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Influence of the strategic planning and the management skills as factors internal of business competitiveness of SME's

Influencia de la planeación estratégica y habilidades gerenciales como factores internos de la competitividad empresarial de las Pymes

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Abstract

The organizations of the 21st century face a dynamic and complex environment characterized by uncertainty, so you must be prepared to respond to changes to achieve their organizational objectives to help them achieve business competitiveness; in this context are include the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), then for their structural features you typically find at a disadvantage with respect to the large enterprises that have access to greater resources and capabilities. The purpose of the research was to measure the influence of strategic planning and management skills as internal factors in the Business Competitiveness perceived by businessmen of SMEs in Hermosillo, Sonora. A mixed investigation was performed, where the first phase consisted of an analysis based on a panel of experts (Delphi method), with the purpose of validating the measuring instrument (apparent validity) through the opinions of the experts and the second phase was a statistical analysis technique of structural equations PLS models. The results show that strategic planning and management skills as internal factors of the SMEs influence in business competitiveness.

JEL Classification: M12, 015, M21.
Keywords: Business competitiveness, Strategic planning, Management skills, SMEs.

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Resumen

Las organizaciones del siglo XXI afrontan un entorno dinámico y complejo caracterizado por la incertidumbre, por lo que deben estar preparadas para dar respuestas a los cambios para el logro de sus objetivos organizacionales que les ayude a lograr competitividad empresarial; en este contexto también se encuentran las Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas (Pymes), que por sus características estructurales suelen encontrarse en desventaja respecto de la gran empresa que tiene a su disposición mayores recursos y capacidades. El objetivo de la investigación fue medir la influencia de la Planeación Estratégica y las Habilidades Gerenciales como factores internos en la Competitividad Empresarial que perciben los empresarios de las Pymes de Hermosillo, Sonora. Se realizó una investigación mixta, donde la *primera fase* consistió en un análisis basado en un panel de expertos (método Delphi), con el propósito de validar el instrumento de medida (validez aparente) a través de las opiniones de los expertos y, la *segunda fase* fue un análisis estadístico con técnica de modelos de ecuaciones estructurales PLS. Los resultados muestran que la planeación estratégica y las habilidades gerenciales como factores internos de las Pymes influyen en la competitividad empresarial.

Códigos JEL: M12, 015, M21.
Palabras clave: Competitividad empresarial, Planeación estratégica, Habilidades gerenciales, Pymes.

Introduction

Strategic Management focuses a large part of its efforts on identifying the factors that most influence competitive success, as shown by the abundance of literature on this matter (Wang et al., 2006; Estrada et al., 2009; Mazarol et al., 2009; Wei-Wei et al., 2010; Ponce et al., 2010; among others). Although this debate can be controversial on occasion, there is a certain consensus among researchers by considering that competitiveness in enterprises is determined by external and internal sources of competitiveness, whose effects have an additive nature.

Álvarez (2008) notes that an enterprise competitiveness is based on the acquisition of skills to achieve more productivity that in turn helps deal with corporate competitiveness. This is expressed by the capacity to create value for all internal and external actors, which makes it possible to compete in new sectors and adapt to global markets; that is, competitiveness is the foundation of corporate growth (Martínez et al., 2010).

A report issued by the Inter-Ministerial Industry Policy Commission (CIPI, for its acronym in Spanish; 2003), revealed that the main problems regarding the internal environment of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are: the lack of innovation culture and technological development; ignorance and lack of use of management processes; and the deficient training of human resources. The results in Mexico coincide with the issues of the SMEs in Latin America, which are characterized by the low grade of technology adoption; low or inexistent training level; low administrative capacity; and low productivity (Zevallos, 2003).

Given that the study of enterprise competitiveness is very broad, as it comprises many variables (even limited to only to those internal variables of the enterprise), the objective of this research is to analyze the relation between competitive success and two factors related to the internal environment of the SME (strategic planning and management skills), through an empirical study. There are two objectives in this research: to measure the influence of Strategic Planning and Management Skills as internal factors in the Corporate Competitiveness perceived by the businesspeople of SMEs in Hermosillo, Sonora, and to analyze the differences in Strategic Planning and Management Skills among the SMEs of Hermosillo, Sonora.

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Theoretical framework

The global dynamic forces organizations to be competitive or to cease to exist. In this sense, corporate competitiveness has become a demand for the survival of enterprises (Artail, 2007). SMEs have been the object of several researches that aim to identify the factors that will make it possible for them to obtain better results and be competitive in the market (Kim et al., 2008). The lack of competitiveness can bring serious negative consequences to the SMEs, which could contribute to the deterioration of their financial conditions and lead them to bankruptcy (Madrid et al., 2007).

A study concerning the determining internal factors of competitiveness in Mexico concluded that the highly competitive SMEs are those that innovate their products, processes and management, have a superior technological level and possess strategic planning in their corporate management (Estrada et al., 2009). Regarding the importance of planning, one key factor that influences strategic performance has been identified, this being the management team (Eden and Ackermann, 2004). Similarly, strategic planning is positively linked to both management skills and corporate competitiveness (Kotey and Meredith, 1997; Peel and Bridge, 1998; Gibbons and O'Connor 2005; O'Regan et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2006; Glaister et al., 2008).

