

Innovation And Organizational Change Through The Lence Of Corporate Culture

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Abstract

According to Carl Wake, change is the only constant in the modern world. Organizations must create and manage a corporate culture that encourages the implementation of positive change that helps increase their competitiveness. The purpose of the present study is to prove that adopting excellent and sustainable practices in the context of innovation is an optimal opportunity for the successful existence of companies in the modern turbulent business environment. A prerequisite for this is the presence of appropriate management and motivation among employees for adopting and operating a corporate culture that promotes organizational learning, a significant factor for acquiring information and improving organizations' flexible adaptation to changes.

After a literature review of the theory related to corporate culture, organizational change, organizational learning and innovation, based on an empirical study based on a representative sample of 300 companies, primarily small and medium-sized enterprises, implementing their business activities in the Republic of Bulgaria, they were carried out by the author the present report presents the trends and challenges faced by companies about the generation and implementation of innovations, the presence of an appropriate communication system, both with internal and external stakeholders supporting organizational learning. The method used is a survey with closed questions created by the author, and the research was conducted by the marketing and sociological research agency "Sova Harris" over two months. After receiving the answers from the author, they were processed with the help of specialized software - Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) and visualized using Excel. The sample is based on the number of companies implementing innovations in Bulgaria. Data is according to the National Statistical Institute. The size of the companies is determined according to the European classification. According to the industry in which they carry out their business activity, the respondents represent the spheres of trade, services, various types of production, energy, IT, science and education. The results that have been reached are that Bulgarian companies generally understand the importance of the positive relationship between corporate culture and competitiveness. Investment in Bulgarian SMEs related to innovation is still mostly in tangible resources – modern equipment and computers and less in intangibles –

acquisition of external knowledge and research. The communication practices of the companies about their stakeholder groups are effective. The conclusions arising from the results are related to a focus on managing corporate culture, promoting the internalization of organizational learning and its transformation into a competitive advantage.

It will be by the creation and implementation of innovations, a culture directly supported by the communication practices of organizations, providing opportunities to motivate the perception of the constant nature of change and last but not least - making more substantial investments in intangible resources.

Keywords: *corporate culture, innovation, organizational learning, change, communication*

1. Introduction

Corporate culture is the invisible infrastructure of an organization. The rest of the organizational constructs are directly related to the corporate strategy and the organizational structure. In the conditions of Industry 4.0. generating and implementing innovation is imperative for any company that wants to increase its competitive advantage. For their implementation, it is necessary to have a corporate culture that promotes the maintenance of values related to the culture of innovation, for the perception and management of which it is required to internalize constant change.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Resource based Theory

The resource-based theory of the firm is one of the theoretical frameworks supporting the understanding of the importance of sustainable competitive advantage and explaining why firms perform differently in the environment in which they operate (Barney, 1991). The modern approach to resource-based theory postulates that a company's competitive advantage is determined by how much the organization can manage its resources (Barney & Arikan, 2001). From the perspective of this theory, resources are seen as stocks of capabilities owned by the company and, therefore, controlled by it. Resources are divided into tangible and intangible, tangible and intangible. Each company possesses unique resources and innovation capabilities that provide opportunities for returns.

2.2. Competitive performance

A company's competitive performance is aided more by its unique resources and ability to innovate than by the industry's structural characteristics. Daft (2010) defined *organizational performance* as an organization's ability to utilize its tangible and intangible resources to achieve organizational goals effectively and efficiently. Competitive advantage represents the company's unique position compared to its competing organizations.

2.3. Innovation

Innovation is one of the essential opportunities for achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Porter, 2008; Crossan & Apaydin, 2010), and corporate culture is seen as an essential source of competitive advantage (Fiol, 1991; Dimitrova, 2012).

Companies achieve competitive advantage through acts of innovation. They approach innovation in its broadest sense, including new technologies and new ways of doing things" (Porter, 1990).

Innovations can be viewed through the prism of their goals - product and process innovations, according to their scope of action - technological and organizational, and the degree of change - incremental and radical (Bessant & Tidd, 2007). Innovation can be open and closed, with the concept of open innovation much more relevant to today's business reality.

The essential thing about innovations is that they support organizations in creating and maintaining long-term competitiveness through acquiring and transferring knowledge, technologies, experiments and creative ideas, which are embodied in product, process innovations, and business model innovations. Innovation is about creating value.

