

The Link Between Competitive Strategy, Organizational Culture and Human Resources Management Practices

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between competitive strategy, organizational culture and human resources management practices. Survey was used as a data collection method in this study. 226 working in different industries in the city of Istanbul in Turkey took the survey. Data obtained from surveys was analyzed through the SPSS statistical package software (v.18). Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses in this study. The results show that market and hierarchy culture have a positive effect on innovative differentiation strategy; clan-adhocracy and market culture have a positive effect on marketing differentiation strategy; market and hierarchy culture have a positive effect on low cost strategy. Additionally; innovative differentiation strategy has a positive effect on extensive training and clear job description-results oriented performance appraisal; marketing differentiation strategy has positive effect on selective staffing and incentive reward; low-cost strategy has a positive effect on employment security, incentive reward and participation.

Keywords: Competitive strategy, organizational culture, human resources management practices

1. Introduction

Competition between corporations increases continually because of inevitable advances in information and communication technologies as well as globalization. This resulted in the creation of new approaches, concepts and practices that show notable effect on the sustainability of the organizations (İşçi, Aydoğan and Koca, 2016). Businesses have to develop some strategies to counter this competition. Developing a competitive strategy means developing a general formula on how a firm should compete, what its objectives should be and what policies are needed to achieve these goals (Porter, 1980).

The successful implementation depends on the link between the strategy and the employees who will implement it. Organizational culture, a social system created by people in the organization, directs the thinking style, decisions and behaviors of the employees. Therefore, in order to successfully implement the strategies that have been formulated by the higher management, it is necessary to support each other to not conflict with the organizational culture (Schrivastava, 1985).

However today, human is considered as the most important component of achieving competitive advantage (Buller and McEvoy, 2012). For this reason, human resources management practices in the organization should be compatible with the selected strategies and be considered as an important factor that will increase the success of the strategy implementation process.

In this study, firstly, the effect of organizational culture on competitive strategies was tried to be determined and then the effect of competitive strategies on human resource management practices was tried to be determined in the context of the relationship between organizational culture, competitive strategies and human resource management practices.

2. Literature Review and Development of Hypothesis

2.1 Competitive Strategies

Businesses are successful when they have some advantages over their competitors (Pearce and Robinson, 2011). Each firm competing in a sector has a competitive strategy, whether clearly defined or not. The connection between a firm and its environment is the basis of the determination of competitive strategy. Although the environment is broad enough to cover social and economic forces, the sector or sectors in which it competes, is the key factor for operating. The objective of the competitive strategy for a business unit in a sector is to find a position where it can best advocate or influence its own competitiveness in the sector (Porter, 1980).

Porter (1985) suggests three potential successful strategy in order to create a rival position in a given industry and to perform better than its competitors. The first strategy is general cost leadership; quality, service and other areas without neglect, low cost compared to competitors. Second strategy, differentiation; it requires the company to create a sectorally recognized product and service as its own, thus allowing the firm to give higher prices than average prices.

Miller (1986) states that there are at least two types of differentiation strategies: those based on product innovation and intensive marketing and image management. The first of these is to create products that are more up-to-date and attractive than their competitors' products but equal to their quality, efficiency, design innovations or style. Second one seeks to create a unique image for a product through marketing practices.

Differentiation through product innovation often involves a combination of new technologies, unpredictable customer and competitor reactions, and many unstructured marketing problems. Product innovations are generally more common and useful in dynamic environments where products and applications change rather quickly. Firms in such environments fall behind and lose market share and sales without innovation. The marketing strategy of differentiation begins to intervene through advertising, prestige pricing and market segmentation to create a unique image for a product. Marketing differentiation includes a multidimensional and inconspicuous competition. A firm can try to address customers on the basis of quality, reliability, convenience or prestige image. In order to achieve this type of attractiveness, complex customer motivations and purchasing patterns need to be estimated, which potentially improves the unpredictability. In addition, differentiation is likely to take competitive returns, thus increasing not only the unpredictability but also the market dynamics (Miller, 1988).

