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The role of corporate identity and percieved success at SME sector

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Contents

1 Topic relevance, theoretical models

The topic of the dissertation is the role of corporate / organizational identity in company success, performance and competitiveness in the SME sector. The focus of the research is the connection between synergy of corporate identity and soft factors of competitiveness from the aspect of leader, organizational culture and strategy.

The origin of company success and its definition comes from the competitiveness theories, based on the next definition: *„the competitiveness means in microlevel the position acquirement in market competition, and the competence in cope with other competitors, companies"* (Török, 1999, pp. 74.). This aspect reveals the necessarity that the competitiveness and company success should have been interpreted by soft factors and correlated to the competitors. Because of their limited sources SMEs are mainly liable to the environmental effect.

The productivity of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs can be characterized by many factors, and the aspect determines the main parts of competitiveness researches. Meanwhile the soft factors were coming to the front of the competitiveness researches, the corporate identity models started to emphasize the company performance and success in the last decade. The models, empirical researches analysed the relationship of corporate and organizational identity and company success mostly at MNCs (Höffner, 1989, Olins 1989, Olins 1995, Balmer 1995, van Rekom 1997, Balmer – Gray 2000, Haslam 2004, Birkigt – Stadler – Funck, 2002, Soenen et al, 2007, Vaara et al, 2007, Brunnige, 2007, Stigliani – Ravasi, 2007, Ravasi – Schultz, 2007, Rindova, 2007, Sutton, 2007, Sarason – Rekom, 2007, Balmer – Cornelissen – Haslam, 2007, Hodgkinson – Healey 2011).

The dissertation limited the corporate identity and success for the SME sector, the effect of the leader, the GAP between the leader and the organization members, and with the definition and analyzation of perceived success created a connection between the identity and competitiveness theories. For this aspect the strategy was the common ground. *„The key factor of the company success is the quality level and clarity of strategy and the competences"* (Storey – Salaman, 2010, p. 67.).

1.1 The structure of the dissertation

After an introduction of theoretical background of organizational and corporate identity models, differrent aspects, research results, the dissertation summarizes the soft factors of competitiveness literature (chapter of 2-3). There is an overwiew about specialities of SME sector, its organizational distinctiveness, especially the family businesses and the prospective effect of familyness factor. The dissertation contains the performance and success aspects of SME focused on the competitiveness researches the same as on psychological business success theories.

After the definition background of literature the own perception of success conception was determined.

The 4th chapter contains the research method, research parts, assumptions, hypotheses, and results. Finally the Conclusion chapter summarizes the results, the presumed reasons of non-conjectural research outputs, the conclusions of factors, limitations and possible future research directions.

1.2 Theoretical background

The success and performance of companies can be assessed by reference to rate of return, added value, growth, market share, sales, measured by return of earnings per share, acid test of liquidation, capacity or price-earnings ratio – prospectively it is described by exact data (Kay, 1993). However, these factors are not able to explain why do companies with the same market capability, similar source allocation have difference performance (Hannigan – Hamilton – Mudambi, 2015). Therefor it was required to analyse the competences and aptitude with difficulty measurable factors, as creativity (Csath, 2004), customer orientation (Chikán, 2008), organizational competences (Teece, 2011), contiguonus knowledge development (Hámori – Szabó, 2012), internationalization (Gelei – Kenesei, 2016, Czakó – Juhász – Reszegi, 2016), regional effects (Szerb – Hornyák, 2016, Lengyel, 2002), innovation (Chikán – Czakó, 2009, Boda, 2012), leader competences (Szabó, 2012), style and personality of the leader (Lippert – Gaál – Kovács, 2015, Hofmeister-Tóth – Kopfer-Rácz – Sas, 2015, Hofmeister-Tóth – Kopfer-Rácz – Zoltayné Paprika, 2016, Gáti – Bauer, 2017), motivation and value system of the leader (Kazainé, 2009), effect of organizational culture (Varga – Csiszárik-Kocsír, 2017), level of change management and constitution (Wimmer – Zoltayné Paprika, 2006).

