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FIRM COMPETITIVENESS AND THE *FEASIBILITY FORMULA*™: THE NECESSARY ALIGNMENT OF STRATEGIC GOALS AND CONTEMPLATED PROJECTS

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Annotation

The success and failure of projects is an important consideration for a firm's competitiveness. Projects require resources, both human and capital, and represent an investment in the firm's success and resulting position within the marketplace.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ is a novel tool and accompanying methodology developed by the author for the purpose of contributing to both the firm and the project management profession in its ability to assess the alignment of a project with an organization's strategy, to inform the likelihood of the project outcome, and to support effective decision making. In ascertaining its effectiveness through an iterative methodology refinement and six case studies, the author is further able to establish a link between the utilization of the combined tool and methodology and its favourable impact on a firm's competitiveness.

This paper will examine the need for an effective pre-project feasibility tool and associated stakeholder engagement or facilitation methodology, and the extent to which the *Feasibility Formula*™ has a positive effect on an organization's competitiveness in the marketplace, irrespective of size of the firm, its position within the lifecycle, industry type or corporate culture. It will address competitiveness factors and the tool's support for strengthening core competencies, firm growth, proficiency of workers, speed of decision making and strategic alignment – culminating in a firm's competitive advantage.

KEY WORDS: project success, project failure, firm competitiveness, strategic alignment

Introduction

Competitiveness can be considered multidimensional, as it can be examined from a country, industry or firm level (Ambastha, Momaya, 2004). At the microeconomic firm level, competitiveness indicates a firm's ability to design, produce and market products superior to those offered by competitors, where dominance can be evaluated from several factors, such as price, quality, technological advancement, etc. Firm level analysis focuses on behaviours and the performance of firms (Depperu, Cerrato, 2005).

Competitiveness is important because a country's standard of living is increasingly dependent on the competitiveness of individual firms, which in turn take advantage of the opportunities presented by the international economy and provide substantial leverage for economic growth (Blunck, 2006). However, standards of living vary (Sen, 1988), and are dependent on government policies related to spending in a variety of areas including education, healthcare, defense, or social welfare (Dixit et al, 1997). The presence of corruption, or misuse of public power for private benefit, must also be considered an impact on the standard of living as it can impede human development (Akçay, 2006). In the context of competitiveness, this corruption will alter the contribution to the living standards of the local population.

Much has been written about the competitiveness of firms, from the earliest resource based theories of Schumpeter and Penrose, to the more contemporary theories of industry structure and competitive positioning (Porter, 1990), organizational capabilities and influences (Henderson, Mitchell, 1997) and strategic competitiveness (Grant, 1991; Ireland, Hitt, 2005).

There are many factors that play a role in the competitiveness of the firm, including the role of innovation and accompanying agility of the firm (Cantwell, 2005), and of course, customer loyalty as a result of favourable client experience, from initial engagement to post-sales service (Lam et al, 2004).

The concept of competitive advantage is central in strategic management studies (Porter, 1990; Ghemawat, 1998). Firms achieve sustained competitive advantages by implementing strategies that make use of internal strengths, and by responding to environmental opportunities while neutralizing external threats and avoiding internal weaknesses (Barney, 1991). Resource based views of competitive advantage, however, focus specifically on the link between a firm's internal characteristics and performance. Firm competencies and resources which are distinctive and superior relative to its rivals becomes the basis for competitive advantage (Peteraf, 1993). It is within this theoretical framework, emphasized by the firm's control over its strategic resources, that the author will examine the effectiveness of the *Feasibility Formula*™.

The *Feasibility Formula*™

The *Feasibility Formula*™ methodology and tool was developed to address an organizational problem that is often seen within the project management discipline and

professional community: firms do not make capital project decisions based on the favourable alignment of the contemplated project with organization's strategic goals. Most often, this lack of assessment or consideration for the extent of project alignment with the firm's objectives may preclude the project's likelihood for success from the outset.

Accordingly, this paper examines the problem and resulting need for an effective pre-project feasibility tool and accompanying stakeholder engagement, or facilitation, methodology.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ assists firms in identifying organizational goals and determining the extent to which a candidate project would satisfy these objectives, hence the likelihood of a successful project outcome. It offers an instrument and accompanying structured process that facilitates stakeholder engagement, discussion and decision making. The primary benefit of the tool is derivative of the consultative and interactive nature of the process itself, and its resulting analysis.

