

THE STRATEGIC BEHAVIOUR OF THE FIRM IN A TRANSITIONAL ECONOMY: CASE OF THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR IN TUNISIA

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—Abstract—

This research work proposes to analyze the choice of strategic behaviour for companies operating in countries with an economy in transition. The conceptual part was devoted to determine the main characteristics of a transitional economy able to have an influence on the choice of the strategic behaviour. The conceptual study was dedicated, also, to the synthesis of the main explanatory variables of strategic behaviour. The empirical analysis, conducted with a sample of industrial enterprises operating in Tunisia, showed that the quest for competitiveness progress is the main transitional countries' characteristic that influences the strategic behaviour of the industrial firm. The empirical analysis revealed the importance of the influence of the business environment and the managerial activity, respectively, on the innovative and follower behaviours. In general, the intelligence strategy was considered, by the managers, as the most appropriate behaviour in a country living a transitional context like Tunisia.

Key Words: *Strategic behaviour, Transitional economies, Managerial activity, Business environment, Industrial sector.*

JEL Classification: M10, M20, M21, L20, P20.

1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of the enterprise in its environment, its strategic position, the improvement of its performance, the quality of its relationship with the stakeholders and the valorization of its distinctive competencies are dependent on strategic behaviour adopted. The choice of strategic behaviour is more problematic when companies operate in a context of transition marked by uncertainty in the economic outlook, societal changes, legal reforms, gradual empowerment of business actors and the development of a culture of change. This research work aims to answer the following question: what is the impact of the characteristics of an economy in transition on the choice of strategic behaviour? The conceptual study will aim to determine the characteristics of an economy in

transition, to propose explanatory variables and a typology of possible strategic behaviours for a firm operating in a context of transition. The empirical analysis will assess the relative importance of the impact of the characteristics of the context in transition and the influence of the explanatory variables on the choice of strategic behaviour.

2. THE CONTEXT OF CHOICE OF THE STRATEGIC BEHAVIOUR: THE TRANSITIONAL ECONOMY

Transition economies aspire to abandon the image of “underdeveloped” or “developing” countries and to position themselves as “emerging” economies to be integrated into the world economic system, to assert their competitive advantage for wealth creation (Barthélemy and Varoudakis, 1996; Desgardins and Lemaire, 1997:269-276; Kortas et al., 2004; Boutin and Gaston-Breton, 2006). Attaining the status of emerging countries is a sign of economic dynamism, a high growth potential, competitiveness and attractiveness to investors (Bouchet, 2005:271; Cavusgil et al., 2007). At the market (M) level, the transition is manifested by the recognition of the limits of an operator state interventionist, planner, centralized, protectionist (Baverez, 1998:13; Sgard, 2008) and the evolution towards an arbitrator state guarantor of the interests involved and the efficient functioning of the market; transition economies are characterized by the development of industrialization, the domination of small and medium enterprises, the offer of attractive human resources in terms of skills and salaries, the promotion of foreign investment, the assimilation of technology transfer, the progress in infrastructure, the liberalization of sectors (through privatization and increased competition) and opening to the outside markets (Desgardins and Lemaire, 1997:269-276; Assoé et al., 1999:13; Boutin and Gaston-Breton, 2006; Andreff, 2007; Cavusgil et al., 2007; Sgard, 2008). Concerning laws, rules and legal framework (LR), the transition can be observed by institutional reforms in order to: harmonize the legal and regulatory framework with international standards and requirements of globalization (Sgard, 2008), regulate gradually opened and liberalized markets in order to promote fair competition, establish a transparent business environment for policy makers, secure transactions, encourage entrepreneurship, protect property, facilitate access to finance, set an incentive fiscal and administrative framework to promote investment and international trade (Assoé et al., 1999:13), improve the quality of the action of public administration and create a participatory and democratic functioning of institutions. The social and cultural (SC) transitions are realized, through, a period of change characterized by the emergence of new norms, values and practices, the abandonment of the culture of support and submission, the quest for greater transparency, the need for