It is difficult to research of SME sector because of their heterogenity and limited accessibility. The competitiveness researches encounter other inconveniences, for eg. the soft factors can not be appropriated from other factors, there is cross-effect among different variables and problematic to exclude other, non-analysed coefficients. Because of the dissertation analyses the business success of SMEs from the aspect of organizational identity, it consumes those results of SME competitiveness researches which focus on soft factors of competitiveness, the same as the methodology and the results have influence on the own research and model development.

The dissertation takes the main approach of corporate and organizational identity literature, it emphasizes the introduction and development of these models.

1.2.1 Empirical research of organizational identity – Lerpold et al.

Several corporate identity models are known but on closer examination, the case-studies of researches we primarily can meet are samples from the world of multinational companies. Lerpold et al (2007) analysed with a comprehensive examination the MNCs how they create and change the identity programme, which processes, values are fundamental to produce it, and what is its motivation background. They analyzed not only the internal factors but the role of design (Soenen et al, 2007), the influence of social-national culture and identity (Vaara et al, 2007, Stigliani – Ravasi, 2007, Rindova, 2007). The role of organizational culture, fundamental values, vision and strategy were emphasized (Ravasi – Schultz, 2007, Sutton, 2007). Based on their research results the vision of leaders and strategy formulation is necessary, the same as the coherent and homogeneous viewpoint of the organization. This well-defined and collectively believed, accepted and followed values were the base of companies' identity programme and this process resulted the synergy, the authentic communication and behaviour genuinely came from the central idea.

1.2.2 The Corporate Identity model of Birkigt, Stadler and Funck

The Birkigt, Stadler and Funck Corporate Identity (CI) model (2002) was applied and tested at the SME sector in the dissertation. This CI model (Figure 1) contains the main soft and hard factors, visualizes the relationship with the environment, and effects among them is drafted in plain. According to the model the Corporate Personality contains the corporate philosophy, culture and mission. In the subsequent version of their model the strategy is part of the

Corporate personality, but in the first version the strategy embodied the result of the corporate identity programme, and had a prompt attention. The Authors emphasized the role of synergy, because only with the holistic system of identity factors can be viable the corporate identity programme.

1. Figure The Corporate Identitiy model of Birkigt, Stadler and Funck


*Source:* own edited based on Birkigt – Stadler – Funck (2002, pp. 19.)

1.2.3 The ACID model of Balmer et al.

The first version of ACID model was created in 1999 by Balmer and Soenen. Based on the many case-studies conducted at MNCs a very dynamic model development was began and numerous modifications were constituted with the adaptation of their research results.

2. Figure The ACID Test model versions
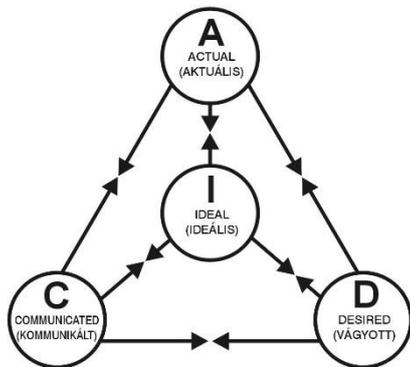
ACID Test (Balmer - Soenen, 1999)
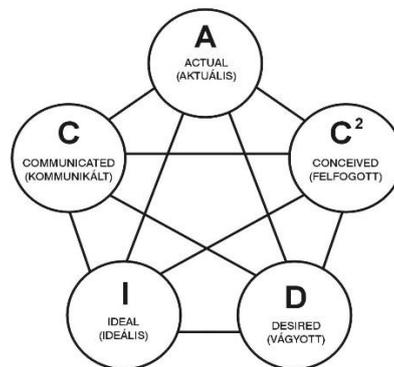
AC^2ID Test (Balmer - Greyser, 2002)
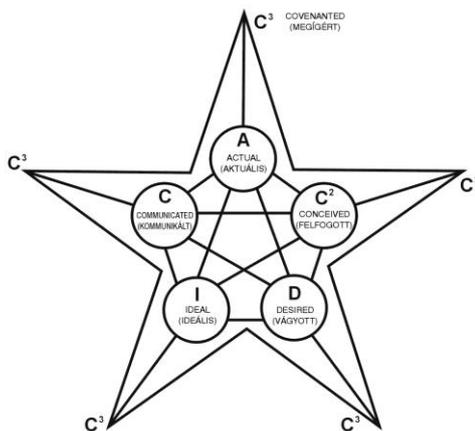
AC^3ID Test™ (Balmer - Greyser, 2003)
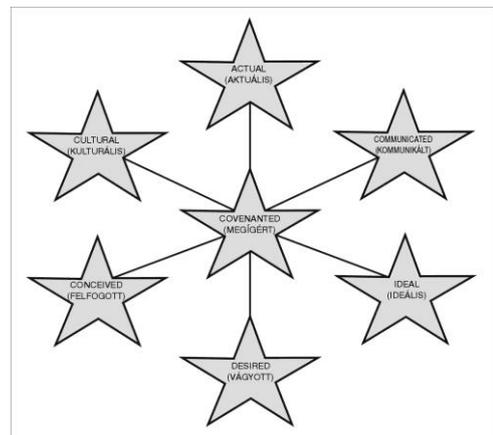
AC^4ID Test (Balmer, 2005)