Innovation is associated with organizational learning and change in the framework of the corporate culture. The innovations are directly associated with risk, uncertainty, and radical change. A challenge to their adoption is overcoming inertia and orientation towards organizational development in constant change.

Corporate culture and organizational learning are among the essential core competencies of organizations that greatly assist in achieving competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). The company must create, implement and manage an appropriate corporate culture to support organizational learning. The corporate culture of each company is unique and cannot be imitated. Understanding the importance of corporate culture and its competent management is an invaluable strategic advantage for any company.

2.4. Corporate Culture

Sherriton and Stern (1997:26) supplement one of the most widely used definitions of corporate culture created by Bower (1966), which postulates that corporate culture is "the way we do things around here", with all its multi-layered dimensions, what distinguishes companies is the organizational reality. Corporate culture is considered the set of values, norms, and basic assumptions accepted and in unison with which the organization's members carry out their daily activities (Schein, 1992; Miron et al., 2004). It represents the "shared social knowledge" in the organization (Colquitt et al., 2009). Corporate culture is an essential driver of organizational change. While not all organizational change necessarily requires innovation, introducing any innovation is a condition for change. Corporate culture and the management of the organization are mutually related and mutually determined.

The construct of corporate culture is multidimensional, as evidenced by the various typologies, models and paradigms created for its study. The culture of adhocracy (Cameron &

Quinn, 1999) and the culture of adaptation (Denison et al., 2006) are related to the company's innovative attitudes. In the typologies created by Cameron and Quinn and Denison et al., the two-faced nature of the corporate culture is most clearly evident - the simultaneous maintenance of stability and change.

One of the most studied aspects of corporate culture is its impact on competitiveness (Dimitrova, 2012; Sackmann, 2011; Boyce et al., 2015)

Several studies emphasize the relationship between culture and organizational learning with the organization's overall performance in the environment in which it conducts its business activities (Ahmed & Shafiq, 2014; Gochhayat et al., 2017).

Corporate culture is directly related to innovation in the organization because in its domain is the motivation of employees, which is also essential for promoting their efforts related to the generation and introduction of innovations. In the research literature, the results of theoretical and empirical studies are presented, which highlight strong evidence for the presence of a positive relationship between corporate culture and company innovativeness (Deshpande, Farley, & Webster, 1993; Hernández-Mogollón, Cepeda-Carrión, Cegarra-Navarro, & Leal-Millan, 2010; Dimitrova, 2018; Martínez-Martínez et al., 2021). In this case, corporate culture is seen as mainly supporting the speed and flexibility of innovation processes.

Our research focuses on small and medium-sized enterprises that must manage an adaptive corporate culture promoting innovation. By presumption, they are characterized as non-resistant to change, risk-taking, and tolerant of uncertainty. Some studies focus on the influence of the innovation culture on enterprises' competitiveness. (Brettel & Cleven, 2011; Martín-de Castro et al., 2013).

An essential manifestation of the corporate culture is the culture of innovation. Indeed, an innovation-supporting culture supports the motivation and sustainability of the interactive process of sharing the knowledge, skills, and technologies necessary for successful innovation. The empowerment of employees in the organization through open communication and sharing of information, their participation in decision-making, shared vision, and common goals are essential elements of the process supporting innovation in the organization (Ahmed, 1998). A corporate culture that supports innovation in the organization should be sensitive in understanding innovation as an integral part of the constant change; innovation must be embedded in its "invisible levels" – the basic assumptions and values. As a result, innovative behaviour results from organizational norms that support exchanging information about changed approaches to "doing things" in organizational reality (Dimitrova, 2018).

2.5. Organizational knowledge and organizational learning

Organizational knowledge helps to increase the competitive performance of the organization. It is embodied in the various components of the firm - its employees, the corporate culture, policies, systems, and documents created by formal communication (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Organizational knowledge is tacit and explicit (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1985).

Knowledge management and the capability-based approach enrich the resource-based theory by postulating that knowledge is an essential resource that supports the creation of new value and competitive advantage (Kogut & Zander, 2003). Organizational learning and knowledge management are interrelated (Mundra et al., 2011). The interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge is the mechanism that links individual and organizational learning. Through dialogues, debates, discussions, and sharing of experiences, personal knowledge is transformed at a group and organizational level. This process supports the creation of networks of knowledge through which the different levels of the organization are overcome, as well as its boundaries, however contingent they may be in different contexts. Interactions between organizations managing a specific culture are essential resources for organizational learning and innovation. Organizational learning has a vital role in the successful existence of the organization in a highly competitive, uncertain and dynamic business environment and affects the overall competitive performance. Empirical research has proven the latter (Nafei, 2015; Shurafa & Mohamed, 2016). Various studies reveal the positive correlation between organizational learning and innovation (Calantone et al., 2002; Tushman & Nadler, 1986). Therefore, the internalization of organizational learning must become an element of the corporate culture.