recognition of merit, the call for accountability of decision-makers, the will of participation and involvement in collective decisions and the aspiration for freedom of speech and initiative. Countries in transition are exposed to a variety of cultural influences with information and communication technology and the establishment of foreign companies in the domestic market, resulting in a tension between the universal values promoted by globalization and local culture (Pras, 2006). Transition countries tend toward collectivism with a strong sense of belonging and national pride (Boutin and Gaston-Breton, 2006:6) that can come up against interventionism of international institutions that impose their conditions in return of their support. The study of the “Business Environment” (BE) leads to consider two hypotheses. The first hypothesis (H₁) considers that the business environment determines (exerts a decisive impact or influence decisively) the choice of the strategic behaviour; according to the second hypothesis (H₂), the components of the business environment (market, Laws and rules, social culture) influence differently the choice of strategic behaviour. The analysis made of the components of business environment in a transitional context allows proposing several economic characteristics that can influence the choice of strategic behaviour (Table 1).

Table 1: The main characteristics of the economies in transition that may have an impact on the choice of the strategic behaviour of firms

Characteristics	Importance of the proposed characteristics and scope of their evolution
<i>The Potential for Wealth Creation (PWC)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Searching for a sustained growth through market potential. ● Improving living standards of the population. ● Revitalization of the economic cycle: production, consumption and income.
<i>The Improvement of Infrastructure (II)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establishment of favourable conditions for investment, entrepreneurship, firm development and business performance. ● Logistical support to the activities of economic agents. ● Facilitate the implementation and access to resources. ● Reduce costs of exploitation.
<i>The Capitalization of Knowledge (CK)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assimilation of progress and best practices through benchmarking. ● Encouraging research and development. ● Improvement of qualifications, skills and expertise of human resources. ● Development of the use of information and communication technologies.
<i>The Industrialization Development (ID)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contribution of technology transfer through foreign direct investment. ● Modernization of production equipment. ● Productivity improvement. ● Engagement in generating value-added activities.
<i>The Quest for Competitiveness Progress (QCP)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ability to confront local and foreign competition. ● Opening the domestic market to foreign competition. ● Liberalization of market mechanisms. ● Incentive regulatory reforms.

The transition economies are also facing difficulties and uncertainties in this intermediate phase; it's also the case of the revolution context that implies a radical break with existing systems, institutional reforms and restructuring, a need to enrol in a long-term perspective (Haddar and Moisseron, 2012). The evolution towards the market economy can lead to disparities in regional development, the strengthening of social inequality, the accentuation of the insecurities associated with job flexibility and a lack of confidence on the part of investors due to the perceived uncertainty related to several causes: the macroeconomic situation, the pace of change (Assoé et al., 1999:13), the lack of transparency (Bouchet, 2005:271; Cavusgil et al., 2007), the insufficient protection of intellectual property (Cavusgil et al., 2007), the instability and structural deficiencies of governing institutions (Bouchet, 2005:271), the acuity of illegal practices and corruption observed (Kortas et al., 2004) and financial risks due to the vulnerability of the banking sector (Boutin and Gaston-Breton, 2006). The improvement of infrastructure may not be mastered and non-accordant with the requirements of sustainable development. The quest for knowledge may encounter difficulties and delays in the process of adapting the education system to the needs of the private sector. The development of industrialization should not be based only on the exploitation of natural resources at the expense of innovation, the use of sophisticated management techniques, the implantation of activities with high added value and requirements for sustainable development. The improvement of competitiveness risk to be focused on strategies of cost domination instead of enhance the quality of products, the lack of regulation of the market limits the approach to the creation of a competitive environment. Finally, the quality of legislative reforms may clash with political differences sources of stagnation and blockages. This analysis of the "Characteristics of a Transitional Economy" (CTE) leads to consider two main hypotheses. The first hypothesis (H_3) considers that characteristics of a transitional economy determines the choice of the strategic behaviour; according to the second hypothesis (H_4), the characteristics of a transitional economy influence differently the choice of the strategic behaviour.