Source: Csordás (2008, 75., 78., 79., 81. o.)

The versions of ACID Tests attend the sector influence (Balmer – Soenen, 1999), the perception of external environment (Balmer – Cornelissen – Haslam, 2007), and the GAP between the leader and the organization (van Riel – Balmer, 1997).

1.2.4 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) research (Szerb et al, 2014) measures the performance of companies not only by the exact data (like number of employees, accounting revenue, etc.) but considered the subjective judgement and perception, expectation of corporate processes and achievements. The SME competitiveness model contains ten factors to measure

the performance of the company: local market and competition, networking, internationalization, human capital, product/service, production, marketing methods, online pesence, decision making processes, strategy.

According to the cluster analysis the companies from the lowest competitiveness group have excessive low rate of human capital and administration routines (0,21 and 0,26), whereas the most competitive companies have above-average values at human capital pillar (but, all the same, 0,42 is not too eminent) and admnistrative routines (0,68). The best performance cluster has spare potential in human capital pillar which would be improved easily and these SMEs could be more successful (Szerb, 2010, Szerb et al., 2017).

1.2.5 Innovation in the SME sector

According to the empirical research results of Hámori and Szabó (2012) the gravity of innovation is outstanding: in the case of companies with high innovation activity is more frequent the organizational innovation as well. The research analysed the style of leadership which has a direct influence on the organization and the strategy at SMEs. The 63% of respondents felt a different leadership style would have been preferential. This GAP indicates the employees are dissatisfied with the organizational structure and culture. Examined the staff headcount data was revealed the autocratic leadership is representative at SMEs have fewer than 10 workers. Autocratic leader was identified at the 70% of under 10 persons / SMEs, on the contrary at the SMEs with large organization this amount was only 42%. Based on the research results the conclusion is that behavioural factors are in the background of low innovation performance at SME sector. The inflexibility, willingness for risk loving behaviour, open-minded tendency, decision making process (as the indication of organizational culture) are the authority of the leaders as well as construction and observance of norms and rules,

1.2.6 Dissertation objectives, definition of perception of success

The defintion of business success is often not distinctly determined, in general it is formulated the synonym like competitiveness, siccess, performance, efficiency. Based on reference pointed and own-phrased success measurement was applied by inland competitiveness researches (for eg. Chikán – Czakó, 2008), when the definition of business success was entrusted to the respondents in the part of in-depth interview research process.

Similar, the respondent-based research methodology was applied in the researches of psyhology, when the definition is too complex and it is complicated to specify, for eg.

happiness, well-being researches (Kahneman, 2003, Scitovsky, 1992, Seligman, 2008, Magyaródi – Oláh, 2016, 2017).

The own researches have a new approache: the detected, felt and embraced success and perceived success was measured in the dissertation with the following factors, which are both important part of corporate identity and competitiveness models. The operation of business and its perception by leaders and employees contains the information flow, decision making processes, co-ordination of changes, development, leadership and constituion as well as expectations about future success of the company and reference-point based success in relation to competitors.

