

INTERNAL BENCHMARKING IN SLOVAK SME: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: The constantly and rapidly changing market, new competition entering the market, or globalization, mean that companies have to constantly rethink their existing operations. The aim of study was to analyze these facts in small and medium-sized enterprises, which seek to eliminate their weaknesses and improve their strengths, with the aim of defining and creating a competitive advantage. This is the key to fighting existing competition. However, in order to identify it, it is necessary to know in detail the external environment of the subject, which we monitored by two main methods, using PEST analysis and the subsequent proceed to the analysis within the company by using the benchmarking method. The presented article describes and applies the benchmarking method within the company Š-Auto, which operates in eastern Slovakia in several district cities. The results brought us conclusions that allow us to provide services of the same high quality level in all operations for customers in analyzed SME.

Key words: benchmarking, PEST analysis, SME, Slovakia.

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Introduction

In recent years, the benchmarking method has been one of the most discussed in the business world and is increasingly used not only by economic experts but also by business consultants. In the field of small and medium-sized enterprises, benchmarking is sometimes considered a "mystery" or something that can be applied only in top and large companies. As a result, SMEs are thus exposed to the risk of not reaping the benefits of the benchmarking process. The rate of benchmarking use, knowledge and quality of its outputs is high not only in the US where it comes from, but also in other advanced economies in the world, such as Japan, Germany, Great Britain and France. This is probably linked to a developed capital market, where comparing companies and monitoring their performance is the main process in finding "future stars in the market". Benchmarking consulting companies are also established in the mentioned countries, the aim of which is to stimulate the company's interest in partnership and participation in such a

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comparison. Companies are also looking for an opportunity to compare themselves with the competition and implement benchmarking in their own business processes.

Literature review

Benchmarking can be currently defined as one of the methods used to measure and evaluate performance and price. Benchmarking as an indirect tool of environmental policy is one of the ways to successfully lead a company on the path to constant competitiveness and also to increase the effect of its activities. As a competitive organization that is a pattern for the company, we can consider the one that achieves better results in the long run than the internal analyzed organization. The point is not to find and transfer finished examples, but a way to find a better solution. In addition, it will focus on increasing the quality and efficiency of public services (Lang, 2007).

Benchmarking is an ongoing and systematic measurement process, also process that constantly compares an organization's processes with business leaders anywhere in the world, in order to obtain information that will help the organization improve its performance (Grabara et al., 2019 or Meyer, Meyer, 2019).

The benchmarking method has been known worldwide not only in the private but also in the public sector since the late 1980s. This method has its origins in the mentioned private sector. According to Řezáč, (2009), benchmarking is associated with "numerical measurement used to determine the performance of a function, operation or business process."

In benchmarking, two paths were used for indicative planning, namely comparing activities and comparing results. There was a close relationship between these paths. Comparing the results is important to identify the actions to be improved in all parts of management (Kot et al., 2020). When comparing activities and processes, it is important to improve the quality of activities and contribute to better results (Kotaskova, 2018). Quality is an important tool in the competition. The market economy is applied worldwide and the intensifying competition is a consequence of the globalization of the market. Companies must make a significant effort to ensure that their competitors do not have the opportunity to crowd out them (Gonos et al., 2016). It is necessary to constantly improve its products, processes, services and also to flexibly assimilate to market assumptions (Dobrovič, 2009; Kot and Brzezinski, 2015). Some different aspects of the quality of the business environment in the SMEs is also represented in Belas et al. (2019)

Research Methodology

The object of the research is a car dealer of the VW group consortium in the Slovak Republic. As part of the market definition, we chose the eastern part of the Slovak

