



## **Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of Organization's Competitive Strategy Formation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The article examines the main theoretical and methodical approaches to the organization's competitive strategy development. It is noted that comprehensive improvement of the competitiveness level, first of all, on the basis of the creation and development of sustainable competitive advantages is the most urgent for domestic organizations. The catalyzer of such a process is the formation of own competitive strategy as a conscious selection of the ways to achieve advantages under the conditions of competitive environment. Such a problem is especially urgent for domestic organizations, which operate in retail, as insufficient level of competitiveness is a considerable obstacle in the improvement of the activity efficiency. On the basis of the critical analysis of different theoretical concepts we have classified organization's competitive strategies and revealed that organization's competitive strategy development should be implemented on the basis of organization's key strategy. We have also identified organization's competitive strategy development principles, which determine the intensity of competition and the formation of the competitive climate. We have defined the necessity of substantiating the concept and developing the technique of organization's competitive strategy formation in order to improve the efficiency of functioning of domestic organizations in the competitive environment, which, in its turn, would promote growth of the national economy potential in general.

**Keywords:** Competitive Strategy, Competitive Advantage, Competitive Environment, Competitive Climate

**JEL Classifications:** L20, L22, D23, M12

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

At the organizational level strategy has a hierarchical structure in the form of a strategic pyramid. For the first time the concept on distinguishing between the strategies of corporate and business levels was suggested by Andrews. Under the corporate strategy the researcher understood the integrity of decisions, which determines and discloses the company's goals and objectives, formulates its main policy and plans for the realization of the set goals, provides a list of businesses, in which the company intends to function, economic and organizational peculiarities of company's future model, as well as reveals the character of economic results, which it could obtain for its shareholders, employees and the population

of the area, in which it will function (Katkalo, 2003. p. 14-15). The strategy of the business level is an element of the corporate strategy and, in contrast to the latter, it determines how the company will compete in the concrete business and position itself in respect of its rivals (Katkalo, 2003. p. 15).

Porter also distinguishes two levels of strategy: The strategy of business units and the corporate strategy. Under the corporate strategy the researcher understands the strategy of corporation, developing more than one business, and the strategy of a company in a separate business he calls business unit strategy or competitive strategy (Porter, 2006. p. 26). In his opinion, the competitive strategy determines how each business of the company can gain the

competitive advantage on the corresponding market (Osadchaya, 2014. p. 157). The strategy of the said level is called by separate authors, e.g., Aaker business strategy and identified with the concept of competitive strategy (Aaker, 2003. p. 22).

The researchers also examine a third level of organization's strategy hierarchy, which includes functional strategies, i.e., the strategies, which are developed by the functional divisions and departments of the company (Markova, 2008. p. 26). For example, they include the strategy of marketing, financial, production strategy, personnel strategy, etc. Thompson and Strickland call a fourth level of the strategic pyramid - The level of operational strategies, which determine the principles of management of the units of organizational structure and the solution of strategically important operational challenges (purchases, stocks management, maintenance, transportation, advertising) (Thompson, 2006. p. 83).

Other authors distinguish different types of strategies. For instance, Ansoff distinguishes the following two interconnected types of strategies: Portfolio and competitive. The portfolio strategy is the concept of business, in which the company is engaged and the competitive strategy defines different approaches, with which a company will act in each strategic field of business (Ansoff, 1999. p. 167, 171).

Certain research of the competitive strategy essence is reflected in the papers of modern Russian researchers: Azoev (1996), Yudanov (1996), Grinkov (2007), Guseinov (2002), Isaenko and Khristova (2014), Knysh (2000), Lipsits (2007) and others.

Thus, the literature on economics lacks a unified approach to the definition of the competitive strategy essence and its place and role in organization's strategies hierarchy. Many authors equal it with a business strategy. At the same time there exists such a point of view that the competitive strategy is "one of the sides of the business strategy, which the development of the company's measures, directed at survival and victory in the struggle with competitors on the market of specific products" (Gavrilenko, 2002. p. 351). In our opinion, such a position is the most correct. In the definition of the corporate strategy essence we agree with Porter, and business strategy - with the interpretation of Ansoff concerning portfolio strategy.