The third competitive strategy defined by Porter is a focus strategy in which the firm focuses on a specific customer group, geographical markets or product group segments. (Dess and Davis, 1984). Focus has two different versions. Cost focus and differentiation focus. Each competitive strategy has a different route to achieve a competitive advantage. (Porter, 1985)

2.2 *Competitive Strategies and Organizational Culture*

Organizational culture is one of the most popular concepts in the literature since the 1980s (Schein, 1992; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Denison, 1990). Organizational culture can be defined as a common system organized by the members that separates the organizations from each other (Robbins and Judge, 2001). Organizational culture can have an impact on the ability of a firm to achieve its goals and plans (Chan, Shaffer and Snape, 2005; Cabrera and Bonache, 1999). In this context, it is one of the subjects that emphasized the importance of ensuring harmony with the organizational culture while formulating the strategy (Schrivastava, 1985). According to Porter (1985), each competitive strategy includes different skills and organizational requirements to achieve success. In this context, each strategy's appropriate organizational structure and organizational culture are different.

There are some studies in the literature investigating the relationship between organizational culture and strategy. (Bates et al 1995; Ahmadi et al. 2012; Chow and Lui 2007; Liviu 2013). Bates et al (1995) investigated the relationship between manufacturing strategy and organizational culture. According to the research results, manufacturing strategy and organizational culture are related. A manufacturer with a well implemented manufacturing strategy indicates a collectivist or a group-oriented organizational culture that contains coordinated decision making, decentralized authority, and a loyal work force.

Ahmadi et al (2012) examined the relationship between all typologies and dimensions of cultures and components of implementation. They found that clear up the key role of flexibility of cultures in strategy implementation process. In addition to this, while according to the findings, flexible cultures are related to the policy formation and structural factors in implementation, the results show that there is a significant correlation between strategic emphases among culture and implementation of the strategy.

Dadzie, Wiston and Dadzie (2012) examined that the effect of competitive strategy on the organizational culture and performance correlation. The results show that of both direct and indirect effects of organizational culture on firm performance. Firms with a predominantly clan or market culture were more likely to be directly related with performance, however firms with adhocracy or hierarchy cultures were more likely to be indirectly related with performance, depending on their alignment with a differentiation strategy or cost leadership strategy. Whereas, just the connection with the differentiation strategy resulted in market performance.

As a result of literature scan, the first hypothesis of the research is composed as given below:

H₁: There is a strong relationship between organizational culture and competitive strategy

2.3 *Competitive Strategies and Human Resources Management Practices*

The importance of human resources management in the effective implementation of the strategy has started to get noticed. A resource-based perspective indicates that a firm is defined by the resources it has control over. A firm can achieve a sustainable competitive advantage if it has valuable, rare, inimitable, non-transferable resources and organizational capacity to benefit from these resources (Buller and McEvoy, 2012). Recent theoretical and experimental studies have focused on human resources and human resources management to achieve competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Wright et al. 1994; Barney and Wright, 1998; Schuller and MacMillan, 1984) Human resources and human resources management are particularly important in building organizational competence that is needed to implement the firm's strategic goals (Buller and McEvoy, 2012). As well as the organizational structure must be appropriate in order for the strategy to continue effectively, the systems and processes in HRM, which direct behaviors and create the organizational culture, must also be directed in certain ways for business strategies (Henry and Pettigrew, 1986).

Porter (1985) explains that when a firm combines other value chain activities with HRM it can achieve and maintain an indispensable support activity to competitive advantage. To understand how a competitive

advantage is achieved in a sector, it is required to evaluate the links in the value chain through firm's operations; from the supply of materials, personnel and finance to the delivery, distribution and service of final products and services. There is a certain scope to have some degree of control over the activities a firm is dependent on. Successful firms are firms that actively engage with external suppliers, distributors and customers to connect their relationships to the firm. Human resources management initiatives are an instrument for this and can be used to develop skills and systems between firm's suppliers, distributors or customers. The development of human resources can make the business to continue more effectively as well as this (Henry and Pettigrew, 1986).