Republic, the Prešov region. The private company Š – Auto (further only Š-A), which was established on November 1991, offers motorists a wide range of services. It represents a private enterprise of an entrepreneur, which was established after the privatization in one of the regional cities. Within the years 1992-2009, the company expanded its business activities to four other regional cities in eastern Slovakia. The years 2014, 2015 and 2016 were a year of "rebranding" which meant that all companies had to be converted to the standard of Š - A Slovakia. As of January 1, 2016 a uniform premium regulations came into force for all of the company's operations. Each Š-A plant has an ISO 9001: 2008 quality certificate and has met all the requirements set for sales and sales outlets in the European Union to provide quality services to its customers. At present, Š-A is ranked in the top ten most successful dealers in the Slovak Republic every year. With the Seat brand, the company is at the top of sales of vehicles of this brand in the Slovak Republic for the third year in a row. At present, Š-A has 140 employees. As part of increasing the demands of clients as well as owners, the company decided to perform internal benchmarking. The goal of internal benchmarking in the company is to eliminate differences in the level of services of sales and service provided. Based on the results of the benchmarking, the owner wants to set generally applicable standards at all five branches. When characterizing internal companies, we will focus mainly on basic information about companies such as data on their establishment, current status, business content as well as an overview of services provided by Š-A companies. Based on defined goals, we defined the research methods with the help of which it was possible to process the obtained data and also to establish work procedures for obtaining the necessary information.

Benchmarking method

If the organization decides to apply the benchmarking method, it is necessary to monitor from the beginning all the braking moments that try to jeopardize its efforts (Nenadál et al., 2011). The most common obstacles to the benchmarking method include: Management resistance, Employee resistance, Political resistance, Lack of resources, Lack of information, Unrealistic expectations.

The choice of a benchmarking partner can in principle be understood as an interactive brainstorming process. At the same time, we can say that it is a certain approach to potentially the best processes in the company. Team members use specific information, for example from the media, from contacts with suppliers and customers, etc. The aim is to select a company that shows higher professionalism of the benchmarking object.

Benchmarking is based on finding the best practice and then applying it to the conditions of the organization. It is necessary to choose the right type of benchmarking for the organization and implement all its phases in it. Subsequently, we come to the conclusion with the help, which should successfully implement the change in the organization. The benefits that come from the benchmarking method

can be considered continuous improvement, comparison with the performance of other organizations, measuring performance and increasing the quality of services (Bednářová, 2008).

When measuring performance in organizations, it is necessary to focus on:

- Performance measures - the organization uses them to compare performance, it is necessary to tell more about the activities of the organization than the workload of employees.
- Efficiency measures - is a representation of the relationship between the resources needed to produce products and services.
- Productivity measures - combined components of efficiency and effectiveness in one indicator.
- Efficiency measures - determine the extent and display of the quality in which the objectives of the unit are met.

Performance measurement allows you to identify best practices. To prevent mistakes, we must adhere to the following principles. We only measure what is important for the company. The measured values must be consistent with the partial and overall goals of the organization. They must also monitor what is important to the customer (Pogranová et al., 2011, Pawliczek, Zimmermannova, 2018, Štefko et al. 2020, Ardielli, 2020, Gunardi et al. 2020, Ribeiro, Santos, 2019).

PEST analysis

PEST analysis is often used for strategic assessment of the macro environment and examines external factors. The company's activities do not affect them in any way, while the company as such is affected by them. PEST Analysis (political, economic, social and technological) is a management method whereby an organization can assess major external factors that influence its operation in order to become more competitive in the market. As described by the acronym, those four areas are central to this model.

This analysis has a very broad content, so it is not possible to provide a detailed procedure (guide) that would reveal aspects of the external environment. The result of the analysis will be the acquisition of a broader set of strategic data, which will be used to identify individual strategic changes affecting business activities and their bearers. However, the result of the PEST analysis must answer the question concerning the effect of the changes and the consequences of these changes on society.

There are numerous benefits of conducting a PEST analysis, which can reap dividends for your business. The more significant benefits include:

- A greater understanding of your company;
- More effective long-term strategic planning;
- Heightened attention to potential threats and dangers;
- Insight for valuable business opportunities.

On the other hand, the disadvantages are also related to the PEST analysis as well, because through the analysis of all the factors, there is a chance that they might change within an hour or day due to its dynamic nature. Some factors are based on assumptions, so they may not be accurate. Also the data collection is huge, one needs to carefully utilize it in a better way, and as it is from external sources, it may not be the accurate. Some different aspect of strategic planning techniques is also represented in Benková et al. (2020), Gallo et al. (2019) or Perminova et al. (2018) and from evaluation perspective analyses in Pastor et al. (2017).