The changes suffered by the organizations affect, without a doubt, the operations of employees, leading to the need to ensure their best contribution to the results expected by the organization. It is in this instance where the managers need to have the ability to obtain the best from workers, while propitiating professional satisfaction. It is therefore imperative for all managers to be willing to undertake these challenges, which entails having a command of the basic and essential skills regarding their role in the organization (Spendlove, 2007). The development of new knowledge entails determining that the fundamental skills for the viability of corporate management are related to the capacity and ability of the management level to acquire knowledge, adapt and change, and even predict changes (Ramírez, 2005).

The efficiency in the performance of management is reflected in their behavior, as they integrally apply their skills, personality traits and acquired knowledge (Levy – Leboyer, 2003). In addition to the knowledge, skills and capabilities, the manager of today must possess practical knowledge in economic, financial, commercial, legal, marketing, and human management topics, and master two or more languages that will make possible to develop essential skills to achieve competitive results: excellent interrelations with their collaborators, suppliers, clients, and every person that intervenes in the value chain (Zahra et al., 2007).

On the other hand, the development of management skills contributes for the management to acquire a more strategic role in order to face, through the development and execution of strategic planning, a more uncertain corporate environment (Giunipero et al., 2006). In this sense, skills have assumed an important role regarding the capabilities of a worker to mobilize the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes necessary to achieve the expected results in a certain professional context (Mertens, 2001). Furthermore, management skills are linked to symbolic factors such as communication skills, adaptive capacity, receptivity to external environments, strong technical abilities, stress management, ability to work well with others, social intelligence, and appreciation for cultural diversity and teamwork, so that they can positively contribute to a management that is focused on corporate competitiveness (Samujh, and El-Kafafi, 2010; Barhem et al., 2011 and Tonidandel et al., 2012).

The people in charge of the process of selecting and developing managers must take into consideration the importance of four dimensions of management skills (technical

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skills, administrative skills, human skills, and behavior), and place special importance on the administrative skills (Tonidandel et al., 2012). A study done in Mexico to determine the management skills concluded that the dimension that shows the most knowledge and management capabilities is in the operational and administrative skills, as it is important for the personnel in management positions to concern themselves with the development of skills and look towards the knowledge and skills of organization and planning (Ponce et al., 2010).

For their part, Koenigsfeld et al. (2012) mention that management skills are classified into five domains: the conceptual/creative domain, the direction domain, the administrative domain, the interpersonal domain, and the technical domain. Teamwork, communication, coordination, execution and continuous learning are also crucial skills for the success of the middle management (Xuejun Qiao and Wang, 2009). Within the study done by Kramar and Steane (2012), the tendencies of the role of the development of new skills in Human Resources (HR) in general, as well as the role of line managers in the management job, are explored. The results indicate that human resources managers expect to cover more and more the responsibilities for the development of competitiveness in human capital as an imperative business strategic.

In Mexico, SMEs lack management competitiveness in their corporate management, that would provide them with a better behavior and more effective abilities to make changes in strategies, programs, structures, among others, and to allow for the organization to adapt and therefore anticipate the changes that could affect it (Longenecker et al., 2009). Nevertheless, highly competitive SMEs are those that innovate their products, processes and management, have a superior technological level, possess strategic planning and a management with skills to carry out corporate management (Estrada et al., 2009).

Approach of the conceptual model

Strategic planning and management abilities as internal factors that influence the corporate competitiveness of the SMEs

In recent years, SMEs have been an important matter for public policies, which has allowed an improvement of certain aspects directly linked to the competitiveness of these types of enterprises. However, the challenges being faced by the SMEs and by micro-enterprises require reinforcing the sensibility towards the problematics of said group, as well as intensifying their support.

To promote the national economic development through the boost of SMEs, the Mexican government approved the Law for the Development of Competitiveness of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (DOF, 2009), where competitiveness is defined as the capacity to maintain and strengthen the profitability of enterprises and their participation in the markets based on advantages associated to their products or services.

A study regarding SMEs projects, based on the strategic analysis for the development of the SME in the State of Veracruz, Mexico (Aragón and Rubio, 2006), found that the development of the small and medium-sized enterprises requires five key factors: 1) having a manager with a university degree and being clearly oriented towards sales; 2) increasing formal strategic planning and alliances and cooperation agreements, aiming for a more innovative, flexible and daring behavior; 3) having a more developed organizational structure, mainly in the areas of accounting and finances; 4) use new information technologies, make the correct use of communications equipment and IT resources, and use software applications in the management of their enterprise; and 5) using systems for cost accounting, annual budget, and the analysis of their economic and financial situation for the making of decisions.

According to the Scientific and Technological Advisory Forum (cited in Góngora and Madrid, 2010), Mexico loses competitiveness to other countries mainly due to its structural issues and the inefficient functioning of its national markets. The Mexican scientific and technological policy of recent years has not managed to motivate an improvement in the national competitive levels. One way to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage is through the formation of a central nucleus via the set of intangible assets of the enterprise, also known as intellectual capital, which is comprised by the people in the enterprise, that is, its set of human capital and, more concretely, the knowledge, skills, values, capabilities and competences brought together individually and collectively (Araujo et al., 2006).