2   The research question and hypotheses

The purpose of the research is creation of an SME-compatible model which combined the results of organizational and corporate identitiy and competitiveness theories. Also was pursued a research methodology framework and test to the SME sector adapted, taking into account their specialities, the organizational background of their business success, and the role of corporate identity, leaders. Integration of different corporate and organizational identity models and a valid research methodology drafting to the SME sector appropriately to their special circumstances was the aim of the dissertation. The new perceived success definition supported the analysis of corporate identity factors and evaluation its relationship with company performance. This extended approach measured business success not according to the exact efficiency data rather with the perception of leaders and the employees.

2.1   Research question

The research was looking for answers to the following research questions:

-Analysation to what extent the corporate identity factors have been necessary for the synergy of identity at SME sector?

-What is the relationship between the synergy of corporate identity and perceived success?

-What is the relationship between the corporate process (determinig the perceived success) and the corporate identity?

-What is the role of the leader and the organization background? The GAP between the leader and the employees and its influence on synergy of corporate identity and perceived success.

2.2 Hypotheses

The first group of hypotheses analyses the inside factors of corporate identity and their relationship with its synergy. Is required every factor to the synergy at SMEs or have other pattern at the sector?

The second group of hypotheses analyses the relationship between synergy of corporate identity and the perceived success.

The third group of hypotheses analyses the relationship between perceived success and corporate operational processes: which operation part has influence on the perception of success?

The fourth group of hypotheses analyses the effect of familyness and special pattern of the family businesses in the case of analysed factors.

The fifth group of hypotheses analyses the GAP between the leader and the employees and its effect on the analysed factors.

H1: The relationship between factors of corporate identity and its synergy

H1/a: There is relationship between the organizational culture and the synergic corporate identity

H1/b: There is relationship between the fundamental values (corporate philosophy) and the synergic corporate identity

H1/c: There is relationship between the strategy and the synergic corporate identity

H2: The relationship between corporate identity and perceived success

H2/a: There is relationship between the organizational culture and perceived success

H2/b: There is relationship between the fundamental values (corporate philosophy) and perceived success

H2/c: There is relationship between the strategy and perceived success

H2/d: There is relationship between the corporate identity synergy and perceived success

H3. The relationship between corporate operation and perceived success

H3/a: There is relationship between the knowledge of strategy and perceived success

H3/b: There is relationship between the information flow and perceived success

H3/c: There is relationship between the decision making processes and perceived success

H3/d: There is relationship between the process change management and perceived success

H3/e: There is relationship between the pecieved leader behaviour and perceived success

H4: There is relationship between the familyness / faily business characteristic and the analysed factors

H5: There is relationship between the GAP leader/organization and the analysed factors