3. THE MANAGERIAL ACTIVITY IN A TRANSITIONAL CONTEXT

The advisability and feasibility of the proposed strategic behaviour involves consideration of the potentialities and constraints of the components of the managerial activity of the company: the "Corporate Culture", the "Operational Setting" and the "Assessment Model". Several managerial trends can be identified in order to enable companies to develop favourably in a context of transition and be prepared to operate in a competitive business environment (Table 2).

Table 2: Managerial activity trends in a transitional economy

Components	Managerial trends
<i>Corporate Culture (CC)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish more transparency and regularity in management practices to create a climate of trust with stakeholders. • Instil management culture based on change, initiative and decision-making autonomy.
<i>Operational Setting (OS)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions negotiated between the leader and subordinates. • Gradual empowerment of decision makers. • Vigilance towards a more efficient use of resources. • Benchmarking with firms operating in developed countries.
<i>Assessment Model (AM)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primacy of income and results compared to the compliance with the procedure. • Ability to enrol in the change and take calculated risks.

This trends in the “Managerial Activity” (MA) lead to consider two hypotheses: the first hypothesis (H₅) considers that the components of the managerial activity determines the choice of the strategic behaviour and the second hypothesis (H₆) provides that the components of the managerial influence differently the choice of the strategic behaviour.

4. THE EXPLANATORY VARIABLES OF THE STRATEGIC BEHAVIOUR

The behaviour is a response to internal or outside requests (Louart, 1999:155-156), an action expressed by an individual or a group of individuals recognized by others; the behaviour is an attitude, a state of mind that leads to react in a certain way facing a well-defined context (Alexandre-Bailly et al., 2006). The attitude reflects a personal appreciation that results from the personality, identity and perception of the situation (Robbins et al., 2006:81-91). The strategic behaviour of the company concerns the couple « product/market » (Ansoff, 1968), aims to influence the market situation to increase its profits (Carlton and Perloff, 1998), to improve its competitive position (Tarondeau and Huttin, 2001:61). In strategic thought several models have been adopted to guide thinking to choose a strategic behaviour such as: 1) the "SWOT" model (Learned et al., 1969) based on an internal (Strength and Weakness) and external (Opportunity and Threat) evaluation of the firm’s situation; 2) Porter's model (1982) based on the bargaining power of actors in the immediate environment of the company; 3) the Boston Consulting Group’s matrix (1980) based on the average annual growth rate of the strategic segment analyzed and the relative market share of the company; 4) the McKinsey’s matrix which considers the attraction of the sector and the position of the company; 5) the Arthur D. Little’s matrix based on the life cycle of the industry showing the attractiveness of a business sector and the

competitive position of the company in its sector; 6) the “seven S” model (Peters and Waterman, 1983) considers that the “strategic choice” depends on several variables : the “structure” established, the “system” in place, the management “style”, the “skill” capitalized, the profile of “staff” and the “shared values”. The review of the various models of strategic thought leads to propose three main explanatory variables of the choice of strategic behaviour: the personal vision of the decision maker (PVD), the references of its membership group (RMG) and the imperatives of practicing his managerial activity (IPMA). The personal vision of the decision maker reflects his individual preferences, the objectives he hopes to achieve (Boudon et al., 1996:22), the perceptions resulting from sensory impressions (Robbins and DeCenzo, 2004:326-332), the requirements that translate a feeling of a lack (Boudon et al., 1996:27) and beliefs that generate accession and considered to be true without scientific justification (Boudon et al., 1996:59-60). The personality of the decision maker is one of the main determinants of the managerial behaviour; it is the result of education, interactions in family and in social backgrounds, religious beliefs and experiences (Alexandre-Bailly et al., 2006). The references of membership group determine the normative behaviour to be followed by the decision maker. Boudon et al. (1996:110) define the reference group as: *"the group whose attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and values are adopted as standards by an individual when he defines a situation evaluates and decides to act"*. The group influences the behaviour of the individual wishing to be incorporate by exerting on him pressure for conformity. Integration in a group implies interdependence and coherence among its members (Boudon et al., 1996:59-60), through, shared beliefs, common practices and community of purpose. The imperatives of practicing managerial activity are the conditions in which the choice of the strategic behaviour is made. The Manager must deal with the principles, potentialities and constraints relating to the internal management of the company (corporate culture, available resources, working methods, organizational structure, mode of exercising power and accountability) and the situation in the business environment in which the company operates (business ethics, regulations in force, economic situation, societal culture). These imperatives determine the opportunity and feasibility of the envisaged strategic behaviour. The proposal of the explanatory variables of the choice of strategic behaviour leads to state three main hypotheses: the first hypothesis (H₇) considers that the explanatory variables determine the choice of the strategic behaviour; the second hypothesis (H₈) envisages that the explanatory variables influence differently the choice of the strategic behaviour. The third hypothesis (H₉) provides that each explanatory variable can determine totally the choice of strategic behaviour; this assumption implies three sub-hypotheses: according to