Porter expresses the idea of competitive strategy in two words: "Be different" (Porter, 2006. p. 72). Alongside with this, the competitive strategy should provide for a company's considerable and sustainable competitive advantages.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Concretizing of Concepts, Which Define Organization's Competitive Strategy

In our opinion, organization's competitive strategy is the system of long-term actions, directed at the emergence, maintenance and protection of competitive advantages, which enable to efficiently work in the competitive environment.

In general, the essence of such definition correlates with other interpretations of the competitive strategy, such as for instance,

"strategy of ensuring long-term competitive advantages..." (Markova, 2008. p. 26). It is evident, that the concept of competitive strategy is narrower than the concept of strategy, and in this case strategic goals act as desirable competitive advantages.

Fatkhutdinov (2000. p. 181) understands the term "competitive advantage" as any exclusive value, which the system possesses and which provides advantages over competitors. Other authors regard this concept as a position of a company or situation with its functional subsystems, which enable to overcome the forces of competition and attract buyers. Lambent (1996. p. 277) names the competitive advantage "those characteristics, properties of goods or brand, which create for a company a certain advantage over its direct competitors." In our opinion, organization's competitive advantage is, first of all, the property, which gives the organization advantage over competitors, which is conditioned by the economic content of this term as "quality, attribute, representing a distinctive peculiarity of somebody or something" (Big Economic Dictionary, 2004. p. 986). Correspondingly, in general we adhere to the definition of the competitive advantage, given by Fatkhutdinov.

Proceeding from the above mentioned it is possible to show in organization's strategy hierarchy the place and role of competitive strategy (Figure 1).

Thus, the competitive strategy is a component element of the organization's corporate and business strategy with its evident subordination and coherence with them.

As Azoev notes, "no company can achieve competitive advantage by all characteristics of goods and their promotional tools on the market. It is necessary to choose the priorities and develop the strategy, to the greatest extent corresponding to the trends of the market situation development and in the best way using strong sides of company's activity" (Azoev, 1996. p. 108). In this connection researchers distinguish definite basic or typical competitive strategies.

### 2.2. Methodical Aspects of Competitive Strategies Classification

Thus, Yudanov (1996) adheres to the following classification of the main competitive strategies, aimed at different conditions of the competitive environment and the resource capacities of organizations: Violent, patient, commuting, expelling. Such terms for the indication of the ecological strategies of plants were for the first time introduced in biology by Ramensky, but his theory remained unnoticed. 40 years later it was rediscovered by Grime. Besides this, Yudanov uses "beast" names for companies, adhering to definite strategies, the author of which is Friezenwinkel: "Proud lions," "powerful elephants," "awkward hippopotamuses," "cunning foxes," "first swallows," "grey mice." Yudanov uses these "beast" and botanic definitions in combination with each other to more visually characterize typical economic strategies.

Azoev (1996) suggests such basic competitive strategies as costs decrease strategy, goods differentiation strategy, market segmentation strategy, innovations introduction strategy, strategy of immediate reaction on market demands.

**Figure 1:** Organization's strategies hierarchy

Porter (1993. p. 58) distinguishes universal strategies of companies, based on the usage of two competitive advantages (low costs and differentiation) and in the sphere of competition (broad goal, narrow goal): Leadership at the expense of costs decrease, focusing on costs, differentiation, and focused differentiation.

Ansoff (1999. p. 173) distinguishes such competitive strategies as market share maximizing strategy, growth strategy, market differentiation strategy (market niche strategy), goods or services differentiation strategy (product niche strategy).