The foundational premise of the *Feasibility Formula*™ is that pre-project feasibility determination against an organization's objectives (i.e. "what's important" to the firm) is necessary to determine the viability of a project and its likelihood for success. The tool permits stakeholders to: engage in necessary and meaningful discussion; rate the project against organizational criteria; and make an informed decision as to whether they should proceed with the project given the extent of alignment and outcome of the exercise. The tool and methodology was created to enhance the likelihood of project success, hence corporate performance.

The due diligence and decision making methodology is supported by a visual scoring matrix that identifies individual criteria and permits stakeholders to weight the relative importance of each one. The final version of the tool presents eleven criteria, including: risk, stakeholder satisfaction, compliance, human resources and organizational maturity, etc., that appear common to most organizations, as validated through the research. The stakeholder participants "drill down" on each criteria to further define objectives, against which they will "negotiate" its merits to the organization, and the project's forecasted ability to satisfy, via a scoring system. The final aggregate score presented provides an indication of viability, but is only secondary in informing the likely outcome to the far more significant discussion that has taken place.

Characteristics of Firm Competitiveness

A number of characteristics of firm competitiveness can be found in the literature and in contemporary studies.

Findings from a recent European Competitiveness Report[1] (2014) indicate that as the EU emerges from the recession, one of its competitive strengths - highly skilled workers - remains intact. Within the report, this is seen as a key characteristic of competitiveness, along with important factors and drivers of firms' growth, such as the role of access to various forms of funding. In a separate research work, the realities of competition were further shown to demand focus on a firm's growth – including by acquisition (Ireland, Hitt, 2005).

Another important unit of analysis for understanding competitive advantage is the relationship between firms and potential sources of "inter-organizational competitive advantage" such as knowledge sharing (Dyer, Singh, 1998; Argote, Ingram, 2000). Operations strategy, which leverages a firm's unique operational resources, should emphasize the dynamic development and utilization of competencies and capabilities in order to set new business strategies and implement best practices more effectively in support of firm agility and competitiveness (Gagnon, 1999).

Effective decision making is also a factor of firm competitiveness. According to Wiig (2004), the firm is dependent on the value and sophistication of intellectual capital assets and on how well they are renewed and utilized in conducting work. Consequently, it is important to understand how people and organizations create and utilize knowledge and understanding (know-how) in their daily work lives to analyze situations and make decisions. Decision making practices have a great influence on the competitiveness of a firm (Maskell, Malmberg, 1999).

According to Koplyay and Goldsmith (1998), key characteristics of competitiveness include a firm's "scope" – core competencies and capabilities; "structure" – including decision flow; "speed" – response times to market; and "strategy" – strategic decision criteria. These elements, in combination, provide for enhanced competitive positioning of a firm.

The size of a firm – either micro, small, medium or large – and its industry sector, can be important determinants of firm competitiveness. The role of firm size in advancing business performance, particularly as measured by productivity or export performance is well established in the literature: it is the larger firms that are shown to be more effective in this regard, and are more likely to compete successfully in global markets (Altomonte, Navaretti et al, 2011). Nevertheless, other researchers have concluded that the size of the firm may only have marginal effect on an organization's competitiveness (Dunning, 1996). The research available, nonetheless, illustrates that firm level characteristics are critical in explaining competitiveness.

Corporate culture is also shown to be a factor in a firm's competitiveness, as it is the culture of an organization that determines its ability to react to challenge and to cope with change (Hall, 1993).

In summary, the author has identified from the literature several key characteristics of firm competitiveness to include:

- Competence and skill level of workforce and knowledge sharing
- Effective decision making
- Elements of scope, structure, speed and strategy
- Focus on growth (including by acquisition, access to funding)
- Size of firm, sector and culture

[1] European Commission, *Helping Firms Grow*, Commission Staff Working Document, SWD(2014) 6319 final, http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/industrial-competitiveness/competitiveness-analysis/index_en.htm

The *Feasibility Formula*™ and Firm Competitiveness

Project success and corporate success have been linked insofar as successful projects lead to improved firm competitiveness (Cooke-Davies, 2002). Firms are turning to project management as part of their competitive advantage strategies and are willing to take critical interest in those practices that will improve their competitive position (Jugdev, Thomas, 2002).