Miles and Snow (1984) identified three types of strategies: defender, prospector and analyzer, and described their impact on human resource management practices. According to them, defenders create a secured market share with a moderate and stable growth. These firms rely heavily on internally developed human resources to support their strategies. Therefore, the employees are carefully selected, placed and trained in these firms. Firms that use prospector strategy are specifically characterized by the rapid growth of management and technical personnel, and continuous resource distribution / reuse. To support this strategy, human resources departments play an entrepreneurial role by helping to identify and rapidly develop vital human resources through rapid movements and change of tasks. Basic human resources are developed both inside and outside the firm. For the analyzers, management emphasizes not only in the initial phase of product development but also on the uniqueness of the firm. But then, they also believe that if mass production needs to be competitive, the firm should compete. For mature products and production processes, the human resources unit takes the role of providing and maintaining appropriate training to the Defender strategy using the correct placement and evaluation tools. The human resources unit plays a more developmental role in designing flexible and enriching team structures and processes for innovative developments (Bird and Beechler, 1995).

Schuller and Jackson (1987) investigated whether HRM practices have changed systematically between different business strategies or not. According to the results, HRM practices are used differently by different organizations that adapt different strategies. In addition to this, as a result of the analyzes, it was observed that there were larger differences between organizations in the HRM applications, irrespective of the organization and strategy. In other words, it is possible for the organizations to use quite different HRM practices with employees at different levels. The results show that organizations change their HRM practices as they change their strategies.

As a result of literature scan, the second hypothesis of the research is composed as given below:

H₂: There is strong relationships between human resources management practices and competitive strategy

3. The Methodology

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

Survey was used as a data collection method in this study. The questionnaire was given to junior level managers, middle level and top level managers working in different industries in Istanbul, Turkey. 226 of the distributed questionnaires were evaluated. Data obtained from questionnaires was analyzed through the SPSS statistical package software (v.18), and proposed relations were tested through analyses.

3.2 Measures

The scale used by Spanos and Lioukas (2001), which was derived and adapted from the studies of Dess and Davis (1984) and Miller (1988) was used to measure competitive strategies. The scale can be used asking questions about specific competitive tactics related to marketing differentiation, innovative differentiation and low cost and the extent of using these tactics. Sample items are: (1) R&D expenditures for product development (2) R&D expenditures for process innovation.

The Organizational Culture Scale developed by Cameron and Quinn (2011) was used to measure organizational culture. Sample items are: (1) The organization is a very personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves. (2) The organization is a dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks.

High Performance Human Resources Practices Scale developed by Zang et al. (2008) was used to measure human resource management practices. Sample items are (1) Great effort is taken to select the right person (2) Long term employee potential is emphasized.

All the items in the questionnaire were accompanied by a 5-point rating scale (from 1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree).

3.3 Factor Analyses and Reliabilities

The factor and reliability analysis of data collection tools has been made in the research. All factors have passed the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Barlett Test of Sphericity, which means that our data set is appropriate for factor analyses. Principal component and varimax methods are used in analysis.

In the factor analysis related to the competitive strategy scale, it is seen that this variable consists of three

dimensions as in the original scale. As a result of the factor analysis on organizational culture, the dimensions called adhocracy and clan in the original scale were put under a single dimension. As a result of HRM practices factor analysis, 6 dimensions were obtained. The dimension of clear job description and results oriented job performance in the original scale were put under a single dimension. The results of factor analysis are given below.

Table 1. The results of factor and reliability analysis

Competitive Strategy

	Factor loading	Factor extraction (%)	Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha)
Innovative Differentiation			
CSTR1	,841	26,615	,867
CSTR2	,882		
CSTR3	,644		
CSTR4	,546		
Marketing Differentiation			
CSTR5	,705	26,397	,855
CSTR6	,797		
CSTR7	,857		
CSTR8	,671		
Low Cost			
CSTR9	,633	21,478	,819
CSTR10	,858		
CSTR11	,839		
		TOTAL 74,490	
	Kaizer Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: ,894		
	Bartlett Test of Sphericity Chi-Square: 1446,343		
	df 55		
	Sig. ,000		