To indicate typical (basic) strategies we suggest using the term “key competitive strategies”. Economic meaning of the word “key” signifies the “information, which serves as the basis for understanding any other wider information” (Gavrilenko, 2002. p. 303). The key competitive strategy is one of organization's competitive strategy characteristics, the basis for the development of the said strategy and represents a priority or key direction for the development of organization's competitive advantages, which enable it to efficiently exercise pressure on a competitor “in the form of measures on its forcing out from the market” (Gavrilenko, 2002. p. 538).

Key competitive strategy determines the priority direction of organization's sustainable competitive advantages formation and growth (Osadchaya, 2014; Tarasova and Shlakaneva, 2010; 2012).

### 2.3. Authors' Approach to Competitive Strategies Classification

We suggest the authors' terminology and classification of key competitive strategies by the attribute of strategic goal, based on the papers of the above mentioned researchers and our own articles (Table 1).

The novelty of the suggested classification is in new terminology and new types of key competitive strategies, which enable to broaden the sphere of the identification of new directions on the development of organization's competitive advantages.

It should be noted that in the literature some strategies (e.g., logistic, brand and other) can be regarded as functional ones. As it was noted above, at the functional level of the strategies

pyramid there are the strategies, which are developed for each functional direction of the organization's activity. The principle difference of the suggested key competitive strategies is in the fact that they are aimed not only at separate functional divisions of the organization but at the identification of the key direction on the creation and development of competitive advantages.

Thereby, besides traditional competitive strategies (in our interpretation - authoritative, segmentary, adaptive, innovative) we also suggest new competitive strategies (brand, information, logistic, service and global), which, in our opinion, correspond to contemporary requirements.

In the process of competitive strategy development an organization should decide on the choice of the key competitive strategy. As a rule, such strategy should be one, as “the biggest strategic mistake is the wish to chase all hares”, i.e., use all competitive strategies simultaneously” (Porter, 1993. p. 58).

## 3. RESULTS

Thus, competition is one of the main factors of organization's competitive environment. One of the main characteristics of the competitive environment activity is the intensity of competition or the degree of counteraction of competitors in the struggle for consumers and new market niches (Azoev, 1996. p. 38). The following factors can influence the intensity of competition:

- Competition grows with the growth of the number of competitive companies as their sizes and production are leveling off;
- Usually competition is strong when demand for products is growing slowly;
- Competition intensifies, when economic conditions in the industry encourage companies to decrease their prices or use other measures to increase the volumes of sales and production;
- Competition grows when one or several companies are not satisfied with their shares on the market and try to increase it at the expense of their competitors' share;
- Competition grows in proportion to the growth of profit from successful strategic decisions;
- Other factors (Thompson, 2006).

**Table 1: Key competitive strategies classification**

Name	Strategic goal	Necessary conditions	Key direction	Competitive advantages
Authoritative	Leadership on the large share of the market	Large production of mass consumption goods of standard quality. Elastic demand by price	Pressure on competitors with a higher price and decrease of their market share through price accessibility of goods	Low price of goods due to low costs
Adaptive	Leadership in the sphere of fast satisfaction of buyers, needs on the local market	Possibility to reorient the activity in a short period of time	Pressure on competitors through fast adjustment to changing market conditions	Outpacing competitors through mobility
Brand	Leadership in consumers' conscience. Development of long-term consumer preference through the formation of the organization's image based on the promotion of its brand on the market	Availability of registered trade mark. Integrated advertising and other marketing measures on its positioning	Pressure on competitors through the availability of prestigious trade mark	Organization's brand, image and reputation
Global	International markets entry	Organization's transnationality. Globalization of the branch	Pressure on competitors through the strengthening of positions on the international market	Scales effect
Innovative	Leadership in the sphere of innovative elaborations introduction	Absence of analogical goods. Availability of potential demand. High scientific and technological potential of organization	Pressure on competitors through the possession of monopoly of new technology on the market	Innovations and modernization. Absence of competitors
Information	Leadership in the sphere of availability and usage of modern information technologies	Availability of modern corporate site. Provision of services of IT specialists, web design, electronic business	Pressure on competitors through active usage of global net capacities. Internet for promotion of goods, obtaining and provision of information	Usage of modern information technologies
Logistic	Leadership in the sphere of availability and usage of goods distribution channels	Availability of own distribution and production enterprises	Pressure on competitors through more effective goods' approximation to direct consumer	Commodity distribution networks
Segmentary	Leadership on certain market segment (commodity or geographical) due to narrow specialization	Diversity of demand by its structure	Pressure on competitors through the creation of unique but more expensive "luxury" products. Satisfaction of consumers' specific needs	Goods' differentiation. Goods' uniqueness.
Service	Leadership in the sphere of additional services provision	Demand for additional services	Pressure on competitors through the satisfaction of buyers' needs in additional services	Accompanying services