The *Feasibility Formula*™ tool and methodology, while developed for the project environment, addresses a number of competitiveness factors, providing support for a firm's competitive advantage.

Competence and skill level of workforce and knowledge sharing

Beginning with the competence and skill level of the workforce, the Project Management Institute (2014) indicates that today's project managers must not only possess leadership and technical competencies, but *strategic and business skills* (the "talent triangle"), in order to support an organization's strategic goals, improve competitiveness and overall performance.

The role of the project manager now bears responsibility for achieving an organization's goals and business results through project delivery. For the purpose of the author's research, capability is defined as an ability, competency or proficiency based on the culmination of skills garnered from education and experience. Capability was examined for the project manager and/or project team in using the *Feasibility Formula*™ - i.e. engaging stakeholders in the application of the tool and methodology and using the data obtained to facilitate discussion around indications of project success and failure, and decision making.

New skills and capabilities of project team members, once introduced to the tool and methodology, was assessed through interviews and discussion; a review of experience and background; and observation by the researcher. Regardless of whether the individual was a professional project manager, a functional specialist, or senior management member, the capability for using the *Feasibility Formula*™ existed.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ supports the development of project managers in fostering stakeholder engagement and facilitation skills, as well as business skills brought about through the use of the tool and exposure to defining organization strategy and objectives. The project manager and project team participants within each workshop were called upon to assess the methodology and tool, including such aspects as:

- The ease of the methodology
- The tool's contribution to the project
- Ways in which the *Feasibility Formula*™ could support the project manager and/or project team member role
- Ability of the project manager/team member to use the tool
- Ability of the project manager/team member to facilitate the process
- Consideration for training in the use of the tool and methodology
- Willingness of the project manager/team member to use the tool
- Applicability to the project manager/project team member's projects

Findings regarding the effectiveness of the tool and methodology in developing competencies and new skills of the project manager and other firm stakeholders concluded that the *Feasibility Formula*™ contributed in a number of areas:

- Expectations and perspectives of stakeholders are better understood
- Knowledge gained re insight into other functional areas, challenges and opportunities within the organization
- Consideration of organizational objectives brings clarity and focus
- Nurtures a stronger familiarization of "what's most important" to the organization
- Introduces consideration for a project's alignment with an organization's objectives
- Provides for substantial dissection of the project at a very detailed level
- Permits reflection on extended impact of project under consideration and other related projects
- Provides a learning experience through participation
- Facilitates skill development, knowledge sharing and enhanced competency levels overall

The effectiveness of the methodology was further measured through twenty-four formal evaluations completed by the participants of the six case studies. Findings confirmed the development of new skills and their continued confidence in the tool and the likelihood of the participant using the *Feasibility Formula*™ again, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

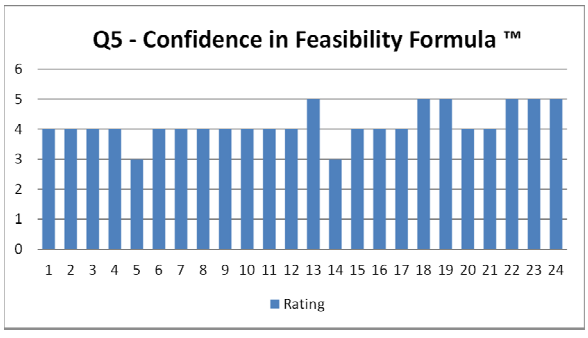

Fig. 1. Confidence in *Feasibility Formula*™

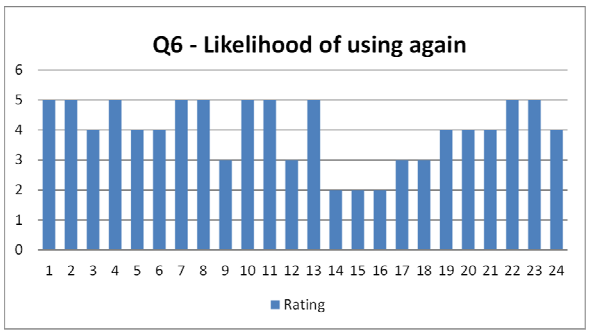

Fig. 2. Likelihood of using *Feasibility Formula*™ again

The project managers and/or project teams in all case studies exhibited new capabilities in using the tool and methodology, with augmented training and instruction on the necessary facilitation techniques. The *Feasibility Formula*™ therefore provides value to the project manager and team members, and to the firm, in the increased competency of its workforce, hence supporting the competitiveness of the firm.

