

Abstract

Göteborg University
School of Economics and
Commercial Law
Department of Business Administration
Vasagatan 1, S-411 80 Göteborg
Sweden

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Author: Jan Edvard Skaug
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Business Strategy and Leadership

Linkage between leadership, competitive strategy and performance in professional logistics companies.

This study has a longitudinal comparative case study approach. The study deals with a historical developmental process of 20 years' duration in two comparable companies. The companies started as private family businesses and they operated in the same geographical area and in the same line of trade, with a similar choice of products. They developed, however, in divergent directions. To what extent is the developmental process of companies linked to leadership and choice of strategy? Thus, it is important to build up a coherent theoretical as well as empirical knowledge basis and understanding of the factors which might govern strategic processes as regards leadership, competitive strategy, and performance. This study is based on a positivist attitude with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including primary as well as secondary data.

The study's target group included the companies' owners and members of their families, managing directors, assistant managing directors, marketing- and purchasing managers, staff- and project managers, logistics- and distribution managers, development managers, supervisors, and consultants, and operational staff members. The population included 120 persons in total (60 persons in each company).

The purpose of the study was to find explanations to describe relationships which contribute to increased knowledge and understanding of the factors that lie behind the actors' different business strategic developments, and to study the relationships between the driving forces working in the companies, concentrating on leadership, competitive strategy and performance. The study's first hypothesis: that the difference in the performance development of the actors can be explained by the differences in their attributes and behaviour. The study's second hypothesis: that there is a linkage between competitive strategy and performance, and in this respect, the actors differ. The study's third hypothesis: that there is a linkage between leadership and competitive strategy, and in this respect, the actors differ. The theoretical frame of reference rests mainly upon Mintzberg's, Ansoff's, and Porter's theories, among others.

The outcome of the study shows that the companies acted in accordance with diametrically different management philosophies, and, also, that there was a linkage between leadership, competitive strategy, and performance. The study also showed that the company which was the most successful one had a clear and distinct target orientation in accordance with "Management by Objectives" theories, and that this strategy governed the technological development of that company. In the less successful company, an "Adhoc Management" appeared, and, in this respect, technology proved to govern the developmental efforts of that company.

Key words: *Leadership, strategy, competition, performance, entrepreneurship, relationship, innovation, imitation, management*