All organizational constructs are related to the requirement for transparent, professionally planned and implemented communication. It should be multidirectional, the best being diagonal, using various media and channels. The success of innovation requires both the dissemination of sufficient and relevant information and the creation and implementation of mechanisms to minimize misunderstanding, resolve conflicts, and improve opportunities for effective decision-making.

Innovation endeavours are increasingly closely related to open innovation, where firms engage in continuous dialogues and debates in which new ideas are generated from internal and external sources, i.e. the various stakeholder groups – employees, customers, and suppliers, are included in the value co-creation processes. Social media is an excellent example of realizing the above.

2.6. Organizational change

One of the main questions related to change is how it affects organizational performance. Change is essential to innovation, although only some changes can be associated with innovation. The complexity of change stems from the multi-layered nature of corporate culture. Its scales differ - from small, gradual, incremental to more enormous transformations. Incremental changes solidify improvements. They are constant, develop over time and lead to the generation of positives for the organization (Weick & Quinn, 1999). This type of change is embodied in the organization's management practices, can happen independently in one or another of its departments, and it is possible to bring the organization to a new level of competitiveness by implementing significant changes. To a large extent, this type of change provides organizational sustainability. For this purpose, the presence and appropriate management of the corporate culture is necessary, which implies adopting the

idea of constant change, ensuring creativity and innovation, which supports the organization's competitiveness in existing and new markets.

We can conclude that organizations constantly strive to adapt to the changing environment (Ackoff, 2006; Kotter, 2012). They are changing to respond to changing markets and the shift in focus from tangible resources to innovation, knowledge management and human capital development (Dess & Picken, 2000).

Organizational leaders have a significant role in legitimizing change and encouraging corporate members to perceive it as positive (Kotter, 2012). They can be considered facilitators of implementing the change, but its implementation is practically only possible with its acceptance by the organization's members.

Innovation is associated with risk. Therefore, top management and organizational members must embrace it. They must be prepared to take risks and see mistakes and failures as opportunities to learn and grow. Uncertainty regarding innovation must be reduced by conducting research, providing the necessary information, and communicating potential opportunities and threats. Transparent communication with employees facilitates the implementation of change (Van Ruler., 2015). Messages related to the communication of change must help establish connections between its essence, the people and the processes at the heart of successful change.

Change management is the process of making it part of the corporate culture. Organizational learning is an essential component of change, and knowledge sharing supports competitive capabilities and contributes to enhanced competitive performance. In the conditions of constancy of change, corporate culture is of critical importance because despite the complexity of the construct, implying the simultaneous preservation of stability and orientation to change, it supports the organization's adaptation and turns it into values and norms (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). According to Weick and Quinn (1999), change never starts because it never stops.

3. Empirical Study

The sample is based on the number of companies implementing innovations in Bulgaria. Data is according to the National Statistical Institute.