Organizational Culture

	Factor loading	Factor extraction (%)	Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha)
Clan + Adhocracy			
OCLT1	,823	32,926	,953
OCLT2	,861		
OCLT3	,811		
OCLT4	,745		
OCLT5	,803		
OCLT6	,745		
OCLT7	,848		
OCLT8	,812		
OCLT9	,851		
OCLT10	,648		
OCLT11			
Market			
OCLT13	,711	17,688	,892
OCLT14	,758		
OCLT15	,841		
OCLT16	,775		
OCLT17	,713		
OCLT18	,607		
Hierarchy			
OCLT19	,676	17,873	,874
OCLT20	,545		
OCLT21	,734		
OCLT22	,813		
OCLT23	,768		

OCLT24	,667		
		TOTAL 68,487	
	Kaizer Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: ,919 Bartlett Test of Sphericity Chi-Square: 3960,419 df 253 Sig. ,000		

High Performance Human Resources Management Practices

	Factor loading	Factor extraction (%)	Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha)
Selective Staffing			
HPHRM1	,820	14,432	,918
HPHRM2	,831		
HPHRM3	,813		
HPHRM4	,811		
Extensive Training			
HPHRM5		13,120	,904
HPHRM6	,887		
HPHRM7	,808		
HPHRM8	,663		
Employment Security			
HPHRM12	,726	12,764	,851
HPHRM13	,842		
HPHRM14	,798		
HPHRM15	,761		
Clear Job Description + Results Oriented Appraisal			
HPHRM16	,787	12,879	,876
HPHRM17	,669		
HPHRM18	,752		
HPHRM19	,565		
HPHRM20	,569		
Incentive Reward			
HPHRM22	,781	9,460	,713
HPHRM23	,728		
HPHRM24	,639		
Participation			
HPHRM5	,773	11,735	,868
HPHRM26	,825		
HPHRM27	,711		
HPHRM28	,666		
		TOTAL 74,481	
	Kaizer Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: ,904 Bartlett Test of Sphericity Chi-Square: 3501,633 df 276 Sig. ,000		

The research model was determined as shown in the figure below after the sub-dimensions of the variables were formed with the results of the factor analysis.

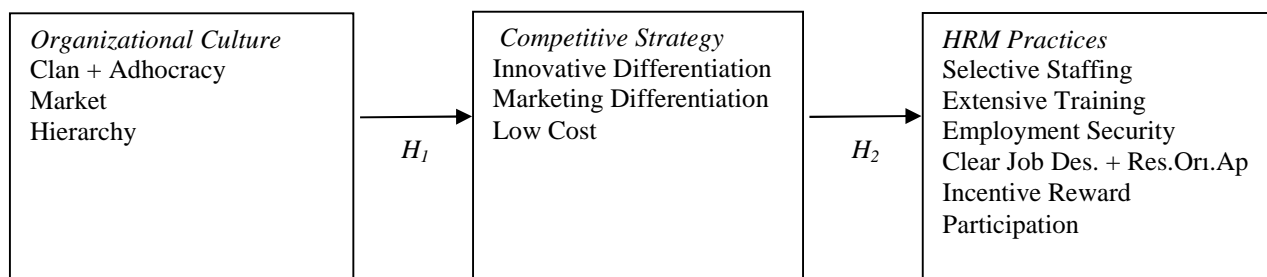


Figure1. Research model

4. Analyses and Results

Table 2 summarizes correlations among the study variables. As a result of the correlation analysis; innovative differentiation are significantly correlated with clan + adhocracy ($r = ,360$); market ($r = ,453$); hierarchy ($r = ,455$); selective staffing ($r = ,315$); extensive training ($r = ,545$); employment security ($r = ,266$); clear job description + results oriented appraisal ($r = ,446$); incentive reward ($r = ,290$); participation ($r = ,279$).