Effective decision making

Williams and Samset (2010) recognized that front-end decision making in projects, in support of organizational objectives, is becoming increasingly important, including "the need for alignment between organizational strategy and the project concept". This alignment permits increased competitiveness through effective decision making and the resulting implementation of projects with a greater likelihood of success.

Two questions regarding decision making were posed in the research: i) *What are the characteristics of effective decision making in a pre-project environment?*; and ii) *Does the use of a pre-project methodology supported by a tool such as the Feasibility Formula™ increase the effectiveness of decision making?* The first question was answered through a comprehensive literature review, and the second question through action research and a comprehensive iterative methodology refinement.

Findings from the research illustrated that the majority of firms studied did not have a formal process in place, nor possess a tool and methodology by which to assess a project up front as to its alignment with organizational goals and its resulting viability. Decision making was not formally facilitated as there was an absence of stakeholder engagement around the decision making process in the organizations surveyed.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ was demonstrated as filling this need by the inherent nature of its methodology in engaging stakeholders and in facilitating the necessary decision making. Value was further brought to the organization via the tool's ability to support effective decision making by:

- Ensuring that the projects are fully assessed to ensure alignment with organizational goals
- Enabling the prioritization of projects among many under consideration
- Allowing for adjustments to project scope and other criteria in order to support increased likelihood of project success
- Supporting the timeliness of the stakeholder engagement sessions, the expediting of same, and the speed with which decisions are made
- Showing likely areas of risk to the organization and consideration for mitigation if the project is undertaken
- Permitting early project termination if applicable (avoiding loss of resources, time and money)
- Providing stakeholders with a view to those elements of a project which may need to be revisited along the lifecycle to ensure continued satisfaction of criteria
- Engaging stakeholders, fostering collaboration, supporting consensus building,

Stakeholders benefit directly from the *Feasibility Formula*™ tool and methodology during the engagement and decision making process as it provides an opportunity for stakeholders to:

- Express themselves and ensure their expectations are known
- Learn about the organization and other stakeholders' perspectives through the process itself
- Seek clarity related to the organization's strategy and objectives
- Become part of an integrated project team
- Enhance communication among team members
- Understand the expectations of others
- Contribute to the organization in a meaningful way
- Assess the project both within and outside of their functional area
- Be better informed, hence better contribute to effective and timely decision making

Decision makers within the organization benefit from having the necessary data and required stakeholder input in a timely manner to inform their decisions. They can further have greater confidence in the accuracy and speed of their decision as a result of the robust process and tool. The process itself supports the firm in its competitiveness, as the outcome is based on effective decisions that are well informed and well timed.

Elements of scope, structure, speed and strategy

Morris (2009) gives consideration to the strategy of the organization, and the importance of aligning projects in pursuit of this strategy. He postulates that the emphasis should be placed on the value that the project produces for the organization, instead of the traditional focus on execution. In order to achieve this, the organization's strategy and requirements must be made explicit. Achieving the alignment between an organization's goals and the project itself is critical to the value that the project can bring to the organization in support of firm competitiveness and performance.

The latter part of the 21st century has seen a stronger emphasis on the role that projects play in generating favourable, constructive change for an organization by addressing identified strategic objectives (Gareis, 1990; Turner, 1993; Dinsmore, 1999). But while project success has been linked to strategic management in the literature,

there remains a gap in knowledge and utilization related to the tools and methodologies that would facilitate same. The *Feasibility Formula*™ is a tool and methodology that links the strategies of an organization with project outcome and resulting firm performance.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ has earlier been shown to support competitiveness factors such as a firm's "scope" – core competencies and capabilities, "structure" and "speed" - specifically around decision making and flow. We now turn to its ability to satisfy the characteristic of "strategy", and its support for establishing strategic decision criteria. The *Feasibility Formula*™ has been specifically designed as a tool and methodology to capture the organization's goals and the weighting associated with their importance. Further, it measures the project's ability to satisfy the strategic criteria captured and in doing so, provides an indication of likelihood for project success or failure. The purpose of the *Feasibility Formula*™ is to ensure the identification and/or development of the firm's strategic criteria so that project alignment can be determined. This definition of strategic criteria and resulting assurance of alignment better positions the firm's competitiveness in the likelihood of delivering successful, strategically supported projects.