the first sub-hypothesis (H_{9,1}) the personal vision of the decision maker determines totally the strategic behaviour; the second sub-hypothesis (H_{9,2}) envisages that the references of membership group determine totally the strategic behaviour; the third sub-hypothesis (H_{9,3}) considers that the imperatives of practicing managerial activity determines totally the strategic behaviour.

5. THE TYPOLOGIES OF STRATEGIC BEHAVIOURS

Snow and Miles (1978:29) determine four main strategic behaviours: the "prospector", the "analyzer", the "defender" and the "reactor". The behaviour of "prospector" involves finding opportunities by innovation in order to create a competitive advantage and favour the development of the firm. The "analyzer" behaviour is based on moderate changes and competitive intelligence in order to follow (or imitate) the best business practices; this behaviour combines between operate in stable markets (with priority to efficiency) and engage in dynamic activities (with priority to innovation). The "defender" behaviour aims to stabilize a favourable situation in order to protect and preserve the position of the firm in its actual market. The "reactor" behaviour implies a contingent and emergent conduct in order give an immediate response to the environment conditions and to the changes observed. Martinet and Ribault (1989) propose the "strategic intelligence" based on the environment listening and the collection of information (Tarondeau and Huttin, 2001:234). Oliver (1991:151-152) identifies several possible strategic behaviours (*with their related tactics*): "acquiescence" ("*habit, Imitate, Comply*"), "compromise" ("*Balance, Pacify, Bargain*"), "avoidance" ("*Conceal, Buffer, Escape*"), "defiance" ("*Dismiss, Challenge, Attack*") and "manipulation" ("*Co-opt, Influence, Control*"). Carlton and Perloff (1998) distinguish between two kinds of strategic behaviour: the "non-cooperative" behaviour (each company is focused on maximizing its profit and improving its position) and the "cooperative" behaviour (resource sharing, common purpose, increase the benefit of the business sector, coordinating actions and restriction of competition). Based on the work of Koenig (1993), Tarondeau and Huttin (2001:6) mention the "confrontation" for companies to improve their competitive position and "avoidance" by differentiation and niche strategy; they also evoke other strategic behaviours (Tarondeau and Huttin, 2001:6) such as: the "cooperation" based on the sharing of resources to pursue a common purpose, the "coopetition" involving collaboration between competitors (this behaviour is positioned between cooperation and confrontation) and the "agreement" (Chamberlin, 1933) by arrangements and coordinated actions on prices, production and distribution (this behaviour is positioned between cooperation and avoidance). Chaher (2002:396-400) relies on the adaptive capacity and the power

of influence to distinguish between the “proactive” behaviour (high adaptability and influence), the “offensive” behaviour (low adaptation and high influence through innovation, skills development and strategies for aggressive penetration), the “defensive” behaviour (limited power of influence and strong adaptability) or the “passive” behaviour (limited adaptability and influence). The synthesis of these typologies brings to retain three main strategic behaviours in a context in transition: the “follower”, the “innovative” and the “contingent” behaviours (This typology is based on the ability of an organization to have the initiative, or not, in its relation with its environment). The behaviour of "follower" is an emergent behaviour based on acquiescence, acceptance of the situation, adaptation to the changing environment and imitation practices observed in the business sector; the objective is to be maintained and to avoid being outdated. The "innovative" behaviour is a purposeful behaviour based on initiative, leadership, creativity and proposal of differential elements, the goal is to stay ahead of the competition and creating a sustainable distinctive advantage. The “contingent” (hybrid or combined) behaviour is depending on the circumstances and combines an attitude of follower or innovator; the objective is to promote flexibility or responsiveness.

