
Editorial

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1 Introduction

Competitiveness, globalisation and innovation from a global perspective have been topics of interest for both policy makers and academics. These three key issues dictate the ability of an industry to compete with foreign competitors and are dependent on the innovative characters exhibited by the industry. Even though this is a well accepted fact within the research community, there is no clear consensus on how individual firms and regional and national governments should go about becoming more innovative, more competitive and more global. We therefore explored these critical issues at a workshop entitled “Globalization, Competitiveness and Innovation” at the German Graduate School of Management and Law (former: Heilbronn Business School) in Heilbronn, Germany. Keynote presentations at this event were Andrew Pendleton (The York Management School, The University of York, UK) on “Corporate Governance and Creativity: A Global Perspective” and Igor Filatotchev (Cass Business School, City University of London, UK) on “Returnee Entrepreneurs, Knowledge Spillovers and Innovation in High-Technology Firms in Emerging Markets”. Papers selected for this focused issue of *IJBE* were initially selected by the workshop committee on the basis of an extended abstract, which was then invited for a full presentation at the workshop. Comments and suggestions were provided to the attendees after which a full double blind review was conducted.

One has to only look at the business news to realise that the competitive environment is getting fiercer by the day, with resources getting tighter and customer getting more involved with product and process requirements. In addition to this, recent market trends

such as the persistent process of commodisation, shorter product life cycles, rapidly evolving supply chain technologies, and the increasing impact of digitalisation/new media on daily business activities is adding pressure on firms to compete and survive. Now more than ever, firms must continually reassess their competitive strategies to maintain their position competitiveness in the global marketplace.

The focus of this special issue is to explore research in the area of globalisation, competitiveness and innovation from three perspectives, viz.: networks and alliances, entrepreneurship, and knowledge management. Taking a view from these perspectives is intended to give us a better understanding of the role managers could take in addressing the emerging challenges faced by today's businesses. After we present a summary of the papers appearing in this special issue, we want to take the opportunity to point out a few issues that we think are going to have substantial impact on globalisation, competitiveness and innovation in the short to medium term.

2 Networks and alliances, entrepreneurship and knowledge management

Networks and in particular informal network aspects in reference to technology can create unique and non-substitutable value and bring network resources to a firm. A firm can gain access to valuable network resource to discover new opportunities. Harald Dolles looks at world market-leading small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) within the Heilbronn-Franconia region of Germany to reveal factors influencing their successful innovation processes. His study shows that innovative SMEs have investigated in a strong sense of entrepreneurial activity and visionary leadership and focused their emphasis on local recruitment, development of retention strategies and empowerment of their employees. It is clear that this not only makes these firms globally competitive but also provides them a clear creative strategy to drive innovation by formalising innovation governance structures and knowledge management processes.

Gorgoni and Pietrobelli further contribute to the aspects of networking and knowledge management by presenting the results of the impact of knowledge flows on firm's innovation in the Chilean meat sector using social network analysis. Their findings show that there is a significant relationship between firms' position in the network and their innovation performance. Their results suggest that knowledge inflows, which are the result of firms' interaction with other players, increase by five times firms' probability to innovate in the sector. Gorgoni and Pietrobelli explain this by the fact that in today's rapidly changing world, competitiveness depends heavily on knowledge, and firms rarely possess within their borders all the knowledge they need in order to innovate.

Network relations and knowledge management are not unique to the meat sector but also significant within pharmaceutical firms. Rygl, Kittler and Schuster focus on three pharmaceutical firms Roche, Novartis and GlaxoSmithKline to analyse reciprocity, role differentiation and network architecture as elements of creative and innovative organisations. They provide an in-depth analysis of knowledge flows in intra-organisational R&D-networks of these firms and study this phenomenon using social network analysis. Creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and innovation are identified as major determinants of these intra-organisational networks. According to their findings R&D-structures support creativity and innovation of companies only if structure follows knowledge flows.

Vanhaverbeke and Du apply the perspective of networks/alliances and knowledge management when considering the role of lead users within an open innovation context. By analysing the innovation funnel as a tool they show how outbound innovation activities of the innovating firm have a profound impact on the relationship between the innovating firm and its lead users. By presenting the case-based analysis of the development process of radical innovations at a Dutch specialty chemicals and materials company that is active worldwide Vanhaverbeke and Du do not only focus at the dyad level but also at the value network level in order to link the role of customers to the open innovation strategy of firms. According to their findings a successful collaboration between innovating companies and lead users should be framed in terms of joint value creation and value appropriation. The recognition of new business opportunities requires a long-lasting relationship between the innovating firm and its lead-users before a viable business model emerges.

Bouncken and Lekse explore the concept of alliances, in particular, the primary and secondary performance effects of project managers in successful alliances, specifically innovative, project, and relational. Herein they introduce the participation issue into the alliance management literature. Bouncken and Lekse analysed 179 alliances in the German Electronic Industry using structural equation modelling. They find that while there is a significant relationship between secondary effects of relationship, innovation and project management, technology uncertainty has a positive relation to a more social project management style. In an alliance, project managers of each firm in their role as a boundary person interconnect the firms by communicating and valuing ideas, however one has to question; if all knowledge transfers are beneficial to alliances.

It is obvious from these papers that a close link between networks and alliances within supply chains exists. Yang and Fernandes similarly examine the appropriateness of global supply chain risk mitigation strategies from a socio-technical perspective. They conclude that by reducing the level of interactive complexity firms can manage their global supply chain disruptions and risks. This provides proof that creativity drives entrepreneurship within a global context. They explore risk management strategies within supply chains from a socio-technical perspective by suggesting that companies should examine their supply chain complexity prior to any analysis.

3 Implications of the articles and future research questions

As a group, these articles demonstrate three important themes in globalisation, competitiveness and innovation. First, in contrast to traditional literature, which is policy-centric, these papers emphasise the practical relevance of networks and alliances, entrepreneurship and knowledge management within supply chain in firms. These papers suggest that future researchers should examine much more carefully the context in which managers operate instead of focusing exclusively on policy aspects of innovation and entrepreneurship. Second, the findings from these papers are consistent with theoretical evidence that argues about a significant relationship between competitiveness, globalisation and innovation. Third, the papers in this issue demonstrate that competitiveness, globalisation and innovation have a strong links to networks and alliances, entrepreneurship and knowledge management. Although the papers in this issue provide some insights into globalisation, competitiveness and innovation, as well as

provide several important themes for future research, they are resoundingly silent on many others. For example, what is the role of emerging technology on creativity and globalisation? What networks would best operate in a creative and innovative environment? In sum, competitiveness, globalisation and innovation is a relatively unexplored topic that offers a variety of opportunities for scholarly inquiry. Despite the diligent efforts of many scholars, much more research needs to be done. As the articles collected here indicate, the unanswered questions can be examined through a wide variety of approaches, both theoretical and methodological. We hope that the papers and themes presented in this volume will spur other researchers to examine this important and fascinating area.

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