Method of strategic profile

The strategic profile method is mostly used to compare with the profile of the strongest competitor in a particular market segment, or with general market requirements. It depicts the company's strengths and weaknesses very clearly. It can be said that the ideal profile is a profile whose parameters are at least at the level of general requirements. It is also true that all parameter values do not have to be at level five (maximum value), but general requirements should be at least partially copied in the profile (Jakubíková, 2008).

According to the Porter, one of the basic goals of strategic diagnostics is to reveal the decisive strengths of the company as a source of a possible competitive advantage, which is the central idea of its competitive strategy. The strategic profile represents a complex of evaluations or levels of selected parameters of the company's competitiveness as discussed in Benková et al. (2020) or specifically from perspective of logistics in Vegsoova et al. (2019a, 2019b) and Straka et al. (2016). Its main features include according to Urbancová and Hudáková (2017):

- shows the strengths and weaknesses of the company, which it compares with the profile of another company or also with the general requirements of the market,
- the ideal profile is when all parameters are at the level of general requirements,
- display using a graphic form, which allows quick orientation in the quality of the company's internal environment,
- the need to cover all functional and cross-cutting areas in the company,
- after a graphic representation, the manager is able to quickly check the strengths and weaknesses of the company.

The evaluation method in benchmarking consists in the mutual comparison of internal companies using selected influences on competing companies and the criteria set for them. The established criteria represent the impact on other competitors. The individual impact was given a "weight" of their sum equal to one. The point rating ranged from 1 to 5. The maximum points obtained is 5, which represents the company whose competitive advantage is the highest in this evaluation area. The resulting value is calculated as the product of the points and

weights for each of the factors. It is true, that the higher number will gain a competitive advantage.

Results discussion

Many Slovak companies nowadays realize that they often have to undergo changes in order to be successful in the market. These would be changes that involve a longer period of time. Companies thus have to draw on the opportunities that are currently available to them or on what they already know. They often encounter problems related to outdated technologies, insufficient corporate culture, the level of education of employees, competition and also the decline of quality products.

The choice of partners was focused on competing companies that offer a similar range of products and services. Based on the market situation and technical and economic alternatives, the company Š-A A was the first to be chosen, which offers the sale of Škoda vehicles, car service, car bazaar, sale of Seat and Volkswagen vehicles. The second selected company is Š-A B, which is focused on the sale of new and used Škoda, Volkswagen, Seat vehicles, car accessories, spare parts and the provision of car service services. The third chosen company is Š-A C, which offers the sale of Škoda vehicles, car service services and also the sale of parts and accessories. Although this operation is the smallest in terms of the number of employees, it occupies the largest market share in northeastern Slovakia.

When comparing the company, we mainly took into account their position on the market. In the following Table 1 are processed factors on the basis of which we can get acquainted with the current activities in internal companies. The acquired data were qualified by the subjective assessment of % the authors.

Table 1: Market research

Indicators	Company A	Company B	Company C
Share of company selling new cars in %	50%	20%	100%
Share of provided services in %	100%	75%	75%

Source: own processing

In the analysis of the current state in the surveyed companies, it was necessary to map the actual state of the internal areas, which were defined to verify:

- compliance of activities, processes and results with applicable legislation,
- status of operational documents,
- the state of communication of the indoor environment with the environment.