6. THE ANALYSIS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESULTS: THE TEST AND THE VALIDATION OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

6.1. The empirical methodology

The survey carried (January-March 2013) has targeted a sample of 51 companies operating in the industrial sector in Tunisia with a workforce greater than or equal to 400 individuals. The survey targeted the entire population of this type of enterprise that is 64 companies according to data from the Agency for Promotion of Industry and Innovation (2013); so the response rate is 79.68%; which favours the representativeness of empirical results. The pre-tested questionnaire was administered in a face to face meeting with leaders in charge of strategic decisions. Consequently, the empirical results will be impregnated with a degree of subjectivity associated with the background, the preferences and the opinions of leaders interviewed.

6.2. The validation of the proposed items

The results of the Cronbach’s alpha (Table 3) demonstrate the reliability of the measurement scale (Likert scale with five levels of evaluation) and confirm the internal coherence between items proposed for the characteristics of a transitional economy and the different types of strategic behaviour.

Table 3: The validation of the retained items in the research proposal

Extracted factor	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Total Variance Explained, Extraction sums of squared loadings (without varimax method)		items' Quality of representation
			Tot	% of variance = cumulative %	
Characteristics of a Transitional Economy (CTE)	0,824	0,766	2,979	59,583	ID: 0,818 / CK: 0,661 / II: 0,611 / QCP:0,575 / PWC: 0,314
Innovative Behaviour (IB)	0,8265	0,706	2,233	74,427	PVD: 0,797 / IPMA: 0,737 / RMG: 0,699
Follower Behaviour (FB)	0,794	0,694	2,126	70,878	IPMA: 0,747 / PVD: 0,740 / RMG: 0,639
Contingent Behaviour (CB)	0,8195	0,680	2,205	73,485	PVD: 0,800 / IPMA: 0,786/ RMG: 0,618
Business Environment (BE)	0,8241	0,600	2,267	75,583	LR: 0,888 / SC: 0,709 / M: 0,671
Managerial Activity (MA)	0,8053	0,699	2,187	72,897	CC: 0,786 / AM: 0,718 / OS: 0,683

The values of the KMO index (sampling adequacy), the results of the Bartlett's test of sphericity (significant in every analysis) and the extraction of one factor after all the applications of the principal component analysis (Table 3) validate all the proposed items (CTE, IB, FB, CB, BE, MA) and confirm the unidimensionality of the retained variables.

6.3 The impact of the transitional context on the strategic behaviour

The results of simple linear regressions confirm that the characteristics of the economies in transition have decisive and differential impacts (validation of H₃ and H₄) on the choice of the three types of retained strategic behaviours (Table 4).

Table 4: The impact of the characteristics of a transitional economy on the strategic behaviour (synthesis of the significant resulting model; sig. = 0,000)

Type of behaviour	The evaluation of influence : Standardized coefficients	Adjusted R Square
Innovative Behaviour =	0,770*CTE + 2,109 E-16	0,593
Follower Behaviour =	0,776*CTE – 2,71 E-17	0,602
Contingent Behaviour =	0,767*CTE + 2,324 E-18	0,588

The results of multiple linear regressions (stepwise method) showed that the choice of innovative behaviour and contingent behaviour are the result of the combined influence of the business environment (in 1st position) and the managerial activity (in 2nd position); the follower behaviour is conditioned, only, by the managerial activity (Table 5). These results validate the determinant and the differentiated influence of the business environment and the managerial

activity on the strategic behaviour (confirmation of H₁, H₂, H₅ and H₆ for IB and CB; concerning FB, H₅ and H₆ are confirmed, but H₁ and H₂ are rejected)