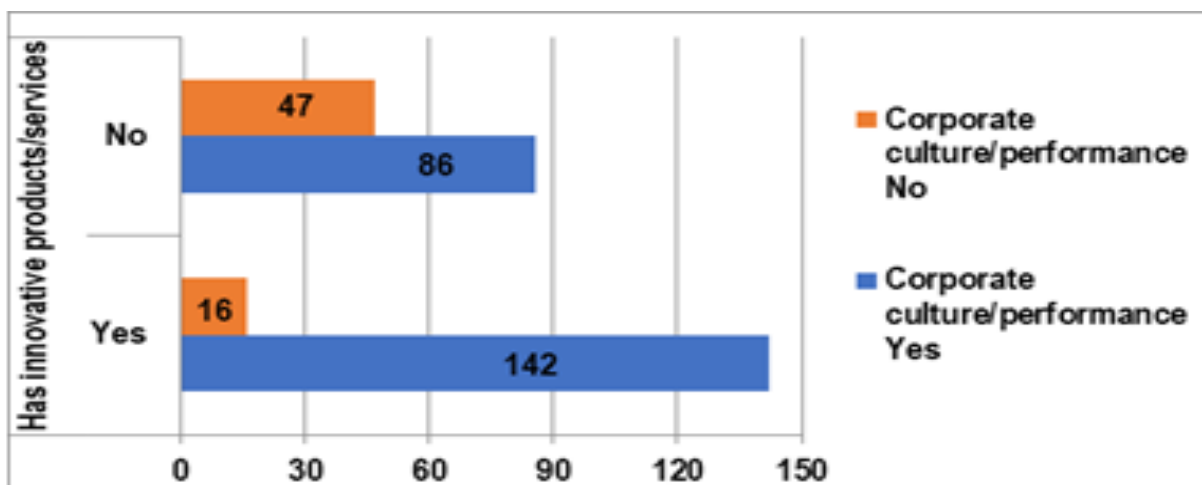
The profile of the surveyed companies is as follows: the number of respondents - 300 companies, and the owners and managers of the companies were interviewed. The closed-question survey is pre-prepared by the author. The survey was conducted in the period March-April 2020. The size of the companies is determined according to the European classification. The micro enterprises (up to 10 people) - one hundred fifty-nine respondents, small (10-49 people) - ninety-two, medium (50-249) - thirty-two, and large (over 250 employees) - five. The twelve respondents still need to answer which group the company belonged. From the demographic profile, the respondents in the survey are mainly representatives of small and

medium enterprises. By field of activity: twenty-three of the respondents in the survey are employed in trade, sixty-seven companies in manufacturing, ninety in the services sector, fifty in the light and processing industries, fourteen in mechanical engineering, seven in energy, seven in science and education - nine. Twenty-seven of the participants in the survey represented the IT sector. Fourteen of the respondents are engaged in construction, design, and engineering. Thirty-four have applied for other economic activity. In the Bulgarian business reality context, micro and small companies predominate.

Through the presented results, we visualize the relationship between the understanding of the positive influence of corporate culture on the competitiveness of companies and the study of the relationship with the creation and introduction of innovative products and services, with the investments made in tangible and intangible resources. The relationship between corporate culture, competitiveness and the internal communication system's motivating effect on employees' innovative attitudes and the tendency to maintain relationships with customers and partners is investigated. The motivation-communication and partnership relations are also examined through the lens of the innovative products and services introduced by the respondent companies.

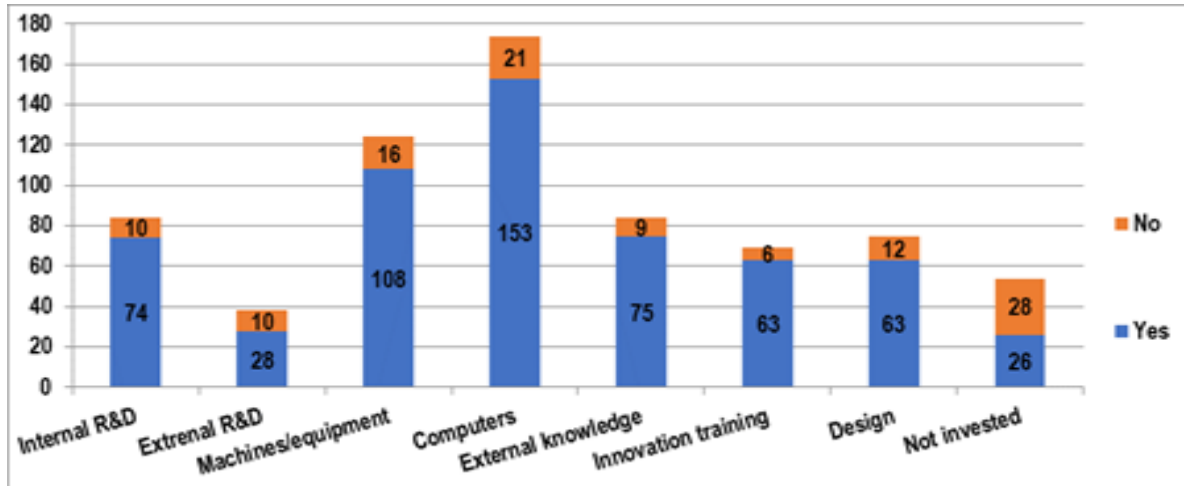
Understanding the positive influence of corporate culture on companies' competitiveness is permanent among Bulgarian businesses, and it has been empirically proven in the author's previous studies (Dimitrova, 2012; 2017). A necessary clarification is that understanding the essence of the corporate culture in all the layers of the construct was not sought, but only its effect on the increase of the companies' competitive advantages. The results of the empirical research considered in this report confirm the understanding of the positive relationship between corporate culture – and competitive performance.

