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MONITORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

Rafał MIŚKO

Faculty of Computer Science and Management, Wroclaw University of Science and Technology;
rafal.misko@pwr.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-4154-419X

Purpose: The purpose of the article is to create a tool for monitoring the growth and development factors of SMEs in the educational services industry.
Design/methodology/approach: To achieve the goal of the paper, key factors were identified, and then the Leppard questionnaire was adapted. A tool was created, which consists of questions related to the use of key growth and development factors.
Findings: The questionnaire has 29 questions divided into 9 groups. The respondent's task is to determine on the Likert scale 1-5 (1 – means definitely disagree, and 5 – strongly agree) the level of truth of the statement with regard to the organisation that the respondent owns or manages.
Research limitations/implications: The most severe disadvantage of the proposed tool seems to be its subjective nature. To reduce subjectivity, the Delphi method may be useful.
Practical implications: The proposed tool can be an essential source of knowledge for entrepreneurs. Thanks to this, they can focus on the most important aspects of the development of their enterprises and will be able to increase the competitiveness of their business.
Originality/value: This paper reveals the potential uses of a new tool for monitoring the growth and development of SME.

Keywords: SME, growth, factors.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the basis of the global economy (Singh et al., 2008). Therefore, their social function is not without significance, which is manifested in the creation of interpersonal relationships and the consolidation of local and regional communities. Enterprises from the SME sector also play a significant role in creating new technologies and products. Because civilisation conditions, education and science are of

fundamental importance for our era, there is a significant increase in entities from the group of SMEs operating in the field of education.

From the perspective of a single person, education enables a fuller use of one's capabilities and, which cannot be overestimated, gives a chance to stay in the labour market and gain upward mobility (Cefalo, and Kazepov, 2008; Rigtering et al., 2014). Indeed, scientific research has revealed that Poles are showing increasing interest and motivation for lifelong learning (Kwiatkowska-Ciotucha, and Załuska, 2014). Therefore, it seems to be particularly important to pay attention to small and medium-sized enterprises in the educational services industry, and notably to factors affecting their growth and development.

According to data from the Central Statistical Office of Poland, over 2 million enterprises were registered in 2017, of which over 99% are small and medium-sized. The number of registered entities has been growing since 2013. It is worth underlining that the number of enterprises operating in the education area increased by 25% compared to 2010 (Dąbrowski et al., 2018).

Therefore, this study aimed to present a proposal for a tool to monitor key growth and development factors for small and medium-sized enterprises in the education services industry. The achievement of the goals of the work is essential both from the theoretical and practical point of view. Through it, the gap in existing knowledge in the field of enterprise development is being filled. In addition, the proposed tool can be an important source of knowledge for entrepreneurs. Thanks to this, they can focus on the most relevant aspects of the development of their enterprises.

Fulfilling the purpose of this work is possible, thanks to the author's previous research, wherein he identified key factors for the growth and development of small and medium enterprises in the education services industry. The procedure and results of this study are presented later in the article.

2. Role of educational sector

Until recently, the education sector in Poland was entirely a sphere of public services, it was financed exclusively from the state budget and consisted of state regulation. The 1990s brought changes because there were massification and marketisation of educational services. Non-public entities began to appear on the market.

It should be noted that years ago, A. Toffler outlined a scenario of changes in the economy, in particular in the education system. He wrote that the purpose of the system would be to meet the needs and expectations of the information society. A. Toffler pointed out that the new reality will require different, non-traditional qualifications and skills, and that the number of alliances and other forms of cooperation between schools and business will increase. Furthermore,

the labour market will also change - most of the existing professions will lose their importance (Toffler, 1980).

Researchers confirm Toffler's predictions. Nonaka stated that: "in the economy where the only certainty is uncertainty, the one sure source of lasting competitive advantage is knowledge. When markets shift, technologies proliferate, competitors multiply, and products become obsolete almost overnight, successful companies are those that consistently create new knowledge, disseminate it widely throughout the organization, and quickly embody it in new technologies and products" (Nonaka, 2007, p. 162).

K. Przybysz noted: "the pace of economic changes and the ageing of society have made the importance of lifelong learning a priority" (Przybysz, 2014, p. 31). Policy makers in the European Union recognise this in the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation and Training (ET 2020)[2] document that proclaims, at European level, at least 15% of adults on average should participate in lifelong learning by 2020. In Poland, in 2018, 5.7% (the indicator has been growing since 2015) of the population, aged 25-64 participates in education. So there is a lot to be done to reach at least an average EU level of 11.1%.

Therefore, there are considerable challenges and opportunities for enterprises operating in the educational services industry. Because most of the companies operating on the Polish market in this industry are SMEs there is a need to analyse SMEs further.