Table 5: The relative importance of the business environment and the managerial activity in the choice of strategic behaviour (synthesis of the significant resulting models; sig. = 0,000)

Type of behaviour	The evaluation of influence : Standardized coefficients	Adjusted R Square
Innovative Behaviour =	0,399 * BE + 0,361 * MA + 4,236 E-16	0,519
Contingent Behaviour =	0,448 * BE + 0,330 * MA + 2,121 E-16	0,545
Follower Behaviour =	0,794 * MA + 2,487 E-16	0,630

The success of the company in a competitive environment involves creating differential to have a competitive advantage and the ability to respond depending on the opportunities and threats. The follower behaviour requires flexibility in the components, processes, methods, techniques adopted in the managerial activity.

6.4. The results of the descriptive analysis

The results of the survey show that the quest for competitiveness progress is the most determining characteristic for 50,98% business leaders operating in a context of transition (2nd position for capitalization of knowledge: 45,098%; 3rd position for industrialization development: 31,373%); the choice of strategic behaviour should allow the company to exploit the competitive advantages of their host market. Each characteristic of the economies in transition exerts a determinant and differentiated influence on the choice of every type of strategic behaviour (validation of H₃ and H₄); the potential for wealth creation (41,176%), the industrialization development (50,98%), the quest for competitiveness (52,941%) and the capitalization of knowledge (49%) exert their most determining influence on the choice of innovative behaviour; the improvement of infrastructure (33,33%) carries its higher determining impact on the choice of follower behaviour. Companies must contend with the available infrastructure, its operational constraints and its utilization standards while waiting for future improvements. Regarding the explanatory variables, the results show the determining and differential impact of each proposed variable on every kind of strategic behaviour (validation of H₇ and H₈; invalidation of H₉ with its three sub-hypotheses: H_{9,1}, H_{9,2} and H_{9,3}). The choice of the innovation behaviour is influenced importantly by the personal vision of the decision maker (important influence: 43%; determinant influence: 27%) and decisively by the references of membership group (determinant influence: 41%). The choice of follower behaviour is determined by the influence of the imperatives of practicing managerial activity (43%) and the personal vision of the decision maker (43%); the choice of contingent behaviour is conditioned in important manner by the

references of membership group (important influence: 61%; determinant influence: 24%) and the personal vision of the decision maker (important influence: 55%; determinant influence: 20%). The results of the survey show that the market determines (52,94%) the choice of strategic behaviour (2nd position for the law and the rules: 47,059%; 3rd position for the societal culture: 23,529%; H₁ and H₂ validated); the operational setting is the managerial component that has most determining influence (49,%) on the choice of the strategic behaviour (2nd position for the corporate culture: 39,216%; 3rd position for the assessment model: 35,294%; H₅ and H₆ validated). Leaders choose to behave according to the competitive situation, the market position, the evolution of demand needs, the opportunities to be seized and the threats to avoid. The intelligence (strategic monitoring) is the most approved strategic behaviour (70.588%) by the leaders in the context of transition because it promotes organizational flexibility, responsiveness to environment changes and innovation for differential creation in a branch of activity in constant renewal where technological progress is crucial.

7. CONCLUSION

This research work aimed to evaluate the impact of the characteristics of an economy in transition and the influence of the explanatory variables proposed on the choice of strategic behaviour; this impact has proven to be determinant but differential according to the analyzed item. The conceptual and the empirical analysis have shown that the choice of strategic behaviour is a combination of objective and subjective elements. The objective elements are related to the diagnosis of the position of the company on the market, the compliance with legal requirements, the balance of available resources, the evaluation criteria adopted. Subjective elements concern the societal and organizational culture; but also the aspirations, preferences, interests, expectations and flair of the decision maker. The strategic behaviour of firms in transition economies should be a follower behaviour based on intelligence, monitoring, benchmarking, assimilation and implementation of referential management techniques observed in developed countries; these assimilated practices are considered as innovations compared to outdated and obsolete methods practiced in the transition economies. This research can be deepened by the identification of the means of action available to companies, through, their strategic behaviour to influence their business climate.

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