Figure 1. Corporate culture-performance/Has innovative products and services?



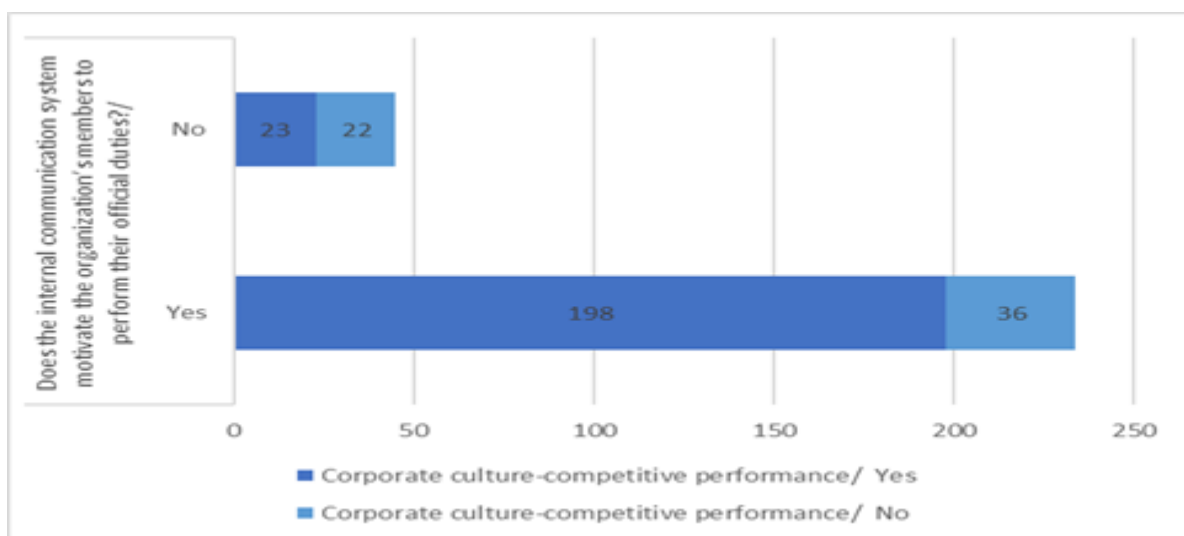
From the results presented, it is clear that the respondents who perceive the corporate culture's positive influence on the company's competitiveness are more inclined to introduce innovative products and services to the market.

Figure 2 In the last three years, has your company invested in: /Corporate culture-competitive performance.



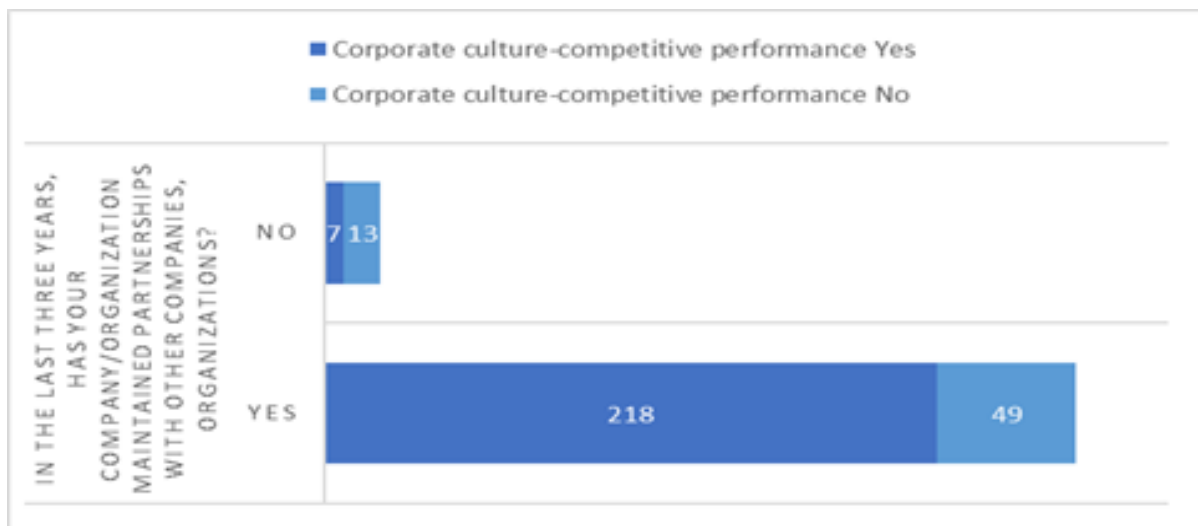
Overwhelmingly, survey respondents invest in visible resources – computers and modern equipment. A significant part of them also invests in intangible resources - acquisition of external knowledge and internal scientific and development activities. Not a few companies also invest in increasing the innovation capacity of their employees through training. The emphasis on investment in external research and development is even weaker. The principal investments related to innovation are implemented by those who positively evaluate the impact of corporate culture on the competitiveness of companies. However, we emphasize that their overwhelming part is in material resources.