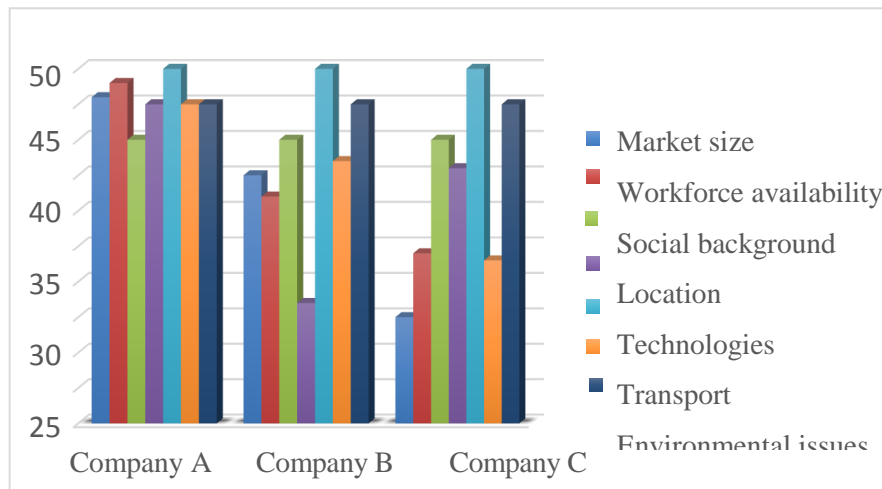


Figure 1: External success factors of internal companies (own processing)

The graphic display can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2. On the basis of the internal analysis, the meaning of individual factors was determined by means of point evaluation in internal companies, which to a large extent significantly affect their position on the market. A scale from 0 to 50 was used in the scoring (the lower the number, the lower the success of the company, the higher the number, the higher the success).

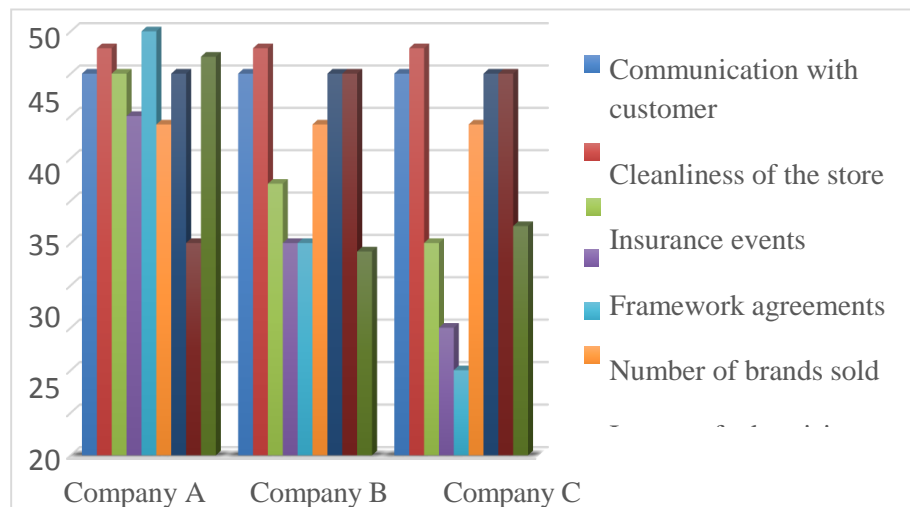


Figure 2: Internal success factors of internal companies (own processing)

Factors relevant to the company are known from analyse that have been performed in order for companies to determine what they consider to be their competitive advantage. Based on the comparison of the mentioned factors, it is possible to identify changes in the importance of these factors. In order to gain a competitive advantage, companies need to focus on factors that have low value and reduce their competitiveness.

PEST analysis

The mentioned analysis can be included in the analysis of the macro environment (analysis of the external environment of the company), which the company resists and cannot influence. We monitored the following external factors:

Political factors

Company Š–A, as well as other companies that carry out their business activities in the Slovak Republic are subject not only to decrees, government regulations, law but also other legal norms in the country, which companies must follow and, above all, respect. Among the legal regulations that are generally applied and by which the company must comply and positively or negatively affect its business itself, we can include, for example: Act No. 513/1991 Coll. Commercial Code, Act No. 595/2003 Coll. Income Tax Act, Act No. 222/2004 Coll. Value Added Tax Act, etc. Every year, the government comes up with proposals for changes in the tax system and laws that are supposed to benefit business entities, but not all changes are successful.

Economic factors

Macroeconomic indicators affecting society's surroundings to a greater or lesser extent are, for example, gross domestic product, inflation, unemployment and wage developments. The development of gross domestic product (GDP) in the period 2015 - 2019 developed as follows. GDP over a five-year period has been on an upward trend. In 2018, the company Š - Auto achieved the highest economic result for the observed period 2015 - 2019. Unemployment affects most countries and the Slovak Republic is no exception. Within the observed period 2010-2015, the development of unemployment in the observed period 2010 - 2015 of the Slovak Republic at the level of 12.34%, until in 2015 it decreased to 10.23%. In the following years, there was a positive trend and the value of 5.42%.