Although it is true that the majority of people that comprise the human structure of an organization are important for the effective and efficient development of its economic activity, not all human groups within the organization are equally important and strategic. The responsibility to choose the path of an enterprise falls on the management, as well as the combination of resources that it requires for the achievement of its objectives and goals, and the market(s) in which it will participate; it is because of this that the management resources comprise a collective whose relevance in the generation and preservation of corporate success has been made manifest by several authors (e.g., Castanias and Helfat, 1991, 2001; Lado and Wilson, 1994; Pickett, 1998; Landeta et al., 2007). Presently, Mexican enterprises, specially SMEs, lack management skills in their corporate management that will help them achieve a better behavior and more effective abilities to make changes in management strategies, programs, structures, etc. to allow the enterprise to adapt and thus be able to anticipate the changes that could affect it (Longenecker et al., 2009).

As indicated by Weik (2009), managers are now considered agents of change who, by establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with the different types of public that expect something from the enterprise, allow a progressive and continuous improvement of the organization. Thus, the performance of the management role for the achievement of corporate competitiveness is based on teamwork, having a network within and outside of the enterprise, and the execution of good strategic planning (Cantzler and Leijón, 2007). Management skills are important for the efficient management of innovation, where technical capabilities are not sufficient for efficiency. The differences in learning styles are important in the acquisition of interpersonal skills, which can be used to develop leadership skills that help create corporate competitiveness strategies (Dreyfus, 2008; De Meuse et al., 2011; Koenigsfeld et al., 2012; Thorn, 2012; Tonidandel et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2013). In this sense, the following work hypotheses are considered:

H_1. *The corporate competitiveness of SMEs is influenced by the Management Skills of the enterprise.*

H_2. *The corporate competitiveness of SMEs is influenced by the Strategic Planning of the enterprise.*

Once the hypotheses have been presented, the proposed explicative model is reflected as shown in Figure 1. This model establishes the influence of Strategic Planning and Management Skills on the corporate competitiveness manifested in the comparative data of theoretical foundation and the exploratory discussion done through a panel of experts.

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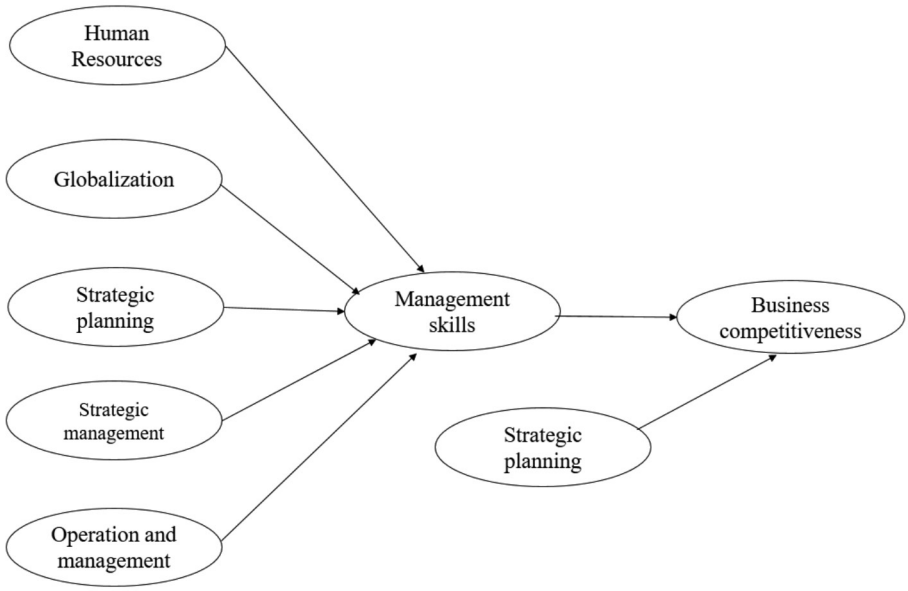

Figura 1. Modelo Conceptual
Fuente: Modelo propuesto. Elaboración propia (2015)

After discussing and theoretically supporting the proposed relations, we detail the analysis methodology in the following section in order to contrast the formulated work hypotheses.

Research design

Data collection

To contrast the formulated hypotheses, a series of actions were developed under two mixed research phases. In a first qualitative phase, an exploratory analysis was done, supported by a panel of experts (also known as the Delphi method) in order to validate the measuring instrument (apparent validity). The panel was comprised of six experts from three sectors related to SMEs: Government, Industry and Education, which were selected according to the pre-fixed objective and catering to the criteria of experience, position, responsibility, access to information, availability, and who had characteristics relating to SMEs. In this context, the prevalence of the so called Triple Helix is key (Mejía, 2004; González, 2009): Government-Industry-University.

The work was done in two phases: the first is an open discussion panel, and the second, the survey applied to experts with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire. The objective of the questionnaire is to identify (based on the opinion of the experts) the influence of management skills as an internal factor of the corporate competitiveness of SMEs in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico.