The study of the main workings on competition and competitive strategies enabled us to suggest the generalized classification of organization's competitive strategies (Tables 1 and 2), which systemizes the given concept from the positions of various features, used in the literature.

As it was mentioned above, competitive environment develops as a result of the influence of the multitude of various factors. But the main feature of the competitive environment is the level of counteraction of the market agents in the struggle for consumer and the market share (Grishkova and Baibardina, 2014). In order to develop the efficient competitive environment, it is necessary to conduct the integrated diagnostics of the said factor of organization's competitive environment, which is determined by the intensity of competition on the market. The obtained characteristics of the competition intensity on the local market could be named competitive climate.

Thus, competitive climate is the aggregate of characteristic attributes, reflecting competition intensity on the local market. Such attributes, for instance, may include the character of the

market shares distribution among the competitors, the level of the market monopolization, etc. The integrated diagnostics of the competitive climate as the determinant of the competitive environment enables to use the obtained results as the basis for the development of competitive strategy.

When the information basis on the situation with competition on the market is available the next stage of competitive strategy development is the analysis of a competitive potential as a part of organization's internal environment.

In general sense, potential is the "totality of the available means, opportunities in any field" (Gavrilenko, 2002, p. 94). We consider that the competitive potential, in general, is the totality of the available material and non-material resources and opportunities of an organization, which determine its competitive advantages (Tarasova and Shlakaneva, 2010).

The next stage is the selection of key competitive strategy, which will make it possible for the organization to define the priority

**Table 2: Organization's competitive strategies classification**

Classification attribute	Types and characteristics of competitive strategy
Competition scale	Global National Regional Local
Organization's position in the branch	Competitive strategy of the market leader Competitive strategy of the organization with a strong competitive position (leadership challenger) Competitive strategy of the organization with a weak competitive position (follower of the leader) Competitive strategy of the market outsider
Branch's development situation	Competitive strategy in a new branch Competitive strategy in the fast growing branch Competitive strategy in the branch at the stage of maturity Competitive strategy in the branch in stagnation or decline
Branch's structure	Competitive strategy in the fragmented branch Competitive strategy in the concentrated branch
Strategic goal on reaching market share	Dominate the market, be the leader Force out the leader Be among the leaders Force out a definite competitor Keep the position Stay on the market, survive
Strategy's nature	Aggressive competitive strategy Defensive competitive strategy Neutral competitive strategy
Trend in the competitive strategy influence (protection from the influence of five competitive forces or influence on them)	Neutralization of the existing competitors  Decreasing the threat of new competitors emergence Decreasing the threat of surrogate goods appearance Neutralization of suppliers' market power Neutralization of buyers' market power

on the development of sustainable competitive advantages. The selection of key competitive strategy directly depends on organization's competitive position and competitive activity, which can be assessed through the joint analysis of the competitive climate and competitive potential. Proceeding from the term "position", under which we understand "status, disposition" (Big Economic Dictionary, 2004. p. 748) we define organization's competitive position as the disposition, which it occupies in respect of its competitors in accordance with its own competitive advantages. Organization's position directly depends on the value of its competitive advantage and the said position depends indirectly on the value of the competition intensity on the market. Strengthening or weakening of organization's competitive position in time reflects, in our opinion, its competitive activity.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Theoretical Viewpoints and Positions of Certain Authors on Strategy Formation