High unemployment in the region can have a positive as well as a negative impact on society. A positive impact for society, for example, is the possibility of better choice of new skilled power, but on the contrary, a negative impact for society is that people buy less, try to save, which can result in a decline in company profits. In the monitored regions where the company carries out its business activity, unemployment reaches higher values year-on-year.

Social factors

The population as a whole has a great influence on how society will work. The standard of living as well as, for example, the distribution of income can determine

whether new cars or previously used cars will be bought and whether the customer will choose a repair at a branded service, which is more expensive, or whether the customer will choose a cheaper repair option. Social factors are related to the demographic side of a given country. The level of education and access to work is associated with the employment of employees in the company and the mobility of the population with the employment of the region. In the analyzed company Š - Auto, which is focused not only on the sale of new and used vehicles but also on the performance of emission inspections, technical inspections and originality inspections, the system of employee education is a very important factor. Each group of employees is specially prepared to carry out their activities through mandatory educational training, which takes place at least four times a year. The employee will acquire all the latest knowledge that is necessary for the performance of his profession. With regard to the age structure, salary and educational level, there is a high turnover of employees in the company, as younger grades are looking for a better paid job in the same place in another region of Slovakia after training and gaining experience.

Technological factors

The company Š-A obtained the ISO 9001: 2008 certificate intended for all companies that want to prove their ability to provide quality goods and services, and which care not only about building a name but also their market position through quality improvement and a responsible approach to the customer.

The use of technical standards is not mandatory for companies, but their use is an advantage for the company. The company Š-A uses the Internet, websites, social networks for presentation to current but also potential customers.

Analysis of strategic profile of internal companies

The results obtained on the basis of a comparison of influences allow us to clearly assess the company's position in relation to the competition. A graphical representation of these results obtained based on a comparison of data is shown in Table 3. The causes of deficiencies and the possibilities of their elimination are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of selected influences

Criteria	Weight v_i	Company A		Company B		Company C	
		Points (b_i)	Consumption	Points (b_j)	Consumption	Points (b_k)	Consumption
Product portfolio	0,08	3	0,24	2	0,16	4	0,32
Environmental policy of company	0,10	5	0,50	5	0,50	5	0,50
Company location	0,11	2	0,22	3	0,33	4	0,44
Price of services	0,12	4	0,48	3	0,36	2	0,24
Range of services	0,10	2	0,20	2	0,20	5	0,50

Communication between management and employees	0,08	2	0,16	3	0,24	3	0,24
Market presence	0,10	3	0,30	4	0,40	3	0,30
Competition in region	0,15	3	0,45	5	0,75	3	0,45
Market size	0,08	3	0,24	2	0,16	4	0,32
Social background	0,08	4	0,32	3	0,24	4	0,32
Calculation			$v_i * b_i$		$v_i * b_j$		$v_i * b_k$
TOTAL	1		2,53		3,34		3,63

Source: own processing

The main benchmark among internal companies is the company based in A, which obtained the highest number of points based on calculations. The strategic profile thus gives us the answer to the question of how it is possible to create and strengthen a long-term competitive market position and subsequently fulfill the individual goals of a company that is advancing in the given area.

Table 3: Strategic profile of company

Criteria	Score				
	Adverse		Average		Favorable
	1	2	3	4	5
Increase of product portfolio		●	●	●	
Improvement of environmental policy of company					●
Improvement of company location		●	●	●	
Reduction of price		●	●	●	
Increase of range of services		●	●		●
Improvement of communication between management and employees		●	●	●	
Market presence			●	●	●
Competition in region			●		●
Market size		●	●	●	
Improvement of social background			●	●	●