The collection of information was carried out by the members of the research project, using a structured questionnaire as support. This questionnaire was applied to the managers of the SMEs affiliated to the National Chamber of Commerce, Services and Tourism (Canaco-Servytur, for its acronym in Spanish), which has over 390 enterprises, and the National Chamber

of Industry Transformation (Canacintra, for its acronym in Spanish), which has 190 affiliated enterprises; both are located in the city of Hermosillo, Sonora. The work was executed in three phases: the first phase was done through the e-mail addresses obtained through the information provided by the industries; though given that the response rate was low, a second phase then took place, which consisted on phone communication; and the third phase was done on-site to finalize the results. The size of the sample obtained, after the filtering process, was of 108 valid questionnaires (see Table 1), 80 manifested being from the commerce sector and 27 from the industrial sector. Furthermore, 72 enterprises declared being small and 34 medium-sized.

Table 1. Data sheet

Geographic scope	Hermosillo, Sonora
Universe	538
Sample unit	SMEs affiliated to Canacintra and Canaco-Servytur
Methodology	Survey with a semi-structured questionnaire
Sampling Procedure	Finite sample without replacement
Sample Size	108 valid surveys
Sampling error	± 5.0 %
Level of confidence	90 %; pq = 0.5
Fieldwork date	August-December of 2015

Source: Own elaboration (2015).

For the information collection process, a semi-structured questionnaire was used. It contained some closed questions that were previously validated through qualitative techniques. For this purpose, the respondents had to be in the role of enterprise manager, and show their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements using a seven-point Likert measurement scale. Specifically, the information referred to the influence of internal factors, such as strategic planning and management skills in the corporate competitiveness of SMEs in Hermosillo, Sonora, perceived by the SME manager, and finally the social and demographic characteristics of the businessperson.

Statistical analysis of the data

Structural equation modeling

To carry out the statistical analysis of the collected data, the methodology of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used along with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique, which is calculated through the variance components matrix. To validate the measuring model, the following methodological actions were executed: (1) analyzing the content and apparent validity, (2) calculating the individual reliability of the reflective indicators through factor loading, (3) examining the construct validity: convergent validity and divergent validity. Regarding the validity of the structural model, the following were analyzed: (1) explained variances (R^2) and (2) the path coefficients or standardized regression weights (β). Each one of the statistical criteria are proven in the following section by applying the SmartPLS 3.0 statistical information package (Ringle et al., 2005).

Content and apparent validity

To validate the statistical instrument and its corresponding measurement scales, the following qualitative tests were applied:

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Content validity, an exhaustive revision of the literature specialized in strategic planning, management skills, and corporate competitiveness was carried out in this test in order to theoretically support the measurement scales.

Apparent validity, this analysis determines that the measurement scales reflect what they are intended to measure, therefore the measurement scales, which were initially proposed based on the result of the previous qualitative studies, were modulated and adapted. For this, the research instrument was submitted to a Panel of Experts (*Delphi method*) on SMEs, in order to filter the indicators that did not show any relation to the research, which in turn made it possible for us to guarantee the achievement of satisfactory results (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Reliability of the indicators

To verify the individual reliability of the indicators as a part of a reflective construct, they need to have a factor load (λ) equal to or greater than 0.707 (Carmines and Zeller, 1979). The factor loading shows that the variance shared between the construct and its corresponding indicators is superior to the error variance. Considering the aforementioned statistical acceptance criterion ($\lambda \geq 0.707$), the following indicators were eliminated in the first phase: **OG1:** *"Ability for the identification and resolution of problems" ($\lambda = 0.666$)*, **OG3:** *"Willingness to act, feel and/or think about the needs of the clients, directing all their actions towards a strategy to guarantee the satisfaction of the same" ($\lambda = 0.661$)*, **OG4:** *"Ability to listen and correctly understand the thoughts, feelings or concerns of the others even when they are not verbally expressed but need to be perceived by the rest" ($\lambda = 0.626$)*, **OG5:** *"Ability to efficiently resolve situations, events or conflicts in which interests that could affect the relations between people are at play, and which could also present a risk to the objectives, interests or the image of the organization" ($\lambda = 0.684$)*, **PE8:** *"Ability to improve the environmental behavior of the activities of the organization" ($\lambda = 0.670$)*, **RH1:** *"Internalization of norms and moral principles that make them responsible of their own well-being and that of others, through a behavior based on socially accepted conducts" ($\lambda = 0.689$).* After re-calculating the PLS algorithm in a second stage, the indicator OG2 was eliminated: *"Ability to present solutions and resolve the differences of ideas or opinions of the parties" ($\lambda = 0.672$), which makes it evident that management does not place importance on the ability of Operations and Management.*

Similarly, the communality test (λ^2) of the manifest variables was calculated, which is part of the variance that is explained by the theoretical construct (Bollen, 1989). To determine the communality, the square of the correlations between the manifest variables and its own latent variable was calculated. For example, for the **AE2** indicator *"Ability to communicate verbally and in writing with other people"*, there is a factor load of $\lambda = 0.798$, which presents a communality of $\lambda^2 = 0.6368$, indicating that 63.68% of the variance of the manifest variable is related to the construct of management skills, a criterion that is above 50%, which is statistically acceptable (see Table 2).

