knowledge, process and extend it which requires educational mobility. However, this resource, in the surveyed enterprises not belonging to machine industry was found at the last positions in the ranking of resource usefulness for competitive advantages development.

Only in the group of machine industry companies it shifted three positions up since 2007 and until 2003 by three more positions. It should be noted that the position of resource: leaders was far from the top in 1998. However, until 2007 it moved up by 10 positions in the ranking in the machine industry companies and by 11 position in the remaining companies and in both groups by 3 positions until 2013. Significance of this group for the company success was emphasized by J. Schumpeter (1960, p. 229) according to whom 'production means can be replaced in most cases but a leader cannot'. Unfortunately in many cases this is the mentality of leaders, their point of view, their mode of operation which are a barrier that prevents from developing innovation based competitive advantages.

A wider time perspective allows to discern a definite change taking place in the environment of management staff. For the last few years, that is during the time of dramatic changes in the environment and dynamic adaptation processes their opinions on the role of particular resources in building competitive advantage have undergone substantial change. On the one hand it was the market and its sensitivity that have been changing –and it could have affected the opinions of rationally functioning entrepreneurs, on the other hand, constantly changing customers and the owned by them companies caused that the instruments of competition that used to contribute to the market success, today when the previously high level is considered to be standard for the sector, are no longer interesting from the point of view of competitive advantage. At the beginning of the XXI century the mode of competition is undergoing substantial change as well – *Global competition does not involve confronting products or firms or organizations with each other. It involves confronting ways of thinking*. Hamel, Prahalad 1993, s. 77).

A variety of the desirable competitive advantage and the subsequent resource enabling to achieve it are connected with the specificity of the respective market, types of customers, and the kind of competition the

enterprise is involved in. Municipal companies, where pressure is exerted on the management staff, also under the influence of global events, on condition that they are given publicity in media, are in such a specific situation. Such a key event that dramatically changed the attitude towards the environment and moved ecology up by 15 positions (tab. 3) was probably the catastrophe of Deep Water Horizon BP oil rig.

Developing their marketing strategies, enterprises are more and more concerned with intangible resources assuming that these are the resources which determine the level of competitive ability. In the time of the economic crisis, human resources are more frequently perceived as a resource crucial for the company competitive advantage. Thus, this resource has risen by 7 positions in the ranking. However, underestimated resources such as: licenses, R&D facilities, intellectual property, and particularly innovativeness indicate little popularity of resource-based approach, among the surveyed companies, to strategy development. Knowledge and information as factors contributing to flexibility have risen by 7 positions in the ranking. The database resource advanced by 7 positions during 6 years (tab. 3). Rational use of available knowledge requires a lot of educational mobility-this resource moved up as many as 9 positions in municipal companies (tab.4). It should be mentioned that the resource: leaders -that used to occupy a distant 14 position before the crisis has now climbed to the 12<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking (tab. 3). The company knowledge is a resource which spreads relatively quickly to the environment. The currently increasing awareness of the necessity to participate in the process of knowledge transfer has been reflected by considerable promotion of the resource 'educational mobility'. Maintaining the company knowledge at a high level of uniqueness which provides the basis to generate new marketing offers and attaching importance to flexibility – ability to manage a change in a proper way have become an indispensable attribute of modern

#### 4. Conclusion

In view of the business environment changeability, entrepreneurial strategy and rational selection of resources to be used for developing competitive advantages seem to be the only choice. The selection of resources needs to be made on the basis of characteristics of the advantages to be created, taking into consideration the type, quantity, tangibility, feasibility, openness, sustainability, dynamics, originality, mysteriousness, location, availability, ability to aggregate, relations, updatedness and market position of the resource. Running a business

activity in very difficult conditions of the world economic crisis and requires to focus attention on changes that occur in the business environment as well as make use of all possible methods to survive and operate successfully on the market. In 2013 managers are definitely more aware of key importance of such resources as: leaders, human resources and educational mobility than before the crisis in 1998-2007.

## Summary

### **Management of Resources in Changing Business Environment**

Nowadays, in order to survive and operate on the market, enterprises need to focus on developing competitive advantages as well as on using all the available methods one of which being entrepreneurial strategy. This strategy provides the possibility to achieve success on the market by being able to detect the opportunities that appear in the constantly changing business environment and take advantage of them using the available resources. Effectiveness of the accepted strategy is determined by selection of the resources that are to be used for developing competitive advantages. Managers' opinion on the subject of particular resources, apart from the world economic crisis, is also affected by specificity of the target markets. The world economic crisis has changed attitudes to different resources in terms of their being used for generation of competitive advantages. In all cases, these are intangible factors that have become of more value rather than tangible ones, particularly human resources, leadership and educational mobility.

*Key words:* *entrepreneurial strategy, competitive advantage, resources, business environment, modern enterprise.*

## Streszczenie

### **Zarządzanie zasobami w zmieniającym się środowisku**

W każdej sytuacji firmy powinny koncentrować się na budowaniu przewag konkurencyjnych i wykorzystania wszelkich możliwych sposobów na przetrwanie i umocnienie się. Jednym z takich sposobów jest strategia przedsiębiorcza, w której szansy na sukces rynkowy, zwłaszcza w gwałtownie zmieniającym się środowisku biznesu, upatruje się w umiejętności dostrzegania pojawiających

się okazji i kombinowania zasobów w sposób umożliwiający wykorzystanie tych okazji. O efektywności przyjętej strategii decyduje wybór zasobów, w obszarze których mają zostać ukształtowane przewagi konkurencyjne. Na poglądy menedżerów na temat roli poszczególnych zasobów, poza światowym kryzysem gospodarczym, wpływ wywierają także specyficzne uwarunkowania rynków docelowych. Czas światowego kryzysu gospodarczego spowodował znaczące zmiany w postrzeganiu różnych zasobów pod kątem możliwości generowania przewag konkurencyjnych. Na znaczeniu, we wszystkich przypadkach, wyraźnie zyskały czynniki niematerialne a zwłaszcza zasoby ludzkie, przywódcy oraz mobilność edukacyjna.

### **Słowa**

**kluczowe:** *przewaga konkurencyjna, strategia przedsiębiorcza, okazja biznesowa, zasoby firmy, specyficzne ograniczenia.*

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