Source: own processing

Company A ● — ●
 Company B ● — ●
 Company C ● — ●

Managerial Implication

Based on the developed critical success factors, we set recommendations to improve the existing situation. We have defined the following areas: product portfolio, service prices, range of services provided, communication between management and employees and social background. Improvements implemented in the mentioned areas are easily manageable for companies. These improvements would not represent an extreme increase in costs for companies, but the result would lead to balancing their position with that of the main benchmark in selected areas. Improvements in selected indicators would help to companies to align with competition in these areas (Vasilkova Kmecova et al. 2017). It was important to address the question of how individual companies will achieve better results than their competitors. This can be achieved through various changes: The first indicator that needs to be implemented is an increase in the portfolio of products sold. Based on the analysis, it can be stated that the company C has the lowest portfolio of products sold compared to other internal competitors. As for the prices for the services provided, companies C and B have lower prices. Their prices for each type of work on all types of motor vehicles are the same. As for the company A, its prices are slightly higher.

Another indicator that requires change is an increase in the scope of services provided. The results of the analysis show that not every internal company provides the same volume of services. Most customer services are provided by the company A. The analysis shows that the worst communication between the management and employees of the company B. What we really need to work out in the company is a better communication and establishment for the same consumer services. It will help costumers to have the same positive feeling in all company branches and also it will lead to involve some new costumers to the showrooms. Our proposal would be for the employer to contribute to their employees' pensions through supplementary pension savings contributions, which would be more advantageous for them than a salary increase. From the increased wage resp. in the event of an exceptional remuneration, the employer would have to pay social security contributions, which would ultimately be more expensive for him than the pension contribution.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the analysis, we can say that the business entity has a strong background within the region. The investigation methods can be applied to other SMEs that require the setting with the same quality parameters. From our professional point of view, it is very important that companies with a larger number of business units create and provide the same background for the client. Internal benchmarking helps companies to find out their potential reserves, not only in services but also in human sources and their quality improvement. As same as we

found in results, we can give advice to the other companies how to do their best in providing services, sell and to support a company culture.

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WYKORZYSTANIE WEWNĘTRZNEJ ANALIZY PORÓWNAWCZEJ WYKORZYSTYWANIE NA PRZYŁADZIE MŚP W SŁOWACJI: STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

Streszczenie: Stale i szybko zmieniający się rynek, nowa konkurencja wchodząca na rynek lub globalizacja oznaczają, że firmy muszą ciągle przemyślać swoje dotychczasowe działania. Celem badań była analiza tych faktów w małych i średnich przedsiębiorstwach, które starają się wyeliminować swoje słabości i poprawić swoje mocne strony, w celu zdefiniowania i stworzenia przewagi konkurencyjnej. To jest klucz do walki z istniejącą konkurencją. Aby go jednak zidentyfikować, konieczne jest szczegółowe poznanie zewnętrznego środowiska podmiotu, które monitorowaliśmy dwiema głównymi metodami, wykorzystując analizę PEST, a następnie przechodziliśmy do analizy w firmie, stosując metodę benchmarkingu. Prezentowany artykuł opisuje i stosuje metodę analizy porównawczej w spółce Š-Auto, która działa we wschodniej Słowacji w kilku miastach

powiatowych. Wyniki przyniosły wnioski, które pozwalają świadczyć usługi o tym samym wysokim poziomie jakości we wszystkich operacjach dla klientów w analizowanych MŚP.

Słowa kluczowe: benchmarking, analiza PEST, MŚP, Słowacja

斯洛伐克中小企业内部基准测试: 案例研究

摘要:瞬息万变的市场, 进入市场的新竞争或全球化, 意味着公司必须不断重新考虑其现有运营。研究的目的是分析中小企业中的这些事实, 这些企业试图消除自己的弱点并提高自己的优势, 以期确定和创造竞争优势。这是对抗现有竞争的关键。但是, 为了识别它, 有必要详细了解对象的外部环境, 我们通过两种主要方法(使用PEST分析)对其进行了监视, 随后通过基准测试法在公司内部进行了分析。本文介绍并应用了Š-Auto公司中的基准测试方法, 该公司在斯洛伐克东部几个城市的地区运营。结果为我们得出结论, 使我们能够在所有运营中为被分析的SME的客户提供相同高质量的服务

关键词: 基准测试, PEST分析, 中小企业, 斯洛伐克