Table 2. Individual reliability of the casual model indicators

Construct Indicators	Factor Loads (λ)	Communality (λ2)
Management skills		
AE1: Constant search for opportunities in the environment to guarantee the viability of the corporate objectives, generating in their collaborators the same spirit to breed new actions that aim for the maximization of the resources and capitalization opportunities in new business projects.	0.716***	0.5126
AE2: Ability to communicate verbally and in writing with other people.	0.798***	0.6368
AE3: Ability to efficiently express ideas showing a technical and professional language in a very spontaneous manner, in accordance with their education level and experience, as well as the role they occupy, which directly affects the personal impact level of the worker.	0.792***	0.6274
AE4: Willingness to act, feel and/or think about the needs of the client, guiding all their actions as a strategy to guarantee the satisfaction of the same.	0.781***	0.6099
AE5: Ability to listen and correctly understand the thoughts, feelings or concerns of others, even if they are not verbally expressed or are partially expressed, but that need to be perceived by others.	0.861***	0.7413
AE6: Ability to reach agreements that are satisfying for everyone.	0.798***	0.6368
AE7: Ability in the constant search for opportunities in the environment to guarantee the viability of the corporate objectives, generating in their colleagues the same spirit to breed new actions that aim for the maximization of the resources and capitalization opportunities in new business projects.	0.813***	0.6609
PE1: Capacity to efficiently determine phases, stages, goals and priorities for the attainment of objectives through the development of action plans, including the necessary resources and control systems.	0.817***	0.6674
PE2: Ability to visualize the trends of the environment with a positive and optimistic attitude and guide their conduct to the attainment of goals.	0.824***	0.6789
PE3: Capacity to anticipate future needs with strategic criteria to find business opportunities that will become a competitive advantage for the enterprise.	0.833***	0.6938
PE4: Capacity to visualize the desired future of the enterprise, identifying strategies, preventing consequences and anticipating the facts that could create risks in the corporate actions implemented.	0.848***	0.7191
PE5: Ability to determine objectives at an organization/department level that will help define the enterprise path.	0.820***	0.6724
PE6: Capacity to formulate in numeric terms an operations and resources plan that will help reach the objectives of the enterprise.	0.795***	0.6320
PE7: Ability in the elaboration of strategic budgets.	0.791***	0.6256
GL1: Ability for the continuous learning of processes that make it possible to implement new concepts and methodologies, and commitment with the promotion of organizational learning.	0.811***	0.6577
GL2: Capacity to efficiently adapt to changing environments, which involve processes, responsibilities or people.	0.756***	0.5715
GL3: Ability to conceive and perform new and inexistent tasks to design and generate new processes with higher profit and efficiency levels.	0.739***	0.5461
GL4: Ability to identify and seize technological innovation opportunities.	0.718***	0.5155
GL5: Ability to visualize the impact of globalization in the economic, technologic, social and cultural context on a large scale.	0.712***	0.5069
GL6: Capacity to visualize the desired future of the enterprise, identifying strategies, preventing consequences and anticipating the facts that could create risks in the corporate actions implemented.	0.854***	0.7393
GL7: Capacity to understand those key points of the business that affect the profitability and growth of an enterprise, and to act persistently to face the competition in an effective manner.	0.713***	0.5083

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GL8: Ability to create one or more characteristics of the enterprise, which can manifest in several different ways.	0.770***	0.5929
RH2: Willingness to understand, comply and act within the organizational and social guidelines and norms.	0.771***	0.5944
RH3: Flexibility of thought (analyze the situations from different perspectives).	0.886***	0.7849
RH4: Ability to build trusting relationships and integral development (personal and organizational).	0.836***	0.6988
RH5: Ability to integrate themselves and integrate effective work groups.	0.775***	0.6006
RH6: Ability to propitiate the participation of their work group, making them bring forth important contributions, and becoming creative and innovative, capable of assuming risks and responsible of their acts and decisions.	0.802***	0.6432
RH7: Capacity to evaluate and give feedback to their collaborators.	0.866***	0.7499
RH8: Ability to foster learning and long-term training.	0.832***	0.6922
RH9: Ability to evaluate information in an intelligent manner.	0.753***	0.5670
Strategic Planning		
GPEE1: Ability to carry out the strategic plan of the enterprise.	0.716***	05126
GPEE2: Capacity to create short and long-term plans.	0.754***	0.5685
GPEE3: Capacity to establish strategic objectives.	0.838***	0.7022
GPEE4: Ability to detect opportunities and threats for the achievement of the enterprise objectives.	0.787***	0.6193
GPEE5: Ability to present key points to carry out the strategic objectives.	0.830***	0.6889
GPEE6: Capacity to identify the most important goals that will help carry out the strategic objectives.	0.845***	0.7140
GPEE7: Ability to carry out analysis information tasks and create strategic management models.	0.843***	0.7131
GPEE8: Capacity to analyze internal and external factors regarding the formulation and planning of the corporate strategy of their enterprise.	0.871***	0.7586
Corporate Competitiveness		
CE1: Broad knowledge on technological advances.	0.778***	0.6052
CE2: Ability in the development of communications.	0.755***	0.5700
CE3: Knowledge on the demand level of high quality products in the market.	0.875***	0.7656
CE4: Ability for the management and control of the competitiveness challenge.	0.919***	0.8445
CE5: Ability for the use of strategies to address the competitiveness of the enterprise.	0.864***	0.7464
CE6: Ability for the identification of the factors that condition the competitiveness of the enterprises in Mexico.	0.852***	0.7259
CE7: Ability to identify variables and the construction of models that help address the competitiveness of the enterprise.	0.875***	0.7656
CE8: Ability for the construction of a follow-up system that helps effectively achieve the competitiveness of the enterprise.	0.878***	0.7708
CNVC1: Knowledge of national competitiveness.	0.841***	0.7072
CNVC2: Broad knowledge of the strategy, structure and rivalry of local enterprises.	0.822***	0.6756
CNVC3: Broad knowledge of the conditions of the factors: availability and the state of the industry factors (work, natural resources, capital, infrastructure).	0.780***	0.6084
CNVC4: Broad knowledge of the process technology of the enterprise, the differentiation of products (based on specific products or services), the reputation of the brand, and the relations with the clients.	0.818***	0.6691
CNVC5: Ability to perceive or discover news as well as better ways to compete in a sector and transfer them to the market, that is, innovating.	0.799***	0.6384
CNVC6: Ability to acquire competitive advantages through a value chain within the organization.	0.843***	0.7106