The formation of organization's competitive strategy is the process of its development or creation - "the way via which the strategy is accepted or selected" (Bowman, 2003. p. 17). At present the multitude of approaches to strategy development is united in scientific strategy schools. In their work "Schools of strategies" (Mintzberg, 2000) Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, Lampel distinguished ten such schools.

From our point of view the most urgent in the process of competitive strategy development are separate ideas of the schools of design and positioning. Thus, the followers of the school of design for the first time put the problem of integrated analysis of organization's external and internal environment in order to create an efficient strategy. We fully agree with the idea of the necessity of organization's external and internal analysis in the aggregate, but the disadvantage of the school's model, in our opinion, is the main principle of apprehension, which is the basis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis, suggested by the representatives of the said school. As the critics of the school of design note "assumption that the organization's head can fully comprehend strong and weak sides" is unrealistic (Kalyagin, 2004. p. 14). Correspondingly, for the analysis of the organization's external and internal environment, as we see it, it is necessary to apply analytical methods. It should be noted that when the competitive strategy is developed, unlike the corporate strategy, it is necessary to conduct the analysis or diagnostics of only part of the organization's external environment - the competitive environment and the competitive potential as a part of the organization's internal environment.

The main distinctive feature of the school of positioning is the principles of strategy selection by the organization from a limited number of key strategies. Unlike, for instance, schools of design and planning, which do not limit the number of possible strategies,

the school of positioning concentrates its attention on the selection of generic strategies when developing organization's strategy (Mintzberg, 2000. p. 73). We agree with the school's principle approach of the necessity of selecting the key strategy.

Thus, the main stages in the process of the competitive strategy development, in our opinion, are the following: Identification of conceptual position, identification of the strategic goal of the organization, diagnostics of the competitive environment, analysis of the competitive potential of the organization, and selection of the key competitive strategy. The next stages are the development of the said organization competitive strategy and the strategy assessment according to the results of its implementation.

It should be noted that the modern literature also singles out such an important stage of strategy development as the identification of organization's mission, which determines the main goal of the company being the general strategic goal, which is on top of the strategic goals tree. Thus, the formulation of the mission is executed on the upper levels of the organization's strategies hierarchy (corporate and business strategies).

The process of competitive strategy development, in our opinion, starts with the selection of the corresponding concept, which is a unified system of views on the said problem. As the analysis of the research schools demonstrated that conceptual stand defines the whole further process of the competitive strategy formation.

Due to the fact, as it was mentioned above, the strategy is to ensure the reaching of organization's strategic goals, at the next stage it is necessary to define certain results, which should be obtained as a result of the said strategy implementation. The reaching of the strategic goals should bring the organization to considerable changes in its strategic position and provide for successful competitive struggle.

#### 4.2. Assessment of Porter's Methodological Approach to the Branch Structural Analysis

The basis for strategy development, in Porter's opinion, is the adjustment to the competitive environment (Porter, 2006. p. 43). The competitive environment is formed in the result of the influence on the market of many various factors and it is the integrity of the market players and their relations, developing in the process of competition and determining the intensity of competition (Azoev, 1996. p. 26). The organization's competitive environment is a part of its external environment, which is "everything that influences the organization from the surrounding environment" (Big Economic Dictionary, 2004. p. 1059). The specificity of the competitive environment is in the presence of competitive relations among organizations and subjects of the external environment.

Five forces of competition, suggested by Porter, are traditionally referred to the most influential factors, building the competitive environment, which, in his opinion, determine the aggregate potential of the branch's profitability:

- Competition among existing competitors;
- Bargaining power of suppliers;

- Bargaining power of consumers;
- Threat of new entrants;
- Threat of substitute products or services (Porter, 2006. p. 45).