Focus on growth

The *Feasibility Formula*™ can contribute to a firm's competiveness by supporting its growth. This may occur on several fronts including helping the organization to maintain focus on its strategic objectives, to support its structure and governance, to assist in the professional development of its human resources, and to help position the firm overall as a viable entity.

When firms seek funding to help fuel their growth, potential investors will require knowledge of the business – both its current state and its potential future state. Interested investors and sources of funding, either public or private, will want to know that the firm is sufficiently sophisticated in its strategy, processes and operational execution. Firms can seek the traditional financing of banks or other financial institutions, or through means such as venture capitalists. Such investors look to the creditability of the leader/entrepreneur and management team, capability of effort, and their ability to handle risk (MacMillan, Siegel, Narasimha, 1986).

The *Feasibility Formula*™ supports the firm by providing a methodology and tool to: engage stakeholders, ensure consensus on strategic objectives, assess projects or programs of work in a comprehensive manner - including level of effort required and level of risk to the organization -and provide detailed input for effective and timely decision making. Investors would be positively influenced by the firm's ability to demonstrate same through the use of the *Feasibility Formula*™, and the tool and methodology, as embraced by the firm, would be a strong element within a business case in support of funding.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ can equally be used to assess the extent to which a contemplated acquisition may be successful. This occurs on two fronts: firstly, the acquisition can be considered a project, and the tool and methodology may be used to assess the opportunity, as with any other contemplated; secondly, it can further look to examine initiatives of the company under consideration for acquisition, and permit assessment of its projects and their continued alignment with parent company goals.

Size of firm, sector and culture

While it is understood that characteristics of a firm, namely size, sector and culture, have an impact on its competitiveness, it can be concluded from the research that the application of the *Feasibility Formula*™ tool and methodology brought similar value to all firms under study.

The research went further to contemplate factors such as the industry, typology, and project type, hence broad representation of business and project environments.

Effectiveness by project type

Across the six case studies, a variety of project types were represented: 3 different Business projects (Business Development, Marketing and Real Estate Strategy), 2 Accommodation projects, and 1 IT project.

Five of the six organizations had not previously used an assessment tool in support of decision making. Further, there was a definite absence of either identifying or considering organizational objectives as part of a project selection process, regardless of project type.

The eleven strategic elements of the *Feasibility Formula*™ were selected intentionally so as to be applicable across all organizations, industry and project types. The research concluded that irrespective of project type, there were widespread similarities captured for the tool and methodology regarding: the enthusiasm displayed; feedback and suggestions for improvement; its applicability to the identified organization, selected project and its stakeholders; its usefulness and cited benefits; and resulting value. The summary of formal evaluations undertaken supports this finding.

And while there were differences in stakeholder representation and functional dissimilarities amongst the case studies (from salespeople to marketing specialists to facilities personnel to IT practitioners, etc.), the *Feasibility Formula*™ tool and methodology was germane to each project type. Regardless of the subject matter, the tool was equally applicable. The project management discipline instructs that a robust project management methodology can apply to any project type, therefore a project manager should be able to manage projects in any environment. It was not expected to be the case for other project team members consisting of functional specialists. Nevertheless, the *Feasibility Formula*™ permitted these team members to assess their organization and project in a structured and methodical manner irrespective of project type, their role, or area of expertise.

Effectiveness by Project Typology

With respect to project typology, initially it was thought that the tool would be most appropriate for complex project typologies – i.e. ones that could be

considered to present a significant risk, cost and complexity to the organization. Through the evaluation of the six case studies which represented: one Simple; one Simple to Typical; one Typical; and three Complex project typologies, the data showed, however, that the *Feasibility Formula*™ tool and methodology was equally applicable and relevant in all project typologies. Nevertheless, consideration should be given to its ultimate value on very Simple projects of small value and complexity.

Effectiveness by Industry

Six distinct industries were represented in the case studies: project management, wealth management/financial services, defense and aerospace engineering, IT, export development and medical.

Similar to the outcome of the assessment of project types and typology, it was found that the *Feasibility Formula*™ was equally relevant and applicable to every industry assessed. Although the different industry organizations had distinct objectives, the application of the tool was indistinguishable and successfully interchangeable.