3.   Figure: Reseacrh model with hypotheses
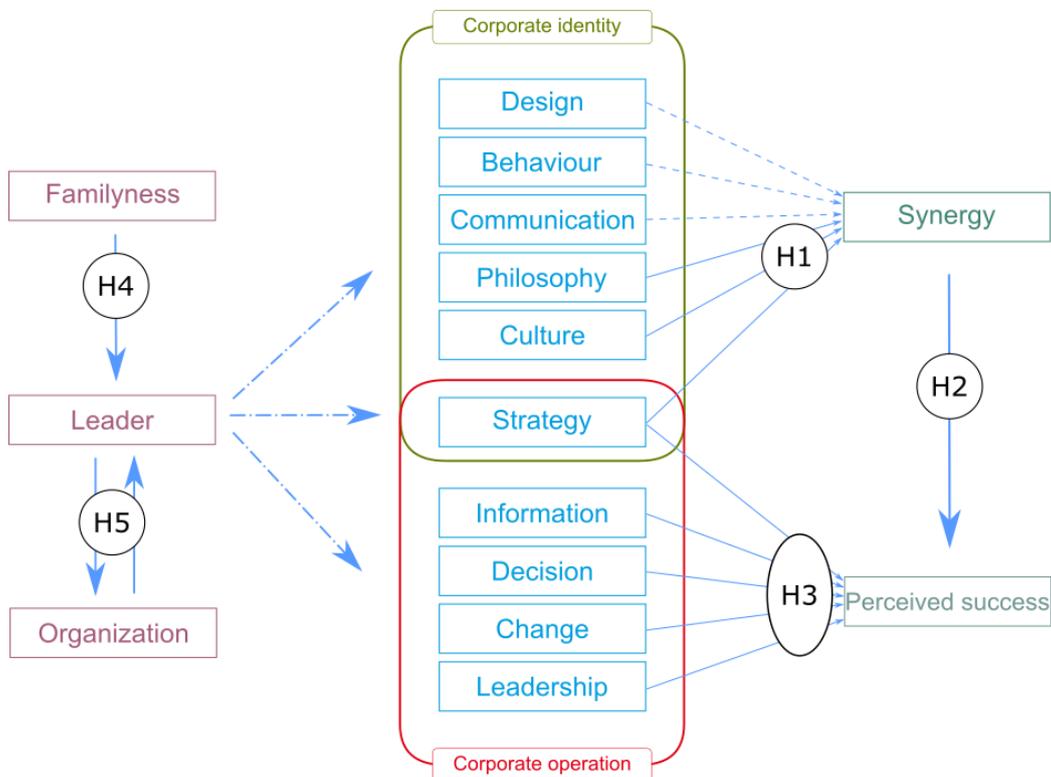
Source: own source

3   Research methodology

The economical and psychological literature and empirical results equally supported the base of own research methodology (Király, 1964, Mérei, 2006, Bertalan, 1987, Szokolszky, 2004, Bodor, 2013, Moksony, 1999, Dienes, 2013). Especially the interactive model and research design of Maxwell (1996) had influence on research methodology, because it is flexible, not linear, and the emphasis is on the factors (Research goals, Conceptual framework, Validity, Method and Research questions), the relationship among them and the interoperability.

The research methodology was determined by the orginal research goals, and the chosen segment, the SME sector framed it. In the course of the research parts the analysed companies had well-defined, obvious specialities: the sample was the SME established and owned by the current leader, and this leader (occasionally with other leaders and owners in the case of joint ownership) has the control of the company (issues of decision making, strategy, organization, etc.)

1.   Table: Research programme

1.Pilot research: the corporate identity and the influence of the sector, test of th model (2014)	Focus of the research: analysis the corporate identity at the building and IT industry Goal of the research part: test of Birkigt – Stadler – Funk CI model at SME sector
Methodology, sample: 5+5 depth-interview / sector with the leaders / owners of the company 50+50 firms / sector desk research analysis	**Conclusion:** The synergy of corporate identity is based on the corporate culture and fundamental value (corporate philosophy) of the leader. GAP can be between the leader and the employees.
2. Case-study: MNC report (2015)	Goal of the research part: corporate identity management research, analysis the practice and specialities
Methodology, sample: Depth-interviews with the HR and PR/Marketing leader and the marketing co-ordinator of a Hungarian MNC (in corporate identity projetcs concerned)	**Conclusion:** The corporate identity programme management is responsibility both of HR and marketing department. In spite of overlap in CI management, fluctuation and time-dimension the corporate identity is synergic because of the clear vision and strong organizational culture.
3. Qualitative research part: organization audit (2016)	Goal of the research part: reveal the relationship between corporate identity and perceived success, strategy and the leader/organization GAP at SMEs
Methodology, sample: Interview with leaders and employees from different fields of the company. SMEs in Hungary, 13 firms, 17 leaders, 37 employees	**Conclusion:** There is relationship between synergic corporate identity and corporate success The GAP between leaders and employees has influence on success perceptions. The vision and strategy has influence on success perceptions.
4. Quantitative research part: secunder database evaluation **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)** (Evaluation 2018, 2019)	Goal of the research part: evaluation the corporate identity and perceived success, strategy and the leader's competence at SMEs
Methodology, sample: Questionnaire Hungarian SMEs min. 5 employees / company Database: 1028 companies	**Conclusion:** Strategy determines the corporate identity and success process factors. The frequency of congestion is based on the weak competences. The leader competence, its perception by employee and future expacions are in connection with perceived success.