3. SME's key growth and development factors

When we would like to define the term SME, we meet "a wide range of definitions and measures, varying from country to country and varying between the sources reporting SME statistics. Some of the commonly used criteria are the number of employees, total net assets, sales and investment level. However, the most common basis for definition is employment, and here again, there is variation in defining the upper and lower size limit of an SME" (Ayyagari et al., 2007, p. 416). In this paper, the European Union definition has been adopted. In EU recommendation 2003/361/EC, it can be found that:

- micro-enterprise has fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover (the amount of money taken in a particular period) or balance sheet (a statement of a company's assets and liabilities) below €2 million,
- small enterprise has fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet below €10 million,
- medium-sized enterprise has fewer than 250 employees and annual turnover below €50 million or balance sheet below €43 million.

[2] For more see: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en.

As with the SME definition, there is ambiguity in the concept of growth definition (De Kok et al., 2014). Polish researchers say that we have growth and development, meanwhile abroad, researchers mostly talk about growth. A. Stabryła for example, describes development as: "a cycle of qualitative changes, perceived positively for the goal they concern. At the organisational level, they cover areas such as economics, organisation, staff, information, and technology and production" (Stabryła, 1995, p. 9). Z. Pierścionek states that the company's growth is measured by the dynamics of sales value and the dynamics of market share; from the resource side, through the dynamics of asset value growth and employment, and also through the increase of skill potential (Pierścionek, 1996).

In the world literature, it can be found that growth can be defined and conceptualised as quantitative growth (Bivona, 2000) in terms of the increase in output, export, sales, employment or profit of the firm (Yusoff et al., 2018), or defined as qualitative growth (Bivona, 2000) in terms of qualitative features such as market position, skills, customers' satisfaction, product quality, customers goodwill (Yusoff et al., 2018).

There is need to define success too, because firm growth is frequently equated with success (Baum et al., 2001). According to J. Kay, success is understood by juxtaposing it with failure on the one hand. On the other hand, however, success of an enterprise can be linked with its performance. Furthermore, J. Kay expresses the link between a success and a company's strategy, albeit the strategy does not always lead to an economic success (Kay, 1995). Therefore, it can be stated that "the success of enterprise consists in constantly struggling with an unregulated environment" (Malara, 2006, p. 61) and in practice, it means not only being positive about spectacular achievements, but also the necessity to be satisfied with survival on the market. After defining the basic concepts, the factors of growth and development can be described.

The literature is rich in many factors of development and growth. However, they can be tied together differently, the most common division being into two main groups. The first of these divides determinants into internal factors, i.e. associated with the operation of a given economic entity and its owner. There are also external factors, i.e. those resulting from the environment in which the enterprise operates. A firm's growth determinants, as well as their importance vary across regions (Federico et al., 2012) and industries (Yusoff et al., 2018).

For example, A. Zabój indicates that internal factors include, among others: capital at the enterprise's disposal, level of knowledge, education and creativity of employees, the attractiveness of the sector on the market, number of competitors in the sector, and skilful and efficient management of employee teams. Among the external factors, it lists, among others: legal regulations, interest rates, environmental protection and forms of support for enterprises in the European Union (Zabój, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, the educational services industry faces challenges related to changes in the economy and the need to meet EU requirements. The author of this article has carried out research to determine the key factors for the growth and development of small and medium-

sized enterprises in the education services industry because, in his opinion, the literature lacked such a study. Research may help achieve a competitive advantage when entrepreneurs know what to focus on.

With regard to the author's study, 121 respondents took part in the survey, which is 13% of the research sample. The sample included 85.12% of micro-enterprises, 11.57% of small enterprises and 1.65% of medium enterprises. The research was carried out in the Lower Silesian Voivodship. Based on the analysis of the literature on the subject, over 100 growth and development factors have been identified. They were then aggregated based on the similarity criterion. As a result, a list of 55 factors was obtained. On this basis, a questionnaire was constructed, addressed to owners and managers of SMEs in the education services industry. In completing the questionnaire, the respondents assessed the impact of factors on the growth and development of their enterprise. Moreover, they had to assign each of the factors a rating on a scale of 1-5, where 1 meant that the factor had no affect, and 5 – had a huge impact. Based on the results obtained, a factor analysis procedure was carried out, which grouped the determinants. The research revealed a list of key factors (Table 1).