Table 2. Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Inn.Diff.	-											
2. Mark.Diff.	,671**	-										
3. Low Cost	,640**	,538**	-									
4. Clan-Adh	,360**	,321**	,325**	-								
5. Market	,453**	,437**	,447**	,400**	-							
6. Hierarchy	,455**	,366**	,448**	,481**	,642**	-						
7. Selec.Staf	,315**	,394**	,328**	,653**	,374**	,534**	-					
8. Ext. Tarin.	,545**	,463**	,458**	,534**	,393**	,530**	,556**	-				
9. Emp. Sec	,266**	,234**	,383**	,478**	,249**	,442**	,433**	,371**	-			
10. C.Job.Des +Res.Ori.Ap.	,446**	,373**	,343**	,611**	,368**	,541**	,616**	,602**	,411**	-		
11. Inc.Rew	,290**	,324**	,296**	,432	,294**	,333**	,305**	,447**	,319**	,557**	-	
12. Particip.	,279**	,285**	,346**	,733**	,342**	,294**	,437**	,384**	,455**	,579**	,505**	-

N=226 * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Market differentiation is significantly positively correlated with clan+adhocracy ($r = ,321$); market ($r = ,437$); hierarchy ($r = ,366$) and selective staffing ($r = ,394$); extensive training ($r = ,463$); employment security ($r = ,234$); clear job description and results oriented appraisal ($r = ,373$); incentive reward ($r = ,324$); participation ($r = ,285$) dimensions.

Low Cost is significantly positively correlated clan+adhocracy ($r = ,325$); market ($r = ,447$); hierarchy ($r = ,448$) and selective staffing ($r = ,328$); extensive training ($r = ,458$); employment security ($r = ,383$); clear job description + results oriented appraisal ($r = ,343$); incentive reward ($r = ,296$); participation ($r = ,346$) dimensions.

Multiple regression analysis was used to test hypotheses developed in the study. Table 3 shows the results of multiple regression analyses.

Table 3. Results of multiple regression analysis for effects of organizational culture on competitive strategy

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables					
	Innovative Differentiation		Marketing Differentiation		Low Cost	
	B	β	B	β	B	β
Clan + Adhocracy	,133	,137	,162	,158*	,110	,109
Market	,262	,259**	,370	,346**	,283	,272**
Hierarchy	,227	,203*	,072	,062	,235	,207*
Constant	1,518		1,336		1,404	
R2	,252		,227		,247	
Adjusted R2	,241		,216		,236	
F	22,443		19,335		21,581	

Note: B= Unstandardized Coefficients, β = Standardized Coefficients

N= 226 * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

According to the results; market ($\beta = .259$, Sig = .001) and hierarchy ($\beta = .203$, Sig = .017) have a positive effect on innovative differentiation. Clan-adhocracy ($\beta = .158$, Sig = .031) and market have a ($\beta = .346$, Sig = .000) positive effect on marketing differentiation. Furthermore, market ($\beta = .272$, Sig = .001) and hierarchy ($\beta = .207$, Sig = .017) have a positive effect on low cost. Based on these results, H1 hypothesis is partially accepted.

Table 4 shows the result of multiple regression analysis to determine the effect of competitive strategies on human resource management practices.

Table 4. Results of multiple regression analysis for effects of competitive strategies on human resources management practices

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables											
	Selective Staffing		Extensive Training		Employment Security		Clear Job.Desc+Result Orient. App.		Incentive Reward		Participation	
	B	β	B	β	B	β	B	β	B	β	B	β
Inn. Diff.	,054	,049	,465	,394**	,080	,072	,376	,328**	,040	,037	,037	,034
Mark. Diff.	,281	,271**	,140	,128	-,005	-,005	,136	,128	,209	,208*	,105	,102
Low Cost	,173	,161	,149	,131	,371	,349**	,062	,056	,183	,176*	,315	,296**
Constant	1,535		,092		1,633		,981		,750		1,579	
R2	,177		,344		,157		,216		,135		,149	
Adjusted R2	,165		,335		,145		,204		,122		,137	
F	14,840		35,362		12,764		18,722		10,554		11,941	

Note: B= Unstandardized Coefficients, β = Standardized Coefficients

N= 226 * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

According to the results; Innovative differentiation has a positive effect on extensive training ($\beta = .394$, Sig = .000) and clear job description + results oriented performance appraisal ($\beta = .328$, Sig = .001). Marketing differentiation has a positive effect on selective staffing ($\beta = .271$, Sig = .002) and incentive reward ($\beta = .208$, Sig = .022). Low Cost has a positive effect on employment security ($\beta = .349$, Sig = .000), incentive reward ($\beta = .176$, Sig = .047) and participation ($\beta = .296$, Sig = .001). Based on these results, H2 hypothesis is partially accepted.