5. Quantitative research part: online questionnaire (2018)	Goal of the research part: analysis of the relationship between the corporate identity and perceived success, especially the GAP between the leaders and employees
Methodology, sample: Questionnaire Leaders and employees of Hungarian SMEs Database: 219 respondent	**Conclusion:** The fundamental values (corporate philosophy) has the strongest effect on the synergy of corporate identity. At the factors of perceived success the change management and the leader's competence and its GAP has the strongest effect on the perceived success.

Source: own source

4 Main results and theses

The results of the pilot and organizational audit research parts determined the final definition of perceived success. Among the success factors the expectations (future business success perception and performance) and the reference-point based (position according to the competitors) aspect was emphasized. The strategy was the link between the factors of corporate identity model and company operation factors, because the strategy is part of the both factorgroups. The perceived success based on the perception of the following factors: formality and knowledge of the strategy, decision making processes, information flow, process / change management, leader competence and operation skills.

The GEM database evaluation showed the well-separated pattern of strategy types: especially the growing-offensive companies have higher leveled operational routines, leader's competence, organization involved information flow, decision making processes, exact leader's competence judgement. On the contrary, the decreasing-defensive companies usually had subjective perception of their own leader's competence and the performance of their firm. Mostly the autocratic leadership style, the intuitive, one-person decision making process, the asymmetry in infomation flow, underestimation the development and training were characteristic in this group of SMEs, and these leaders often blamed the environmental circumstances because of their failure. In addition, the leader's role and competences outlined the lack of knowledge at SMEs and its effect on the competitiveness and business success. The leaders often were not aware their weaknesses and deficiencies, they overrate their leader competences, and it can be the limit of the company business success.

The familyness factor emerged in the former research part therefor the quantitative part had to handle this influence. There was a filter question which method allowed to evaluate the two parts of the SMEs: family and non-family businesses, and to reveal the possible pattern, specialities.

2. Table: The hypotheses and evaluation of final (quantitative) research period

Hypothesis	H Evaluation	H4 Familyness	H5 GAP
H1: The relationship between factors of corporate identity and its synergy			
H1/a: There is relationship between the organizational culture and the synergic corporate identity	✓	X	X
H1/b: There is relationship between the fundamental values (corporate philosophy) and the synergic corporate identity	✓	X	X
H1/c: There is relationship between the strategy and the synergic corporate identity	✓	X	X
H2: The relationship between corporate identity and perceived success			
H2/a: There is relationship between the organizational culture and perceived success	✓	X	✓ partly
H2/b: There is relationship between the fundamental values (corporate philosophy) and perceived success	✓	X	✓
H2/c: There is relationship between the strategy and perceived success	✓ partly	X	X
H2/d: There is relationship between the corporate identity synergy and perceived success	X	X	X
H3: The relationship between corporate operation and perceived success			
H3/a: There is relationship between the knowledge of strategy and perceived success	✓	X	✓
H3/b: There is relationship between the information flow and perceived success	✓	X	✓
H3/c: There is relationship between the decision making processes and perceived success	✓ patly	X	✓ partly
H3/d: There is relationship between the process change management and perceived success	✓	X	✓
H3/e: There is relationship between the pecieved leader behaviour and perceived success	✓ partly	X	✓