Figure 3 Corporate culture-competitive performance / Does the internal communication system motivate the organization’s members to perform their official duties?



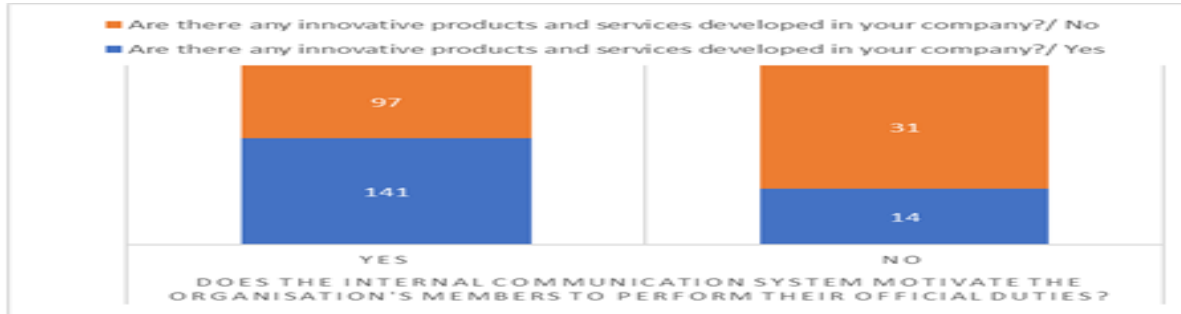
An organization's culture and communications are interrelated and mutually determined. One of the main goals of internal communications is to motivate employees to perform their daily duties and, as we saw from the literature review - to explain the opportunities and risks in implementing innovations and to motivate perception and action in the direction of their realization. For communications to be maximally effective, it is necessary to manage a corporate culture that encourages the innovative efforts of organizational members. It is clear from the figure that the respondents who are aware of the positive nature of the relationship between corporate culture – and competitiveness also understand the motivating effect of internal communications on employees' attitudes.

Figure 4 Corporate culture-competitive performance/ In the last three years, has your company/organization/ maintained partnerships with other companies, organizations?



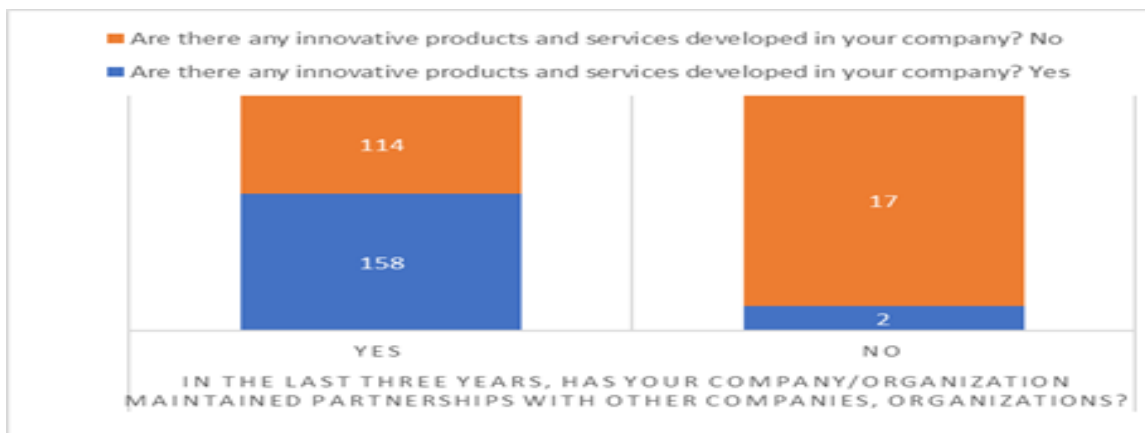
Establishing and maintaining relationships with external stakeholder groups is critical in value co-creation. Respondents who perceive the positive effect of corporate culture on the company's competitive advantages maintain partnerships with diverse stakeholder groups to a much greater extent.