5. Discussion

This study aims at testing the relationships among competitive strategies, organizational culture and human resources management practices. The first finding of the research is related to the impact of organizational culture on competitive strategies. In some related literatures, organizational culture is considered as an effective variable on strategy. In this study, it was seen that market culture and hierarchy culture have a positive effect on innovative differentiation strategy and low cost strategy.

Market culture is a competitive, winning culture and market leadership is important in this culture. Firms that implement the innovative differentiation strategy often use this strategy in dynamic environments where products and applications change rapidly. From this point of view, the positive effect of market culture, that is dominating firms in rapidly changing and competitive environments, on innovative differentiation can be seen as an appropriate result. In addition to the relationship between efficiency-oriented low-cost, with a target-oriented, competitive market culture can also be considered as a suitable result.

In organizations dominated by hierarchy culture have formal rules and procedures. In the long term, stability and performance are important. In this respect, the relationship between hierarchical organizational

culture and low-cost strategy can be considered as an appropriate result. However, the relationship between innovative differentiation and hierarchy culture where innovation is important can be considered as an interesting finding. One of the reasons may be the cultural structure of the country the firm is in. Because, even the most innovative firms in Turkey are doing business with traditional values. Another interesting point here is the relationship between market and hierarchy culture, and both innovative differentiation and low-cost.

This result indicates that the dominant values of national culture and the way of doing business in the country should be evaluated together in the relationship between organizational culture and competitive strategies. This finding can be considered as one of the important contributions of the study. The role of the national culture and the ways of doing business in the country where the firms operate and the relationship between the organizational culture and competitive strategies can be examined in the following studies.

Another finding of the study is the positive effect of clan + adhocracy and market culture on marketing differentiation. Firms that implement marketing differentiation strategies try to address customers on the basis of quality, reliability, convenience or prestige. In this respect, the positive effect of the clan + adhocracy culture, which approaches its employees and customers in a sensitive way and which also exhibits innovative and dynamic feature; and of the market culture where competition, success and taste are important on marketing differentiation can be considered as an appropriate result.

Another result of the study is the impact of competitive strategies on human resource management practices. According to the results, innovative differentiation has a positive effect on extensive training, clear job description and results oriented performance appraisal.

Extensive training can be considered as an important function for firms that implement product innovation strategy that aims to create up-to-date and attractive products with their quality, design innovations and style compared to their competitors. However, clear job description and results oriented performance appraisal refers to applications where employees are clearly informed about their work and performance is evaluated according to achieving goals. Although this is not an expected result, it can be concluded that these factors, which have an impact on the success of the employees, contribute to the selected strategy.

Another finding is that marketing differentiation has a positive effect on selective staffing and incentive reward. Marketing differentiation strategy rely on marketing practices in order to competing. Therefore selective staffing that selection of qualified employees who can ensure customer satisfaction and incentive reward that ensure the motivation of employees can be considered very important functions for marketing differentiation strategy.

The final result of the research is the positive effect of low cost strategy on employment security, incentive reward and participation. Efficiency, reduce costs are quite important in firms that implementing low cost strategy. In this context employment security, incentive reward and participation functions can contribute employee efficiency and this can effect on organizational efficiency. Therefore these results can be considered as a very appropriate.

There are some limitations with the contributions of the research. First of all, this research was conducted on some businesses in one country and one city. In order to generalize the results, this research should be repeated in firms operating in different countries and different cities. Another limitation is that, as stated earlier, research results can be influenced by national cultural values and ways of doing business. Therefore, it may be useful to consider the effects of these variables in future researches.

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