Five forces of competition, in the author's opinion, determine the branch's profitability as they influence the prices, which companies can dictate, the costs, which they have to bear, and the volumes of investments necessary to compete in this branch. "Whatever forces can be in their totality, the goal of the strategy is to find and take the position in the branch, in which the company will be best protected from the influence of the said forces or will be able, on its part, to influence them," "Understanding of the basic factors of competitive pressure ensures solid foundation for strategic action plan" (Porter, 2006. p. 44).

Besides five forces of competition there are other factors as well, which develop the competitive environment, e.g. the state policy in the field of competition regulation. In this context the most important factors are as follows: Antitrust policy and the conditions of dominant position qualification, quoting and licensing of certain types of activity, patent and license policy, social protection of consumers and terms of crediting and taxation (Azoev, 1996. p. 32).

From our point of view, application of Porter's methodological approach to the branch structural analysis is the basis for the development of organization's strategy. Integrated assessment of competitive forces in the branch enables to identify their ratio on the market and stimulate own position improvement.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The stages of the practical development of organization's competitive strategy and its assessment by the results of its implementation, in our opinion, lie in the field of the strategic objectives of specific organizations and are individual for any organization (Tarasova et al., 2014).

Alongside with this the process of organization's competitive strategy development should take into account certain general principles, which, in our opinion, are not sufficiently formulated in economic literature require additional elaboration. We believe that organization's competitive strategy should be developed on the basis of the following principles: Consistency and complementarity; subjectivity; relevancy; applicability; efficiency; interactivity; adaptability; cumulative effect; consequence effect (Tarasova and Shlakaneva, 2012).

### 5.1. Consistency and Complementarity

Such principle of the competitive advantage development as consistency is the most important as it testifies to the systemic integrity, interconnection and interaction (complementarity) of strategies at all levels of the organization's strategies hierarchy.

### 5.2. Subjectivity

The principle means that the process of the development of competitive strategy envisages not only the development of the strategy with the simple analysis of the competitive environment and prognosis of its changes but also management implementation

of the said environment and control over it. Despite the objectivity of the external environment, the process of competitive strategy development is a subjective one, as it is determined by the interests of specialists, engaged in the said process, organization and its top management.

### 5.3. Relevance

This principle means obligatory correspondence of the decisions adopted in the course of competitive strategy development to the results of the conducted analysis of the competitive environment.

### 5.4. Applicability

Under this principle we understand the development of the competitive advantage in accordance with the possibility of its practical application.

### 5.5. Efficiency

This principle envisages the obligatory obtaining of the definite result, which corresponds to the set goals and objectives in the process of the development and realization of organization's competitive strategy.

### 5.6. Interactivity

The principles means the possibility of control over the implementation of the strategy and results assessment. Besides this, the strategy should be brought to the attention of performers and other employees of the organization and facilitate their motivation. The other side of the principle is the necessity of conducting advertising events to support the adopted strategy.

### 5.7. Adaptability (Flexibility)

Competitive strategy is adaptive if with the changes in the competitive environment situation, in which its efficiency decreases, it can be modified to restore its efficiency.

### 5.8. Cumulative Effect

With competitive strategy development we consider this principle to be close in the meaning to the notion "learning ability," i.e., knowledge accumulation. Competitive strategy development process should be successive and constant accumulation of organization's competitive potential as well as the experience of such activity.

### 5.9. Consequence Effect

The said principle is manifested in competitive strategy development as successive activity in reaching the set goals.

In the process of competitive advantage development it is necessary to conduct the analysis of its correspondence to the said principles for the highest probability of its efficient design.

Thus, organization's competitive strategy development is an important and labor consuming process. The development of conceptual and methodological approaches requires further research, which would enable to improve the methods of competitive strategy development and ensure the opportunities of the practical application in specific organizations.

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