Source: own source

3. Figure: The model of corporate identity and perceived success at the SME sector
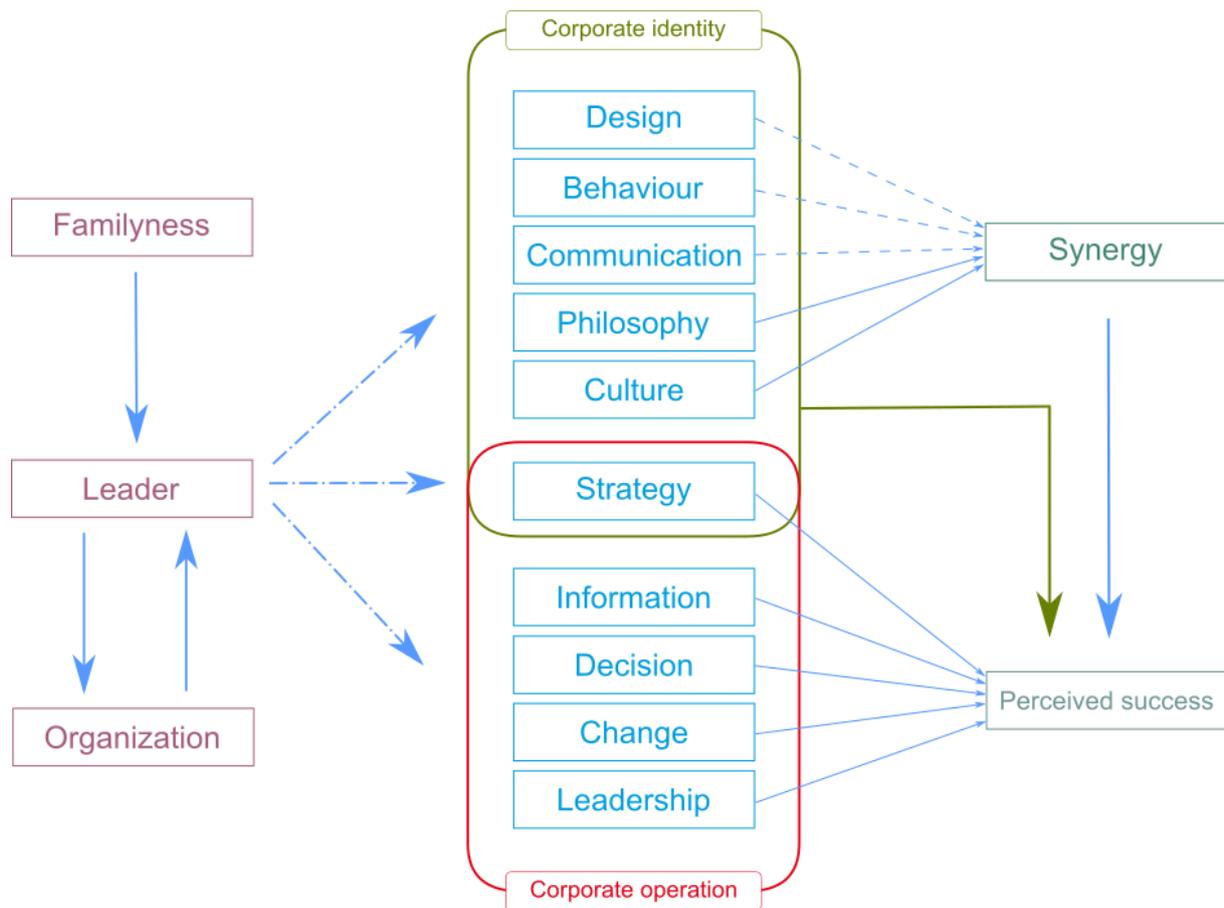
Source: own source

The relationship between the leader and the strategy, corporate identity, and operation of the company was accepted as scientifically proven by former empirical research results and literature. The quantitative research part did not analyse the external factors of the corporate identity model (Corporate Communication, Behaviour and Design). The questions covered these factors limited rate, slightly the required relation to the synergy analysis.

According to the results of corporate identity literature and empirical researches (especially proven at MNCs) it could be stated that the synergy of corporate identity has demonstrated influence on company business success, performance, incomings, reputation, awareness. At SMEs the evaluated sample showed that the fundamental values (corporate philosophy) effects on this synergy, the organizational culture goes after it, and the strategy is the third one only with low regression value. Based on the own research results the strategy does not contribute to the synergy of corporate identity at SME sector, and the model contains

the fundamental values (corporate philosophy) and the organizational culture. The depth-interviews supported to reveal, that the strategy is leader's functional task for the employees and leaders, and it is connected to the operational factors (performance feedback, plan/fact GAP analysis, etc.). The correlation analysis of the identity factors resulted significant, but weak correlation with the synergy. The companies with higher synergy value had more positive success perception in future expectation and reference-point based success in relation to competitors.