*** value t > 2.576 ($p < 0.01$); ** value t > 1.960 ($p < 0.05$); * valor t > 1.645 ($p < 0.10$); n.s. = non-significant.; N/A = Non-applicable

Source: Own elaboration based on the collected data (2015).

Reliability of the construct

To determine the internal consistency of the indicators that measure the reflective constructs, the reliability of the construct was analyzed through *Cronbach's Alpha* (α) and the Coefficient of Composite Reliability (ρ_c). Although 0.700 is an acceptable value for Cronbach's Alpha and for composite reliability in the first stages of the research, the accepted values for more advanced stages are between 0.800 and 0.900. Values of 0.600 or less indicate a lack of internal reliability (Henseler et al., 2009). Table 4 shows that the *Cronbach's Alpha* Coefficient is greater than 0.700 in all cases, as recommended by Nunnally (1978) and Sanz et al. (2008).

Regarding the Composite Reliability or *Spearman's Rho* coefficient, all reflective constructs have values greater than 0.600 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Chin, 1998; Steenkamp and Geyskens, 2006). Similarly, all Composite Reliability Coefficients (ρ_c) are greater than the values of Cronbach's Alpha for each of the proposed constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), so that the internal reliability of the theoretical concepts is guaranteed. In the same manner, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.500 (Bagozzi, 1991; Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and significant at the level of 0.01 (Sanzo et al., 2003), which indicates that more than 50% of the construct variance must be explained by its indicators. Therefore, it could be said that the constructs proposed in the model have a satisfactory internal consistency in statistical terms (see Table 3).

Table 3. Reliability of the construct.

Construct **Indicators**	**Cronbach's Alpha** (α)	**Composite Reliability** (ρc)	**Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**
Corporate Competitiveness (CE1; CE2; CE3; CE4; CE5; CE6; CE7; CE8; CNVC1; CNVC2; CNVC3; CNVC4; CNVC5; CNVC6).	0.967	0.970	0.700
Management Skills (OG1; AE1; AE2; AE3; AE4; AE5; AE6; AE7; PE1; PE2; PE3; PE4; PE5; PE6; PE7; GL1; GL2; GL3; GL4; GL5; GL6; GL7; GL8; RH1; RH2; RH3; RH4; RH5; RH6; RH7; RH8; RH9).	0.980	0.981	0.637
Strategic Planning GPPE1; GPPE2; GPPE3; GPPE4; GPPE5; GPPE6; GPPE7; GPPE8).	0.926	0.939	0.659

Source: Own elaboration based on the statistical analysis of the SmartPLS 3.0 data.w

Convergent validity and divergent validity

After the validity of the construct in terms of the internal reliability of the indicators, we proceeded to determine the validity of the construct through the analysis of the following statistical tests:

Convergent validity, for the realization of this test the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated for the reflective constructs, as is suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The AVE Reliability Coefficient provides the amount of variance that a reflective construct obtains from its indicators in relation to the amount of variance due to the measuring error of the scales. As shown in Table 4, the AVE Coefficient for the constructs with reflective indicators must be greater than 0.500 (Bagozzi, 1991; Fornell and Larcker, 1981), which indicates that more than 50% of the variance of each of the theoretical dimensions must explain and measure

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the indicators. The previous analysis allows us to demonstrate the convergent validity for the proposed model.

Divergent Validity, this statistical test determines if the proposed construct is significantly removed from other constructs which it is theoretically related with (Roldán, 2000). In this sense, the values of the Correlation Matrix between Constructs were examined—which is comprised by the square root of the AVE Coefficient—, and which must be superior to the rest in their same column. This means that the coefficient of internal reliability of the constructs may be greater than the square of the correlations between the latent variables, indicating that with a greater portion of variance between the components of the latent variables, the more differences will exist between the blocks of the measuring indicators (Chin, 2000; Sánchez and Roldán; 2005; and Real et al., 2006). According to Sánchez and Roldán (2005), to satisfy divergent validity, the indicators on the diagonal ($\sqrt{}$AVE) must be greater than the indicators below the diagonal (see Table 5). As can be observed in Table 4, not all dimensions comply with the statistical criterion due to the augmentation of indicators by construct, so the divergence between the measurement scales that represent the concepts object of the analysis is theoretically justified (Martínez and Martínez, 2009). The divergent validity of the measurement scales is guaranteed through the aforementioned empirical procedure, based on the theoretical and methodological evidences (content and apparent validity), thus confirming the discriminatory validity of the different constructs that comprised the proposed casual model.