Effectiveness by Sector

The case studies further represented three sectors: private, public (i.e. government) and not-for-profit. Each represents a distinct focus and accountability. Private sector organizations are profit driven and typically answer to shareholders; public sector entities serve constituents and are held accountable for the cost-conscious delivery of services to, in this case, Canadians; and not-for-profit organizations are typically driven by their membership and other sponsors to provide relevant services. The author initially undertook the development of the *Feasibility Formula*™ with the private sector in mind. However, with a growing consideration for the wider application of the tool, the public sector was added. And finally, upon undertaking the case studies and seeing an opportunity to include another key sector, the not-for-profit organization was appended.

From the data collected and analysed, it became apparent that the *Feasibility Formula*™ tool and methodology was applicable to all sectors undertaken in this research. As the vast majority of organizations can be categorized within one of these three sectors, it can be concluded that the *Feasibility Formula*™ is applicable to all sectors.

Corporate Culture

It is understood that corporate culture plays a role in the firm's performance. There is a need for corporate culture that encompasses teamwork, involved management and continuous improvement to facilitate organizational success, growth and competitiveness (Irani et al, 2004).

The *Feasibility Formula*™ supports companies operating in this type of cultural environment because of its ability to engage stakeholders and foster teamwork among management and others by requiring their participation in facilitated sessions for the purpose of populating the tool and assessing its outcome.

The culture of each organization participating in the research was taken into consideration and studied in the context of how the tool and methodology was embraced and applied. A narrative was included in the research work to describe the culture of each organization, and the resulting acceptance and adoption of the *Feasibility Formula*™.

Cultures among the organizations varied greatly, and ranged from entrepreneurial firms that exercised autonomy and creativity, to the highly professional matrix organization, to the bureaucratic and hierarchical. However, at their core, each firm exhibited the appropriate cultural traits – i.e. teamwork, involved management, continuous improvement - required for the *Feasibility Formula*™ to have the greatest favourable impact. Interestingly, many of these exhibited traits appeared latent, as a number of the participants commented that teamwork, robust discussion and management involvement was often absent from their past and current informal approach to assessing the viability of projects. It appears that the *Feasibility Formula*™, in some cases, liberated the stakeholders to embrace cultural traits that had merely been dormant.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ augments necessary cultural traits by encouraging both the teamwork of stakeholders and the involvement of management through the application of the methodology. The greatest value that The *Feasibility Formula*™ brings to firms is the direct engagement of stakeholders and facilitation of healthy discussion in order to populate the tool and assess the outcome.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ was developed to foster the engagement of key stakeholders and ensure a common understanding of a project's ability (or inability) to address organizational strategy, and ultimately its likelihood of success. The varying cultures of the organizations did not provide evidence of any impediments in their ability to embrace or utilize the tool and methodology or to fulfill its purpose. Each organization was able to successfully participate and implement the suggested methodology.

It would be interesting to examine the potential of the *Feasibility Formula*™ in supporting firms operating in different cultural environments. A culturally diverse workforce within an organization can contribute to a firm's competitive advantage (Cox, Blake, 1991), and many of the participating firms had such diversity in their stakeholders representation. But what about firms operating in other cultures entirely, such as Asia or EMEA? Would the tool and methodology apply equally successfully in these cultural environments?

The literature possesses few studies that compare the effectiveness of firms across countries that can be linked to differences in the culture or values of the organization, however one particular study conducted by Denison et al (2004), successfully compared cultural traits with firm performance for North America, Asia and EMEA. The results are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Average culture trait scores by region

Culture Trait	North America	Asia	EMEA
Mission	3.32	3.39	3.35
Adaptability	3.25	3.28	3.26
Involvement	3.43	3.42	3.45
Consistency	3.28	3.21	3.26

Source: Denison, Haaland, Goelzer (2004)

The study concluded that the link between company culture and effectiveness appeared to be both strong and consistent: the scores for the culture measures were essentially the same for the samples of organizations in each of the three regions.

This author would then postulate that such similarities in cultural traits between North American firms and organizations in Asia and EMEA infers that the *Feasibility Formula*™ would be equally embraced and effective in its application across these cultural environments.