Table 1.
Key factors for the growth and development of SMEs in the education services industry

Rank	Factor	Mean
I	Positive image (company reputation, possession of recognisable brand products, perceived quality of products and services)	4,58
II	Competences (managerial competencies and qualifications, work efficiency and employee competencies, company strategy)	4,30
III	Requirements of the population (lifestyle, a system of training and professional development, educational infrastructure, absorption of the local market)	3,92
	The country's economy (the level of wealth of the society, economic growth, the level of unemployment in the country)	3,86
	Assessment and range of operation (staff assessment systems, skilful market analysis, range of enterprise operation, operational management efficiency)	3,83
	Age and structure (company age, the flexibility of organisational structure)	3,73
IV	Local factors (company location, infrastructure condition)	3,65
	Finances, material resources and organisational culture (creditworthiness, the financial potential of an enterprise, cost optimization, material resources, organisational culture of an enterprise)	3,64
	Political climate and technology (social security system, government policy towards SMEs, computer technologies	3,41
	Integration and cooperation (integration with the EU, cooperation with business support institutions)	3,29

Source: (Malara, and Miśko, 2016).

The most important factor turned out to be the "positive image", and it included elements such as company reputation, possession of products with a recognisable brand, perceived quality of products and services. It seems that due to the intensified competition on the market of educational services, the enterprises operating there should apply the differentiation strategy. A distinctive element can be a positive reputation or quality of services offered. The competency factor came in second. In particular, it is about employee competences. Competent employees who are able to transfer knowledge skilfully can significantly contribute

to an enterprise distinguishing itself on the market of educational services – which implies a more significant number of clients being served by the company. Third place is ex aequo "population requirements", "country's economy", "evaluation and range of activity" and "age and structure". SMEs, in the educational services industry, just like any other enterprise, face the challenges of the environment. The survey showed that factors outside the enterprise are high in the hierarchy of importance.

It should be added here that the hierarchy of factors was established by means of appropriate statistical tests, i.e. the Wilcoxon test. If the differences between the factors were not statistically significant, they occupied the same place in the hierarchy.

Finally, the last items were: local factors, finances, material resources and organisational culture, political climate and technology, as well as integration and cooperation.

The research results are similar to those achieved by other researchers in Poland. For example, the work of M. Matejun shows that entrepreneurship and resourcefulness of the owner, as well as the skills and qualifications of the persons managing the entity are of the greatest importance for the development of enterprises (Matejun, 2008). In the author's research, this factor comes second under the name "competences". Similarly, in the analysis carried out by A. Kamińska, the most critical respondents included the standard of living of the local community and the resulting absorbency of the local market, EU subsidies, financial support from the state and local government, quick decision-making by local government and administration, regional and local government policy (Kamińska, 2011). The similarity of the results is manifested by factors such as "population requirements", where the absorbency of the local market is contained. In addition, EU subsidies can be equated with the "integration and cooperation" factor, and the financial support of the state and local government with the "political climate and technologies" factor. Finally, in the light of R. Przygodzka's research, the most important are high quality products and high quality of customer service (Przygodzka, 2010). The same results were obtained by the author of this paper.

The results show that growth determinants may be quite similar for one country or region, but their importance may differ between industries. That is why determining the importance of factors for industries seems to be so crucial.

4. Measurement of growth and development factors

According to L. Filkenstein, a measurement is an important tool for modern thought. It is the basis for describing the world that surrounds us. The concept of measurement has been adapted from physical and technical sciences to other areas of knowledge such as social sciences or management sciences, and the development of computer technologies has facilitated its use in many areas (Filkenstein, 2003).

There is no consensus on measurement of firm growth, with different measurements of growth being employed in different studies (Bouazza et al., 2015). Hence, comparisons between studies are difficult and cannot be generalized (Bakar et al., 2011).

According to research, the most popular indicators of growth are sales or turnover (Achtenhagen et al., 2010), and employment (Weinzimmer et al., 1998). However, numerous researchers advocate the employment of multiple growth measurements in firm growth research. Due to the multidimensional and heterogeneity features of the growth process of SMEs and the outcome – using a combination or various growth measurement indicators is more relevant (Achtenhagen et al., 2010).

There are many methods for testing the growth of an organisation; one is the J. Leppard method. It is based on an organisational development diagnostic questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 60 questions, where they are arranged by meeting the requirements of the Greiner model. Each question should be answered 'yes' or 'no'. The number of 'yes' answers indicates the stage of development achieved by the company (Clarke, 1997).

Therefore, to achieve the goal of this work - proposing a tool to monitor key growth and development factors of SMEs in the education services industry, the Leppard questionnaire was adapted. Elements of B. Bellinger's multi-criteria analysis (Bellinger, 1978) also served as support. This tool answers how key growth and development factors are used in the enterprise. Therefore, it uses various growth measurement indicators. The tool is dedicated for specific country and specific industry because a firm’s growth determinants, as well as their importance vary across regions and industries.

A series of 29 questions were developed, referring to the key factors of growth and development of SMEs in the educational services industry previously identified by the author.