Table 4. Construct Validity: Convergent and Divergent Validity.
Standardized correlations matrix between the different latent variables

Construct	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	1	2	3
Corporate Competitiveness (1)	0.700	**0.837**		
Management Skills (2)	0.637	0.788	**0.798**	
Strategic Planning (3)	0.659	0.971	0.850	**0.812**

Source: Own elaboration based on the statistical analysis of the SmartPLS 3.0 data.

Validation of the structural model

The validation of the structural model is analyzed through two basic indexes (Johnson, Herrmann and Huber, 2006) and the Q^2 Parameter:

Explained Variance or Coefficient of Determination (R^2), this measurement indicator must be equal to or greater than 0.100 (Falk and Miller, 1992). Based on the aforementioned empirical criterion, all constructs possess a satisfactory predictive power for the proposed structural model, **$R^2 = 0.948$** (see Table 6).

Standardized Regression Coefficients (β), these weights or paths must reach a value of at least 0.200 to be considered significant, as is established by Chin (1998). Therefore, the causal relations proposed in the hypotheses of the conceptual model do not comply with the acceptance criterion (H1: $\beta = -0.133$; and H2: $\beta = 1.084$), but it does comply with the significant criterion (H1: $t = 2.461$; $p < 0.05$; and H2: $t = 22.498$; $p < 0.01$). The standardized regression coefficients (beta) of the latent variables are levels below the statistical criterion, but given the significance of the relation, it is considered a partial regression (Barrera and Vargas, 2005).

Stone-Geisser test or Q^2 parameter (Cross Validated Redundancy), determines the predictive power of the model through the blindfolding technique, which indicates that an

indeterminate construct is a combination of its indicators plus an error term (Stone, 1954; Barroso et al., 2005). Furthermore, this indicator must be greater than zero for the construct to have predictive validity (Chin, 1998). Consequently, the proposed structural model complies with the aforementioned criteria, as the $\mathbf{Q^2}$ parameter is above zero **($Q^2 = 0.656$)**, confirming that the observed values were reconstructed and the structural model has predictive power (see Table 5).

Table 5. Results of the statistical analysis

Hypothesis	Symbol of the hypothesis	Standardized path coefficients (β)	*T* value (*Bootstrap*)
H_1: *Management Skills → Corporate Competitiveness*	+	-0.133	2.461**
H_2: *Strategic Planning → Corporate Competitiveness*	+	1.084	22.498***

Note: *** t value > 2.576 (p < 0.01), ** t value > 1.960 (p < 0.05), * t value > 1.645 (p < 0.10), n.s. = non-significant.

Construct	Explained Variance R^2	*Stone-Geisser* test Q^2
Corporate Competitiveness	0.948	0.656
Management Skills		
Strategic Planning		

Source: Own elaboration based on the statistical analysis done in SmartPLS 3.0

Goodness of Fit Index (GoF)

Finally, the Goodness of Fit index of the structural model was calculated (GoF = 0.7941), which determined that there is a fit of 79.41% to extrapolate the results of the study population to that of the analysis (see Table 6). This indicates that there is a good fit, complying with the empirical criterion that states that the goodness of fit must vary between 0 and 1. The greater the value the better the index (Tenenhaus, 2008).

Table 6. Goodness of Fit Index

Construct	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Explained Variance (R^2)	Goodness of Fit Index[a]
Corporate Competitiveness	0.700	0.948	
Management Skills	0.637		
Strategic Planning	0.659		
Arithmetic mean	0.6653	0,948	0,7941[a]

[a] The Goodness of Fit Index (GoF) = $\sqrt{}$ (AVE) * (R^2) (Tenenhaus Tenenhaus, 2008).

Source: Own elaboration based on the statistical results of the data obtained with SmartPLS 3.0.

Interpretation and discussion of results

Based on the results obtained during the first phase of the research work, the Delphi Method was used in order to validate the measurement instrument (apparent validity) through the opinions of the experts. Once the validation of the measurement model has been analyzed, as well as that of the structural model, the results obtained were examined to contrast the two research hypotheses that were formulated, thus making it possible to justify and argue the possible deviations of the expected results.

The results of the structural model reveal that management skills as internal factors perceived by the businesspeople of the SMEs of Hermosillo, Sonora, significantly influence corporate competitiveness (H_1: β = -0.133; $p < 0.05$). When verifying under the acceptance criterion ($\lambda \geq 0.707$) if the factor loading shows the shared variance between the Management Skills construct and their corresponding indicators (Operational and Management, Strategic Administration, Strategic Planning, Globalization, Human Resources, and Corporate Competitiveness), a big portion of the *Operational and Management* indicator items were eliminated; however, after recalculating the PLS algorithm and applying the same acceptance criterion, the end result was the elimination of this indicator.