Effectiveness by firm size

Research conducted by Dunning (1996) characterizes the effect of the size of a firm on its competitiveness: large firms are more likely to engage in global activities than small firms, and transnationality supports a firm's global market share; medium-size firms are likely to be more specialized in their portfolio of global assets and reliant on foreign sources to enhance their portfolio; evidence suggests, however, that small firms are just as likely to engage in merger-and-acquisition activities as are their larger competitors. Results of Dunning's research
illustrate that the size of firms is only of marginal importance in affecting the sourcing of most categories of competitive advantage (i.e. access to resources and assets, consumer demand, inter-firm competition, and linkages with foreign or domestic firms).

Firm sizes of the organizations represented in the research were considered mid-to-large and ranged from 300 to 10,000+ employees. As the unit of analysis for the research was the project itself, firm size appeared to have little direct impact on the application of the *Feasibility Formula*™ tool and methodology and its effectiveness. It was observed, however, that the projects chosen as the basis for the research were scalable as appropriate to the respective size of the organization. Most of the selected projects were for domestic implementation, as this was the focus of these organizations, and one, from the global firm, was planned for transnational execution. When working with the research participants, their access to firm resources and assets, for example, all seemed to be based on what was achievable, given the size of the organization and the project to be undertaken: the large, bordering on mega, firm had chosen to evaluate a contemplated project that would be global in its application and significant to the organization; the smallest firm in the study chose a modest project that had national implications for the organization. Each firm appeared to consider projects that were realistic and appropriately "sized" for the organization, and that would be supported with appropriate resources – both human and financial. The application of the *Feasibility Formula*™ did not uncover the contemplation of any projects that were not appropriate to the size of the firm or its organizational maturity level.

In this context, it appears that the *Feasibility Formula*™ was an appropriate tool and methodology, irrespective of firm size, as the representative stakeholders from the organizations of varying scale found it a most useful input to the evaluation process and ultimate decision making around the project. There was no indication when implementing the tool and methodology of its unsuitability for a particular size of firm. If anything, it may be further considered that in a large firm, the *Feasibility Formula*™ could be more widely applied – i.e. to a larger number of projects or initiatives – compared to a small firm which may have fewer to evaluate.

Conclusion

The success and failure of projects is an important consideration for a firm's competitiveness. The *Feasibility Formula*™ tool, and accompanying stakeholder engagement and facilitation methodology, contributes novel substance to both the firm and the project management profession in its ability to assess the alignment of a project with an organization's strategy, to inform the likelihood of the project outcome, and to support effective decision making. In ascertaining its effectiveness through an iterative methodology refinement and six case studies, the author is has been able to establish a link between the utilization of the tool and methodology, and its favourable impact on a firm's competitiveness.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ methodology and tool provides a practical and engaging means for project stakeholders to contemplate a project's viability and contribution to firm performance. It provides a process and analytical technique for organizations to determine "what matters most" and to identify a project's ability to satisfy these objectives for the benefit of the organization. The author now contemplates adding "competitiveness" as a 12th strategic element for consideration.

The *Feasibility Formula*™ methodology and tool was conceived, and subsequently developed, to address the organizational problem that is often witnessed by project management professionals: organizations do not typically make significant project decisions based on an examination of the favourable alignment of the contemplated project with the organization's strategic goals. The absence of this practice can jeopardize a project's likelihood for success from the outset.

This paper has examined the problem and resulting need for an effective pre-project feasibility tool and accompanying stakeholder engagement, or facilitation, methodology. It has also assessed, through comprehensive research, the extent to which the *Feasibility Formula*™ has a positive effect on an organization's competitiveness in the marketplace, irrespective of size of the firm, its position within the lifecycle, industry type or corporate culture. It addresses competitiveness factors and the tool's support for

strengthening core competencies, firm growth, proficiency of workers, speed of decision making and strategic alignment – culminating in a firm's competitive advantage.

According to Grant (1991), a resource-based approach to competitiveness would include identifying the firm's capabilities and determining what the firm can do more effectively than its rivals. The findings from this research suggest that the *Feasibility Formula*™ is one such tool and methodology that can provide the firm with a number of advantages and practical benefits in supporting the firm's strategic focus, agility, flexibility and adaptability through effective and timely decision making around corporate initiatives, projects and programs of work. The *Feasibility Formula*™ can be considered a valuable tool in supporting firm competitiveness.

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