Figure 5 Are there any innovative products and services developed in your company? / Does the internal communication system motivate the organization's members to perform their official duties?



Companies that create and market innovative products and services are more likely to confirm the motivating effect that internal communication has on innovation.

Figure 6 Are there any innovative products and services developed in your company? /In the last three years, has your company/organization/ maintained partnerships with other companies, organizations?



Logically, those bringing innovative products and services to market will likely establish and maintain partnerships with other organizations and stakeholder groups.

4. Discussion

As a result of the results of the empirical research, we can draw several main conclusions, based on which we can derive recommendations for developing Bulgarian companies in the context of sustainability when applying good practices.

We observe a lasting understanding among Bulgarian businesses of the positive nature of the connection between corporate culture and competitive performance.

The internal communication system motivates employees to fulfil their duties among most respondents. The two trends mentioned above are permanent, and the results of previous empirical studies confirm that (Димитрова, 2012, 2013, 2017).

Companies are oriented towards maintaining relationships with other organizations and stakeholder groups to exchange knowledge and feedback regarding the characteristics of offered and newly introduced products and services and search for solutions to various problems. What has been said implies an effective communication policy towards external stakeholders, proven in an empirical study (Dimitrova, 2020). In the context of integrated communications, messages of a consistent nature must be sent inside and outside the conventional boundaries of the organization; accordingly, here, we do not observe an imbalance in the implemented communication policies and practices.

Small and medium-sized enterprises dominate the Bulgarian business reality. The size of the companies is essential for implementing innovations and their management (Dimitrova, year). The advantages of small and medium-sized enterprises are found in their adaptability and flexibility in faster decision-making procedures. However, at the same time, they are also resource-limited against the background of large companies. A similar organizational structure facilitates the processes and contributes to implementing innovations. At the same time, they must manage a corporate culture and the corresponding communication policy that supports building and maintaining networks with partners to share knowledge and ideas and overcome resource constraints. We must remember that SMEs are diverse in their characteristics – those engaged in commerce offer different innovative products and services compared to high-tech start-ups. The opportunities to attract investment, the capital held, and the nature of the partnerships built also differ depending on the size, sector, products and services offered.

The Bulgarian business must realize that investment in intangible resources is essential from the point of view of overcoming resource limitations. By acquiring results from external scientific and development activities, external knowledge will enrich their opportunities for increasing innovation performance and competitiveness. Companies capable of developing, managing and transferring knowledge achieve and maintain sustainable long-term competitive advantage. To the greatest extent, leveraging knowledge within the organization increases the capacity to innovate by sharing knowledge and information between organizational members and external stakeholders. Creating and participating in networks with diverse organizations - business, educational, research, and Third Sector organizations - provides opportunities to expand the scope of knowledge and its management, facilitate organisational learning processes and unlearn, supporting faster rejection of outdated practices. Learning and experimentation are essential to building the organization's future because it is unpredictable (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997).

Companies need to manage a culture of innovation that supports their competitiveness through the generation and introduction of such. We live in the conditions of Industry 4.0. Our slogan, "Innovate or die", should be imperative for any company that strives for success

in a business environment characterized by high uncertainty and turbulence. Implementing and managing a culture of innovation helps organizations and their members perceive the constant nature of change and carry out their business activities through it. Organizations must change to stay the same. Understanding the above by the top management of the companies is essential.

5. Limitations of the Study

In the present study, we do not consider how the external and internal communications of the respondent organizations are carried out, but only their reflection in the context of the relationship between corporate culture and competitiveness, as well as in the light of investments related to innovation and the offered innovative products and services. It is important to emphasize that when researching the nature of the relationship between corporate culture - competitiveness, the understanding of the essence of the corporate culture construct is not sought, but only the aspect of its influence. Additional, full-fledged recommendations for Bulgarian businesses can be provided.

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