The respondent's task was to determine on the Likert scale 1-5 (1 – means definitely disagree, and 5 – strongly agree) the level of truth of the statement with the organisation which respondent owns or manages. This is illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2.
Preposition of tool for monitoring SME development

1	The company has a positive reputation among customers	1 2 3 4 5
2	Customers perceive the company's products as having high quality	1 2 3 4 5
3	Our brand is recognisable on the market	1 2 3 4 5
I	Sum	
4	The company's employees are qualified and competent	1 2 3 4 5
5	The company's management is highly competent	1 2 3 4 5
6	The company's strategy is transparent and understandable	1 2 3 4 5
II	Sum	
7	We skilfully use the lifestyle of the population in the business	1 2 3 4 5
8	The market in which the company operates is absorbent	1 2 3 4 5
9	The educational infrastructure in our place of operation is our support	1 2 3 4 5
III	Sum	

Cont. table 2.

10	If we wanted to take a loan, banks would not refuse us	1 2 3 4 5
11	We are closely monitoring costs and are continually looking for opportunities to optimise them	1 2 3 4 5
12	Our financial potential allows us to invest	1 2 3 4 5
13	Possessed material resources facilitate running a business	1 2 3 4 5
14	The company's organisational culture is conducive to sound financial policy	1 2 3 4 5
IV	Sum	
15	We use the benefits of Poland's integration with the European Union	1 2 3 4 5
16	We work with business environment institutions	1 2 3 4 5
V	Sum	
17	The organisational structure of enterprises can be quickly and efficiently modified	1 2 3 4 5
18	As the years go by, we deal with difficulties more skilfully	1 2 3 4 5
VI	Sum	
19	We observe government regulations regarding our activities and actively respond to them	1 2 3 4 5
20	We use computer technologies to support our business	1 2 3 4 5
VII	Sum	
21	We can predict events on our market	1 2 3 4 5
22	We use the full potential of our employees	1 2 3 4 5
23	The range of our activity covers 100% of our capabilities	1 2 3 4 5
24	There are no errors in the ongoing management, or there are slight errors	1 2 3 4 5
VIII	Sum	
25	The condition of local infrastructure favours our activities	1 2 3 4 5
26	We use all the advantages of our business location	1 2 3 4 5
IX	Sum	
27	We can achieve satisfactory results also during economic slowdown	1 2 3 4 5
28	We skilfully use the level of society's wealth	1 2 3 4 5
29	We can operate on the market with both high and low levels of unemployment	1 2 3 4 5
X	Sum	

Source: own work.

To determine the position of the enterprise, one should transfer the values for each group to the score sheet (Table 3). The next stage is multiplying the value for each group by assigned weight (the value is related to the place in the hierarchy occupied by a given factor – higher position, higher weight). In the last step, the results obtained should be summarised – the higher the final result, the better the development situation of the enterprise.

Table 3.
Weights for each factor

Weight I – 5	Weight II – 3	Weight III – 2	Weight IV – 1	Weight V – 1
Weight VI – 3	Weight VII – 1	Weight VIII – 2	Weight IX – 1	Weight X – 2
Sum = (5* Weight I+3* Weight II+2* Weight III+ Weight IV+ Weight V+3* Weight VI+ Weight VII+2* Weight VIII+ Weight IX+2* Weight X)/21				

Source: own work.

What does the end result mean? It should be referred to the rating scale as shown in Table 4.

Table 4.
Interpretation of obtained results

Bad	Fair	Good	Very well	Excellent
Below 3	<3-3,5)	<3,5-4)	<4-4,5)	<4,5-5>

Source: own work.

A value below 3 means that the company has poor use of key growth and development factors. Action, therefore, should be taken to change the position of the enterprise as soon as possible. Values from 3 to 3.5 mean sufficient use of key factors, while values from 3.5 to 4 mean good use of key factors. Values from 4 to 4.5 mean very good use of key factors, but it is still possible to improve the company's situation. Values between 4.5 and 5 mean excellent use of key factors. Action should be taken to maintain this position.

Summary

The instrument proposed in the article can be used in the group of enterprises that were included in the survey. However, this does not exclude the possibility of adapting this tool to other companies operating in different fields. One should then change the questionnaire statements and adapt them to factors that have been diagnosed for the needs of other companies. Similarly, the score sheet should be adjusted, and new weights given by the adopted hierarchy of factors.

The most serious disadvantage of the proposed tool seems to be its subjective nature. The owner of the enterprise or managing person assign assessments at his discretion, burdened with historical experience (usually negative) and (often) limited knowledge and knowledge of management issues. Action should, hence, be taken to reduce subjectivity. The Delphi method may be useful here (Malara, 1994). Generally speaking, it involves asking the panel of experts several times for opinions on a specific topic. And so, experts based on their knowledge and experience are able to determine the statements needed to construct a questionnaire and weight to the established hierarchy of factors.

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