The familyness and its influence results showed in the sample that not the family businesses shape a homogenious group of entrepreneurs, but the non-family owned, „simple" SMEs are similar. The family businesses divergent from „simple" SMEs and their group is very heterogenous, have not pattern or specialities. Therefor based on the research sample the results are not appropriate to arrived at the conclusion that family businesses have special pattern in corporate identity programme. They are different from the „simple" SMEs, but these SMEs form a homogenious group, not the family businesses.

The GAP between the leader and the organization has not influence on the synergy of the corporate identity factors, and the lower GAP value did not generate more synergic corporate identity in the analysed sample. The fundamental values (corporate philosophy) and the organizational culture determined the synergy, and the matching is a substantial attribute between the leaders and employees. However, the GAP between the leader and the organization has effect on the operational factors, and there was relationship with perceived success too.

The staff headcount was an important filter: above 15 persons / organization (probably above this number the leader's effect became indirect) the companies showed strong correlation between GAP value and perceived success. The leader's competence must follow the organizational changes which are expected and essential in growth.

The analysis of percieved success revealed that primarily not the synergy of corporate identity but the corporate identity factors independently have direct effect on the perceived success. The operational factors were the same in the three own research parts: formality and knowledge the strategy, decision making processes, information flow, process change management, leader competence and operation skills.

Based on the research results the knowledge of strategy is not so important for the employees in the perception of success. The strategy was interpreted as context and defined as the responsibility of the leader. Therefor it seemed to be deficiency at leaders competence or advantage at fundamental values (philosophy), and it was desrcibed by the employees as an organizer force in the organizational culture.

The change management from the operational factors have the most important effect on perceived success, goes after it the leadership and competences, and finally the information flow. Also the direction and type of the strategy resulted a well-shaped pattern at the analysed sample: especially the growing-offensive companies had higher leveled and qualified operational routines, leader's competence, organizational-based information flow and decision making process, objective leader competence evaluation. The decreasing-defensive companies and leaders usually rated their own knowledge and the performance of their company based on more subjective perception, and the intuitive, one-person decision making process, information assymmetry, underestimation of development and training was frequently characteristic at this group of respondents. The reason of the business failures often was mentioned of the external, basicly the environmental background.

The theses determined on the base of research goals, hypotheses and main results of the research parts:

1. At SMEs for the synergy of corporate identity is not required the elaboration of every identity factor, and the soft factors (philosophy, culture) has stronger influence as hard factors (strategy).
2. At SMEs there is relationship between corporate identity and perceived success.
3. At SMEs there is relationship between operational factors (formality and knowledge the strategy, decision making processes, information flow, process change management, leader competence and operation skills) and perceived success.
4. At SMEs the GAP between the leaders and employees has influence on perceived success.
5. Ther is relationship between the type of strategy and the corporate identity, perceived success: the companies with increasing-offensive strategy have higher value of corporate identity synergy and perceived success.

5 Limitations and future research directions

The main limitation of the research has to be refered to the cardinality, therefor the research results are not classified on the basis of general criteria or its validity at the SME sector is not proven with the samples. At the part of qualitative research there was a decision that not the separated, identifiable companies were the respondents and the group of leaders and

employees were analysed. In this session of the research the results are not able to link to the firms, and the GAP between the leaders and the employees can be evaluated not by organizations, but by every leaders and employees. The GAP focus was on the factors and the groups, not at the companies.

Further research should be neccesary to test the definition of perceived success: the success perception in future expectation and reference-point based success in relation to competitors. The first one seemed to be well classified in the quastionnaire, but the second one needs more examination. The reference-point based success in relation to competitors generally had lower regression and correlation values. This slight difference deserves considering and reveal its sector-based background: probably the SMEs are especially future-oriented and it is more difficult to judge their performance in relation to the competitors.

The trust seemed to be a new factor with important influence on the GAP between leaders and employees and the perceived success, but the last research part and its methodology was not suitable and competent enough to measure the effect of trust. Therefor it means a further research topic and project. At the part of organization audit research session the trust was able to compensate the lack of operational skills, failures (for eg. information flow assymmetry or problematic change management), leader's competence, it has influence on percieved success. A positive or negative spiral was detected, and its effect should be accurately analysed.

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