The foregoing led to analyzing the factor loading average. Within the individual reliability of the indicators of the causal model regarding the Management Skills construct (*Strategic Administration, Strategic Planning, Globalization and Human Resources*) as shown in Table 3, the average of the factor loads of the indicators accepted in the Management Skills construct are: Strategic Administration: .7941; Strategic Planning: .8183; Globalization: .7591; and Human Resources: .8151.

The Operational and Management dimension turned out to be irrelevant for the managers of the SMEs of Hermosillo, Sonora. Nevertheless, the literature demonstrates its importance as a management skill, implying a corporate management work based on the managers' preparation to sustain changes and strategic actions through the identification and resolution of problems, conflict situations, or strategic mechanisms to create the willingness to act, feel and/or think about the needs of the clients (Samujh and El-Kafafi, 2010; Berhem, Younies and Smith, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). Although there was sufficient evidence to accept hypothesis H_1, which supports the relation between Management Skills and Corporate Competitiveness (H_1: β = -0.133; $p < 0.05$), the result was not as expected, as indicated by some authors (Wang *et al.*, 2006; Glaister et al., 2008; Estrada et al., 2009; Simons, 2010), thus it is necessary to go deeper in future researches regarding SMEs and this particular topic.

Furthermore, greater Strategic Planning within the SMEs makes corporate competitiveness increase, given that they present the expected effect ($\boldsymbol{H_2}$: β = 1.084; $p < 0.01$). This coincides with other scientific studies, which state that the perceived Strategic Planning influences Corporate Competitiveness (Rudd *et al.*, 2007; Simons, 2010; Ponce *et al.*, 2010).

Differences in strategic planning and management skills between the small and medium-sized enterprises

An analysis was carried out through a t test for two independent samples based on the differences of the "enterprise size" variable (Small and Medium). The results confirmed that between the small and medium-sized enterprises there are differences in two dimensions: strategic planning as a skill (p=0.041) and corporate competitiveness (p=0.034), finding that medium-sized enterprises show more management skills for strategic planning and for corporate competitiveness when compared to small enterprises. Table 7 shows the results obtained from the T tests to evaluate the equality of means.

Table 7. *T* test for the equality of means

Variable	t	gl	Sig. (bilateral)	Difference of means	Typ. Error of the difference	Median of small enterprises	Mean of medium enterprises	Result of the hypothesis
Organization and Management	-1.291	104	0.201	-0.2344	0.18163	5.7361	5.9706	Is not rejected
Strategic administration	-1.188	104	0.239	-0.25408	0.2183	5.5694	5.8235	Is not rejected
Strategic planning as an ability	**-2.075**	**104**	**0.041**	**-0.43156**	**0.2075**	**5.569**	**6.00**	**Is rejected**
Globalization	-1.669	109	0.099	-0.31291	0.18751	0.5.5694	5.8824	Is not rejected
Human Resources	-1.406	109	0.164	-0.28595	0.20335	05.861	6.147	Is not rejected
Corporate Competitiveness	**-2.161**	**109**	**0.034**	**-0.43709**	**0.20224**	**5.880**	**6.117**	**Is rejected**
Strategic Planning as management	-1.725	109	0.089	-0.35212	0.20408	5.736	6.088	Is not rejected

Source: Own elaboration based on the statistical analysis of the data.

Conclusions and business implications

In short, corporate competitiveness requires a management team that is: dynamic, up to date, open to organizational and technological change, and aware of the need to consider the members of the organization as a first order resource that needs to be cared for. However, it can be asserted that it tends to be one of the weak points of a significant number of enterprises that have disappeared or that have survival issues.

For the SMEs businesspeople of the city of Hermosillo, Sonora, the results obtained in this research bring to light the importance of acknowledging the scientifically supported need to aim for corporate excellence through the achievement of sustainable market advantages, given that excellence is associated with corporate competitiveness, and to achieve said competitiveness, it is necessary to have a management level that is dynamic, up to date, skilled, open to organizational and technological change, and aware of the need to implement planning as a management strategy within the business.

Nowadays, it is essential for all organizations to be aware of the fact that competitiveness is presently an important topic that demands an effective corporate management. Furthermore, several SMEs have management weaknesses, so it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of having a management with skills that will make it possible to have an adequate strategic planning and to be able to determine, more precisely, the current state of the business, where they envision it to be and, consequently, the necessary elements to achieve said goal and lead their business to corporate competitiveness.

The value of strategy in a competitive environment comes from the development of management skills to intervene in a complex system with limited information, and with this, to produce a predictable and desirable change in the system balance. With management skills, it will be possible to create an adequate strategic planning in SMEs that will help managers determine the actions that they need to implement in order to achieve the objective or goal of the organization. This means that it will present the path to be followed in the performance of their activities and to achieve corporate competitiveness.

As is the case with other works, this study has its limitations. It is a cross-sectional design applied to the context of Hermosillo, Sonora, and as such, the results may not be pervasive to all Mexican SMEs. Therefore, the recommendation is for future studies to replicate this work in other companies to find out whether the results on the influence of management skills in competitiveness are similar to those found in the context studied here. We also recommend evaluating the impact of other variables, since the foregoing will come into play in the validity of the knowledge regarding competitiveness in Mexican organizations.

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